

A.A. FOR THE WOMAN

This is A.A. General Service Conference-approved literature.

recovery

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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Drinking Problem?

1. Do you buy liquor at different places so no one will know how much you purchase?
2. Do you hide the empties and dispose of them secretly?
3. Do you plan in advance to “reward” yourself with a little drinking bout after you’ve worked very hard in the house?
4. Are you often permissive with your children because you feel guilty about the way you behaved when you were drinking?
5. Do you have “blackouts,” periods about which you remember nothing?
6. Do you ever phone the hostess of a party the next day and ask if you hurt anyone’s feelings or made a fool of yourself?
7. Do you take an extra drink or two before leaving for a party when you know liquor will be served there?
8. Do you feel wittier or more charming when you are drinking?
9. Do you feel panicky when faced with non-drinking days, such as a visit to relatives?
10. Do you invent social occasions for drinking, such as inviting friends for lunch, cocktails, or dinner?
11. When others are present, do you avoid reading articles or seeing movies or TV shows about women alcoholics, but read and watch when no one is around?
12. Do you ever carry liquor in your purse?
13. Do you become defensive when someone mentions your drinking?
14. Do you drink when under pressure or after an argument?
15. Do you drive even though you’ve been drinking, but feel certain you are in complete control of yourself?

*From an Ann Landers column in Newsday;
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You are not alone

If you think you have a drinking problem – if you suspect that drinking may be one of your problems – then you will read in this pamphlet the stories of women who once thought and felt as you do.

Different as each is from the other, they all finally reached a point where they had to recognize that alcohol was seriously affecting their lives. For all of these women – young, middle-aged, old, housewife, career woman, student, from affluence, from poverty, and from many social and ethnic backgrounds – the answer was the same. Through the simple program of Alcoholics Anonymous, they found a way to stop drinking, to maintain sobriety, and to build in sobriety a life more rewarding and fuller than any had believed possible.

The word “alcoholic” may disturb you. To many people it still suggests weakling or outcast. Applied to women, this misconception remains particularly strong. Most of society tends to look with tolerance or even amusement on a male drunk, but to recoil in distaste from a woman who is in the same condition. Even more tragic is that the woman alcoholic herself often shares this bias. For her, the burden of guilt carried by every alcoholic drinker is often doubled.

The women of A.A. have shed the crippling weight of unjustified guilt. They have learned a medical fact for themselves. Alcoholism is not in itself a question of morals or manners (though it certainly affects both). Alcoholism is a health problem. It is an illness, described as such by both the American Medical Association and the British Medical Association.

This definition is no longer revolutionary. It has been well-publicized, and most people accept it casually, as a general statement: “Of course

alcoholism is an illness.” But when the focus turns to a specific person – co-worker, neighbor, friend, relative, or yourself, the old attitudes return: “Why can’t she drink like a lady?” or “Why can’t I drink the way other women do?” or “Why can’t I stop? I have no willpower,” or even, “I’m no good.” On a personal basis, the illness is too often regarded in its earlier stages as a breach of etiquette, in its latter stages as a deep moral failing.

Perhaps the strangest and most insidious aspect of the disease of alcoholism is its ability to hide itself from the sufferer. Alcoholics are experts at not seeing their own illness. They are often the last to admit that they have a drinking problem.

If the illness is so hard for the alcoholic to recognize, how can you tell whether or not you are an alcoholic? What is the measuring stick of alcoholism? Drinking in the morning? Drinking alone? How much you drink? Not necessarily any of these. The test is not when you drink, or with whom, or how much, or where, or what (alcohol is alcohol regardless of what it’s flavored or diluted with), or even *why* you drink. The real measure is in the answers to these questions: What has drinking done to you? How does your drinking affect your family, your home, your job or school work, your social life, your physical well-being, your inner emotions?

Trouble in any one of these areas suggests the possibility of alcoholism. It need not be devastating trouble at first. Some alcoholics start out as social drinkers, enjoying a large capacity for liquor and literally “feeling no pain.” Others experience typical alcoholic symptoms from the very beginning. If you are “functioning” – as a housewife, student, working women, etc. – and covering up the effects of your drinking, ask yourself: How much effort, how much sheer willpower is involved in the cover-up? Is the effect worth the effort? Is there any real fun left?

Alcoholism is a progressive illness. Late starting or early, the drinking gets more and more out of control. Indeed, the very attempt to control it can become an all-consuming preoccupation. Drinking only wine or beer, promising oneself to drink only on weekends, spacing drinks; these are only a few of the methods devised by drinkers

to try to control their alcohol intake. Such “white knuckled” ruses are themselves as classic a symptom of alcoholism as the shattering hang-over or the frightening blackout.

There is a turning point, and you do not have to reach it via a hospital bed or “rehab” or prison, although many women have come to A.A. only after reaching these stages of the illness. At any point in the downward progression of the illness called alcoholism, you can get off and stay off, simply by reaching out for help and becoming willing to face your problem. It doesn’t matter whether you are 15 or 50, rich or poor, college graduate or high school dropout, self-supporting or sheltered in a family household, a patient in a treatment facility, a prison inmate, or a street person. Help is available, but you must make the decision to ask for it.

In A.A there are no application forms to sign or admission fees to pay. You will not be asked to subscribe to any formal “course of treatment.” You will simply meet men and women who have found a way to free themselves from their dependence on alcohol and have begun to repair the damage it has done to their lives. Such freedom and recovery can be yours, too.

In this pamphlet you will read no dry statistics, but rather the stories of individual women alcoholics. These stories were chosen to represent the common experience of women alcoholics and to show the wide range of types of women who recover from alcoholism, what A.A. means to them and could mean to you. After attending their first meetings, some other women have reported: “A feeling of warmth at being with other people who had the same problem that I did” “compassion and understanding. . . .” “an atmosphere of unconditional love. . . .” “I realized I was not alone.”

