

## PART I

### PIONEERS OF A.A.

*Dr. Bob and the nine men and women who here tell their stories were among the early members of A.A.'s first groups.*

*All ten have now passed away of natural causes, having maintained complete sobriety.*

*Today, hundreds of additional A.A. members can be found who have had no relapse for more than fifty years.*

*All of these, then, are the pioneers of A.A. They bear witness that release from alcoholism can really be permanent.*

## DOCTOR BOB'S NIGHTMARE

*A co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous. The birth of our Society dates from his first day of permanent sobriety, June 10, 1935.*

*To 1950, the year of his death, he carried the A.A. message to more than 5,000 alcoholic men and women, and to all these he gave his medical services without thought of charge.*

*In this prodigy of service, he was well assisted by Sister Ignatia at St. Thomas Hospital in Akron, Ohio, one of the greatest friends our Fellowship will ever know.*

**I** WAS BORN in a small New England village of about seven thousand souls. The general moral standard was, as I recall it, far above the average. No beer or liquor was sold in the neighborhood, except at the State liquor agency where perhaps one might procure a pint if he could convince the agent that he really needed it. Without this proof the expectant purchaser would be forced to depart empty handed with none of what I later came to believe was the great panacea for all human ills. Men who had liquor shipped in from Boston or New York by express were looked upon with great distrust and disfavor by most of the good townspeople. The town was well supplied with churches and schools in which I pursued my early educational activities.

My father was a professional man of recognized ability and both my father and mother were most

active in church affairs. Both father and mother were considerably above the average in intelligence.

Unfortunately for me, I was the only child, which perhaps engendered the selfishness which played such an important part in bringing on my alcoholism.

From childhood through high school I was more or less forced to go to church, Sunday School and evening service, Monday night Christian Endeavor and sometimes to Wednesday evening prayer meeting. This had the effect of making me resolve that when I was free from parental domination, I would never again darken the doors of a church. This resolution I kept steadfastly for the next forty years, except when circumstances made it seem unwise to absent myself.

After high school came four years in one of the best colleges in the country where drinking seemed to be a major extra-curricular activity. Almost everyone seemed to do it. I did it more and more, and had lots of fun without much grief, either physical or financial. I seemed to be able to snap back the next morning better than most of my fellow drinkers, who were cursed (or perhaps blessed) with a great deal of morning-after nausea. Never once in my life have I had a headache, which fact leads me to believe that I was an alcoholic almost from the start. My whole life seemed to be centered around doing what I wanted to do, without regard for the rights, wishes, or privileges of anyone else; a state of mind which became more and more predominant as the years passed. I was graduated "summa cum laude" in the eyes of the drinking fraternity, but not in the eyes of the Dean.

The next three years I spent in Boston, Chicago, and Montreal in the employ of a large manufacturing con-

cern, selling railway supplies, gas engines of all sorts, and many other items of heavy hardware. During these years, I drank as much as my purse permitted, still without paying too great a penalty, although I was beginning to have morning jitters at times. I lost only a half day's work during these three years.

My next move was to take up the study of medicine, entering one of the largest universities in the country. There I took up the business of drinking with much greater earnestness than I had previously shown. On account of my enormous capacity for beer, I was elected to membership in one of the drinking societies, and soon became one of the leading spirits. Many mornings I have gone to classes, and even though fully prepared, would turn and walk back to the fraternity house because of my jitters, not daring to enter the classroom for fear of making a scene should I be called on for recitation.

This went from bad to worse until Sophomore spring when, after a prolonged period of drinking, I made up my mind that I could not complete my course, so I packed my grip and went South to spend a month on a large farm owned by a friend of mine. When I got the fog out of my brain, I decided that quitting school was very foolish and that I had better return and continue my work. When I reached school, I discovered the faculty had other ideas on the subject. After much argument they allowed me to return and take my exams, all of which I passed creditably. But they were much disgusted and told me they would attempt to struggle along without my presence. After many painful discussions, they finally gave me my credits and I

migrated to another of the leading universities of the country and entered as a Junior that fall.

There my drinking became so much worse that the boys in the fraternity house where I lived felt forced to send for my father, who made a long journey in the vain endeavor to get me straightened around. This had little effect however for I kept on drinking and used a great deal more hard liquor than in former years.

Coming up to final exams I went on a particularly strenuous spree. When I went in to write the examinations, my hand trembled so I could not hold a pencil. I passed in at least three absolutely blank books. I was, of course, soon on the carpet and the upshot was that I had to go back for two more quarters and remain absolutely dry, if I wished to graduate. This I did, and proved myself satisfactory to the faculty, both in deportment and scholastically.

I conducted myself so creditably that I was able to secure a much coveted internship in a western city, where I spent two years. During these two years I was kept so busy that I hardly left the hospital at all. Consequently, I could not get into any trouble.

When those two years were up, I opened an office downtown. I had some money, all the time in the world, and considerable stomach trouble. I soon discovered that a couple of drinks would alleviate my gastric distress, at least for a few hours at a time, so it was not at all difficult for me to return to my former excessive indulgence.

By this time I was beginning to pay very dearly physically and, in hope of relief, voluntarily incarcerated myself at least a dozen times in one of the

local sanitariums. I was between Scylla and Charybdis now, because if I did not drink my stomach tortured me, and if I did, my nerves did the same thing. After three years of this, I wound up in the local hospital where they attempted to help me, but I would get my friends to smuggle me a quart, or I would steal the alcohol about the building, so that I got rapidly worse.

Finally my father had to send a doctor out from my home town who managed to get me back there in some way, and I was in bed about two months before I could venture out of the house. I stayed about town a couple of months more and then returned to resume my practice. I think I must have been thoroughly scared by what had happened, or by the doctor, or probably both, so that I did not touch a drink again until the country went dry.

With the passing of the Eighteenth Amendment I felt quite safe. I knew everyone would buy a few bottles, or cases, of liquor as their exchequers permitted, and that it would soon be gone. Therefore it would make no great difference, even if I should do some drinking. At that time I was not aware of the almost unlimited supply the government made it possible for us doctors to obtain, neither had I any knowledge of the bootlegger who soon appeared on the horizon. I drank with moderation at first, but it took me only a relatively short time to drift back into the old habits which had wound up so disastrously before.

During the next few years, I developed two distinct phobias. One was the fear of not sleeping, and the other was the fear of running out of liquor. Not being

a man of means, I knew that if I did not stay sober enough to earn money, I would run out of liquor. Most of the time, therefore, I did not take the morning drink which I craved so badly, but instead would fill up on large doses of sedatives to quiet the jitters, which distressed me terribly. Occasionally, I would yield to the morning craving, but if I did, it would be only a few hours before I would be quite unfit for work. This would lessen my chances of smuggling some home that evening, which in turn would mean a night of futile tossing around in bed followed by a morning of unbearable jitters. During the subsequent fifteen years I had sense enough never to go to the hospital if I had been drinking, and very seldom did I receive patients. I would sometimes hide out in one of the clubs of which I was a member, and had the habit at times of registering at a hotel under a fictitious name. But my friends usually found me and I would go home if they promised that I should not be scolded.

If my wife was planning to go out in the afternoon, I would get a large supply of liquor and smuggle it home and hide it in the coal bin, the clothes chute, over door jambs, over beams in the cellar and in cracks in the cellar tile. I also made use of old trunks and chests, the old can container, and even the ash container. The water tank on the toilet I never used, because that looked too easy. I found out later that my wife inspected it frequently. I used to put eight or twelve ounce bottles of alcohol in a fur lined glove and toss it onto the back airing porch when winter days got dark enough. My bootlegger had hidden alcohol at the back steps where I could get it at my convenience. Sometimes I would bring it in my

pockets, but they were inspected, and that became too risky. I used also to put it up in four ounce bottles and stick several in my stocking tops. This worked nicely until my wife and I went to see Wallace Beery in "Tugboat Annie," after which the pant-leg and stocking racket were out!

I will not take space to relate all my hospital or sanitarium experiences.

During all this time we became more or less ostracized by our friends. We could not be invited out because I would surely get tight and my wife dared not invite people in for the same reason. My phobia for sleeplessness demanded that I get drunk every night, but in order to get more liquor for the next night, I had to stay sober during the day, at least up to four o'clock. This routine went on with few interruptions for seventeen years. It was really a horrible nightmare, this earning money, getting liquor, smuggling it home, getting drunk, morning jitters, taking large doses of sedatives to make it possible for me to earn more money, and so on ad nauseam. I used to promise my wife, my friends, and my children that I would drink no more—promises which seldom kept me sober even through the day, though I was very sincere when I made them.

For the benefit of those experimentally inclined, I should mention the so-called beer experiment. When beer first came back, I thought that I was safe. I could drink all I wanted of that. It was harmless; nobody ever got drunk on beer. So I filled the cellar full, with the permission of my good wife. It was not long before I was drinking at least a case and a half a day. I put on thirty pounds of weight in about two



months, looked like a pig, and was uncomfortable from shortness of breath. It then occurred to me that after one was all smelled up with beer nobody could tell what had been drunk, so I began to fortify my beer with straight alcohol. Of course, the result was very bad, and that ended the beer experiment.

About the time of the beer experiment I was thrown in with a crowd of people who attracted me because of their seeming poise, health, and happiness. They spoke with great freedom from embarrassment, which I could never do, and they seemed very much at ease on all occasions and appeared very healthy. More than these attributes, they seemed to be happy. I was self conscious and ill at ease most of the time, my health was at the breaking point, and I was thoroughly miserable. I sensed they had something I did not have, from which I might readily profit. I learned that it was something of a spiritual nature, which did not appeal to me very much, but I thought it could do no harm. I gave the matter much time and study for the next two and a half years, but I still got tight every night nevertheless. I read everything I could find, and talked to everyone who I thought knew anything about it.

My wife became deeply interested and it was her interest that sustained mine, though I at no time sensed that it might be an answer to my liquor problem. How my wife kept her faith and courage during all those years, I'll never know, but she did. If she had not, I know I would have been dead a long time ago. For some reason, we alcoholics seem to have the gift of picking out the world's finest women. Why they

should be subjected to the tortures we inflict upon them, I cannot explain.

About this time a lady called up my wife one Saturday afternoon saying she wanted me to come over that evening to meet a friend of hers who might help me. It was the day before Mother's Day and I had come home plastered, carrying a big potted plant which I set down on the table and forthwith went upstairs and passed out. The next day she called again. Wishing to be polite, though I felt very badly, I said, "Let's make the call," and extracted from my wife a promise that we would not stay over fifteen minutes.

We entered her house at exactly five o'clock and it was eleven fifteen when we left. I had a couple of shorter talks with this man afterward, and stopped drinking abruptly. This dry spell lasted for about three weeks; then I went to Atlantic City to attend several days' meeting of a national society of which I was a member. I drank all the scotch they had on the train and bought several quarts on my way to the hotel. This was on Sunday. I got tight that night, stayed sober Monday till after the dinner and then proceeded to get tight again. I drank all I dared in the bar, and then went to my room to finish the job. Tuesday I started in the morning, getting well organized by noon. I did not want to disgrace myself so I then checked out. I bought some more liquor on the way to the depot. I had to wait some time for the train. I remember nothing from then on until I woke up at a friend's house, in a town near home. These good people notified my wife, who sent my newly made friend over to get me. He came and got me home and to bed, gave

me a few drinks that night, and one bottle of beer the next morning.

That was June 10, 1935, and that was my last drink. As I write nearly four years have passed.

The question which might naturally come into your mind would be: "What did the man do or say that was different from what others had done or said?" It must be remembered that I had read a great deal and talked to everyone who knew, or thought they knew anything about the subject of alcoholism. But this was a man who had experienced many years of frightful drinking, who had had most all the drunkard's experiences known to man, but who had been cured by the very means I had been trying to employ, that is to say the spiritual approach. He gave me information about the subject of alcoholism which was undoubtedly helpful. *Of far more importance was the fact that he was the first living human with whom I had ever talked, who knew what he was talking about in regard to alcoholism from actual experience. In other words, he talked my language.* He knew all the answers, and certainly not because he had picked them up in his reading.

It is a most wonderful blessing to be relieved of the terrible curse with which I was afflicted. My health is good and I have regained my self-respect and the respect of my colleagues. My home life is ideal and my business is as good as can be expected in these uncertain times.

I spend a great deal of time passing on what I learned to others who want and need it badly. I do it for four reasons:

1. Sense of duty.
2. It is a pleasure.
3. Because in so doing I am paying my debt to the man who took time to pass it on to me.
4. Because every time I do it I take out a little more insurance for myself against a possible slip.

Unlike most of our crowd, I did not get over my craving for liquor much during the first two and one-half years of abstinence. It was almost always with me. But at no time have I been anywhere near yielding. I used to get terribly upset when I saw my friends drink and knew I could not, but I schooled myself to believe that though I once had the same privilege, I had abused it so frightfully that it was withdrawn. So it doesn't behoove me to squawk about it for, after all, nobody ever had to throw me down and pour liquor down my throat.

If you think you are an atheist, an agnostic, a skeptic, or have any other form of intellectual pride which keeps you from accepting what is in this book, I feel sorry for you. If you still think you are strong enough to beat the game alone, that is your affair. But if you really and truly want to quit drinking liquor for good and all, and sincerely feel that you must have some help, we know that we have an answer for you. It never fails, if you go about it with one half the zeal you have been in the habit of showing when you were getting another drink.

Your Heavenly Father will never let you down!

(1)

ALCOHOLIC ANONYMOUS  
NUMBER THREE

*Pioneer member of Akron's Group No. 1, the first A.A. group in the world. He kept the faith; therefore, he and countless others found a new life.*

ONE OF FIVE children, I was born on a Kentucky farm in Carlyle County. My parents were well-to-do people, and their marriage was a happy one. My wife, a Kentucky girl, came with me to Akron where I completed my course in law at the Akron Law School.

My case is rather unusual in one respect. There were no childhood episodes of unhappiness to account for my alcoholism. I had, seemingly, just a natural affinity for grog. My marriage was happy, and I never had any of the reasons, conscious or unconscious, which are often given for drinking. Yet, as my record shows, I did become an extremely serious case.

Before my drinking had cut me down completely, I achieved a considerable measure of success, having been a city councilman for five years and a financial director of a suburb later taken into the city itself. But, of course, this all went down the drain with my increased drinking. So, at the time Dr. Bob and Bill came along, I had about run out my strength.

The first time that I became intoxicated I was eight years old. This was no fault of my father or mother, as

they were both very much opposed to drinking. A couple of hired hands were cleaning out the barn on the farm, and I was riding to and fro on the sled, and while they were loading, I drank hard cider out of a barrel in the barn. On the return trip, after two or three loads, I passed out and had to be carried to the house. I remember that my father kept whiskey around the house for medical purposes and entertainment, and I would drink from this when no one was about and then water it to keep my parents from knowing I was drinking.

This continued until I enrolled in our state university, and at the end of the four years, I realized that I was a drunk. Morning after morning I awoke sick and with terrible jitters, but there was always a flask of liquor sitting on the table beside my bed. I would reach over and get this and take a shot and in a few moments get up and take another, shave, eat my breakfast, slip a half pint of liquor in my hip pocket, and go on to school. Between classes I would run down to the washroom, take enough to steady my nerves, and then go on to the next class. This was in 1917.

I left the university in the latter part of my senior year and enlisted in the army. At the time, I called it patriotism. Later I realized that I was running from alcohol. It did help to a certain extent, since I found myself in places where I could not obtain anything to drink and so broke the habitual drinking.

Then Prohibition came into effect, and the facts that the stuff obtainable was so horrible and sometimes deadly, and that I had married and had a job which I had to look after, helped me for a period of some three

or four years, although I would get drunk every time I could get hold of enough to drink to get started. My wife and I belonged to some bridge clubs, and they began to make wine and serve it. However, after two or three trials, I found this was not satisfactory because they did not serve enough to satisfy me. So I would refuse to drink. This problem was soon solved, however, as I began to take my bottle along with me and hide it in the bathroom or in the shrubbery outside.

