



NATURE COAST JOURNAL

JULY 2020



The sound of fairground music came swimming across the crowds in my direction, through a sea of alcohol and maudlin sentiment. I was leaning against the fairground rifle range at the seaside, surrounded by the smell of candy floss and point 22 calibre rifle shots. I was nine, and I'd been drinking steadily for four years. Nothing was making sense.

I came from a white-collar family, one of my earliest memories was of being strapped in to an aeroplane at four years old, sitting behind my mother, as she flew across Europe. My first premeditated drink was in the summer of 1956. I was five years old and it rocked my world. It hit me hard like a remorseless thunderbolt. I had found the secret of life. Alcohol washed away my emotional uneasiness.

I had my first experience of alcohol poisoning at the age of ten. Late one Friday afternoon, I had a drinking competition with an old school friend. I won the battle, but lost the war, I passed out after twenty-three shot glasses of spirits. When I came to, I could hear the Doctor telling my Father through the crack in the half-open door, 'He'll have a fifty-fifty chance providing he makes it through the night.' The next day I was crawling around the attic looking for more, drinking the sludge out of the bottom of bottles the family had forgotten about.



I hollowed out the middle of my favourite book, glued the pages together and squeezed an old flat medicine bottle inside. Filling the bottle with a mixture of whiskey and surgical spirit, I hid the book in the top pocket of my jacket and went to school; the tepid mixture of 'electric soup' slopping around inside. I drank it in the toilets during break times, in our garden shed, behind the shrubbery, and when I'd stopped caring what I looked like, I drank it out in the streets. Two weeks later, I got into a fight over a girlfriend, fell over a stone wall, smashed the bottle, ruined the book, and wrecked my jacket into the bargain. I'd become the classic 'boy whistling in the dark, inwardly trying to keep up his spirits.'

To a great extent I was still mentally attached to my first drink, it was as though I was still tethered to it by a long piece of emotional elastic. I was trying to recapture the great moments of the past, to relive those boundless feelings of elation I'd experienced at the age of five. But there were no new miracles of control.

By the end of 1973, I could see what the problem was, I'd scientifically worked out the facts; but I still didn't know how to unravel the deepening mystery of my inner life. Right now, I felt swamped by a sea of troubles, debts, and emotional problems, and I collapsed helplessly within myself. I'd tried everything to control my drinking by my own unaided will, physical fitness, psychiatry, the Church, meditation, health foods, vitamins, and medical articles on the subject. Notwithstanding all this mighty effort on my ... (continued on page 3)...

HOTLINE 352-621-0599

Steps | Traditions | Concepts

Step 7: Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

Tradition 7: Every AA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

Concept 7: The Charter and Bylaws of the General Service Board are legal instruments, empowering the trustees to manage and conduct world service affairs. The Conference Charter is not a legal document; it relies upon tradition and the AA purse for final effectiveness.

Double Trouble in Recovery



**** NEW MEETING ****

Starts Saturday, July 4th
12-1 at Club Recovery

*For the dually addicted (any combination of mental illness
and addiction)*

Hope to have you join us!

CONTRIBUTIONS

District 28

P.O. Box 640914
Beverly Hills, FL 34464

Nature Coast Intergroup

P.O. Box 2634
Crystal River, FL 34423

North Florida Area Conference

(Please write District 28 and your group number on
the check)

Make checks payable to NFAC and send to:

P.O. Box 10094
Jacksonville FL 32247

General Service Office

P.O. Box 459
Grand Central Station
New York, NY 10163

... (continued from page 1)... part, nothing had changed, it was blindingly obvious what I'd become. Leaning dejectedly against the front door, to support myself, I picked up the phone and dialed the A.A. number.