***“This breaking of promises
to my children . . .”***

My mother died when I was 12 years old, and I used to think that my life would have been different if she had lived. However, I now believe that my problem was already a part of me, even then. I was full of feelings of inferiority and extremely shy. My father did his best raising me and my two younger sisters, keeping the family together until I went to college. He sent both my sisters away to boarding school as well.

I can remember the overwhelming fear that gripped me as my father got ready to leave me at college. I just knew I was not going to be able to cope with getting to know all those people. I was a misfit from the beginning and felt like one. So my years at college were years of hurt feelings, rejection, and anxiety.

I did finally get married. My husband was a very handsome man, and I thought I would lose my fears and no longer be so anxious with people. Unfortunately, this was not the case unless I had a drink. I had learned at college that a drink or two made communication possible. And three drinks made me forget that I wasn't pretty!

Eventually, we had children, and they meant everything in the world to me. Yet I would awake horror-stricken to realize that I had been driving the car around the countryside in a blackout, the children with me.

Then my husband became ill. Lonely and frightened, I needed to drink, even though the children – and now my husband, too – were dependent upon me.

We moved to a small town in Massachusetts, to live with my in-laws. I hoped that a brand-new social circle would solve the problem. It didn't.

I can guarantee that one way not to endear yourself to your mother-in-law is to get drunk publicly in a small community.

Our next move was to an old farmhouse, hard to heat and hard to take care of. My husband was away frequently, and my drinking accelerated.

One night, I went to a bar a few miles from our house, leaving my 11-year-old son in charge of his sisters. I took an elderly neighbor along. One of the men in the bar offered to drive my car home, but I argumentatively told him I could handle it. When I was close to home, I speeded

up a bit and crashed into a stanchion. Both of my neighbor's eyes were blackened.

Without my knowledge, the man who had offered to drive us home had followed us. He arranged to have the car hauled out of the ditch and put in the middle of our driveway. He didn't stay very long, but when he left, I went upstairs to find my son sitting beside the hot-air register with his BB gun aimed down through it.

"What in the world are you doing?" I asked. "I didn't know, Mommy," he said, "but I thought you might need help." I thought I had reached the depths at that point. I do believe that there has to be some motivating factor that makes us want to get sober, and I am sure that for me the motivating factor was my children.

I will never forget my little girl's fourth birthday party. When the day came, the mothers arrived with their children, took one look at me, and stayed for the party. I was so drunk that they dared not leave their children alone with me.

It was this breaking of promises to my children that finally made me realize that I could no longer live with myself, and I turned to A.A. for help. Like most other people, I was full of the usual misconceptions about what I would find when I got there. I thought that alcoholics were all Bowery characters. At my first meeting, I was surprised to meet people who I knew as respectable church members.

More important, when I first walked into an A.A. meeting, I had that wonderful feeling of belonging. Talking with the people there, I discovered that I was not the only person in the world who had done the kind of things I had done, hurting the people I loved most. I had been afraid that I might be going out of my mind. I was grateful to learn that alcoholism is a threefold illness, that I had been ill mentally, physically and spiritually.

During my first few years, I had trouble getting to A.A. meetings regularly. The children were small, and it was not always easy to find someone to come and sit with them. Nonetheless, I fell in love with A.A. from the very first meeting and somehow knew that in this program I was going to find the answers.

Even though I didn't find my answers all at once, I have found them slowly. At the begin-

ning, I was still so shy, so self-conscious, so wrapped up in myself, that it was very hard to reach out and grasp the hand of friendship generously extended to me.

In time, through A.A.'s Twelve Steps, I realized that if I would accept the love that was being offered to me so freely and try to share it with others, I could learn through A.A. to be comfortable with people. To me this was a wonderful step forward. And it led to one of the greatest gifts that A.A. has given me: no longer to be afraid. My life had always been dominated by fear – fear of people, of situations, of my own inadequacies. In A.A., I learned to have faith and so to live without fear.

“I thought that liquor was God.”

I was an adopted child, and by the age of seven I was put in an orphanage. The nuns in the orphanage were always praying to God, but I couldn't find that God they were always speaking to.

When I was nine years old, I tasted some wine. I said, “So this is the God they're talking about.” I thought that liquor was God.

I was expelled from school because I jumped into a conversation about ethnic groups. One of the girls swore at me: “You _____ Puerto Ricans!” and I jumped her. When I came to, I was in a straightjacket. “Do you know what you did last night?” the nurse asked. I said, “No.” She told me I had fought with the other girl. She was unconscious, but I kept shouting that I wanted to tear her heart out. I had broken a soda bottle to do it.

I wanted to get out of the orphanage so I got married. When I was five months pregnant, my husband left me and joined the service. I went to my mother-in-law for help. She gave me a little bottle of Kentucky Gentleman and said, “You just take a little shot of this at night and you'll sleep. You'll have no problems.” I drank the whole bottle.

I went to the Red Cross to find out what to do with my life. They told me the only way out was to work, so I dedicated myself to working two jobs. And my little Kentucky Gentleman went with me.

I worked and saved money, and four years later my husband returned. He said we could pick up the pieces and start all over again. With the money I had saved, we bought a candy store. We also sold booze and we got into a lot of underground, shady stuff.

There was something wrong with me. I kept throwing my husband out of the store so I could drink all day long while he was gone. I was sure my husband didn't love me, my kids didn't love me, that nobody understood me. I needed something to make me want to live.

I got a job as a barmaid, where I had all the men and all the liquor I wanted. I thought I was happy at last. I wanted to get rid of my husband, so when the cops came looking for him, I told them where to find him. The detectives picked him up, and he was convicted of first-degree murder.

While he was in prison, I lost my barmaid job. I couldn't do anything except drink. I had to survive, and the only people I could turn to were the regular customers at the bar. So I did a lot of things that weren't right, but I thought they were all right because my kids had food.

I felt I was not worthy of living any more, that I had sinned against God's law. I felt dirty. I tried to commit suicide three times. I tried to take my kids with me so they wouldn't suffer what I had suffered. I turned on the gas stove, took my gallon of gin, and sat there waiting to die. But my neighbor broke open the door and took me to the hospital. They told me I had a problem with drinking, but I wouldn't listen. I wanted to die drunk.