As time went on, my drinking became progressively worse. I would be away from my office two or three weeks at a time, horrible days and nights when I would lie on the floor of my home and reach over to get the bottle, take a drink, and then go back into oblivion.

During the first six months of 1935, I was hospitalized eight times for intoxication and shackled to the bed two or three days before I even knew where I was.

On June 26, 1935, I came to in the hospital, and to say I was discouraged is to put it mildly. Each of the seven times that I had left this hospital in the previous six months, I had come out fully determined in my own mind that I would not get drunk again—for at least six or eight months. It hadn't worked out that way, and I didn't know what the matter was and did not know what to do.

I was moved into another room that morning and there was my wife. I thought to myself, Well, she is going to tell me this is the end, and I certainly couldn't blame her and did not intend to try to justify myself. She told me that she had been talking to a couple of fellows about drinking. I resented this very

much, until she informed me that they were a couple of drunks just as I was. That wasn't so bad, to tell it to another drunk.

She said, "You are going to quit." That was worth a lot even though I did not believe it. Then she told me that these two drunks she had been talking to had a plan whereby they thought they could quit drinking, and part of that plan was that they tell it to another drunk. This was going to help them to stay sober. All the other people who had talked to me wanted to help *me*, and my pride prevented me from listening to them and caused only resentment on my part, but I felt as if I would be a real stinker if I did not listen to a couple of fellows for a short time, if that would cure *them*. My wife also told me that I could not pay them even if I wanted to and had the money, which I did not.

They came in and began to give me instruction in the program that later became known as Alcoholics Anonymous. There was not much of it at that time.

I looked up and there were two great big fellows over six-foot tall, very likable looking. (I knew afterwards that the two who came in were Bill W. and Doctor Bob.) Before very long we began to relate some incidents of our drinking, and pretty soon I realized that both of them knew what they were talking about, because you can see things and smell things when you're drunk that you can't other times. If I had thought they didn't know what they were talking about, I wouldn't have been willing to talk to them at all.

After a while, Bill said, "Well, now, you've been talking a good long time, let me talk a minute or two." So, after hearing some more of my story, he turned



around and said to Doc—I don't think he knew I heard him, but I did—he said, “Well, I believe he's worth saving and working on.” They said to me, “Do you want to quit drinking? It's none of our business about your drinking. We're not up here trying to take any of your rights or privileges away from you, but we have a program whereby we think we can stay sober. Part of that program is that we take it to someone else who needs it and wants it. Now, if you don't want it, we'll not take up your time, and we'll be going and looking for someone else.”

The next thing they wanted to know was if I thought I could quit of my own accord, without any help, if I could just walk out of the hospital and never take another drink. If I could, that was wonderful, that was just fine, and they would very much appreciate a person who had that kind of power, but they were looking for a man who knew he had a problem and knew he couldn't handle it himself and needed outside help. The next thing they wanted to know was if I believed in a Higher Power. I had no trouble there because I had never actually ceased to believe in God and had tried lots of times to get help but hadn't succeeded. Next they wanted to know would I be willing to go to this Higher Power and ask for help, calmly and without any reservations.

They left this with me to think over, and I lay there on that hospital bed and went back over and reviewed my life. I thought of what liquor had done to me, the opportunities that I had discarded, the abilities that had been given me and how I had wasted them, and I finally came to the conclusion that if I didn't want

to quit, I certainly ought to want to, and that I was willing to do anything in the world to stop drinking.

I was willing to admit to myself that I had hit bottom, that I had gotten hold of something that I didn't know how to handle by myself. So after reviewing these things and realizing what liquor had cost me, I went to this Higher Power that, to me, was God, without any reservation, and admitted that I was completely powerless over alcohol and that I was willing to do anything in the world to get rid of the problem. In fact, I admitted that from then on I was willing to let God take over instead of me. Each day I would try to find out what His will was and try to follow that, rather than trying to get Him to always agree that the things I thought up for myself were the things best for me. So, when they came back, I told them.

One of the fellows, I think it was Doc, said, "Well, you want to quit?" I said, "Yes, Doc, I would like to quit, at least for five, six, or eight months, until I get things straightened up, and begin to get the respect of my wife and some other people back, and get my finances fixed up and so on." And they both laughed very heartily and said, "That's better than you've been doing, isn't it?" Which of course was true. They said, "We've got some bad news for you. It was bad news for us, and it will probably be bad news for you. Whether you quit six days, months, or years, if you go out and take a drink or two, you'll end up in this hospital tied down, just like you have been in these past six months. You are an alcoholic." As far as I know that was the first time I had ever paid any attention to that word. I figured I was just a drunk. And they said, "No, you have a disease, and it doesn't make any

difference how long you do without it, after a drink or two you'll end up just like you are now." That certainly was real disheartening news, at the time.

The next question they asked was, "You can quit twenty-four hours, can't you?" I said, "Sure, yes, anybody can do that, for twenty-four hours." They said, "That's what we're talking about. Just twenty-four hours at a time." That sure did take a load off of my mind. Every time I'd start thinking about drinking, I would think of the long, dry years ahead without having a drink; but this idea of twenty-four hours, that it was up to me from then on, was a lot of help.

(At this point, the Editors intrude just long enough to supplement Bill D.'s account, that of the man on the bed, with that of Bill W., the man who sat by the side of the bed.) Says Bill W.:

Nineteen years ago last summer, Dr. Bob and I saw him (Bill D.) for the first time. Bill lay on his hospital bed and looked at us in wonder.

Two days before this, Dr. Bob had said to me, "If you and I are going to stay sober, we had better get busy." Straightway, Bob called Akron's City Hospital and asked for the nurse on the receiving ward. He explained that he and a man from New York had a cure for alcoholism. Did she have an alcoholic customer on whom it could be tried? Knowing Bob of old, she jokingly replied, "Well, Doctor, I suppose you've already tried it yourself?"

Yes, she did have a customer—a dandy. He had just arrived in D.T.'s, had blacked the eyes of two nurses, and now they had him strapped down tight. Would this one do? After prescribing medicines, Dr. Bob ordered, "Put him in a private room. We'll be down as soon as he clears up."

Bill didn't seem too impressed. Looking sadder than ever, he wearily ventured, "Well, this is wonderful for you fellows, but it can't be for me. My case is so terrible that I'm scared to go out of this hospital at all. You don't have

to sell me religion, either. I was at one time a deacon in the church, and I still believe in God. But I guess He doesn't believe much in me."

Then Dr. Bob said, "Well, Bill, maybe you'll feel better tomorrow. Wouldn't you like to see us again?"

"Sure I would," replied Bill, "Maybe it won't do any good, but I'd like to see you both, anyhow. You certainly know what you are talking about."

Looking in later, we found Bill with his wife, Henrietta. Eagerly he pointed to us saying, "These are the fellows I told you about; they are the ones who understand."

Bill then related how he had lain awake nearly all night. Down in the pit of his depression, new hope had somehow been born. The thought flashed through his mind, "If they can do it, I can do it!" Over and over he said this to himself. Finally, out of his hope, there burst conviction. Now he was sure. Then came a great joy. At length, peace stole over him and he slept.

Before our visit was over, Bill suddenly turned to his wife and said, "Go fetch my clothes, dear. We're going to get up and get out of here." Bill D. walked out of that hospital a free man, never to drink again.

A.A.'s Number One Group dates from that very day.

(Bill D. now continues his story.)

It was in the next two or three days after I had first met Doc and Bill that I finally came to a decision to turn my will over to God and to go along with this program the best that I could. Their talk and action had instilled in me a certain amount of confidence, although I was not too absolutely certain. I wasn't afraid that the program wouldn't work, but I still was doubtful whether I would be able to hang on to the program, but I did come to the conclusion that I was willing to put everything I had into it, with God's power, and that I wanted to do just that. As soon as I had done that, I did feel a great release. I knew that

I had a helper whom I could rely upon, who wouldn't fail me. If I could stick to Him and listen, I would make it. I remember when the boys came back, I told them, "I have gone to this Higher Power, and I have told Him that I am willing to put His world first, above everything. I have already done it, and I am willing to do it again here in the presence of you, or I am willing to say it any place, anywhere in the world from now on and not be ashamed of it." And this certainly gave me a lot of confidence and seemed to take a lot of the burden off me.

I remember telling them too that it was going to be awfully tough, because I did some other things, smoked cigarettes and played penny ante poker and sometimes bet on the horse races, and they said, "Don't you think you're having more trouble with this drinking than with anything else at the present time? Don't you believe you are going to have all you can do to get rid of that?" "Yes," I said, reluctantly, "I probably will." They said, "Let's forget about those other things, that is, trying to eliminate them all at once, and concentrate on the drink." Of course, we had talked over quite a number of the failings that I had and made a sort of an inventory, which wasn't too difficult, because I had an awful lot of things wrong that were very apparent to me. Then they said, "There is one other thing. You should go out and take this program to somebody else who needs it and wants it."

Of course, by this time, my business was practically nonexistent. I didn't have any. Naturally, for quite a time, I wasn't too well physically, either. It took me a year, or a year and a half, to get to feeling physically

well, and it was rather tough, but I soon found folks whose friendship I had once had, and I found, after I had been sober for quite some little time, that these people began to act like they had in previous years, before I had gotten so bad, so that I didn't pay too awful much attention to financial gains. I spent most of my time trying to get back these friendships and to make some recompense toward my wife, whom I had hurt a lot.

It would be hard to estimate how much A.A. has done for me. I really wanted the program, and I wanted to go along with it. I noticed that the others seemed to have such a release, a happiness, a something that I thought a person ought to have. I was trying to find the answer. I knew there was even more, something that I hadn't got, and I remember one day, a week or two after I had come out of the hospital, Bill was at my house talking to my wife and me. We were eating lunch, and I was listening and trying to find out why they had this release that they seemed to have. Bill looked across at my wife and said to her, "Henrietta, the Lord has been so wonderful to me, curing me of this terrible disease, that I just want to keep talking about it and telling people."

I thought, I think I have the answer. Bill was very, very grateful that he had been released from this terrible thing and he had given God the credit for having done it, and he's so grateful about it he wants to tell other people about it. That sentence, "The Lord has been so wonderful to me, curing me of this terrible disease, that I just want to keep telling people about it," has been a sort of a golden text for the A.A. program and for me.

Of course, as time went on, I began to get my health back and began to be so I didn't have to hide from people all the time—it's just been wonderful. I still go to meetings, because I like to go. I meet the people that I like to talk to. Another reason that I go is that I'm still grateful for the good years that I've had. I'm so grateful for both the program and the people in it that I still want to go. And then probably the most wonderful thing that I have learned from the program—I've seen this in the A.A. Grapevine a lot of times, and I've had people say it to me personally, and I've heard people get up in meetings and say it—is this statement: "I came into A.A. solely for the purpose of sobriety, but it has been through A.A. that I have found God."

I feel that is about the most wonderful thing that a person can do.

(2)

## GRATITUDE IN ACTION

*The story of Dave B., one of the founders of A.A. in Canada in 1944.*

I BELIEVE IT would be good to tell the story of my life. Doing so will give me the opportunity to remember that I must be grateful to God and to those members of Alcoholics Anonymous who knew A.A. before me. Telling my story reminds me that I could go back to where I was if I forget the wonderful things that have been given to me or forget that God is the guide who keeps me on this path.

In June 1924, I was sixteen years old and had just graduated from high school in Sherbrooke, Quebec. Some of my friends suggested that we go for a beer. I had never had beer or any other form of alcohol. I don't know why, since we always had alcohol at home (I should add that no one in my family was ever considered an alcoholic). Well, I was afraid my friends wouldn't like me if I didn't do as they did. I knew firsthand that mysterious state of people who appear to be sure of themselves but are actually eaten alive with fear inside. I had a rather strong inferiority complex. I believe I lacked what my father used to call "character." So on that nice summer day in an old inn in Sherbrooke, I didn't find the courage to say no.

I became an active alcoholic from that first day, when alcohol produced a very special effect in me. I



was transformed. Alcohol suddenly made me into what I had always wanted to be.

Alcohol became my everyday companion. At first, I considered it a friend; later, it became a heavy load I couldn't get rid of. It turned out to be much more powerful than I was, even if, for many years, I could stay sober for short periods. I kept telling myself that one way or another I would get rid of alcohol. I was convinced I would find a way to stop drinking. I didn't want to acknowledge that alcohol had become so important in my life. Indeed, alcohol was giving me something I didn't want to lose.

In 1934, a series of mishaps occurred because of my drinking. I had to come back from Western Canada because the bank I worked for lost confidence in me. An elevator accident cost me all of the toes of one foot and a skull fracture. I was in the hospital for months. My excessive drinking also caused a brain hemorrhage, which completely paralyzed one side of my body. I probably did my First Step the day I came by ambulance to Western Hospital. A night-shift nurse asked me, "Mr. B., why do you drink so much? You have a wonderful wife, a bright little boy. You have no reason to drink like that. Why do you?" Being honest for the first time, I said, "I don't know, Nurse. I really don't know." That was many years before I learned about the Fellowship.

You might think I'd tell myself, "If alcohol causes so much harm, I will stop drinking." But I found countless reasons to prove to myself that alcohol had nothing to do with my misfortunes. I told myself it was because of fate, because everyone was against me, because things weren't going well. I sometimes thought

that God did not exist. I thought, "If this loving God exists, as they say, He would not treat me this way. God would not act like this." I felt sorry for myself a lot in those days.

My family and employers were concerned about my drinking, but I had become rather arrogant. I bought a 1931 Ford with an inheritance from my grandmother, and my wife and I made a trip to Cape Cod. On the way back, we stopped at my uncle's place in New Hampshire. This uncle had taken me under his wing at the time of my mother's death, and he worried about me. Now he said to me, "Dave, if you stop drinking for a full year, I will give you the Ford roadster I just bought." I loved that car, so I immediately promised I wouldn't drink for a whole year. And I meant it. Yet I was drinking again before we reached the Canadian border. I was powerless over alcohol. I was learning that I could do nothing to fight it off, even while I was denying the fact.

On Easter weekend 1944, I found myself in a jail cell in Montreal. By now, I was drinking to escape the horrible thoughts I had whenever I was sober enough to become aware of my situation. I was drinking to avoid seeing what I had become. The job I'd had for twenty years and the new car were long gone. I had undergone three stays in a psychiatric hospital. God knows I didn't want to drink, yet to my great despair, I always returned to the infernal merry-go-round.

I wondered how this misery would end. I was full of fear. I was afraid to tell others what I felt lest they would think I was insane. I was terribly lonely, full of self-pity, and terrified. Most of all, I was in a deep depression.

Then I recalled a book given to me by my sister Jean about drunks as desperate as I was who had found a way to stop drinking. According to this book, these drunks had found a way to live like other human beings: to get up in the morning, go to work, and return home in the evening. This book was about Alcoholics Anonymous.

I decided to get in touch with them. I had much difficulty in reaching A.A. in New York, as A.A. wasn't as well-known then. I finally spoke to a woman, Bobbie, who said words I hope I never forget: "I am an alcoholic. We have recovered. If you want, we'll help you." She told me about herself and added that many other drunks had used this method to stop drinking. What impressed me most in this conversation was the fact that these people, five hundred miles away, cared enough to try to help me. Here I was, feeling so sorry for myself, convinced that no one cared whether I was dead or alive.

I was very surprised when I got a copy of the Big Book in the mail the following day. And each day after that, for nearly a year, I got a letter or a note, something from Bobbie or from Bill or one of the other members of the central office in New York. In October 1944, Bobbie wrote: "You sound very sincere and from now on we will be counting on you to perpetuate the Fellowship of A.A. where you are. You will find enclosed some queries from alcoholics. We think you are now ready to take on this responsibility." She had enclosed some four hundred letters that I answered in the course of the following weeks. Soon, I began to get answers back.