The woman I spoke to listened patiently while I told her about all the iniquities of my sad little life. The following week found me standing outside the AA office, pounding the footpath looking everywhere to see if anyone recognised me. I climbed the tall flight of stairs to the top of the building and met someone in a small kitchen off to the right, who was making a cup of coffee. We talked briefly about how desolate I felt, and for his part, he told me what happened to him, and what it was like at meetings. Oh, and not to worry about the God stuff. In all honestly what he told me went in one ear and out the other, but just as I was leaving, he leaned over, firmly shook me by the hand, and passed me a small orange card, on which were the printed addresses of six local meetings, one of them was only four miles away from where I lived.

Days later, I nervously drove to the nearest meeting on the list. I got there early and leaving my car some distance away, I scrambled through the weeds into an overgrown church yard. I hid in the dark for about an hour, which gave me time to think. How had I got to this wretched point in my life, why, when and what had gone wrong? I slipped quietly into the meeting, finding a seat near the back; to get as far away as I could from these annoying but disconcertingly happy people.

There was good news and bad news. I wouldn't be able drink safely again, although I could have a normal life without drinking alcohol. It was something I hadn't been able to achieve with my own unaided will power. I could be returned to sanity with God's help and start a new life of endless possibilities. These men and women's confidence impressed me, because they were the first people I'd ever met who gave me the gift of hope. Confidence is infectious, and it was rubbing off on me already. Here were people who believed as I had done, who'd done most of the things that I had, who were once as desperate as I was. By declaring my self an alcoholic who wanted to get well, I had quietly, without any fanfare, unintentionally at first, made myself a full member of Alcoholics Anonymous. Free at last; I had publicly and honestly, accepted I was alcoholic. It was a relief to say those now familiar words out loud. They were out in the smoke-filled atmosphere of the meeting, and couldn't be Un-said. By the time the meeting had ended, I'd formed a new idea, maybe, just maybe, I would be ok after all. It was the dawn of a new era.

I've always struggled with my preconceptions about God, or powers greater myself, I had tried and dismissed a vast multiplicity of spiritual ideas. I tried being an atheist, and agnostic, even by combining the two an 'atheenostic' for a year. I read lots of books, indulged in windy arguments, yet I eventually found my reality buried deep within my heart all along, it'd been buried by years of closed mindedness, dogma, and prejudice.

The wind of change was blowing though my personality, and all those spiritual cobwebs were swept away within a few moments; everything fell into place. Now someone was caring about me, and if I can convey some small part of this loving message to another individual, who can in turn help the next person who walks through the door in to Alcoholics Anonymous, I'm a success. This simple concept of passing a message from one alcoholic to another, is the cornerstone of the AA way; this unfathomable power greater than me keeps me safe, loved and supported, one day at a time. Helping someone else was revolutionary new idea, but one which really seemed to work, and is very attractive.

I'm really thankful AA found me. I was still a young man, but getting sober gave me an infinitely better life. There was no more insistent yearning to live life as I once did, just the desire to give away what I had found and it took away the urge to drink at fairground rifle ranges too.

-Lightbulb Keith





Coming Soon!

Dear friends,

As most of you are aware, in the spring the decision was made to cancel the 2020 International Convention due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While this was a difficult decision, and a disappointing outcome for those planning to attend, we are confident it was the most appropriate action to ensure the health and safety of our members. There is good news, however, as we now have an opportunity to bring together many of the special components that make International Conventions memorable — by utilizing a virtual platform. For this purpose, we are planning a 2020 International Convention digital site. Throughout the month of July, the 2020 International Convention will come alive online to provide a new experience that includes A.A. speakers; a digital “Carrying the Message Pavilion”; sharing from nonalcoholic friends of A.A. and special guests linked to our history; a presentation of the 40 millionth Big Book; a new Archives video on the history of A.A.; an AA Grapevine video created for the Convention, and more.

The virtual experience will also help us reaffirm the International Convention's goals, which include rededicating ourselves to the primary purpose of A.A.; sharing the success and growth of the A.A. program around the globe; and letting the world know that A.A. is alive, flourishing and available as a community resource internationally.

We will be up and running on aa.org by July 1, 2020, to coincide as closely as possible with the original Convention date, and the site will be available throughout the entire month of July. Please stay tuned for updates on aa.org.