When my husband came out of prison, he decided to go with his mistress. I had to sell my house and move into an unfurnished apartment. Three times men in the street tried to rape me. The last time I was beaten up badly and was in the hospital for three months. I wanted to get even with all men.

I started walking the streets, daring some man to try to do something to me so I could kill him and go to jail. With pills and liquor I wound up in the hospital again. The psychiatrist told me I had a drinking problem, and I should go to A.A. I said I couldn't live without liquor.

But I went to A.A., and when I walked into my first meeting, I saw all men there. I hated men – I wished they were all dead. But I sat, remembering what the doctor said: “Go, sit, listen!” (I couldn't go sober – I'd had a few drinks.) I remember hearing that alcoholism was a progressive disease, that I had a good opportunity to make a life for myself now.

I was in A.A. for three months, still drinking, asking myself, “Why can't I stop? Maybe they're lying. They must be drinking!” One night – I'd had three drinks that day – I was sitting in a meeting, and I felt my heart beat for the first time in years. I said, “If this is God, if this is Your presence, let me hold onto a thread of Your hope and take me out of this bottle so that I may be able to walk again among people.” I knew something wonderful was happening, and I left that meeting with a beautiful feeling. That was July 3rd. I celebrate my A.A. anniversary on Independence Day

– the day I got independent from the bottle.

It wasn't easy at the beginning, but my sponsor helped me through it. Then I started to do service in my group. After two months, I went to the intergroup office and answered the phones at the Spanish desk. Today, I thank God I did these things because I was able to keep away from my drinking friends. Now I am institutions coordinator for the Spanish Committee.

I am going back to school. I know there are many women like me, especially in the Spanish-speaking nationalities. I have a beautiful life, and each night I pray that I'll be able to carry the A.A. message to another alcoholic.

“Guilt, fear, and remorse were my daily companions.”

Now that I enjoy a measure of sobriety, I am able to see how blind I was for 20 years. I started drinking at 13. I drank a large quantity of port wine on a bet, and became very sick and drunk and promised myself not to drink wine like that again.

In high school I went around with an older crowd. They drank, and there was nothing I liked better. I drank because I liked it, and once I started I wasn't ready to stop when the others were. If you liked to drink, I was glad for your company. If you didn't care for it, you didn't see much of me.

At 19 I got married. My husband drank. He liked it and could hold it. I had a lifetime drinking partner, and our marriage started out as one long celebration.

About a year after our daughter was born, I became very ill. The family doctor suggested that I stop drinking, that I was potentially an alcoholic. I laughed, and ignored him, my family, and friends who complained about my drinking.

I did lose control more often now. Sometimes what started out as a few drinks for the evening went on for a week. To get off the hook, we moved to a new neighborhood, and I went to work. I started finding excuses to drink more often. One day, on my way to work, I needed a pickup and stopped for a drink. I remember having two more after the first one. The next clear memory came three days later, and I knew fear for the first time. I told my family that I must be mentally ill for this to happen.

I started going to a psychiatrist. I never mentioned drinking except to say I drank on occasion. I didn't tell him I usually made sure I had an occasion to drink, and the occasions included him.

Years passed and I reached a stage where I couldn't cope with anything. My husband and I separated several times and when we reconciled we'd hope that things would change.

They did. They got worse. I finally ended up in a hospital where the doctor told me I was a schizophrenic. I was pleased as could be. I was crazy, a nut. I wasn't an alcoholic.

When I finally stopped hearing voices and was well again, I had to celebrate. He suggested that I drink nothing but good Scotch whisky and no

more than three drinks. He didn't say what size glass.

My husband and I separated for the last time. He gave me my choice: him or the bottle. I didn't have any choice; by now I couldn't live without a drink.

I lived the next two years in a nightmare. Guilt, fear, and remorse were my daily companions, I no longer had any friends; they crossed the street when they saw me coming. Most of the time I was a sodden zombie. Finally, the day I woke up for the umpteenth time in a strange room with a stranger, I knew I couldn't take it any longer. I was sentenced to prison for a crime committed in an alcoholic fog.

I finally learned how to live through the A.A. program. When I started attending A.A. meetings in prison, my prayer for help was answered. One of the women used an expression which exactly fits what happened to me in this Fellowship: "I started living when I stopped crying and started trying." I tried to work the pattern given me by A.A. in the Twelve Steps – a model for today and all my days.

There are two things I've learned from this program. First, to surrender completely. I was fighting a losing battle with the bottle. I gave up, and through defeat I won. Second, to change myself, because the world isn't going to change to suit "poor little old me." It's just this simple whatever it is in me that led me down the alcoholic road to misery, I no longer want any part of it. I spent 14 months in an institution because I could not live without the bottle, but today I have learned how.

Now I am another cog in the wheel of this Fellowship. I've been given a second chance to be the kind of mother I've always wanted to be. Yes, I have the greatest of all gifts: the return of my daughter and her love. Yesterday I only existed, without hope, without anything but misery; today I live with hope because I carry a message of hope to other alcoholics. This program works for these reasons: You want sobriety badly enough, and once you have it, you share it.

***“By the end of my drinking. . .
I had threatened patients,
been drunk on duty, contemplated murder...”***

I'm an alcoholic. I am also a registered nurse, a single woman who enjoys many activities. But this was not always the case.

I have been sober in Alcoholics Anonymous for a little more than five years now, and they have been the happiest years of my life. Prior to seeking A.A., I was “dry” for a year, out of fear of another bout with the DTs. I had sworn I'd never take another drink because I couldn't again come off a drunk the way I did the week between Christmas and New Year's of 1977.

Early on Christmas morning, driving drunk and under the influence of narcotics, I snapped off a telephone pole and demolished my car, not for the first time. Abusive and uncooperative in the emergency room (I was still in uniform), I refused care until the following morning, when I could be admitted free of alcohol and other mood-changing drugs.