In my new enthusiasm, and having found an answer

to my problem, I told Dorie, my wife, "You can quit your job now; I will take care of you. From now on, you will take the place you deserve in this family." However, she knew better. She said, "No, Dave, I will keep my job for a year while you go save the drunks." That is exactly what I set out to do.

As I look back on it now, I did everything wrong, but at least I was thinking of somebody else instead of myself. I had begun to get a little bit of something I am very full of now, and that is gratitude. I was becoming increasingly grateful to the people in New York and to the God they referred to but whom I found difficult to reach. (Yet I realized I had to seek the Higher Power I was told about.)

I was all alone in Quebec at that time. The Toronto Group had been in operation since the previous fall, and there was a member in Windsor who attended meetings across the river in Detroit. That was A.A. in its entirety in this country.

One day I got a letter from a man in Halifax who wrote, "One of my friends, a drunk, works in Montreal, but he is currently in Chicago, where he went on a major binge. When he returns to Montreal, I'd like you to talk to him."

I met this man at his home. His wife was cooking dinner, their young daughter at her side. The man was wearing a velvet jacket and sitting comfortably in his parlor. I hadn't met many people from high society. I immediately thought, "What's going on here? This man isn't an alcoholic!" Jack was a down-to-earth person. He was used to discussions about psychiatry, and the concept of a Higher Power didn't appeal to him

very much. But from our meeting, A.A. was born here in Quebec.

The Fellowship started to grow, most particularly following the publicity we got in the *Gazette* in the spring of 1945. I will never forget the day that Mary came to see me—she was the first woman to join our Fellowship here. She was very shy and reserved, very low-key. She had heard of the Fellowship through the *Gazette*.

For the first year, all the meetings were held in my home. There were people all over the house. The wives of members used to come with their husbands, though we didn't allow them in our closed meetings. They used to sit on the bed or in the kitchen, where they would make coffee and snacks. I believe they were wondering what would happen to us. Yet they were as happy as we were.

The first two French Canadians to learn about A.A. did so in the basement of my home. All French-speaking meetings in existence today were born out of those early meetings.

At the end of my first year of sobriety, my wife agreed to leave her job after I found some work. I thought that would be easy. All I had to do was go see an employer and I'd be able to support my family in a normal fashion. However, I looked for work for many months. We didn't have much money, and I was spending the little we had going from one place to the other, answering ads and meeting people. I was getting more and more discouraged. One day, a member said, "Dave, why don't you apply at the aircraft factory? I know a fellow there who could help you." So

that was where I got my first job. There really is a Higher Power looking after us.

One of the most fundamental things I have learned is to pass on our message to other alcoholics. That means I must think more about others than about myself. The most important thing is to practice these principles in all my affairs. In my opinion, that is what Alcoholics Anonymous is all about.

I never forgot a passage I first read in the copy of the Big Book that Bobbie sent me: “Abandon yourself to God as you understand God. Admit your faults to Him and to your fellows. Clear away the wreckage of your past. Give freely of what you find and join us.” It is very simple—though not always easy. But it can be done.

I know the Fellowship of A.A. doesn't offer any guarantees, but I also know that in the future I do not have to drink. I want to keep this life of peace, serenity, and tranquility that I have found. Today, I have found again the home I left and the woman I married when she was still so young. We have two more children, and they think their dad is an important man. I have all these wonderful things—people who mean more to me than anything in the world. I shall keep all that, and I won't have to drink, if I remember one simple thing: to keep my hand in the hand of God.

(3)

## WOMEN SUFFER TOO

*Despite great opportunities, alcohol nearly ended her life. An early member, she spread the word among women in our pioneering period.*

WHAT WAS I saying . . . from far away, as if in a delirium, I heard my own voice—calling someone “Dorothy,” talking of dress shops, of jobs . . . the words came clearer . . . this sound of my own voice frightened me as it came closer . . . and suddenly, there I was, talking of I knew not what, to someone I’d never seen before that very moment. Abruptly I stopped speaking. Where was I?

I’d waked up in strange rooms before, fully dressed on a bed or a couch; I’d waked up in my own room, in or on my own bed, not knowing what hour or day it was, afraid to ask . . . but this was different. This time I seemed to be already awake, sitting upright in a big easy chair, in the middle of an animated conversation with a perfectly strange young woman who didn’t appear to think it strange. *She* was chatting on, pleasantly and comfortably.

Terrified, I looked around. I was in a large, dark, rather poorly furnished room—the living room of a basement flat. Cold chills started chasing up and down my spine; my teeth were chattering; my hands were shaking, so I tucked them under me to keep them from flying away. My fright was real enough, but it

didn't account for these violent reactions. I knew what they were, all right—a drink would fix them. It must have been a long time since I had my last drink—but I didn't dare ask this stranger for one. I must get out of here. In any case I must get out of here before I let slip my abysmal ignorance of how I came to be here and she realized that I was stark, staring mad. I was mad—I must be.

The shakes grew worse, and I looked at my watch—six o'clock. It had been one o'clock when I last remembered looking. I'd been sitting comfortably in a restaurant with Rita, drinking my sixth martini and hoping the waiter would forget about the lunch order—at least long enough for me to have a couple more. I'd only had two with her, but I'd managed four in the fifteen minutes I'd waited for her, and of course I'd had the usual uncounted swigs from the bottle as I painfully got up and did my slow spasmodic dressing. In fact, I had been in very good shape at one o'clock—feeling no pain. What *could* have happened? That had been in the center of New York, on noisy 42nd Street . . . this was obviously a quiet residential section. Why had “Dorothy” brought me here? Who was she? How had I met her? I had no answers, and I dared not ask. She gave no sign of recognizing anything wrong, but what had I been doing for those lost five hours? My brain whirled. I might have done terrible things, and I wouldn't even know it!

Somehow I got out of there and walked five blocks past brownstone houses. There wasn't a bar in sight, but I found the subway station. The name on it was unfamiliar, and I had to ask the way to Grand Central. It took three-quarters of an hour and two changes to



get there—back to my starting point. I had been in the remote reaches of Brooklyn.

That night I got very drunk, which was usual, but I remembered everything, which was very unusual. I remembered going through what my sister assured me was my nightly procedure of trying to find Willie Seabrook's name in the telephone book. I remembered my loud resolution to find him and ask him to help me get into that "Asylum" he had written about. I remembered asserting that I was going to *do* something about this, that I couldn't go on . . . I remembered looking longingly at the window as an easier solution and shuddering at the memory of that other window, three years before, and the six agonizing months in a London hospital ward. I remembered filling the peroxide bottle in my medicine chest with gin, in case my sister found the bottle I hid under the mattress. And I remembered the creeping horror of the interminable night, in which I slept for short spells and woke dripping with cold sweat and shaken with utter despair, to drink hastily from my bottle and mercifully pass out again. "You're mad, you're mad, you're mad!" pounded through my brain with each returning ray of consciousness, and I drowned the refrain with drink.

That went on for two more months before I landed in a hospital and started my slow fight back to normalcy. It had been going on like that for over a year. I was thirty-two years old.

When I look back on that last horrible year of constant drinking, I wonder how I survived it, either physically or mentally. For there were, of course, periods of clear realization of what I had become,

attended by memories of what I had been, what I had expected to be. And the contrast was pretty shattering. Sitting in a Second Avenue bar, accepting drinks from anyone who offered, after my small stake was gone, or sitting at home alone, with the inevitable glass in my hand, I would remember, and, remembering, I would drink faster, seeking speedy oblivion. It was hard to reconcile this ghastly present with the simple facts of the past.

My family had money—I had never known denial of any material desire. The best boarding schools and a finishing school in Europe had fitted me for the conventional role of debutante and young matron. The times in which I grew up (the Prohibition era immortalized by Scott Fitzgerald and John Held Jr.) had taught me to be gay with the gayest; my own inner urges led me to outdo them all. The year after coming out, I married. So far, so good—all according to plan, like thousands of others. But then the story became my own. My husband was an alcoholic, and since I had only contempt for those without my own amazing capacity, the outcome was inevitable. My divorce coincided with my father's bankruptcy, and I went to work, casting off all allegiances and responsibilities to anyone other than myself. For me, work was only a different means to the same end, to be able to do exactly what I wanted to do.

For the next ten years I did just that. For greater freedom and excitement I went abroad to live. I had my own business, successful enough for me to indulge most of my desires. I met all the people I wanted to meet; I saw all the places I wanted to see; I did all the things I wanted to do—I was increasingly miserable.

Headstrong and willful, I rushed from pleasure to pleasure and found the returns diminishing to the vanishing point. Hangovers began to assume monstrous proportions, and the morning drink became an urgent necessity. “Blanks” were more frequent, and I seldom knew how I’d got home. When my friends suggested that I was drinking too much, they were no longer my friends. I moved from group to group—then from place to place—and went on drinking. With a creeping insidiousness, drink had become more important than anything else. It no longer gave me pleasure—it merely dulled the pain—but I *had* to have it. I was bitterly unhappy. No doubt I had been an exile too long—I should go home to America. I did. And to my surprise, my drinking grew worse.

When I entered a sanitarium for prolonged and intensive psychiatric treatment, I was convinced that I was having a serious mental breakdown. I wanted help, and I tried to cooperate. As the treatment progressed, I began to get a picture of myself, of the temperament that had caused me so much trouble. I had been hypersensitive, shy, idealistic. My inability to accept the harsh realities of life had resulted in a disillusioned cynic, clothed in a protective armor against the world’s misunderstanding. That armor had turned into prison walls, locking me in loneliness—and fear. All I had left was an iron determination to live my own life in spite of the alien world—and here I was, an inwardly frightened, outwardly defiant woman, who desperately needed a prop to keep going.

Alcohol was that prop, and I didn’t see how I could live without it. When my doctor told me I should never touch a drink again, I *couldn’t afford* to believe

him. I had to persist in my attempts to get straightened out enough to be able to use the drinks I needed, without their turning on me. Besides, how could *he* understand? He wasn't a drinking man; he didn't know what it was to *need* a drink, nor what a drink could do for one in a pinch. I wanted to *live*, not in a desert, but in a normal world; and my idea of a normal world was being among people who drank—teetotalers were not included. And I was sure that I couldn't be with people who drank, without drinking. In that I was correct: I couldn't be comfortable with *any* kind of people without drinking. I never had been.

Naturally, in spite of my good intentions, in spite of my protected life behind sanitarium walls, I several times got drunk and was astounded . . . and badly shaken.

That was the point at which my doctor gave me the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* to read. The first chapters were a revelation to me. I wasn't the only person in the world who felt and behaved like this! I wasn't mad or vicious—I was a sick person. I was suffering from an actual disease that had a name and symptoms like diabetes or cancer or TB—and a disease was respectable, not a moral stigma! But then I hit a snag. I couldn't stomach religion, and I didn't like the mention of God or any of the other capital letters. If that was the way out, it wasn't for me. I was an intellectual and I needed an intellectual answer, not an emotional one. I told my doctor so in no uncertain terms. I wanted to learn to stand on my own feet, not to change one prop for another, and an intangible and dubious one at that. And so on and on, for several weeks, while I grudgingly plowed through some more

of the offending book and felt more and more hopeless about myself.

Then the miracle happened—to *me!* It isn't always so sudden with everyone, but I ran into a personal crisis that filled me with a raging and righteous anger. And as I fumed helplessly and planned to get good and drunk and *show them*, my eye caught a sentence in the book lying open on my bed: "We cannot live with anger." The walls crumpled—and the light streamed in. I wasn't trapped. I wasn't helpless. I was *free*, and I didn't have to drink to "show them." This wasn't "religion"—this was freedom! Freedom from anger and fear, freedom to know happiness, and freedom to know love.

I went to a meeting to see for myself this group of freaks or bums who had done this thing. To go into a gathering of people was the sort of thing that all my life, from the time I left my private world of books and dreams to meet the real world of people and parties and jobs, had left me feeling an uncomfortable outsider, needing the warming stimulus of drinks to join in. I went trembling into a house in Brooklyn filled with strangers . . . and I found I had come home at last, to my own kind. There is another meaning for the Hebrew word that in the King James version of the Bible is translated "salvation." It is: "to come home." I had found my salvation. I wasn't alone any more.

That was the beginning of a new life, a fuller life, a happier life than I had ever known or believed possible. I had found friends—understanding friends who often knew what I was thinking and feeling better than I knew myself—and who didn't allow me to re-

treat into my prison of loneliness and fear over a fancied slight or hurt. Talking things over with them, great floods of enlightenment showed me myself as I really was—and I was like them. We all had hundreds of character traits, fears and phobias, likes and dislikes, in common. Suddenly I could accept myself, faults and all, as I was—for weren't we all like that? And, accepting, I felt a new inner comfort and the willingness and strength to do something about the traits I couldn't live with.

It didn't stop there. They knew what to do about those black abysses that yawned, ready to swallow me, when I felt depressed or nervous. There was a concrete program, designed to secure the greatest possible inner security for us long-time escapist. The feeling of impending disaster that had haunted me for years began to dissolve as I put into practice more and more of the Twelve Steps. It worked!

An active member of A.A. since 1939, I feel myself a useful member of the human race at last. I have something to contribute to humanity, since I am peculiarly qualified, as a fellow-sufferer, to give aid and comfort to those who have stumbled and fallen over this business of meeting life. I get my greatest thrill of accomplishment from the knowledge that I have played a part in the new happiness achieved by countless others like myself. The fact that I can work again and earn my living is important but secondary. I believe that my once overweening self-will has finally found its proper place, for I can say many times daily, "Thy will be done, not mine" . . . and mean it.

(4)

## OUR SOUTHERN FRIEND

*Pioneer A.A., minister's son, and southern farmer,  
he asked, "Who am I to say there is no God?"*

FATHER IS an Episcopal minister and his work takes him over long drives on bad roads. His parishioners are limited in number, but his friends are many, for to him race, creed, or social position makes no difference. It is not long before he drives up in the buggy. Both he and old Maud are glad to get home. The drive was long and cold but he was thankful for the hot bricks that some thoughtful person had given him for his feet. Soon supper is on the table. Father says grace, which delays my attack on the buckwheat cakes and sausage.

Bedtime comes. I climb to my room in the attic. It is cold, so there is no delay. I crawl under a pile of blankets and blow out the candle. The wind is rising and howls around the house. But I am safe and warm. I fall into a dreamless sleep.

I am in church. Father is delivering his sermon. A wasp is crawling up the back of the lady in front of me. I wonder if it will reach her neck. Shucks! It has flown away. At last! The message has been delivered.

"Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works—." I hunt for my nickel to drop in the plate so that mine will be seen.

I am in another fellow's room at college. "Fresh-

man," said he to me, "do you ever take a drink?" I hesitated. Father had never directly spoken to me about drinking but he never drank any, so far as I knew. Mother hated liquor and feared a drunken man. Her brother had been a drinker and had died in a state hospital for the insane. But his life was unmentioned, so far as I was concerned. I had never had a drink, but I had seen enough merriment in the boys who were drinking to be interested. I would never be like the village drunkard at home.

"Well," said the older boy, "do you?"

"Once in a while," I lied. I could not let him think I was a sissy.

He poured out two drinks. "Here's looking at you," said he. I gulped it down and choked. I didn't like it, but I would not say so. A mellow glow stole over me. This wasn't so bad after all. Sure, I'd have another. The glow increased. Other boys came in. My tongue loosened. Everyone laughed loudly. I was witty. I had no inferiorities. Why, I wasn't even ashamed of my skinny legs! This was the real thing!

A haze filled the room. The electric light began to move. Then two bulbs appeared. The faces of the other boys grew dim. How sick I felt. I staggered to the bathroom. Shouldn't have drunk so much or so fast. But I knew how to handle it now. I'd drink like a gentleman after this.

And so I met John Barleycorn. The grand fellow who at my call made me a hail-fellow-well-met, who gave me such a fine voice, as we sang "Hail, hail, the gang's all here" and "Sweet Adeline," who gave me freedom from fear and feelings of inferiority. Good old John! He was my pal, all right.