In fellowship,

Julio E., 2020 IC Coordinator.

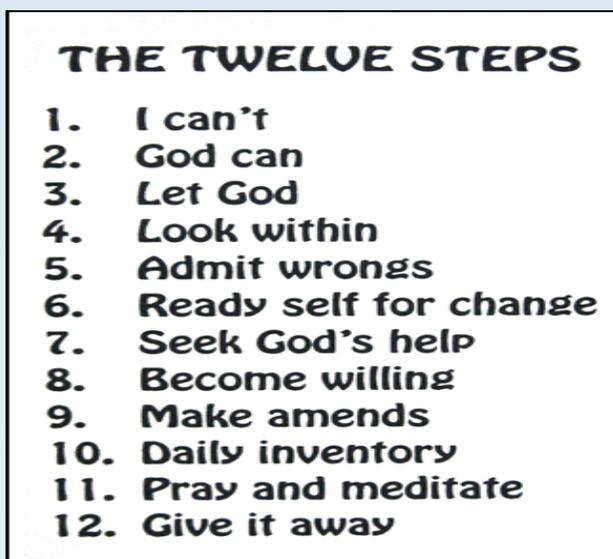


Those Crazy AA Slogans Set Me Free

By Steve N.

Part IV

A.A. taught me that this 12 Step Program is actually quite simple – not easy – but simple. I had a tendency to over-think the Steps, and that over-thinking often became an excuse not to do them. A kind sponsor did not call me stupid. He said Keep It Simple Steve. Luckily, the twin gifts of Grace and Desperation were powerful enough that I did what I was told. That willingness to just follow the directions given me by my sponsor relieved me from the terrible bondage of self analysis, over complications of life, and the torture of the wheels spinning incessantly in my brain. When drinking I was a complex person who lived in and out of my brain. A.A. taught me how to keep my life simple and I am no longer locked in the walls of my brain. I am no longer morbidly preoccupied with self and I am growing in the ability to reach out to others and participate in life on life's terms. I love the simplicity of the steps represented in the poster below.



The Big Book told me I had to resign as Chairman of the Board of the Universe and the Director of the Play. This slogan made me realize I had to give up control. It was hard, but I wanted what people had and developed the greatest admiration for all who enter the surrender process of a twelve-step program. For me and many others, it is the difference between death and life, the difference between existing as a human who wanted to die and participating in community. Drinking, I was totally dysfunctional. A.A. taught me to experience the serenity that only God gives with amazing grace. For me, the first three steps of Anonymous programs set up this “Let go let God” dynamic. They became as another saying says a mantra for me – “I can't. God can. Let Him!”

At Alcoholics Anonymous meetings or twelve-step recovery retreats, the expression “Let go, let God” is often used. These four important words constitute the core spirituality of A.A. ..(continued on page 6)...

... (continued from page 5)... and the twelve steps in relation to alcoholism. “Let go, let God” is an invitation to surrender one’s unmanageable life to God.

“Let go, let God” is a gentle conversion reminder, a kind of mantra, which assists us both to admit the alcohol addiction and to hand it over along with its various forms of compulsions to God. The long form of the prayer would be something like “Let go of alcohol and let the hand and grace of God guide my life.”



“Like feathers drifting on the breeze, some things are beyond our control.”

-Viktoriya Panasenka



The original text is in the AA manual. It is from page 60 of the Ninth Step Promises in the AA Big Book.

Progress not perfection references your ability to practice these principles in all your affairs. This means you embody the principles in every aspect of your life. That is certainly a tall order. But these principles are how to achieve a spiritual awakening (step 12). It is understandable that learning these principles will take time. What ‘Progress Not Perfection’ does mean is to try your best – commit to a process like your life depends on it. When you are able to admit that you’ve made mistakes along the way, even as you’ve put in your best effort, you can let go of shame and guilt. No one is perfect and the tension caused by perfectionism creates a doom loop that leads back to relapse. Look at recovery as a process. There will be missteps, there will be errors. But it is important not to see this as failure.