At that time, as well as I can remember, I was a day drinker and user of whatever chemicals I could obtain with or without prescription. After I was discharged, my increasing irritability, nervousness, and tremors went to full-blown hallucinations accompanied by a growing horror of what I was experiencing.

I couldn't go back to the hospital that employed me and my family could no longer tolerate my antisocial behavior. For another full year I continued to hit successive bottoms, one substance at a time, but there was no change in my essential outlook on life. Recovery for me began when I stopped taking drugs and began to make active efforts to get better. It began with attendance at my first A.A. meeting.

I had been a bashful child, oversensitive, overweight, and unsure of myself. I sought solace in books and in the role of “little mother.” I remember feeling important when Dad let me beg sips of his drinks. I liked the effect. My first real blackout and passout drunk occurred when I was 13. It felt as though the only way I could shut off my sense of inferiority and nagging conscience was to be drunk.

In school I was considered a good-natured partner who would give anyone “the shirt off her

back.” People-pleasing caused me much grief, especially in my profession, until I learned to say no to the first drink.

For me, putting on that white uniform and cap meant unleashing Wonder Nurse. Out of uniform, I was heavily into the hippie counterculture. To offset that, I needed to be Florence Nightingale. I was always angry at the incompetence all around me, convinced that I was the only one doing the work.

With all that anger and martyrdom, I had to get drunk after work to let off steam. I needed my job to support my habit, and nursing was the only respectable thing I had.

By the end of my drinking, which lasted 12 years, I had threatened patients, been drunk on duty, contemplated murder, dealt drugs to children, overdosed, had two abortions and passed out in bars in my uniform. I smelled bad and had cheated on my most loyal – and last – friend, with her husband. I’d drive when I was too drunk to walk. I demolished several vehicles and was stopped many times by the police, without having any memory of it.

I loathed drunks because they were visible proof of what I was beneath my facade – manipulative, dishonest, fearful, and lonely. I’ve spent most of my life pretending to be something I’m not. I did not know until I got sober that I am exactly the person I always wanted to be.

In A.A., I have been shown how to really change – from within, not just the externals – by people who now laugh at their troubles, cry in their joy, and enjoy life.

Today, I’m working as a flight nurse on a helicopter transport team, an opportunity for professional growth that I wouldn’t be able to handle without sobriety. I have a reputation for honesty, although I’m not always diplomatic about it. The beauty of sobriety is the ability to admit my wrong if I’ve harmed someone by unthinking word or deed, and then go on from there. While drinking, I had a horrible fear of anyone finding out I made mistakes. Therefore, I was unable to learn by my errors and continued doing the same things that didn’t work, over and over again.

I can now learn and grow with the people placed in my life, without putting unrealistic expectations on them or myself. I’ve gone back

to my childhood church with an adult faith, and I'm active in A.A. service as well as other community and professional affairs.

One area of continued struggle for me in the program is the ability to see myself realistically in relation to those around me. Acquiring self-esteem and self-acceptance have probably been the hardest tasks I have faced. Out of adversity, in many uncomfortable living situations, I have found some self-respect and peace of mind, whether or not I've received approval.

I appreciate so much the gift of an honest self-love. I've always wanted to be able to help others and be useful but was incapable due to my crippling addictive needs. Now free, I am living the life I never dreamed possible and realize more fully each day that I am only limited in life by my lack of faith. A walking zombie is emerging as a capable, complete, caring woman.

***“I can do it by myself.
I am more intelligent.”***

She is sleeping in my home, my new A.A. friend. When she was brought here, she was drunk and unconscious. A nearly empty bottle of sleeping pills had been found close to her body. She was brought to me because I am a doctor and an alcoholic.

I am not sure when I became an alcoholic. In my teens, I went to dances. My brother's friends told him to invite me, because I needed only a few drinks to be merry. But most of the time, when people around me were happy, I was sad.

After I got my first job as an intern in surgery, I was invited to a party with other hospital staff. I got so drunk on one glass of wine that I fell over a little table. My best friend was shocked and told me that a lady had to drink two glasses of wine; if she can't she is not a lady. I asked what I had to do, and she said I had to practice.

I did that every evening, mostly at home, where my mother said, “A lady who drinks so much is not a lady.” But the wine seemed to make my efficiency greater. I could work longer at night, when I wanted to read or write. I was ambitious and wanted to be the chief of my hospital. When I was drinking, I was the chief. More than that, I was the most intelligent doctor, the most beautiful woman, the best daughter, the best friend.

My career actually did skyrocket, though I kept on drinking. I was never drunk, but never sober, either. Then, during an unusually busy day, a colleague said she was going into the common room (where doctors spend off-duty time) because she needed a drink. That day was the beginning of the end for me. She drank only a little, but within six months I was drinking a water glass of vodka every morning. My work got worse and worse, and I let others do it.

My mother had been ailing, but I could always find a reason to drink. I knew I had a problem with alcohol. I read medical books about the subject and knew what could happen to my brain. I wanted to stop but didn't know how. I only knew I had to get away from the hospital before my drinking was discovered. When the opportunity arrived, I bought a private practice and left the hospital.

My mother died at this time. There were no more questions when I came home: "How much did you drink? How much did you spend on liquor?" I was my own boss. I drank and drank – alone, because my friends had left me. I was no longer the most intelligent doctor, the most beautiful woman. I was alone with my fears. I had to drink.

My desperation intensified, and I could see no way out. Finally, a patient reported to the board of health that I had been drunk. As a result I had to see a professor who followed up on such matters, and it was there that a miracle happened. He understood the hell I was living in and gave me a book about alcoholism. Even though I was drinking while I read it, I saw a light of hope. I told him a few days later that I would like to meet the members of Alcoholics Anonymous discussed in that book.

A week later I had a phone call from a college friend who had become a psychiatrist. "A.A. is in our town," he said, telling me where and when the meetings were. I found my way to a meeting about two weeks later, but only after taking a drink. I opened the door, and there were six men. I listened hard to what they said.