Final exams of my senior year and I may somehow graduate. I would never have tried, but mother counts on it so. A case of measles saved me from being kicked out during my sophomore year.

But the end is in sight. My last exam and an easy one. I gaze at the board with its questions. Can't remember the answer to the first. I'll try the second. No soap there. I don't seem to remember anything. I concentrate on one of the questions. I don't seem to be able to keep my mind on what I am doing. I get uneasy. If I don't get started soon, I won't have time to finish. No use. I can't think.

I leave the room, which the honor system allows. I go to my room. I pour out half a tumbler of grain alcohol and fill it with ginger ale. Now back to the exam. My pen moves rapidly. I know enough of the answers to get by. Good old John Barleycorn! He can be depended on. What a wonderful power he has over the mind! He has given me my diploma!

Underweight! How I hate that word. Three attempts to enlist in the service, and three failures because of being skinny. True, I have recently recovered from pneumonia and have an alibi, but my friends are in the war or going, and I am not. I visit a friend who is awaiting orders. The atmosphere of "eat, drink, and be merry" prevails and I absorb it. I drink a lot every night. I can hold a lot now, more than the others.

I am examined for the draft and pass the physical test. I am to go to camp on November 13. The Armistice is signed on the eleventh, and the draft is called off. Never in the service! The war leaves me with a pair of blankets, a toilet kit, a sweater knit by my sister, and a still greater sense of inferiority.

It is ten o'clock of a Saturday night. I am working hard on the books of a subsidiary company of a large corporation. I have had experience in selling, in collecting, and in accounting, and I am on my way up the ladder.

Then the crack-up. Cotton struck the skids and collections went cold. A twenty-three million dollar surplus wiped out. Offices closed up and workers discharged. I, and the books of my division, have been transferred to the head office. I have no assistance and am working nights, Saturdays, and Sundays. My salary has been cut. My wife and new baby are fortunately staying with relatives. I feel exhausted. The doctor has told me that if I don't give up inside work, I'll have tuberculosis. But what am I to do? I have a family to support and have no time to be looking for another job.

I reach for the bottle that I just got from George, the elevator boy.

I am a traveling salesman. The day is over and business has been not so good. I'll go to bed. I wish I were home with the family and not in this dingy hotel.

Well—well—look who's here! Good old Charlie! It's great to see him. How's the boy? A drink? You bet your life! We buy a gallon of "corn" because it is so cheap. Yet I am fairly steady when I go to bed.

Morning comes. I feel horrible. A little drink will put me on my feet. But it takes others to keep me there.

I become a teacher in a boys' school. I am happy in my work. I like the boys and we have lots of fun, in class and out.

The doctor bills are heavy and the bank account is low. My wife's parents come to our assistance. I am filled with hurt pride and self-pity. I seem to get no sympathy for my illness and have no appreciation of the love behind the gift.

I call the bootlegger and fill up my charred keg. But I do not wait for the charred keg to work. I get drunk. My wife is extremely unhappy. Her father comes to sit with me. He never says an unkind word. He is a real friend, but I do not appreciate him.

We are staying with my wife's father. Her mother is in a critical condition at a hospital. I cannot sleep. I must get myself together. I sneak downstairs and get a bottle of whiskey from the cellaret. I pour drinks down my throat. My father-in-law appears. "Have a drink?" I ask. He makes no reply and hardly seems to see me. His wife dies that night.

Mother has been dying of cancer for a long time. She is near the end now and is in a hospital. I have been drinking a lot but never get drunk. Mother must never know. I see her about to go.

I return to the hotel where I am staying and get gin from the bellboy. I drink and go to bed; I take a few the next morning and go see my mother once more. I cannot stand it. I go back to the hotel and get more gin. I drink steadily. I come to at three in the morning. The indescribable torture has me again. I turn on the light. I must get out of the room or I shall jump out of the window. I walk miles. No use. I go to the hospital, where I have made friends with the night superintendent. She puts me to bed and gives me a hypodermic.

I am at the hospital to see my wife. We have an-

other child. But she is not glad to see me. I have been drinking while the baby was arriving. Her father stays with her.

It is a cold, bleak day in November. I have fought hard to stop drinking. Each battle has ended in defeat. I tell my wife I cannot stop drinking. She begs me to go to a hospital for alcoholics that has been recommended. I say I will go. She makes the arrangements, but I will not go. I'll do it all myself. This time I'm off of it for good. I'll just take a few beers now and then.

It is the last day of the following October, a dark, rainy morning. I come to on a pile of hay in a barn. I look for liquor and can't find any. I wander to a table and drink five bottles of beer. I must get some liquor. Suddenly I feel hopeless, unable to go on. I go home. My wife is in the living room. She had looked for me last evening after I left the car and wandered off into the night. She had looked for me this morning. She has reached the end of her rope. There is no use trying any more, for there is nothing to try. "Don't say anything," I say to her. "I am going to do something."

I am in the hospital for alcoholics. I am an alcoholic. The insane asylum lies ahead. Could I have myself locked up at home? One more foolish idea. I might go out West on a ranch where I couldn't get anything to drink. I might do that. Another foolish idea. I wish I were dead, as I have often wished before. I am too yellow to kill myself.

Four alcoholics play bridge in a smoke-filled room. Anything to get my mind from myself. The game is over and the other three leave. I start to clean up the

debris. One man comes back, closing the door behind him.

He looks at me. "You think you are hopeless, don't you?" he asks.

"I know it," I reply.

"Well, you're not," says the man. "There are men on the streets of New York today who were worse than you, and they don't drink anymore."

"What are you doing here then?" I ask.

"I went out of here nine days ago saying that I was going to be honest, but I wasn't," he answers.

A fanatic, I thought to myself, but I was polite. "What is it?" I enquire.

Then he asks me if I believe in a power greater than myself, whether I call that power God, Allah, Confucius, Prime Cause, Divine Mind, or any other name. I told him that I believe in electricity and other forces of nature, but as for a God, if there is one, He has never done anything for me. Then he asks me if I am willing to right all the wrongs I have ever done to anyone, no matter how wrong I thought the others were. Am I willing to be honest with myself about myself and tell someone about myself, and am I willing to think of other people, of their needs instead of myself, in order to get rid of the drink problem?

"I'll do anything," I reply.

"Then all of your troubles are over," says the man and leaves the room. The man is in bad mental shape certainly. I pick up a book and try to read, but I cannot concentrate. I get in bed and turn out the light. But I cannot sleep. Suddenly a thought comes. Can all the worthwhile people I have known be wrong about God? Then I find myself thinking about myself

and a few things that I had wanted to forget. I begin to see I am not the person I had thought myself, that I had judged myself by comparing myself to others and always to my own advantage. It is a shock.

Then comes a thought that is like a voice. "*Who are you to say there is no God?*" It rings in my head; I can't get rid of it.

I get out of bed and go to the man's room. He is reading. "I must ask you a question," I say to the man. "How does prayer fit into this thing?"

"Well," he answers, "you've probably tried praying like I have. When you've been in a jam, you've said, 'God, please do this or that,' and if it turned out your way that was the last of it, and, if it didn't, you've said 'There isn't any God' or 'He doesn't do anything for me.' Is that right?"

"Yes," I reply.

"That isn't the way," he continued. "The thing I do is to say 'God, here I am and here are all my troubles. I've made a mess of things and can't do anything about it. You take me, and all my troubles, and do anything you want with me.' Does that answer your question?"

"Yes, it does," I answer. I return to bed. It doesn't make sense. Suddenly I feel a wave of utter hopelessness sweep over me. I am in the bottom of hell. And there, a tremendous hope is born. It might be true.

I tumble out of bed onto my knees. I know not what I say. But slowly a great peace comes to me. I feel lifted up. I believe in God. I crawl back into bed and sleep like a child.

Some men and women come to visit my friend of the night before. He invites me to meet them. They are a joyous crowd. I have never seen people that joyous

before. We talk. I tell them of the peace and that I believe in God. I think of my wife. I must write her. One girl suggests that I phone her. What a wonderful idea!

My wife hears my voice and she knows that I have found the answer to life. She comes to New York. I get out of the hospital and we visit some of these new-found friends.

I am home again. I have lost the Fellowship. Those who understand me are far away. The same old problems and worries still surround me. Members of my family annoy me. Nothing seems to be working out right. I am blue and unhappy. Maybe a drink—I put on my hat and dash off in the car.

Get into the lives of other people is one thing the fellows in New York had said. I go to see a man I had been asked to visit and tell him my story. I feel much better! I have forgotten about a drink.

I am on a train, headed for a city. I have left my wife at home, sick, and I have been unkind to her in leaving. I am very unhappy. Maybe a few drinks when I get to the city will help. A great fear seizes me. I talk to the stranger in the seat beside me. The fear and the insane idea are taken away.

Things are not going so well at home. I am learning that I cannot have my own way as I used to. I blame my wife and children. Anger possesses me, anger such as I have never felt before. I will not stand for it. I pack my bag and I leave. I stay with some understanding friends.

I see where I have been wrong in some respects. I do not feel angry any more. I return home and say I am sorry for my wrong. I am quiet again. But I have

not seen yet that I should do some constructive acts of love without expecting any return. I shall learn this after some more explosions.

I am blue again. I want to sell the place and move away. I want to get where I can find some alcoholics to help and where I can have some fellowship. A man calls me on the phone. Will I take a young fellow who has been drinking for two weeks to live with me? Soon I have others who are alcoholics and some who have other problems.

I begin to play God. I feel that I can fix them all. I do not fix anyone, but I am getting part of a tremendous education and I have made some new friends.

Nothing is right. Finances are in bad shape. I must find a way to make some money. The family seems to think of nothing but spending. People annoy me. I try to read. I try to pray. Gloom surrounds me. Why has God left me? I mope around the house. I will not go out and I will not enter into anything. What is the matter? I cannot understand. I will not be that way.

I'll get drunk! It is a cold-blooded idea. It is premeditated. I fix up a little apartment over the garage with books and drinking water. I am going to town to get some liquor and food. I shall not drink until I get back to the apartment. Then I shall lock myself in and read. And as I read, I shall take little drinks at long intervals. I shall get myself "mellow" and stay that way.

I get in the car and drive off. Halfway down the driveway a thought strikes me. I'll be honest anyway. I'll tell my wife what I am going to do. I back up to the door and go into the house. I call my wife into a



room where we can talk privately. I tell her quietly what I intend to do. She says nothing. She does not get excited. She maintains a perfect calm.

When I am through speaking, the whole idea has become absurd. Not a trace of fear is in me. I laugh at the insanity of it. We talk of other things. Strength has come from weakness.

I cannot see the cause of this temptation now. But I am to learn later that it began with my desire for material success becoming greater than my interest in the welfare of my fellow man. I learn more of that foundation stone of character, which is honesty. I learn that when we act upon the highest conception of honesty that is given us, our sense of honesty becomes more acute.

I learn that honesty is truth and that truth shall make us free!

(5)

## THE VICIOUS CYCLE

*How it finally broke a Southerner's obstinacy and destined this salesman to start A.A. in Philadelphia.*

JANUARY 8, 1938—that was my D-Day; the place, Washington, D.C. This last real merry-go-round had started the day before Christmas, and I had really accomplished a lot in those fourteen days. First, my new wife had walked out, bag, baggage, and furniture; then the apartment landlord had thrown me out of the empty apartment; and the finish was the loss of another job. After a couple of days in dollar hotels and one night in the pokey, I finally landed on my mother's doorstep—shaking apart, with several days' beard, and, of course, broke as usual. Many of these same things had happened to me many times before, but this time they had all descended together. For me, this was It.

Here I was, thirty-nine years old and a complete washout. Nothing had worked. Mother would take me in only if I stayed locked in a small storeroom and gave her my clothes and shoes. We had played this game before. That is the way Jackie found me, lying on a cot in my skivvies, with hot and cold sweats, pounding heart, and that awful itchy scratchiness all over. Somehow, I had always managed to avoid D.T.'s.

I seriously doubt I ever would have asked for help, but Fitz, an old school friend of mine, had persuaded

Jackie to call on me. Had he come two or three days later, I think I would have thrown him out, but he hit when I was open for anything.

Jackie arrived about seven in the evening and talked until three a.m. I don't remember much of what he said, but I did realize that here was another guy exactly like me; he had been in the same laughing academies and the same jails, known the same loss of jobs, same frustrations, same boredom, and the same loneliness. If anything, he had known all of them even better and more often than I. Yet he was happy, relaxed, confident, and laughing. That night, for the first time in my life, I really let down my hair and admitted my general loneliness. Jackie told me about a group of fellows in New York, of whom my old friend Fitz was one, who had the same problem I had, and who, by working together to help each other, were now not drinking and were happy like himself. He said something about God or a Higher Power, but I brushed that off—that was for the birds, not for me. Little more of our talk stayed in my memory, but I do know I slept the rest of that night, while before I had never known what a real night's sleep was.

This was my introduction to this "understanding Fellowship," although it was to be more than a year later before our Society was to bear the name Alcoholics Anonymous. All of us in A.A. know the tremendous happiness that is in our sobriety, but there are also tragedies. My sponsor, Jackie, was one of these. He brought in many of our original members, yet he himself could not make it and died of alcoholism. The lesson of his death still remains with me, yet I often wonder what would have happened if somebody

else had made that first call on me. So I always say that as long as I remember January 8, that is how long I will remain sober.

The age-old question in A.A. is which came first, the neurosis or the alcoholism. I like to think I was fairly normal before alcohol took over. My early life was spent in Baltimore, where my father was a physician and a grain merchant. My family lived in very prosperous circumstances, and while both my parents drank, sometimes too much, neither was an alcoholic. Father was a very well-integrated person, and while mother was high-strung and a bit selfish and demanding, our home life was reasonably harmonious. There were four of us children, and although both of my brothers later became alcoholic—one died of alcoholism—my sister has never taken a drink in her life.

Until I was thirteen I attended public schools, with regular promotions and average grades. I have never shown any particular talents, nor have I had any really frustrating ambitions. At thirteen I was packed off to a very fine Protestant boarding school in Virginia, where I stayed four years, graduating without any special achievements. In sports I made the track and tennis teams; I got along well with the other boys and had a fairly large circle of acquaintances but no intimate friends. I was never homesick and was always pretty self-sufficient.

However, here I probably took my first step toward my coming alcoholism by developing a terrific aversion to all churches and established religions. At this school we had Bible readings before each meal, and church services four times on Sunday, and I became so rebellious at this that I swore I would never join or

go to any church, except for weddings or for funerals.

At seventeen I entered the university, really to satisfy my father, who wanted me to study medicine there as he had. That is where I had my first drink, and I still remember it, for every “first” drink afterwards did exactly the same trick—I could feel it go right through every bit of my body and down to my very toes. But each drink after the first seemed to become less effective, and after three or four, they all seemed like water. I was never a hilarious drunk; the more I drank, the quieter I got, and the drunker I got, the harder I fought to stay sober. So it is clear that I never had any fun out of drinking—I would be the soberest-seeming one in the crowd, and, all of a sudden, I would be the drunkest. Even that first night I blacked out, which leads me to believe that I was an alcoholic from my very first drink. The first year in college I just got by in my studies. I majored in poker and drinking. I refused to join any fraternity, as I wanted to be a freelance, and that year my drinking was confined to one-night stands, once or twice a week. The second year my drinking was more or less restricted to weekends, but I was nearly kicked out for scholastic failure.

In the spring of 1917, in order to beat being fired from school, I became “patriotic” and joined the army. I am one of the lads who came out of the service with a lower rank than when I went in. I had been to OTC the previous summer, so I went into the army as a sergeant but I came out a private, and you really have to be unusual to do that. In the next two years, I washed more pans and peeled more potatoes than any other doughboy. In the army, I became a periodic

alcoholic—the periods always coming whenever I could make the opportunity. However, I did manage to keep out of the guardhouse. My last bout in the army lasted from November 5 to 11, 1918. We heard by wireless on the fifth that the Armistice would be signed the next day (this was a premature report), so I had a couple of cognacs to celebrate; then I hopped a truck and went AWOL. My next conscious memory was in Bar le Duc, many miles from base. It was November 11, and bells were ringing and whistles blowing for the real Armistice. There I was, unshaven, clothes torn and dirty, with no recollection of wandering all over France but, of course, a hero to the local French. Back at camp, all was forgiven because it was the End, but in the light of what I have since learned, I know I was a confirmed alcoholic at nineteen.