I grew up in an unsupportive environment where there was no freedom to make mistakes or to learn by doing. Mistakes were punished. Perfection was the only option. But far from encouraging me to be my best, this kind of pressure forced me deeper into my addiction to alcohol. I could not cope with the stress of trying to be perfect, of never making a mistake, of needing to say the right thing. The result was a sort of life paralysis. I became “Steve Too Much,” Everything I did, I did to excess. I was a workaholic addicted to success, but never achieved it. I hid my true self so that no one could criticize my shortcomings, I often quit because of fear that I would never measure up anyway. I brought these fears and maladaptive patterns with me into recovery. Those life patterns did ..(continued on page 7) ...

(continued from page 6)... not serve me well. For me, A.A. became a place of safety, not repression. AA taught me that I ended up in a Twelve Step program not because I was perfect, but because I was weak and needed help.

Finally, in A.A. you folks provided a context and an environment in which I could grow, develop, and learn to stand on my own two sober feet, perhaps often falling, but you helped me get up again. No judgement, no criticism, just acceptance. You taught me through these setbacks that you and God loves me even in my broken state. The words, "We claim spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection" were a life saver for me.

This story is posted on a British AA site,

A king called all his wise men and counselors together for a meeting. He addressed them and said, "I want you to go and think, read, and research. Consult the wisest and most learned men in the land. Spare no expense."

"I want you to find the ONE statement that will get me through all situations in life. Whether I am on top of the world or in the pits, find that statement."

"I don't want to learn long and complicated philosophies. I want one simple statement. Find it or write it; I don't care, just bring me the statement."

The men left and consulted for months. They finally returned and handed the King a scroll. The King unrolled the scroll. On it was written four words.

"THIS TOO SHALL PASS" That was it.

The wise men explained. When you are on top of the world, that is but a fleeting moment, things change, always remember, this too shall pass. When you are in the pits, all nights are followed by day, at your lowest moments remember also, this too shall pass. All external circumstances and material things change, so no matter what your circumstances, remember, "THIS TOO SHALL PASS"



In my early days of sobriety, when I was desperate for sobriety and was beset with problems and be-devilments arising from my past, my cry would be "Why is this happening to me? When will this ever stop?" The usual reply from older and wiser AA's would be "This too shall pass!" Gradually, with the help and support of the AA program and fellowship, my Higher Power, my sponsor and other AA members, I began to say "Life is great!" The usual reply from older and wiser AA's still is "This too shall pass!" You folks taught me that life is not always a piece of cake. But the corollary to that was that when one accepts that problems are just part of the journey, life gets more doable. Today I have learned that life's rough patches are lessons. And more importantly, the more rough patches you get through, the more faith you acquire that you can get through the next patch. With the A.A. tools taught to me I have survived periods where, literally, by the grace of God, I didn't pick up a drink. Deaths. Financial stressors. Romance. Family issues. Health. There are plenty of sticky situations to navigate as I learn to live life on life's terms. Thankfully, this powerful saying gets me through them today.

CONTINUED IN NEXT MONTH'S JOURNAL...

UPCOMING ANNIVERSARIES

JULY 2020



WOMEN'S FRIENDSHIP

JULY

Carol K.	44
Nancy L.	35
Kathy D.	13

REAL HAPPY HOUR

JULY

Gloria T.	38
Dave B.	5

SOBER SAND GNATS

JULY

John P.	25
Sue P.	15
Debbie O.	2

WE NEED YOUR STORIES!

Tell us about "what it was like, what happened and what it is like now."
In upcoming issues, Nature Coast Journal will publish your stories about:

Laughter and Fun in Sobriety, Balance in and out of AA , The Steps ,

Living Your Dreams In Sobriety, AA Humor/ Jokes

Send us stories on any topic sobriety

related!

e-mail: news@ncintergroup.com