"What shall I do?" I asked. "I have half a bottle at home, and I drank the other half before I came here." I was being honest about my drinking! What had happened?

One of the men said, "You can do with that bottle whatever you want to do, drink it or pour it out. It's your life." For the first time I was not being forbidden to drink. I finished the bottle that night but went to the next meeting sober.

A new life started. Friends in my group understood me. I felt at home. I found happiness outside my group, too. I could do my work, and my patients began to love and respect me; my old friends returned.

For 19 months I was happy, but did not work hard on the program. I did a lot of Twelfth Step work, helping other alcoholics, but only to escape myself. One day, I had an emotional upset and took two tranquilizers. The next day four, and more in the days after that.

I didn't go regularly to meetings. "I am a doctor," I told myself. "I know enough about A.A.; I can do it myself. I have too much work to do. I

am more intelligent than the others. I am a special alcoholic.”

All the lying and fears that went with drinking came with the tranquilizers. I changed to sleeping pills.

One day the bottle was back. My bottle. It was so easy to start. After all I had heard in A.A. about “the first drink,” nothing happened for several days. “So I’m not an alcoholic!” I decided. “It was a mistake. I do not belong with the people in A.A. I can handle it...” I drank more and took more pills.

And then I hit bottom. After a suicide attempt, I awoke in my home and found myself still alive. I knew I was an alcoholic, and I phoned A.A. friends.

Two days later, I met another A.A., the doctor who is now my husband. I have started to live again. I go to meetings and work the program, which has taught me how to have peace of mind without alcohol or pills. I have again established a relationship with my Higher Power. Without Him, I could not have become such a happy alcoholic.

While I have been writing my story, the new A.A. friend I mentioned at the beginning has awakened. She is alive and has been without a drink for 24 hours. A.A. works.

“I assumed my drinking was one more symptom of neurosis.”

I drank for more than 20 years without being aware of any compulsion to do so. I could leave alcohol alone, and frequently did.

But I had other problems – quite deep emotional ones. I suffered from depressions from adolescence on, perhaps even before. In my early twenties, after my child was born, I had severe postpartum depression and began a process of psychotherapy, which was to continue, with interruptions, for many years. I would experience relief – good times when I functioned well and was productive – but it always seemed to me that there was some invisible barrier between me and the life I wanted.

During this time I had two marriages which failed. Alcohol played no part in either failure.

Ten years later I knew I was in trouble with the bottle. I’d just had a professional success, but in the midst of it I came down with a case of mumps. When I got well I found myself plunged into a severe depression which had no obvious causes, except that my doctor told me that virus diseases often left patients depressed. I don’t think I told him then that besides the depression, which was familiar, I was experiencing another thing which was strange; my drinking had entirely changed its character – it had become compulsive.

My son was in his teens, and if the solitary drinker hates herself, the drinker who is a parent and responsible for the welfare of a child feels unspeakable guilt and self-loathing. And of course, the way to get rid of guilt was to drink systematically until I passed out – and woke up again; drank – passed out again. It was a nightmare.

But somehow I was getting meals on the table, sending out laundry, seeing my son off to school. He and I loved and hated each other simultaneously – it was hard to tell which was the more painful. He was the one to whom I first admitted that I was alcoholic. He said to me, “Why do you drink so much, Mom? It makes you smell.”

My answer was, “I drink because I’m an alcoholic.”

But I didn’t know what being an alcoholic meant. Accustomed to thinking of myself as a neurotic person, I assumed that my drinking was one more symptom of neurosis and that what I

must do about it was to delve yet deeper into my unconscious to find out what was making me drink and then I would be able to go back to drinking as I used to. So I again began to trek from one psychiatrist to another.

The last crazy twist of my drinking came after my son went off to college. One weekend when I went to visit him, I took all the money I had left and bought a motel outside his college town. It was a “geographic cure”; I hoped, by changing my residence and my way of life, to leave myself behind.

In the first year, when I was involved in fixing up the farmhouse and the seven cabins that went with it, I actually managed to stop drinking. However, something else was now happening to me. When I went back to New York for a visit, I went to my doctor, who was pleased to see I’d lost 30 pounds. “What have you been doing?” he asked.

I said, “I think I’ve changed addictions.”

“What do you mean?”

“I’ve shifted from addiction to alcohol to addiction to tranquilizers.”

“Nonsense,” he said. “You can’t become addicted to tranquilizers.”

Tranquilizers were relatively new at that time; now doctors know what I had already found out then. I was incapable of limiting the amount of medication I took to the amount prescribed by the doctor.

My road downhill was steep. There was one hospitalization in a coma brought on by a combination of alcohol and tranquilizers. Another, in a futile attempt to break my addiction to tranquilizers. And, at last, a third from an overdose of barbiturates.

This time I was in the care of a psychiatrist who got me into a New York psychiatric clinic for a six-month stay. But when I left the hospital I still had no idea that I was an alcoholic. I was told not to drink, but not why I shouldn’t, so I only resented it and, of course, drank.

Then began a three-month vicious cycle of first drinking until I was terrified of alcohol, then taking tranquilizers until I was equally terrified of them. I called a friend who had been in A.A. for nine sober months, and said I was ready to try. Within a week I was at my first meeting, with the

tremendously moving and releasing sense that I had come home, that I was where I belonged. I looked around the room and felt the difference in these people. Though I had known many sick people in the past, they were almost always trying to adjust to their sickness. These A.A.s were sick people trying to get well. I wanted that, too.

I continued to take tranquilizers for a week after my first A.A. meeting, but during that week I grasped the idea that, as an alcoholic, I had better not take anything which would change my mood chemically.

At first I fully expected that, having been a drunken depressive, I could now expect to be a sober one. The greatest miracle of my sobriety for me has been my almost complete freedom from depression. Insights I had gotten through psychotherapy were helpful, but it was the A.A. program that set me free to make full use of them.