With the war over and back in Baltimore with the folks, I had several small jobs for three years, and then I went to work soliciting as one of the first ten employees of a new national finance company. What an opportunity I shot to pieces there! This company now does a volume of over three billion dollars annually. Three years later, at twenty-five, I opened and operated their Philadelphia office and was earning more than I ever have since. I was the fair-haired boy all right, but two years later I was blacklisted as an irresponsible drunk. It doesn't take long.

My next job was in sales promotion for an oil company in Mississippi, where I promptly became high man and got lots of pats on the back. Then I turned two company cars over in a short time and bingo—fired again. Oddly enough, the big shot who

fired me from this company was one of the first men I met when I later joined the New York A.A. Group. He had also gone all the way through the wringer and had been dry two years when I saw him again.

After the oil job blew up, I went back to Baltimore and Mother, my first wife having said a permanent goodbye. Then came a sales job with a national tire company. I reorganized their city sales policy and eighteen months later, when I was thirty, they offered me the branch managership. As part of this promotion, they sent me to their national convention in Atlantic City to tell the big wheels how I'd done it. At this time I was holding what drinking I did down to weekends, but I hadn't had a drink at all in a month. I checked into my hotel room and then noticed a placard tucked under the glass on the bureau stating "There will be positively NO drinking at this convention," signed by the president of the company. That did it! Who, me? The Big Shot? The only salesman invited to talk at the convention? The man who was going to take over one of their biggest branches come Monday? I'd show 'em who was boss! No one in that company saw me again—ten days later I wired my resignation.

As long as things were tough and the job a challenge, I could always manage to hold on pretty well, but as soon as I learned the combination, got the puzzle under control, and the boss to pat me on the back, I was gone again. Routine jobs bored me, but I would take on the toughest one I could find and work day and night until I had it under control; then it would become tedious, and I'd lose all interest in it. I could never be bothered with the follow-through and would

invariably reward myself for my efforts with that “first” drink.

After the tire job came the thirties, the Depression, and the downhill road. In the eight years before A.A. found me, I had over forty jobs—selling and traveling—one thing after another, and the same old routine. I’d work like mad for three or four weeks without a single drink, save my money, pay a few bills, and then “reward” myself with alcohol. Then I’d be broke again, hiding out in cheap hotels all over the country, having one-night jail stands here and there, and always that horrible feeling “What’s the use—nothing is worthwhile.” Every time I blacked out, and that was every time I drank, there was always that gnawing fear, “What did I do this time?” Once I found out. Many alcoholics have learned they can bring their bottle to a cheap movie theater and drink, sleep, wake up, and drink again in the darkness. I had repaired to one of these one morning with my jug, and, when I left late in the afternoon, I picked up a newspaper on the way home. Imagine my surprise when I read in a page-one “box” that I had been taken from the theater unconscious around noon that day, removed by ambulance to a hospital and stomach-pumped, and then released. Evidently I had gone right back to the movie with a bottle, stayed there several hours, and started home with no recollection of what had happened.

The mental state of the sick alcoholic is beyond description. I had no resentments against individuals—the whole world was all wrong. My thoughts went round and round with, What’s it all about anyhow? People have wars and kill each other; they struggle and cut each other’s throats for success, and what does



anyone get out of it? Haven't I been successful, haven't I accomplished extraordinary things in business? What do I get out of it? Everything's all wrong and the hell with it. For the last two years of my drinking, I prayed during every drunk that I wouldn't wake up again. Three months before I met Jackie, I had made my second feeble try at suicide.

This was the background that made me willing to listen on January 8. After being dry two weeks and sticking close to Jackie, all of a sudden I found I had become the sponsor of my sponsor, for he was suddenly taken drunk. I was startled to learn he had only been off the booze a month or so himself when he brought me the message! However, I made an SOS call to the New York Group, whom I hadn't met yet, and they suggested we both come there. This we did the next day, and what a trip! I really had a chance to see myself from a nondrinking point of view. We checked into the home of Hank, the man who had fired me eleven years before in Mississippi, and there I met Bill, our founder. Bill had then been dry three years and Hank, two. At the time, I thought them just a swell pair of screwballs, for they were not only going to save all the drunks in the world but also all the so-called normal people! All they talked of that first weekend was God and how they were going to straighten out Jackie's and my life. In those days we really took each other's inventories firmly and often. Despite all this, I *did* like these new friends because, again, they were like me. They had also been periodic big shots who had goofed out repeatedly at the wrong time, and they also knew how to split one paper match into three separate matches. (This is very use-

ful knowledge in places where matches are prohibited.) They, too, had taken a train to one town and had wakened hundreds of miles in the opposite direction, never knowing how they got there. The same old routines seemed to be common to us all. During that first weekend, I decided to stay in New York and take all they gave out with, except the "God stuff." I knew they needed to straighten out *their* thinking and habits, but *I* was all right; *I* just drank too much. Just give me a good front and a couple of bucks, and I'd be right back in the big time. I'd been dry three weeks, had the wrinkles out, and had sobered up my sponsor all by myself!

Bill and Hank had just taken over a small automobile polish company, and they offered me a job—ten dollars a week and keep at Hank's house. We were all set to put DuPont out of business.

At that time the group in New York was composed of about twelve men who were working on the principle of every drunk for himself; we had no real formula and no name. We would follow one man's ideas for a while, decide he was wrong, and switch to another's method. But we *were* staying sober as long as we kept and talked together. There was one meeting a week at Bill's home in Brooklyn, and we all took turns there spouting off about how we had changed our lives overnight, how many drunks we had saved and straightened out, and last but not least, how God had touched each of us personally on the shoulder. Boy, what a circle of confused idealists! Yet we all had one really sincere purpose in our hearts, and that was not to drink. At our weekly meeting I was a menace to serenity those first few months, for I took

every opportunity to lambaste that “spiritual angle,” as we called it, or anything else that had any tinge of theology. Much later I discovered the elders held many prayer meetings hoping to find a way to give me the heave-ho but at the same time stay tolerant and spiritual. They did not seem to be getting an answer, for here I was staying sober and selling lots of auto polish, on which they were making one thousand percent profit. So I rocked along my merry independent way until June, when I went out selling auto polish in New England. After a very good week, two of my customers took me to lunch on Saturday. We ordered sandwiches, and one man said, “Three beers.” I let mine sit. After a bit, the other man said, “Three beers.” I let that sit too. Then it was my turn—I ordered, “Three beers,” but this time it was different; I had a cash investment of thirty cents, and, on a ten-dollar-a-week salary, that’s a big thing. So I drank all three beers, one after the other, and said, “I’ll be seeing you, boys,” and went around the corner for a bottle. I never saw either of them again.

I had completely forgotten the January 8 when I found the Fellowship, and I spent the next four days wandering around New England half drunk, by which I mean I couldn’t get drunk and I couldn’t get sober. I tried to contact the boys in New York, but telegrams bounced right back, and when I finally got Hank on the telephone he fired me right then. This was when I really took my first good look at myself. My loneliness was worse than it had ever been before, for now even my own kind had turned against me. This time it really hurt, more than any hangover ever had. My brilliant agnosticism vanished, and I saw for the first

time that those who really believed, or at least honestly tried to find a Power greater than themselves, were much more composed and contented than I had ever been, and they seemed to have a degree of happiness I had never known.

Peddling off my polish samples for expenses, I crawled back to New York a few days later in a very chastened frame of mind. When the others saw my altered attitude, they took me back in, but for me they *had* to make it tough; if they hadn't, I don't think I ever would have stuck it out. Once again, there was the challenge of a tough job, but this time I was determined to follow through. For a long time the only Higher Power I could concede was the power of the group, but this was far more than I had ever recognized before, and it was at least a beginning. It was also an ending, for never since June 16, 1938, have I had to walk alone.

Around this time our big A.A. book was being written, and it all became much simpler; we had a definite formula that some sixty of us agreed was the middle course for all alcoholics who wanted sobriety, and that formula has not been changed one iota down through the years. I don't think the boys were completely convinced of my personality change, for they fought shy of including my story in the book, so my only contribution to their literary efforts was my firm conviction—since I was still a theological rebel—that the word *God* should be qualified with the phrase “as we understand Him”—for that was the only way I could accept spirituality.

After the book appeared, we all became very busy in our efforts to save all and sundry, but I was still

actually on the fringes of A.A. While I went along with all that was done and attended the meetings, I never took an active job of leadership until February 1940. Then I got a very good position in Philadelphia and quickly found I would need a few fellow alcoholics around me if I was to stay sober. Thus I found myself in the middle of a brand-new group. When I started to tell the boys how we did it in New York and all about the spiritual part of the program, I found they would not believe me unless I was practicing what I preached. Then I found that as I gave in to this spiritual or personality change, I was getting a little more serenity. In telling newcomers how to change their lives and attitudes, all of a sudden I found I was doing a little changing myself. I had been too self-sufficient to write a moral inventory, but I discovered in pointing out to the new man his wrong attitudes and actions that I was really taking my own inventory, and that if I expected him to change, I would have to work on myself too. This change has been a long, slow process for me, but through these latter years the dividends have been tremendous.

In June 1945, with another member, I made my first—and only—Twelfth Step call on a female alcoholic, and a year later I married her. She has been sober all the way through, and for me that has been good. We can share in the laughter and tears of our many friends, and most important, we can share our A.A. way of life and are given a daily opportunity to help others.

In conclusion, I can only say that whatever growth or understanding has come to me, I have no wish to graduate. Very rarely do I miss the meetings of my

neighborhood A.A. group, and my average has never been less than two meetings a week. I have served on only one committee in the past nine years, for I feel that I had my chance the first few years and that newer members should fill the jobs. They are far more alert and progressive than we floundering fathers were, and the future of our fellowship is in their hands. We now live in the West and are very fortunate in our area A.A.; it is good, simple, and friendly, and our one desire is to stay *in* A.A. and not *on* it. Our pet slogan is "Easy Does It."

And I still say that as long as I remember that January 8 in Washington, that is how long, by the grace of God as I understand Him, I will retain a happy sobriety.

(6)

## JIM'S STORY

*This physician, one of the earliest members of A.A.'s first black group, tells of how freedom came as he worked among his people.*

I WAS BORN in a little town in Virginia in an average religious home. My father, a Negro, was a country physician. I remember in my early youth my mother dressed me just as she did my two sisters, and I wore curls until I was six years of age. At that time I started school, and that's how I got rid of the curls. I found that even then I had fears and inhibitions. We lived just a few doors from the First Baptist Church, and when they had funerals, I remember very often asking my mother whether the person was good or bad and whether they were going to heaven or hell. I was about six then.

My mother had been recently converted and, actually, had become a religious fanatic. That was her main neurotic manifestation. She was very possessive with us children. Mother drilled into me a very Puritanical point of view as to sex relations, as well as to motherhood and womanhood. I'm sure my ideas as to what life should be like were quite different from that of the average person with whom I associated. Later on in life that took its toll. I realize that now.

About this time an incident took place in grade school that I have never forgotten because it made me realize that I was actually a physical coward. During recess we were playing basketball, and I had accidentally tripped a fellow just a little larger than I was. He took the basketball and smashed me in the face with it. That was enough provocation to fight but I didn't fight, and I realized after recess why I didn't. It was fear. That hurt and disturbed me a great deal.

Mother was of the old school and figured that anyone I associated with should be of the proper type. Of course, in my day, times had changed; she just hadn't changed with the times. I don't know whether it was right or wrong, but at least I know that people weren't thinking the same. We weren't even permitted to play cards in our home, but Father would give us just a little toddy with whiskey and sugar and warm water now and then. We had no whiskey in the house, other than my father's private stock. I never saw him drunk in my life, although he'd take a shot in the morning and usually one in the evening, and so did I; but for the most part he kept his whiskey in his office. The only time that I ever saw my mother take anything alcoholic was around Christmas time, when she would drink some eggnog or light wine.

In my first year in high school, mother suggested that I not join the cadet unit. She got a medical certificate so that I should not have to join it. I don't know whether she was a pacifist or whether she just thought that in the event of another war it would have some bearing on my joining up.

About then I realized that my point of view on the opposite sex wasn't entirely like that of most of the



boys I knew. For that reason, I believe, I married at a much younger age than I would have, had it not been for my home training. My wife and I have been married for some thirty years now. Vi was the first girl that I ever took out. I had quite a heartache about her then because she wasn't the type of girl that my mother wanted me to marry. In the first place, she had been married before; I was her second husband. My mother resented it so much that the first Christmas after our marriage, she didn't even invite us to dinner. After our first child came, my parents both became allies. Then, in later days, after I became an alcoholic, they both turned against me.

My father had come out of the South and had suffered a great deal down there. He wanted to give me the very best, and he thought that nothing but being a doctor would suffice. On the other hand, I believe that I've always been medically inclined, though I have never been able to see medicine quite as the average person sees it. I do surgery because that's something that you can see; it's more tangible. But I can remember in postgraduate days, and during internship, that very often I'd go to a patient's bed and start a process of elimination and then, very often, I'd wind up guessing. That wasn't the way it was with my father. I think with him it possibly was a gift—intuitive diagnosis. Father, through the years, had built up a very good mail-order business because, at that time, there wasn't too much money in medicine.

I don't think I suffered too much as far as the racial situation was concerned because I was born into it and knew nothing other than that. A man wasn't actually mistreated, though if he was, he could only resent it.

He could do nothing about it. On the other hand, I got quite a different picture farther south. Economic conditions had a great deal to do with it, because I've often heard my father say that his mother would take one of the old-time flour sacks and cut a hole through the bottom and two corners of it and there you'd have a gown. Of course, when Father finally came to Virginia to work his way through school, he resented the southern "cracker," as he often called them, so much that he didn't even go back to his mother's funeral. He said he never wanted to set foot in the Deep South again, and he didn't.

I went to elementary and high school in Washington, D.C., and then to Howard University. My internship was in Washington. I never had too much trouble in school. I was able to get my work out. All my troubles arose when I was thrown socially among groups of people. As far as school was concerned, I made fair grades throughout.

This was around 1935, and it was about this time that I actually started drinking. During the years 1930 to 1935, due to the Depression and its aftermath, business went from bad to worse. I then had my own medical practice in Washington, but the practice slackened and the mail-order business started to fall off. Dad, due to having spent most of his time in a small Virginia town, didn't have any too much money, and the money he had saved and the property he had acquired were in Washington. He was in his late fifties, and all that he had undertaken fell upon my shoulders at his death in 1928. For the first couple of years it wasn't too bad because the momentum kept things going. But when things became crucial,

everything started going haywire and I started going haywire with them. At this point I believe I had only been intoxicated on maybe three or four occasions, and certainly whiskey was no problem to me.

My father had purchased a restaurant, which he felt would take up some of my spare time, and that's how I met Vi. She came in for her dinner. I'd known her five or six months. To get rid of me one evening, she decided to go to the movies, she and another friend. A very good friend of mine who owned a drugstore across the street from us came by only about two hours later and said that he had seen Vi downtown. I said that she told me she was going to the movies, and I became foolishly disturbed about it, and as things snowballed, I decided to go out and get drunk. That's the first time I was ever really drunk in my life. The fear of the loss of Vi and the feeling that, though she had the right to do as she pleased, she should have told me the truth about it, upset me. That was my trouble. I thought that all women should be perfect.

I don't think I actually started to drink pathologically until approximately 1935. About that time I had lost practically all my property except the place we were living in. Things had just gone from bad to worse. It meant that I had to give up a lot of the things that I had been accustomed to, and that wasn't the easiest thing in the world for me. I think that was basically the thing that started me drinking in 1935. I started drinking alone then. I'd go into my home with a bottle, and I remember clearly how I would look around to see if Vi was watching. Something should have told me then that things were haywire. I can remember her watching. There came a time when

she spoke to me about it, and I would say that I had a bad cold or that I wasn't feeling well. That went on for maybe two months, and then she got after me again about drinking. At that time the repeal whiskeys were back, and I'd go to the store and buy my whiskey and take it to my office and put it under the desk, first in one place and then in another, and there soon was an accumulation of empty bottles. My brother-in-law was living with us at that time, and I said to Vi, "Maybe the bottles are Brother's. I don't know. Ask him about it. I don't know anything about the bottles." I actually *wanted* a drink, besides feeling that I had to have a drink. From that point on, it's just the average drinker's story.

I got to the place where I'd look forward to the weekend's drinking and pacify myself by saying that the weekends were mine, that it didn't interfere with my family or with my business if I drank on the weekends. But the weekends stretched on into Mondays, and the time soon came when I drank every day. My practice at that juncture was just barely getting us a living.

A peculiar thing happened in 1940. That year, on a Friday night, a man whom I had known for years came to my office. My father had treated him many years prior to this. This man's wife had been suffering for a couple of months, and when he came in he owed me a little bill. I filled a prescription for him. The following day, Saturday, he came back and said, "Jim, I owe you for that prescription last night. I didn't pay you." I thought, "I know you didn't pay me, because you didn't get a prescription." He said, "Yes. You know the prescription that you gave me for my wife

last night.” Fear gripped me then, because I could remember nothing about it. It was the first blackout I had to recognize as a blackout. The next morning I carried another prescription to this man’s house and exchanged it for the bottle his wife had. Then I said to my wife, “Something has to be done.” I took that bottle of medicine and gave it to a very good friend of mine who was a pharmacist and had it analyzed, and the bottle was perfectly all right. But I knew at that point that I couldn’t stop, and I knew that I was a danger to myself and to others.

I had a long talk with a psychiatrist, but nothing came of that, and I had also, just about that time, talked with a minister for whom I had a great deal of respect. He went into the religious side and told me that I didn’t attend church as regularly as I should and that he felt, more or less, that this was responsible for my trouble. I rebelled against this, because just about the time that I was getting ready to leave high school, a revelation came to me about God, and it made things very complicated for me. The thought came to me that if God, as my mother said, was a vengeful God, he couldn’t be a loving God. I wasn’t able to comprehend it. I rebelled, and from that time on, I don’t think I attended church more than a dozen times.

After this incident in 1940, I sought some other means of livelihood. I had a very good friend who was in the government service, and I went to him about a job. He got me one. I worked for the government about a year and still maintained my evening office practice when the government agencies were decentralized. Then I went south, because they told me that the particular county I was going to in North

Carolina was a dry county. I thought that this would be a big help to me. I would meet some new faces and be in a dry county.

But I found that after I got to North Carolina, it wasn't any different. The state was different, but I wasn't. Nevertheless, I stayed sober there about six months, because I knew that Vi was to come later and bring the children. We had two girls and a boy at that time. Something happened. Vi had secured work in Washington. She was also in the government service. I started inquiring where I could get a drink, and, of course, I found that it wasn't hard. I think whiskey was cheaper there than it was in Washington. Matters got worse all the time until finally they got so bad that I was reinvestigated by the government. Being an alcoholic, slick, and having some good sense left, I survived the investigation. Then I had my first bad stomach hemorrhage. I was out of work for about four days. I got into a lot of financial difficulties too. I borrowed five hundred dollars from the bank and three hundred from the loan shop, and I drank that up pretty fast. Then I decided that I'd go back to Washington.

My wife received me graciously, although she was living in a one-room-with-kitchen affair. She'd been reduced to that. I promised that I was going to do the right thing. We were now both working in the same agency. I continued to drink. I got drunk one night in October, went to sleep in the rain, and woke up with pneumonia. We continued to work together, and I continued to drink, but I guess, deep down within our hearts, we both knew I couldn't stop drinking. Vi thought I didn't want to stop. We had several

fights, and on one or two occasions I struck her with my fist. She decided that she didn't want any more of that. So she went to court and talked it over with the judge. They cooked up a plan whereby she didn't have to be molested by me if she didn't want to be.

I went back to my mother's for a few days until things cooled off, because the district attorney had put out a summons for me to come to see him in his office. A policeman came to the door and asked for James S., but there wasn't any James S. there. He came back several times. Within ten days I got locked up for being drunk, and this same policeman was in the station house as I was being booked. I had to put up a three-hundred-dollar bond because he was carrying the same summons around in his pocket for me. So I went down to talk to the district attorney, and the arrangement was made that I would go home to stay with my mother, and that meant that Vi and I were separated. I continued to work and continued to go to lunch with Vi, and none of our acquaintances on the job knew that we had separated. Very often we rode to and from work together, but being separated really galled me deep down.

The November following, I took a few days off after pay day to celebrate my birthday on the twenty-fifth of the month. As usual I got drunk and lost the money. Someone had taken it from me. That was the usual pattern. I sometimes gave it to my mother, and then I'd go back and hound her for it. I was just about broke. I guess I had five or ten dollars in my pocket. Anyhow, on the twenty-fourth, after drinking all day on the twenty-third, I must have decided I wanted to see my wife

and have some kind of reconciliation or at least talk with her. I don't remember whether I went by street-car, whether I walked or went in a taxicab. The one thing I can remember now was that Vi was on the corner of 8th and L, and I remember vividly that she had an envelope in her hand. I remember talking to her, but what happened after that I don't know. What actually happened was that I had taken a penknife and stabbed Vi three times with it. Then I left and went home to bed. Around eight or nine o'clock there came two big detectives and a policeman to arrest me for assault; and I was the most amazed person in the world when they said I had assaulted someone, and especially that I had assaulted my wife. I was taken to the station house and locked up.

The next morning I went up for arraignment. Vi was very kind and explained to the jury that I was basically a fine fellow and a good husband but that I drank too much and that she thought I had lost my mind and should be committed to an asylum. The judge said that if she felt that way, he would confine me for thirty days' examination and observation. There was no observation. There might have been some investigation. The closest I came to a psychiatrist during that time was an intern who came to take blood tests. After the trial, I got big-hearted again and felt that I should do something in payment for Vi's kindness to me; so I left Washington and went to Seattle to work. I was there about three weeks, and then I got restless and started to tramp across the country, here and there, until I finally wound up in Pennsylvania, in a steel mill.

I worked in the steel mill for possibly two months,



and then I became disgusted with myself and decided to go back home. I think the thing that galled me was that just after Easter I had drawn my salary for two weeks' work and had decided that I was going to send some money to Vi; and above all else I was going to send my baby daughter an Easter outfit. But there happened to be a liquor store between the post office and the mill, and I stopped to get that one drink. Of course the kid never got the Easter outfit. I got very little out of the two hundred that I drew on that pay-day.

I knew I wasn't capable of keeping the bulk of the money myself, so I gave it to a white fellow who owned the bar I frequented. He kept the money for me, but I worried him to death for it. Finally, I broke the last one hundred dollar bill the Saturday before I left. I got out of that bill one pair of shoes, and the rest of that money was blown. I took the last of it to buy my railroad ticket.

I'd been home about a week or ten days when one of my friends asked if I could repair one of his electrical outlets. Thinking only of two or three dollars to buy some whiskey, I did the job and that's how I met Ella G., who was responsible for my coming into A.A. I went to this friend's shop to repair his electrical outlet, and I noticed this lady. She continued to watch me, although she didn't say anything. Finally she said, "Isn't your name Jim S.?" I said, "Yes." Then she told me who she was. She was Ella G. When I had known her years before, she was rather slender, but at this time she weighed as much as she does now, which is up around in the two hundreds or very close to it. I had not recognized her, but as soon as she said

who she was, I remembered her right away. She didn't say anything about A.A. or getting me a sponsor at that time, but she did ask about Vi, and I told her Vi was working and how she could locate her. It was around noon, a day or two later, when the telephone rang and it was Ella. She asked me if I would let someone come up and talk to me concerning a business deal. She never mentioned anything about my whiskey drinking because if she had I would have told her no right then. I asked her just what this deal was, but she wouldn't say. She said, "He has something of interest, if you will see him." I told her that I would. She asked me one other thing. She asked me if I would try to be sober if I possibly could. So I put forth some effort that day to try to stay sober if I could, though my sobriety was just a daze.

About seven that evening my sponsor walked in, Charlie G. He didn't seem too much at ease in the beginning. I guess I felt, and he sensed it, that I wanted him to hurry up and say what he had to say and get out. Anyhow, he started talking about himself. He started telling me how much trouble he had, and I said to myself, I wonder why this guy is telling me all his troubles. I have troubles of my own. Finally, he brought in the angle of whiskey. He continued to talk and I to listen. After he'd talked half an hour, I still wanted him to hurry up and get out so I could go and get some whiskey before the liquor store closed. But as he continued to talk, I realized that this was the first time I had met a person who had the same problems I did and who, I sincerely believe, understood me as an individual. I knew my wife didn't, because I had been sincere in all my promises to her

as well as to my mother and to my close friends, but the urge to take that drink was more powerful than anything else.

After Charlie had talked a while, I knew that this man had something. In that short period he built within me something that I had long since lost, which was hope. When he left, I walked with him to the streetcar line, which was just about a half a block, but there were two liquor stores, one on each corner from my home. I put Charlie on the car, and when I left him, I passed both of those liquor stores without even thinking about them.

The following Sunday we met at Ella G.'s. It was Charlie and three or four others. That was the first meeting of a colored group in A.A., so far as I know. We held some two or three meetings at Ella's home, and from there we held some two or three at her mother's home. Then Charlie or someone in the group suggested that we try to get a place in a church or hall to hold meetings. I approached several ministers and all of them thought it was a very good idea, but they never relinquished any space. So, finally, I went to the YMCA, and they graciously permitted us to use a room at two dollars a night. At that time we had our meetings on Friday nights. Of course, it wasn't very much of a meeting in the beginning; most of the time it was just Vi and myself. But, finally, we got one or two to come in and stick, and from there, of course, we started to grow.

I haven't mentioned it, but Charlie, my sponsor, was white, and when we got our group started, we got help from other white groups in Washington. They came, many of them, and stuck by us and told us how

to hold meetings. They taught us a great deal about Twelfth Step work too. Indeed, without their aid we couldn't possibly have gone on. They saved us endless time and lost motion. And, not only that, but they gave us financial help. Even when we were paying that two dollars a night, they often paid it for us because our collection was so small.

At this time I wasn't working. Vi was taking care of me, and I was devoting all my time to the building of that group. I worked at that alone for six months. I just gathered up this and that alcoholic, because, in the back of my mind, I wanted to save all the world. I had found this new "something," and I wanted to give it to everyone who had a problem. We didn't save the world, but we did manage to help some individuals.

That's my story of what A.A. has done for me.

## THE MAN WHO MASTERED FEAR

*He spent eighteen years in running away, and then found he didn't have to run. So he started A.A. in Detroit.*

FOR EIGHTEEN YEARS, from the time I was twenty-one, fear governed my life. By the time I was thirty, I had found that alcohol dissolved fear—for a little while. In the end I had two problems instead of one: fear and alcohol.

I came from a good family. I believe the sociologists would call it upper middle class. By the time I was twenty-one, I had had six years of life in foreign countries, spoke three languages fluently, and had attended college for two years. A low ebb in the family fortunes necessitated my going to work when I was twenty. I entered the business world with every confidence that success lay ahead of me. I had been brought up to believe this, and I had shown during my teens considerable enterprise and imagination about earning money. To the best of my recollection, I was completely free from any abnormal fears. Vacations from school and from work spelled “travel” to me—and I traveled with gusto. During my first year out of college, I had endless dates and went to countless dances, balls, and dinner parties.

Suddenly all this changed. I underwent a shattering nervous breakdown. Three months in bed. Three more months of being up and around the house for brief periods and in bed the rest of the time. Visits

from friends that lasted over fifteen minutes exhausted me. A complete checkup at one of the best hospitals revealed nothing. I heard for the first time an expression that I was to grow to loathe: "There is nothing organically wrong." Psychiatry might have helped, but psychiatrists had not penetrated the Middle West.

Spring came. I went for my first walk. Half a block from the house, I tried to turn the corner. Fear froze me in my tracks, but the instant I turned back toward home, this paralyzing fear left me. This was the beginning of an unending series of such experiences. I told our family doctor—an understanding man who gave hours of his time trying to help me—about this experience. He told me that it was imperative that I walk around the entire block, cost me what it might in mental agony. I carried out his instructions. When I reached a point directly back of our house, where I could have cut through a friend's garden, I was almost overpowered by the desire to get home, but I made the whole journey. Probably only a few readers of this story will be able, from personal experiences of their own, to understand the exhilaration and sense of accomplishment I felt after finishing this seemingly simple assignment.

The details of the long road back to something resembling normal living—the first short streetcar ride, the purchase of a used bike, which enabled me to widen the narrow horizon of life, the first trip downtown—I will not dwell on. I got an easy, part-time job selling printing for a small neighborhood printer. This widened the scope of my activities. A year later I was able to buy a Model T roadster and take a better

job with a downtown printer. From this job and the next one with yet another printer, I was courteously dismissed. I simply did not have the pep to do hard, "cold-turkey" selling. I switched to real estate brokerage and property management work. Almost simultaneously, I discovered that cocktails in the late afternoon and highballs in the evening relieved the many tensions of the day. This happy combination of pleasant work and alcohol lasted for five years. Of course, the latter ultimately killed the former, but of this, more anon.

All this changed when I was thirty years old. My parents died, both in the same year, leaving me, a sheltered and somewhat immature man, on my own. I moved into a "bachelor hall." These men all drank on Saturday nights and enjoyed themselves. My pattern of drinking became very different from theirs. I had bad, nervous headaches, particularly at the base of my neck. Liquor relieved these. At last I discovered alcohol as a cure-all. I joined their Saturday night parties and enjoyed myself too. But I also stayed up weeknights after they had retired and drank myself into bed. My thinking about drinking had undergone a great change. Liquor had become a crutch on the one hand and a means of retreat from life on the other.

The ensuing nine years were the Depression years, both nationally and personally. With the bravery born of desperation, and abetted by alcohol, I married a young and lovely girl. Our marriage lasted four years. At least three of those four years must have been a living hell for my wife, because she had to watch the man she loved disintegrate morally, mentally, and

financially. The birth of a baby boy did nothing toward staying the downward spiral. When she finally took the baby and left, I locked myself in the house and stayed drunk for a month.

The next two years were simply a long, drawn-out process of less and less work and more and more whiskey. I ended up homeless, jobless, penniless, and rudderless, as the problem guest of a close friend whose family was out of town. Haunting me through each day's stupor—and there were eighteen or nineteen such days in this man's home—was the thought: Where do I go when his family comes home? When the day of their return was almost upon me, and suicide was the only answer I had been able to think of, I went into Ralph's room one evening and told him the truth. He was a man of considerable means, and he might have done what many men would have done in such a case. He might have handed me fifty dollars and said that I ought to pull myself together and make a new start. I have thanked God many times in the last sixteen years that *that* was just what he did not do!

Instead, he got dressed, took me out, bought me three or four double shots, and put me to bed. The next day he turned me over to a couple who, although neither was an alcoholic, knew Dr. Bob and were willing to drive me to Akron where they would turn me over to his care. The only stipulation they made was this: I had to make the decision myself. What decision? The choice was limited. To go north into the empty pine country and shoot myself, or to go south in the faint hope that a bunch of strangers might help me with my drinking problem. Well, suicide was a last-straw matter, and I had not drawn the last straw



yet. So I was driven to Akron the very next day by these Good Samaritans and turned over to Dr. Bob and the then tiny Akron Group.