I threw myself into A.A. with a kind of hunger. I went to a great many meetings and became so absorbed in the program that I found it difficult to concentrate on anything else for a while. But as I tried to work the program, it began to show results in my life – in terms of peace of mind, relationships with people, a slow resumption of professional proficiency. I am particularly grateful for my relationship with my son, who seems to have gained a new faith in life and himself by seeing me get well. “If you can do it, Mom,” he said once, “anyone can!” A little left-handed, but nice.

I truly have a sense of having been born again since coming into A.A., of having broken through that invisible barrier I always felt between me and the life I wanted to live. I want to live the life I am living now – a life based on the principles of A.A.

***“I was the typical housewife
‘lace curtains’ drunk.”***

My name is Doris and I am an alcoholic. I was sixty-five years old when I came to A.A. – quite a bit older than most when I decided I must get sober or end my golden years a drunken mother and grandmother.

I was the typical housewife “lace curtain” drunk. Alcohol must have been interfering with my life and causing many problems for many years; I didn’t know that was happening until about five years before I came to the Fellowship of A.A.

I had to make three attempts to get sober in A.A.; by the third time, I had no choice – not too many years left to get sober.

I grew up in an alcoholic household. My father was a chug-a-lug drinker, and I took after him. I was not one who could sit sipping whiskey like my mother.

By the time I was 16, I had quit school and married a man 12 years older than I was. We had a good life in those days. I didn’t drink because we didn’t have any liquor. It was simple.

I lost my first baby after three years of marriage, and it was four years before we had our son, John. The first time I got drunk and sick was just before John was born. We went out with a couple of relatives and I got tanked up on beer, sang on the top of the table and danced around like a fool. I threw up all the way home. My husband laughed.

Our daughter Linda was born in 1937. During the war years we were having lots of fun, and I believed I could stop drinking anytime I wanted to. I had gotten violently drunk again, and started having hangovers.

I can’t really say when I passed over the line, and I don’t remember when I started to sneak drinks either. My husband was a social drinker who could have one drink and go to sleep. His idea of a drink was a thimbleful of Scotch and a glass full of soda. I couldn’t imagine drinking like that.

After our third child was born in 1947, I would come home from my job at a major department store and have a glass of Metrical, the diet drink of the time. That was an effort to fight weight gain (which I still do), but I would add a couple of shots of booze to it. I was having a lot of trou-

ble but wouldn't admit it.

We moved, eventually, and the first thing I learned fast was where the liquor store was. Our two older children were perfect little squares, doing what they had to, keeping good heads on their shoulders. Our youngest son, David, may have been the most affected by my drinking. He got into drugs, and that gave me a good excuse. Our son was as sick as I was, and I was as sick as he was, and my husband was in between, for what were 19 years of hell.

David turned out to be another kind of messenger. He was going to a methadone center where he met a lady who was in A.A. Here was this drug addict telling his mother that she should see this recovered alcoholic lady. So I got on the bus and went to the methadone center, where Lerisa was and I talked with her. She gave me the Big Book. That night she and her sponsor took me to my first A.A. meeting. That was five years before I was ready to stop drinking. I seemed to be ready to hear something but I wasn't ready to do the work. I would go home and drink after the meetings.

It took me a long time to see it, but the evidence was pretty obvious. I was drinking on a daily basis, and I knew I was in deep trouble. Going out to dinner one night after my first round of A.A. meetings, I staggered out to the car and told my husband, "I have to go to a treatment center." The trip was arranged. I don't have a great deal of memory about what happened. I just knew I had to go.

One problem I had, and didn't want to face, was that I was very embarrassed because I was older. There were youngsters 14 and 15 years old and a lot of women in their thirties and forties. Another thing really hit me: I was told that my daughter had answered an inquiry from the center, and told them that her dad needed someone to talk to. That was the first time I realized my husband was hurting. It hurt me terribly, and I was determined that I would make a go of sobriety.

I got out and found that no one was paying attention to me in A.A. meetings. I stayed sober for a year, but I still had this feeling that I didn't belong. I said to myself that they were all looking at me, this sweet little thing. I was feeling very sorry for myself. They didn't know a thing about

me because I wasn't about to tell them anything. I was a know-it-all who was sliding away.

It wasn't long before I took a drink. I felt bad, but I immediately called two A.A.s who came and took me to a meeting. Then I went to an A.A. meeting on my own. Now I have a home group where I can remember my last drink.

When I came to the Fellowship to stay I felt very much out of place, with my white hair, etc. I was older than most and those that were anywhere near my age had been in the Fellowship a good many years. So, consequently, I felt like a ten-year-old in kindergarten.

It took me time to catch on that I would have to give if I wanted to survive in this program. We have a strong A.A. group where we support each other and I can spend time with women friends in their fifties; I'm 72, but I'm right on their level. Serving as secretary for my group was the turning point in beginning to feel a part of things. I've enjoyed being general service representative, attending the A.A. assemblies and conferences. It's important for me to not just sit but to do something – and A.A. service work gives me that opportunity. Through service, I've met so many wonderful people. My social life is well-rounded, too – the frosting on the cake – and I wish a lot of people could have what I have.

My A.A. friends love me for who and what I am, grey hair and all. My family loves me and my daughter is my friend, too. My grandchildren know I'm an alcoholic and see to it that Grandma has her ice water or pop. At first it bothered me that they knew, until I thought about how I don't want to be a drunken mother or grandmother anymore. Now I'm a great-grandmother, and somehow that would be worse. And I'm blessed that the family trusts me to take care of that great-grandchild.

My husband died three years ago. My A.A. friend Phyllis lost her son the day after my husband died and she and I met in the mortuary. It was a sad time for us. When you cry together and embrace at a time like that, you are deep friends.

The program and the Fellowship are here for you too. A.A. members will come and get you if you cannot get to a meeting on your own. It's a

great way to find love and sobriety and I will never be lonely again. The golden years are really golden – and no tarnish.

“I was insatiable, empty inside, looking for happiness at the bottom of the bottle.”