Here, while I was in a hospital bed, men with clear eyes, happy faces, and a look of assurance and purposefulness about them came to see me and told me their stories. Some of these were hard to believe, but it did not require a giant brain to perceive that they had something I could use. How could I get it? It was simple, they said, and went on to explain to me in their own language the program of recovery and daily living that we know today as the Twelve Steps of A.A. Dr. Bob dwelt at length on how prayer had given him release, time and time again, from the nearly overpowering compulsion to take a drink. It was he who convinced me, because his own conviction was so real, that a Power greater than myself could help me in the crises of life and that the means of communicating with this Power was simple prayer. Here was a tall, rugged, highly educated Yankee talking in a matter-of-course way about God and prayer. If he and these other fellows could do it, so could I.

When I got out of the hospital, I was invited to stay with Dr. Bob and his dear wife, Anne. I was suddenly and uncontrollably seized with the old, paralyzing panic. The hospital had seemed so safe. Now I was in a strange house, in a strange city, and fear gripped me. I shut myself in my room, which began to go around in circles. Panic, confusion, and chaos were supreme. Out of this maelstrom just two coherent thoughts came to the surface; one, a drink would mean homelessness and death; two, I could no longer relieve the pressure of fear by starting home, as was once my

habitual solution to this problem, because I no longer had a home. Finally, and I shall never know how much later it was, one clear thought came to me: Try prayer. You can't lose, and maybe God will help you—just maybe, mind you. Having no one else to turn to, I was willing to give Him a chance, although with considerable doubt. I got down on my knees for the first time in thirty years. The prayer I said was simple. It went something like this: "God, for eighteen years I have been unable to handle this problem. Please let me turn it over to you."

Immediately a great feeling of peace descended upon me, intermingled with a feeling of being suffused with a quiet strength. I lay down on the bed and slept like a child. An hour later I awoke to a new world. *Nothing had changed and yet everything had changed.* The scales had dropped from my eyes, and I could see life in its proper perspective. I had tried to be the center of my own little world, whereas God was the center of a vast universe of which I was perhaps an essential, but a very tiny, part.

It is well over sixteen years since I came back to life. I have never had a drink since. This alone is a miracle. It is, however, only the first of a series of miracles that have followed one another as a result of my trying to apply to my daily life the principles embodied in our Twelve Steps. I would like to sketch for you the highlights of these sixteen years of a slow but steady and satisfying upward climb.

Poor health and a complete lack of money necessitated my remaining with Dr. Bob and Anne for very close to a year. It would be impossible for me to pass over this year without mentioning my love for, and my

indebtedness to, these two wonderful people who are no longer with us. They made me feel as if I were a part of their family, and so did their children. The example that they and Bill W., whose visits to Akron were fairly frequent, set for me of service to their fellow men imbued me with a great desire to emulate them. Sometimes during that year I rebelled inwardly at what seemed like lost time and at having to be a burden to these good people whose means were limited. Long before I had any real opportunity to give, I had to learn the equally important lesson of receiving graciously.

During my first few months in Akron, I was quite sure that I never wanted to see my hometown again. Too many economic and social problems would beset me there. I would make a fresh start somewhere else. After six months of sobriety, I saw the picture in a different light: Detroit was the place I had to return to, not only because I must face the mess I had made there, but because it was there that I could be of the most service to A.A. In the spring of 1939, Bill stopped off in Akron on his way to Detroit on business. I jumped at the suggestion that I accompany him. We spent two days there together before he returned to New York. Friends invited me to stay on for as long as I cared to. I remained with them for three weeks, using part of the time in making many amends, which I had had no earlier opportunity of making.

The rest of my time was devoted to A.A. spadework. I wanted "ripe" prospects, and I didn't feel that I would get very far chasing individual drunks in and out of bars. So I spent much of my time calling on the people who I felt would logically come in contact

with alcoholic cases—doctors, ministers, lawyers, and the personnel men in industry. I also talked A.A. to every friend who would listen, at lunch, at dinner, on street corners. A doctor tipped me off to my first prospect. I landed him and shipped him by train to Akron, with a pint of whiskey in his pocket to keep him from wanting to get off the train in Toledo! Nothing has ever to this day equaled the thrill of that first case.

Those three weeks left me completely exhausted, and I had to return to Akron for three more months of rest. While there, two or three more “cash customers” (as Dr. Bob used to call them—probably because they had so little cash) were shipped in to us from Detroit. When I finally returned to Detroit to find work and to learn to stand on my own feet, the ball was already rolling, however slowly. But it took six more months of work and disappointments before a group of three men got together in my rooming-house bedroom for their first A.A. meeting.

It sounds simple, but there were obstacles and doubts to overcome. I well remember a session I had with myself soon after I returned. It ran something like this: If I go around shouting from the rooftops about my alcoholism, it might very possibly prevent me from getting a good job. But *supposing that just one man died* because I had, for selfish reasons, kept my mouth shut? No. I was supposed to be doing God's will, not mine. His road lay clear before me, and I'd better quit rationalizing myself into any detours. I could not expect to keep what I had gained unless I gave it away.

The Depression was still on, and jobs were scarce. My health was still uncertain. So I created a job for

myself selling women's hosiery and men's made-to-order shirts. This gave me the freedom to do A.A. work and to rest for periods of two or three days when I became too exhausted to carry on. There was more than one occasion when I got up in the morning with just enough money for coffee and toast and the bus fare to carry me to my first appointment. No sale—no lunch. During that first year, however, I managed to make both ends meet and to avoid ever going back to my old habit-pattern of borrowing money when I could not earn it. Here by itself was a great step forward.

During the first three months, I carried on all these activities without a car, depending entirely on buses and streetcars—I, who always had to have a car at my immediate command. I, who had never made a speech in my life and who would have been frightened sick at the prospect, stood up in front of Rotary groups in different parts of the city and talked about Alcoholics Anonymous. I, carried away with the desire to serve A.A., gave what was probably one of the first radio broadcasts about A.A., living through a case of mike fright and feeling like a million dollars when it was all over. I lived through a week of the fidgets because I had agreed to address a group of alcoholic inmates in one of our state mental hospitals. There it was the same reward—exhilaration at a mission accomplished. Do I have to tell you who gained the most out of all this?

Within a year of my return to Detroit, A.A. was a definitely established little group of about a dozen members, and I too was established in a modest but steady job handling an independent dry-cleaning route of my own. I was my own boss. It took five years of A.A. living, and a substantial improvement in my

health, before I could take a full-time office job where someone else was boss.

This office job brought me face to face with a problem that I had sidestepped all my adult life, lack of training. This time I did something about it. I enrolled in a correspondence school that taught nothing but accounting. With this specialized training, and a liberal business education in the school of hard knocks, I was able to set up shop some two years later as an independent accountant. Seven years of work in this field brought an opportunity to affiliate myself actively with one of my clients, a fellow A.A. We complement each other beautifully, as he is a born salesman and my taste is for finance and management. At long last I am doing the kind of work I have always wanted to do but never had the patience and emotional stability to train myself for. The A.A. program showed me the way to come down to earth, start from the bottom, and work up. This represents another great change for me. In the long ago past I used to start at the top as president or treasurer and end up with the sheriff breathing down my neck.

So much for my business life. Obviously I have overcome fear to a sufficient degree to think in terms of success in business. With God's help I am able, for one day at a time, to carry business responsibilities that, not many years ago, I would not have dreamed of assuming. But what about my social life? What about those fears that once paralyzed me to the point of my becoming a semi-hermit? What about my fear of travel?

It would be wonderful were I able to tell you that my confidence in God and my application of the

Twelve Steps to my daily living have utterly banished fear. But this would not be the truth. The most accurate answer I *can* give you is this: Fear has never again ruled my life since that day in September 1938, when I found that a Power greater than myself could not only restore me to sanity but could keep me both sober and sane. Never in sixteen years have I dodged anything because I was afraid of it. I have faced life instead of running away from it.

Some of the things that used to stop me in my tracks from fear still make me nervous in the anticipation of their doing, but once I kick myself into doing them, nervousness disappears and I enjoy myself. In recent years I have had the happy combination of time and money to travel occasionally. I am apt to get into quite an uproar for a day or two before starting, but I *do* start, and once started, I have a swell time.

Have I ever wanted a drink during these years? Only once did I suffer from a nearly overpowering compulsion to take a drink. Oddly enough, the circumstances and surroundings were pleasant. I was at a beautifully set dinner table. I was in a perfectly happy frame of mind. I had been in A.A. a year, and the last thing in my mind was a drink. There was a glass of sherry at my place. I was seized with an almost uncontrollable desire to reach out for it. I shut my eyes and asked for help. In fifteen seconds or less, the feeling passed. There have also been numerous times when I have thought about taking a drink. Such thinking usually began with thoughts of the pleasant drinking of my youth. I learned early in my A.A. life that I could not afford to fondle such thoughts, as you might fondle a pet, because this particular pet could

grow into a monster. Instead, I quickly substitute one or another vivid scene from the nightmare of my later drinking.

Twenty-odd years ago I made a mess out of my one and only marriage. It was therefore not extraordinary that I should shy away from any serious thought of marriage for a great many years after joining A.A. Here was something requiring a greater willingness to assume responsibility and a larger degree of cooperation and give and take than even business requires of one. However, I must have felt, deep down inside myself, that living the selfish life of a bachelor was only half living. By living alone you can pretty much eliminate grief from your life, but you also eliminate joy. At any rate the last great step toward a well-rounded life still lay ahead of me. So six months ago I acquired a ready-made family consisting of one charming wife, four grown children to whom I am devoted, and three grandchildren. Being an alcoholic, I couldn't dream of doing anything by halves! My wife, a sister member in A.A., had been a widow nine years and I had been single eighteen years. The adjustments in such a case are difficult and take time, but we both feel that they are certainly worth it. We are both depending upon God and our use of the Alcoholics Anonymous program to help us make a success of this joint undertaking.

It is undoubtedly too soon for me to say how much of a success I shall be as a husband in time to come. I do feel, though, that the fact that I finally *grew up* to a point where I could even tackle such a job is the apex of the story of a man who spent eighteen years running away from life.



(8)

## HE SOLD HIMSELF SHORT

*But he found there was a Higher Power that had more faith in him than he had in himself. Thus, A.A. was born in Chicago.*

I GREW UP in a small town outside Akron, Ohio, where the life was typical of any average small town. I was very much interested in athletics, and because of this and parental influence, I didn't drink or smoke in either grade or high school.

All of this changed when I went to college. I had to adapt to new associations and associates, and it seemed to be the smart thing to drink and smoke. I confined drinking to weekends, and drank normally in college and for several years thereafter.

After I left school, I went to work in Akron, living at home with my parents. Home life was again a restraining influence. When I drank, I hid it from my folks out of respect for their feelings. This continued until I was twenty-seven. Then I started traveling, with the United States and Canada as my territory and with so much freedom and with an unlimited expense account, I was soon drinking every night and kidding myself that it was all part of the job. I know now that 60 percent of the time I drank alone without benefit of customers.

In 1930, I moved to Chicago. Shortly thereafter, aided by the Depression, I found that I had a great

deal of spare time and that a little drink in the morning helped. By 1932, I was going on two- or three-day benders. That same year, my wife became fed up with my drinking around the house and called my dad in Akron to come and pick me up. She asked him to do something about me because she couldn't. She was thoroughly disgusted.

This was the beginning of five years of bouncing back and forth between my home in Chicago and Akron to sober up. It was a period of binges coming closer and closer together and being of longer duration. Once Dad came all the way to Florida to sober me up after a hotel manager called him and said that if he wanted to see me alive he'd better get there fast. My wife could not understand why I would sober up for Dad but not for her. They went into a huddle, and Dad explained that he simply took my pants, shoes, and money away so that I could get no liquor and had to sober up.

One time my wife decided to try this too. After finding every bottle that I had hidden around the apartment, she took away my pants, my shoes, my money, and my keys, threw them under the bed in the back bedroom, and slip-locked our door. By one a.m. I was desperate. I found some wool stockings, some white flannels that had shrunk to my knees, and an old jacket. I jimmied the front door so that I could get back in, and walked out. I was hit by an icy blast. It was February with snow and ice on the ground, and I had a four-block walk to the nearest cab stand, but I made it. On my ride to the nearest bar, I sold the driver on how misunderstood I was by my wife and what an unreasonable person she was. By the time we

reached the bar, he was willing to buy me a quart with his own money. Then when we got back to the apartment, he was willing to wait two or three days until I got my health back to be paid off for the liquor and fare. I was a good salesman. My wife could not understand the next morning why I was drunker than the night before, when she had taken my bottles.

After a particularly bad Christmas and New Year's holiday, Dad picked me up again early in January 1937 to go through the usual sobering up routine. This consisted of walking the floor for three or four days and nights until I could take nourishment. This time he had a suggestion to offer. He waited until I was completely sober, and on the day before I was to head back for Chicago, he told me of a small group of men in Akron who apparently had the same problem that I had but were doing something about it. He said they were sober, happy, and had their self-respect back, as well as the respect of their neighbors. He mentioned two of them whom I had known through the years and suggested that I talk with them. But I had my health back, and, besides, I reasoned, they were much worse than I would ever be. Why, even a year ago I had seen Howard, an ex-doctor, mooching a dime for a drink. I could not possibly be that bad. I would at least have asked for a quarter! So I told Dad that I would lick it on my own, that I would drink nothing for a month and after that only beer.

Several months later Dad was back in Chicago to pick me up again, but this time my attitude was entirely different. I could not wait to tell him that I wanted help, that if these men in Akron had anything,

I wanted it and would do anything to get it. I was completely licked by alcohol.

I can still remember very distinctly getting into Akron at eleven p.m. and routing this same Howard out of bed to do something about me. He spent two hours with me that night telling me his story. He said he had finally learned that drinking was a fatal illness made up of an allergy plus an obsession, and once the drinking had passed from habit to obsession, we were completely hopeless and could look forward only to spending the balance of our lives in mental institutions—or to death.

He laid great stress on the progression of his attitude toward life and people, and most of his attitudes had been very similar to mine. I thought at times that he was telling my story! I had thought that I was completely different from other people, that I was beginning to become a little balmy, even to the point of withdrawing more and more from society and wanting to be alone with my bottle.

Here was a man with essentially the same outlook on life, except that he had done something about it. He was happy, getting a kick out of life and people, and beginning to get his medical practice back again. As I look back on that first evening, I realize that I began to hope, then, for the first time; and I felt that if he could regain these things, perhaps it would be possible for me too.

The next afternoon and evening, two other men visited me, and each told me his story and the things that they were doing to try to recover from this tragic illness. They had that certain something that seemed to glow, a peace, a serenity combined with happiness.

In the next two or three days the balance of this handful of men contacted me, encouraged me, and told me how they were trying to live this program of recovery and the fun they were having doing it.

Then and then only, after a thorough indoctrination by eight or nine individuals, was I allowed to attend my first meeting. This first meeting was held in the living room of a home and was led by Bill D., the first man that Bill W. and Dr. Bob had worked with successfully.

The meeting consisted of perhaps eight or nine alcoholics and seven or eight wives. It was different from the meetings now held. The big A.A. book had not been written, and there was no literature except various religious pamphlets. The program was carried on entirely by word of mouth.

The meeting lasted an hour and closed with the Lord's Prayer. After it was closed, we all retired to the kitchen and had coffee and doughnuts and more discussion until the small hours of the morning.

I was terribly impressed by this meeting and the quality of happiness these men displayed, despite their lack of material means. In this small group, during the Depression, there was no one who was not hard up.

I stayed in Akron two or three weeks on my initial trip trying to absorb as much of the program and philosophy as possible. I spent a great deal of time with Dr. Bob, whenever he had the time to spare, and in the homes of two or three other people, trying to see how the family lived the program. Every evening we would meet at the home of one of the members and have coffee and doughnuts and spend a social evening.

The day before I was due to go back to Chicago—

it was Dr. Bob's afternoon off—he had me to the office and we spent three or four hours formally going through the Six-Step program as it was at that time. The six steps were:

1. Complete deflation.
2. Dependence and guidance from a Higher Power.
3. Moral inventory.
4. Confession.
5. Restitution.
6. Continued work with other alcoholics.