My name is Cathy and I am an alcoholic. Thanks to Alcoholics Anonymous and God’s grace, I have not had to take a drink of alcohol in 21 years.

I took my first drink when I was 16 years old, which happens to be the day that I got married. I immediately liked the effect that alcohol had on me. I am naturally a quiet, shy person, but the alcohol let me do things I wouldn’t dream of doing sober.

Growing up in Queens, New York, in an integrated neighborhood, the realization that I was indeed a black woman became apparent when I moved to Chicago. Not that I could change the fact, it only made me more determined to be somebody.

I drank for only five years, but looking back, I drank alcoholically from the start. When I drank, another person took over. A person that I didn’t like very much. I have three children. One was born during the latter stages of my disease, and I can see the difference today in her personality.

I was unfaithful to my husband during my drinking years. I blamed my unhappiness on him, or the fact that I had married too young. I was insatiable, empty inside, looking for happiness at the bottom of the bottle.

I didn’t drink in bars. Most of my drinking took place at home. My husband’s job took him out of town a great deal and I would give him approximately a half-hour, then would go to the liquor store, buy my supply, come back and drink continuously until I passed out. I would get in what I later learned to be a “self-pity bag,” call my drinking partners over and have a party. However, the feeling only lasted a short while before the remorse and guilt took over. I had no idea that I was an alcoholic. I didn’t know what an alcoholic was. Again, I thought that all of my problems were caused by my husband, and at that point I made up my mind that I was going to divorce him.

One afternoon, while I was sitting on the sofa listening to the radio or the TV, I don’t remember which, I heard a voice say, “If you have a problem with alcohol, call this number.” I had been told that I drank too much, so why not? If the announcer had said “If you are an alcoholic . . .” I

would never have called. Out of curiosity I called. A lady, who was very polite, asked me if I needed help with a drinking problem; she also asked me if I could stay sober for 24 hours, and I said no. She said that anyone could stay sober for 24 hours. I felt insulted and hung up the phone.

I was also one of those “crying drunks,” so naturally I cried some more. The next day I got up, started to drink again and remembered that I had called A.A. the day before and decided to call again. I spoke with the same lady; she offered to have someone call me and take me to a meeting. I refused to go, hung up, cried and drank some more.

I called again, and she asked if she could mail me some material. She did and I read the material, called her back again and she told me where a meeting was.

It was an open meeting. I asked a neighbor to go with me that night. There was a gentleman speaking. I don't remember anything that was said, except a lady gave me a “beginners kit” with names on it and asked me to call someone before I took my next drink. She also told me to “keep coming back.”

That was 21 years ago. I have always believed in God. In A.A. we refer to God as a Higher Power, so it was easy for me to accept that part of the program. I was told to ask my Higher Power for help in the morning and thank Him at night. There are only suggestions in A.A., no rules, and this is good for me. It seemed that I have always been told what to do. That didn't work very well for me.

I go to the meetings today to remind myself that although I have been sober a number of years, I am still only one drink away from a drunk. Alcoholics Anonymous allowed me the opportunity to go back to school, something I have always wanted to do. In a few months I will have my masters degree in psychology. That can only happen in A.A.. The tools are there; I only had to stay sober, reach out and get them.

Today, again, as a result of Alcoholics Anonymous, I am responsible. I have a good job that allows me to share a part of myself with the recovered as well as the still-suffering alcoholic. For me it still works – one day at a time.

What Is the A.A. program?

The most enlightening introduction to Alcoholics Anonymous and the most valuable means of making its program work are one and the same: A.A. meetings. Held regularly in communities around the world (now in over 180 countries), these meetings fall into three types, although not all areas have all three: open, closed, newcomers.

Anyone, alcoholic or not, may attend an open meeting; you may take along a relative or friend, even if your companion has no drinking problem. Look around you at such a meeting; by appearances alone, you won't be able to tell the alcoholics from the nonalcoholics.

Going to an open A.A. meeting involves no commitment; just sit quietly and listen to the A.A. members share their personal histories and explain how the A.A. program of recovery has altered their lives. You will be better equipped to get the most out of such a meeting if you arrive in as sober a condition as you can manage, with an open mind ready to consider ideas that may be new, and willing to learn more about yourself through identifying with others. A.A. meetings are never mere lectures; they are always sharing sessions.

While open meetings are open to anyone, closed meetings are limited to those who know they are alcoholics and those who think they might be. In the informal discussions that are the major part of these meetings, the participants explore ways to achieve and maintain a happy sobriety, as well as how to handle both everyday situations and the inevitable occasional crisis without the use of alcohol.

In newcomers (beginners) meetings, discussion focuses on the primary task – how to stay away from the first drink one day at a time. You will hear useful, practical suggestions from peo-

ple who have been exactly where you are now and have lived through many sober days since. The shared experience of sober A.A.s is the lifeline to sobriety. However far away from the last drink a member may be, an A.A. always says “*I am* an alcoholic.” A.A.s accept the fact that they have a chronic illness and cherish the Fellowship’s help in the ongoing process of their own recovery.

Where to find A.A.

Help is within easy reach in most towns, suburbs, and big cities (where there are often many neighborhood A.A. groups). In rural areas, members willingly drive long distances if a meeting is not nearby.

For those who are physically unable to attend meetings, and for those who are far from any A.A. group, help is still available. A member in the Midwest thought she was stranded following an accident: "I was confined to a wheelchair and knew I would be for many months. So I wrote to the A.A. General Service Office and asked for correspondents. Letters started pouring in! I didn't think I had even one friend in the world, and here I had them all over the world. It is the most wonderful thing that through God and A.A. we can extend the hand of fellowship by mail. Many women bring up personal problems, and we talk them over. We are helping each other – in fact, I'm receiving the most help."

A.A.'s Loners (or Lone Members) rely upon letters, the *Loners Internationalists Meeting* – a meeting by mail, and sometimes the spoken word (via tape recordings), as substitutes for meeting with the rest of the membership. They also enjoy another important resource, A.A. literature, which is listed in this pamphlet, most especially the books *Alcoholics Anonymous* (the Big Book) and *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*.