Dr. Bob led me through all of these steps. At the moral inventory, he brought up several of my bad personality traits or character defects, such as selfishness, conceit, jealousy, carelessness, intolerance, ill-temper, sarcasm, and resentments. We went over these at great length, and then he finally asked me if I wanted these defects of character removed. When I said yes, we both knelt at his desk and prayed, each of us asking to have these defects taken away.

This picture is still vivid. If I live to be a hundred, it will always stand out in my mind. It was very impressive, and I wish that every A.A. could have the benefit of this type of sponsorship today. Dr. Bob always emphasized the religious angle very strongly, and I think it helped. I know it helped me. Dr. Bob then led me through the restitution step, in which I made a list of all of the persons I had harmed and worked out the ways and the means of slowly making restitution.

I made several decisions at that time. One of them was that I would try to get a group started in Chicago; the second was that I would have to return to Akron to attend meetings at least every two months until I

did get a group started in Chicago; third, I decided I must place this program above everything else, even my family, because if I did not maintain my sobriety, I would lose my family anyway. If I did not maintain my sobriety, I would not have a job. If I did not maintain my sobriety, I would have no friends left. I had few enough at that time.

The next day I went back to Chicago and started a vigorous campaign among my so-called friends or drinking companions. Their answer was always the same: If they needed it at any time, they would surely get in touch with me. I went to a minister and a doctor whom I still knew, and they, in turn, asked me how long I had been sober. When I told them six weeks, they were polite and said that they would contact me in case they had anyone with an alcoholic problem.

Needless to say, it was a year or more before they did contact me. On my trips back to Akron to get my spirits recharged and to work with other alcoholics, I would ask Dr. Bob about this delay and wonder just what was wrong with me. He would invariably reply, "When you are right and the time is right, Providence will provide. You must always be willing and continue to make contacts."

A few months after I made my original trip to Akron, I was feeling pretty cocky, and I didn't think my wife was treating me with proper respect, now that I was an outstanding citizen. So I set out to get drunk deliberately, just to teach her what she was missing. A week later I had to get an old friend from Akron to spend two days sobering me up. That was my lesson, that one could not take the moral inventory and

then file it away; that the alcoholic has to continue to take inventory every day if he expects to get well and stay well. That was my only slip. It taught me a valuable lesson. In the summer of 1938, almost a year from the time I made my original contact with Akron, the man for whom I was working, and who knew about the program, approached me and asked if I could do anything about one of his salesmen who was drinking very heavily. I went to the sanitarium where this chap was incarcerated and found to my surprise that he was interested. He had been wanting to do something about his drinking for a long time but did not know how. I spent several days with him, but I did not feel adequate to pass the program on to him by myself. So I suggested that he take a trip to Akron for a couple of weeks, which he did, living with one of the A.A. families there. When he returned, we had practically daily meetings from that time on.

A few months later one of the men who had been in touch with the group in Akron came to Chicago to live, and then there were three of us who continued to have informal meetings quite regularly.

In the spring of 1939, the Big Book was printed, and we had two inquiries from the New York office because of a fifteen-minute radio talk that was made. Neither one of the two was interested for himself, one being a mother who wanted to do something for her son. I suggested to her that she should see the son's minister or doctor, and that perhaps he would recommend the A.A. program.

The doctor, a young man, immediately took fire with the idea, and while he did not convince the son, he turned over two prospects who were anxious for



the program. The three of us did not feel up to the job, and after a few meetings we convinced the prospects that they, too, should go to Akron where they could see an older group in action.

In the meantime, another doctor in Evanston became convinced that the program had possibilities and turned over a woman to us to do something about. She was full of enthusiasm and also made the trip to Akron. Immediately on her return in the autumn of 1939, we began to have formal meetings once a week, and we have continued to do this and to expand ever since.

Occasionally, it is accorded to a few of us to watch something fine grow from a tiny kernel into something of gigantic goodness. Such has been my privilege, both nationally and in my home city. From a mere handful in Akron, we have spread throughout the world. From a single member in the Chicago area, commuting to Akron, we now exceed six thousand.

These last eighteen years have been the happiest of my life, trite though that statement may seem. Fifteen of those years I would not have enjoyed had I continued drinking. Doctors told me before I stopped that I had only three years at the outside to live.

This latest part of my life has had a purpose, not in great things accomplished but in daily living. Courage to face each day has replaced the fears and uncertainties of earlier years. Acceptance of things as they are has replaced the old impatient champing at the bit to conquer the world. I have stopped tilting at windmills and, instead, have tried to accomplish the little daily tasks, unimportant in themselves, but tasks that are an integral part of living fully.

Where derision, contempt, and pity were once shown me, I now enjoy the respect of many people. Where once I had casual acquaintances, all of whom were fair-weather friends, I now have a host of friends who accept me for what I am. And over my A.A. years I have made many real, honest, sincere friendships that I shall always cherish.

I'm rated as a modestly successful man. My stock of material goods isn't great. But I have a fortune in friendships, courage, self-assurance, and honest appraisal of my own abilities. Above all, I have gained the greatest thing accorded to any man, the love and understanding of a gracious God, who has lifted me from the alcoholic scrap heap to a position of trust, where I have been able to reap the rich rewards that come from showing a little love for others and from serving them as I can.

## THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM

*This worldly lady helped to develop A.A. in Chicago  
and thus passed her keys to many.*

A LITTLE MORE than fifteen years ago, through a long and calamitous series of shattering experiences, I found myself being helplessly propelled toward total destruction. I was without power to change the course my life had taken. How I had arrived at this tragic impasse, I could not have explained to anyone. I was thirty-three years old and my life was spent. I was caught in a cycle of alcohol and sedation that was proving inescapable, and consciousness had become intolerable.

I was a product of the post-war prohibition era of the Roaring '20s. That age of the flapper and the "It" girl, speakeasies and the hip flask, the boyish bob and the drugstore cowboy, John Held Jr. and F. Scott Fitzgerald, all generously sprinkled with a patent pseudo-sophistication. To be sure, this had been a dizzy and confused interval, but most everyone else I knew had emerged from it with both feet on the ground and a fair amount of adult maturity.

Nor could I blame my dilemma on my childhood environment. I couldn't have chosen more loving and conscientious parents. I was given every advantage in a well-ordered home. I had the best schools, summer camps, resort vacations, and travel. Every reason-

able desire was possible of attainment for me. I was strong and healthy and quite athletic.

I experienced some of the pleasure of social drinking when I was sixteen. I definitely liked everything about alcohol—the taste, the effects; and I realize now that a drink did something for me or to me that was different from the way it affected others. It wasn't long before any party without drinks was a dud for me.

I was married at twenty, had two children, and was divorced at twenty-three. My broken home and broken heart fanned my smoldering self-pity into a fair-sized bonfire, and this kept me well supplied with reasons for having another drink, and then another.

At twenty-five I had developed an alcoholic problem. I began making the rounds of the doctors in the hope that one of them might find some cure for my accumulating ailments, preferably something that could be removed surgically.

Of course the doctors found nothing. Just an unstable woman, undisciplined, poorly adjusted, and filled with nameless fears. Most of them prescribed sedatives and advised rest and moderation.

Between the ages of twenty-five and thirty, I tried everything. I moved a thousand miles away from home to Chicago and a new environment. I studied art; I desperately endeavored to create an interest in many things, in a new place among new people. Nothing worked. My drinking habits increased in spite of my struggle for control. I tried the beer diet, the wine diet, timing, measuring, and spacing of drinks. I tried them mixed, unmixed, drinking only when happy, only when depressed. And still, by the time I was thirty years old, I was being pushed around by a

compulsion to drink that was completely beyond my control. I couldn't stop drinking. I would hang on to sobriety for short intervals, but always there would come the tide of an overpowering *necessity* to drink, and, as I was engulfed in it, I felt such a sense of panic that I really believed I would die if I didn't get that drink inside.

Needless to say, this was not pleasurable drinking. I had long since given up any pretense of the social cocktail hour. This was drinking in sheer desperation, alone and locked behind my own door. Alone in the relative safety of my home because I knew I dare not risk the danger of blacking out in some public place or at the wheel of a car. I could no longer gauge my capacity, and it might be the second or the tenth drink that would erase my consciousness.

The next three years saw me in sanitariums, once in a ten-day coma, from which I very nearly did not recover, in and out of hospitals or confined at home with day and night nurses. By now I wanted to die but had lost the courage even to take my life. I was trapped, and for the life of me I did not know how or why this had happened to me. And all the while my fear fed a growing conviction that before long it would be necessary for me to be put away in some institution. People didn't behave this way outside of an asylum. I had heartsickness, shame, and fear bordering on panic, and no complete escape any longer except in oblivion. Certainly, now, anyone would have agreed that only a miracle could prevent my final breakdown. But how does one get a prescription for a miracle?

For about one year prior to this time, there was one doctor who had continued to struggle with me. He

had tried everything from having me attend daily mass at six a.m. to performing the most menial labor for his charity patients. Why he bothered with me as long as he did I shall never know, for he knew there was no answer for me in medicine, and he, like all doctors of his day, had been taught that the alcoholic was incurable and should be ignored. Doctors were advised to attend patients who could be benefited by medicine. With the alcoholic, they could only give temporary relief and in the last stages not even that. It was a waste of the doctors' time and the patients' money. Nevertheless, there were a few doctors who saw alcoholism as a disease and felt that the alcoholic was a victim of something over which he had no control. They had a hunch that there must be an answer for these apparently hopeless ones, somewhere. Fortunately for me, my doctor was one of the enlightened.

And then, in the spring of 1939, a very remarkable book was rolled off a New York press with the title *Alcoholics Anonymous*. However, due to financial difficulties, the whole printing was, for a while, held up and the book received no publicity nor, of course, was it available in the stores, even if one knew it existed. But somehow my good doctor heard of this book, and he also learned a little about the people responsible for its publication. He sent to New York for a copy, and after reading it, he tucked it under his arm and called on me. That call marked the turning point in my life.

Until now, I had never been told that I was an alcoholic. Few doctors will tell a hopeless patient that there is no answer for him or for her. But this day my doctor gave it to me straight and said, "People like

you are pretty well known to the medical profession. Every doctor gets his quota of alcoholic patients. Some of us struggle with these people because we know that they are really very sick, but we also know that, short of some miracle, we are not going to help them except temporarily and that they will inevitably get worse and worse until one of two things happens. Either they die of acute alcoholism or they develop wet brains and have to be put away permanently.”

He further explained that alcohol was no respecter of sex or background but that most of the alcoholics he had encountered had better-than-average minds and abilities. He said the alcoholics seemed to possess a native acuteness and usually excelled in their fields, regardless of environmental or educational advantages.

“We watch the alcoholic performing in a position of responsibility, and we know that because he is drinking heavily and daily, he has cut his capacities by 50 percent, and still he seems able to do a satisfactory job. And we wonder how much further this man could go if his alcoholic problem could be removed and he could throw 100 percent of his abilities into action.

“But, of course,” he continued, “eventually the alcoholic loses all of his capacities as his disease gets progressively worse, and this is a tragedy that is painful to watch: the disintegration of a sound mind and body.”

Then he told me there was a handful of people in Akron and New York who had worked out a technique for arresting their alcoholism. He asked me to read the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*, and then he wanted me to talk with a man who was experiencing success with his own arrestment. This man could tell

me more. I stayed up all night reading that book. For me it was a wonderful experience. It explained so much I had not understood about myself, and, best of all, it promised recovery if I would do a few simple things and be willing to have the desire to drink removed. Here was hope. Maybe I could find my way out of this agonizing existence. Perhaps I could find freedom and peace, and be able once again to call my soul my own.

The next day I received a visit from Mr. T., a recovered alcoholic. I don't know what sort of person I was expecting, but I was very agreeably surprised to find Mr. T. a poised, intelligent, well-groomed, and mannered gentleman. I was immediately impressed with his graciousness and charm. He put me at ease with his first few words. Looking at him, I found it hard to believe he had ever been as I was then.

However, as he unfolded his story for me, I could not help but believe him. In describing his suffering, his fears, his many years of groping for some answer to that which always seemed to remain unanswerable, he could have been describing me, and nothing short of experience and knowledge could have afforded him that much insight! He had been dry for 2½ years and had been maintaining his contact with a group of recovered alcoholics in Akron. Contact with this group was extremely important to him. He told me that eventually he hoped such a group would develop in the Chicago area but that so far this had not been started. He thought it would be helpful for me to visit the Akron group and meet many like himself.

By this time, with the doctor's explanation, the revelations contained in the book, and the hope-inspiring



interview with Mr. T., I was ready and willing to go to the ends of the earth, if that was what it took, for me to find what these people had.

So I went to Akron, and also to Cleveland, and I met more recovered alcoholics. I saw in these people a quality of peace and serenity that I knew I must have for myself. Not only were they at peace with themselves, but they were getting a kick out of life such as one seldom encounters, except in the very young. They seemed to have all the ingredients for successful living: philosophy, faith, a sense of humor (they could laugh at themselves), clear-cut objectives, appreciation—and most especially appreciation and sympathetic understanding for their fellow man.

Nothing in their lives took precedence over their response to a call for help from some alcoholic in need. They would travel miles and stay up all night with someone they had never laid eyes on before and think nothing of it. Far from expecting praise for their deeds, they claimed the performance a privilege and insisted that they invariably received more than they gave. Extraordinary people!

I didn't dare hope I might find for myself all that these people had found, but if I could acquire some small part of their intriguing quality of living—and sobriety—that would be enough.

Shortly after I returned to Chicago, my doctor, encouraged by the results of my contact with A.A., sent us two more of his alcoholic patients. By the latter part of September 1939, we had a nucleus of six and held our first official group meeting.

I had a tough pull back to normal good health. It had been so many years since I had not relied on some

artificial crutch, either alcohol or sedatives. Letting go of everything at once was both painful and terrifying. I could never have accomplished this alone. It took the help, understanding, and wonderful companionship that was given so freely to me by my ex-alkie friends—this and the program of recovery embodied in the Twelve Steps. In learning to practice these steps in my daily living, I began to acquire faith and a philosophy to live by. Whole new vistas were opened up for me, new avenues of experience to be explored, and life began to take on color and interest. In time, I found myself looking forward to each new day with pleasurable anticipation.

A.A. is not a plan for recovery that can be finished and done with. It is a way of life, and the challenge contained in its principles is great enough to keep any human being striving for as long as he lives. We do not, cannot, outgrow this plan. As arrested alcoholics, we must have a program for living that allows for limitless expansion. Keeping one foot in front of the other is essential for maintaining our arrestment. Others may idle in a retrogressive groove without too much danger, but retrogression can spell death for us. However, this isn't as rough as it sounds, as we do become grateful for the necessity that makes us toe the line, and we find that we are compensated for a consistent effort by the countless dividends we receive.

A complete change takes place in our approach to life. Where we used to run from responsibility, we find ourselves accepting it with gratitude that we can successfully shoulder it. Instead of wanting to escape some perplexing problem, we experience the thrill of challenge in the opportunity it affords for another

application of A.A. techniques, and we find ourselves tackling it with surprising vigor.

The last fifteen years of my life have been rich and meaningful. I have had my share of problems, heartaches, and disappointments because that is life, but also I have known a great deal of joy and a peace that is the handmaiden of an inner freedom. I have a wealth of friends and, with my A.A. friends, an unusual quality of fellowship. For, to these people, I am truly related. First, through mutual pain and despair, and later through mutual objectives and newfound faith and hope. And, as the years go by, working together, sharing our experiences with one another, and also sharing a mutual trust, understanding, and love—without strings, without obligation—we acquire relationships that are unique and priceless.

There is no more aloneness, with that awful ache, so deep in the heart of every alcoholic that nothing, before, could ever reach it. That ache is gone and never need return again.

Now there is a sense of belonging, of being wanted and needed and loved. In return for a bottle and a hangover, we have been given the Keys of the Kingdom.