The Twelve Steps (printed in full on p. 37) often mentioned in the personal stories you have just read and regularly discussed at meetings, are the heart of the A.A. program. They are not based on mere theory; early members of the Fellowship analyzed together what they had done to get sober and stay sober. The Steps are a summary of their experience, and are a guide

toward the spiritual recovery that is now working for more than a million other alcoholics.

Yes, A.A. is a spiritual program, not a religious program. Although the Steps do mention God, His name is followed by the words "*as we understood Him,*" leaving the interpretation entirely up to the individual member. When you hear A.A.s thank a Higher Power for giving them the sobriety that they could not achieve on their own, most of them do mean God, but some simply express gratitude to the higher power of their A.A. group or to the Fellowship as a whole for empowering them to do what they could not do alone.

In other words, attitudes on religion have no more bearing on A.A. membership than have age, sex, race, or nationality. At the opening of most meetings, you will hear words that mean just this: "The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking." For an active alcoholic, the immediate need is *to stop drinking*. The A.A. program begins with that essential – and goes far beyond.

How do women find their way to A.A.? If you have picked up this pamphlet at a meeting, of course you are already with us and heartily welcome. In many communities there is an A.A. listing in the telephone book, so you may call and get local meeting times and places. Many women attend their first A.A. meeting in the hospital, prison, or treatment center where they may find themselves. Other find their way to A.A. through school or job counseling programs. Many women are referred by their doctors, psychiatrists, or clergy; others are put in touch by friends acquainted with the program. (While members are called on to respect each other's anonymity scrupulously outside the Fellowship, most of them want to tell their families and closest friends about their own membership in A.A.)

If none of these contacts is available to you, you may write to Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, New York 10163. This is the mailing address of the A.A. General Service Office, which will send you specific information about A.A. in or near your community.

THE TWELVE STEPS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.

2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.

4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

5. Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

THE TWELVE TRADITIONS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.

2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.

3. The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.

4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.

5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

6. An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.

7. Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.

9. A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.

10. Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.

11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films.

12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

A.A. PUBLICATIONS Complete order forms available from
General Service Office of ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS,
Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163

BOOKS

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS (*regular, portable, large-print and abridged pocket editions*)
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS COMES OF AGE
TWELVE STEPS AND TWELVE TRADITIONS
(*regular, soft-cover, large-print, pocket and gift editions*)
EXPERIENCE, STRENGTH AND HOPE
AS BILL SEES IT (*regular & soft cover editions*)
DR. BOB AND THE GOOD OLDTIMERS
"PASS IT ON"
DAILY REFLECTIONS

BOOKLETS

CAME TO BELIEVE
LIVING SOBER
A.A. IN PRISON: INMATE TO INMATE

PAMPHLETS

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT A.A.
A.A. TRADITION—HOW IT DEVELOPED
MEMBERS OF THE CLERGY ASK ABOUT A.A.
THREE TALKS TO MEDICAL SOCIETIES BY BILL W.
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS AS A RESOURCE FOR
THE HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL
A.A. IN YOUR COMMUNITY
IS A.A. FOR YOU?
IS A.A. FOR ME?
THIS IS A.A.
IS THERE AN ALCOHOLIC IN THE WORKPLACE?
DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DIFFERENT?
A.A. FOR THE BLACK AND AFRICAN AMERICAN ALCOHOLIC
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON SPONSORSHIP
A.A. FOR THE WOMAN
A.A. FOR THE NATIVE NORTH AMERICAN
A.A. AND THE GAY/LESBIAN ALCOHOLIC
A.A. FOR THE OLDER ALCOHOLIC—NEVER TOO LATE
THE JACK ALEXANDER ARTICLE
YOUNG PEOPLE AND A.A.
A.A. AND THE ARMED SERVICES
THE A.A. MEMBER—MEDICATIONS AND OTHER DRUGS
IS THERE AN ALCOHOLIC IN YOUR LIFE?
INSIDE A.A.
THE A.A. GROUP
G.S.R.
MEMO TO AN INMATE
THE TWELVE CONCEPTS ILLUSTRATED
THE TWELVE TRADITIONS ILLUSTRATED
LET'S BE FRIENDLY WITH OUR FRIENDS
HOW A.A. MEMBERS COOPERATE
A.A. IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES
A MESSAGE TO CORRECTIONS PROFESSIONALS
A.A. IN TREATMENT SETTINGS
BRIDGING THE GAP
IF YOU ARE A PROFESSIONAL
A.A. MEMBERSHIP SURVEY
A MEMBER'S-EYE VIEW OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS
PROBLEMS OTHER THAN ALCOHOL
UNDERSTANDING ANONYMITY
THE CO-FOUNDERS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS
SPEAKING AT NON-A.A. MEETINGS
A BRIEF GUIDE TO A.A.
A NEWCOMER ASKS
WHAT HAPPENED TO JOE; IT HAPPENED TO ALICE
(*Two full-color, comic-book style pamphlets*)
TOO YOUNG? (*A cartoon pamphlet for teenagers*)
IT SURE BEATS SITTING IN A CELL
(*An Illustrated pamphlet for inmates*)

VIDEOS

A.A. VIDEOS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE
HOPE: ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS
IT SURE BEATS SITTING IN A CELL
CARRYING THE MESSAGE BEHIND THESE WALLS
YOUR A.A. GENERAL SERVICE OFFICE,
THE GRAPEVINE AND THE GENERAL SERVICE STRUCTURE

PERIODICALS

A.A. GRAPEVINE (monthly)
LA VIÑA (bimonthly)

A Declaration of Unity

This we owe to A.A.'s future:
To place our common welfare first;
To keep our fellowship united.
For on A.A. unity depend our lives,
And the lives of those to come.

I am responsible...

When anyone, anywhere,
reaches out for help, I want
the hand of A.A. always to be there.
And for that: I am responsible.