



IT SURE BEATS SITTING IN A CELL

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



It Felt Good To Drink

All of us used to drink. Most of us drank a lot. Wine, beer, rum, whiskey, gin, vodka, tequila, or anything else with alcohol in it. Most of us got drunk sometimes, too.

But many of us never felt or looked drunk. Many of us could drink a lot without showing it.

Nearly all of us enjoyed drinking at first. We liked to be around people who drank.

Many of us liked to go out and drink with our friends. Some of us drank at home. Some of us drank alone.

Drinking somehow made us feel free. It seemed to make us good at everything. Braver. Smarter. Funnier. Livelier. Better looking. Better lovers. Not so nervous, or shy, or scared. It helped us sleep. It helped us get along better with other folks.

It could make us happy, or help us forget troubles.

We started drinking young. As Clyde will tell you later, he began drinking when he was 14 years old.

Gary says in his story that he felt he could only face society when he had the sense of ease and comfort booze gave him.

You can also read about Carmen, who says, "I held my liquor well, and got more cool with every glass. I was the grooviest woman in my block . . ."

Billy says, "I started drinking at the age of 17, and right away I liked it."

*We liked to be
around people
who drank.*

*Drinking somehow
made us feel free.*

(Later on in this pamphlet, all these people and others will tell you about themselves.)

We are *not* against drinking. We enjoyed it too much. Drinking is just fine, unless it causes us trouble. *Any* kind of trouble.

We are not against anyone's drinking, except our *own*. We do not try to get *anybody* to stop drinking, except *ourselves*. If you can drink without trouble, have one for us!

But we got sick. Or we got into some kind of trouble with our drinking. Sometimes we did not remember the things we did.

All of us who tell our stories in this pamphlet got locked up. While we were inside, we heard some surprising things about drinking. Things we did not know. Most of them were about *health*.

We decided to learn more.

We tell you here exactly what happened to us. Maybe things like these happened to you. We also tell how we used to feel, and how we feel now. Maybe you have had feelings like ours.

We will also tell what we did about our drinking while we were still locked up.

But now, we tell you about-

Things We Did While Locked Up

We kept getting sent back to jail or prison, or reformatory, or work farm, time after time. We figured we must be doing something wrong. Maybe drinking had something to do with it.

We could also see where we were headed. Unless something changed.





We looked at the good parts of our drinking, and at the bad parts. We saw how often we got into trouble while drinking.

We could see where we had been. We could also see where we were headed. Unless something changed.

We Took A Good, Honest Look at Our Own Drinking

At first, we did this alone, without anyone else knowing. We believe drinking or not drinking is our own business. So we tried hard to tell *ourselves* the real truth, not to kid ourselves.

We looked at the good parts of our drinking, and at the bad parts. We saw how often we got into trouble while drinking. Many of us almost never got into trouble *except* when we were drinking. Over and over, our troubles had some hookup with drinking.

We Decided to Learn About Drinking From Experts—The Drunks

Men and women in Alcoholics Anonymous call themselves alcoholics, or drunks. They must know the real truth about drinking, if anybody does.

If there is an A.A. group where you are, and you think you *might* have a problem connected with drinking, you are welcome to go to the A.A. meetings. You do not have to say you are an alcoholic. A.A. does not care how much you drank. A.A. does not care what kind of alcohol you drank, or even what you did. All A.A. cares about is whether you want to do something about your drinking problem.

So we told the chaplain (or counselor or doctor or some other official) we thought we *might* have a drinking problem. We said we wanted to go to some A.A. meetings.

We Went to Every A.A. Meeting We Could, and Listened

We did not argue. We did not even talk at first. We just listened, and maybe asked a few questions.

We tried to keep an open mind. We could tell that these people really knew about drinking. They had been there.

Anyhow, going to A.A. meetings sure beats sitting in a cell! By going to the meetings, we got to visit with some people, and we laughed a lot. In many places, we also got free coffee and smokes. It was a nice break in the routine.

We Learned That for Some People Drinking Is a Sickness

It is kind of like being allergic. Some people, for some reason, cannot drink safely. Doctors do not know why some people can drink a lot and be all right, while others get sick. Doctors say this is a disease, called alcoholism.

We in A.A. call ourselves alcoholics. But that does not mean we are winos or old bums. Many of us panhandled, slept in doorways, spent time in mental hospitals, jails, and flophouses.

But many of us did *none* of those things. Many A.A.'s never lost families, never had car wrecks, and never got into trouble with the law.

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Alcoholics are all kinds of people. It is not what you drink, or how much, that makes you an alcoholic. It is what the drinking does to you.

But in one way, all alcoholics are alike. We all wound up with problems connected with our drinking.

Something is wrong if you drink when you do not want to drink. Something is wrong if you get drunk when you do not plan to. If drinking gives you trouble, and you keep on drinking, something is wrong.

We Talked to All the A.A. Members We Could

After or before the A.A. meetings, we asked visiting A.A. members about their drinking, and how they quit. They did not tell us what to do. They just told us what happened to *them*, and what *they* did.

We Decided to Try Not Drinking

At least for a while. A.A. members do not swear off drinking forever. They just do not pick up the first drink, today.

We had nothing to lose. We could try their way for a while. If we decided we did not like it, we could go back to our old ways, later. But for now, since our old ways had caused us so much trouble, we would try the A.A. way.

We Tried to Use ‘The 24-Hour Plan’

It can be used many ways.

If you want a drink, try to put it off—but only for 24

hours. If 24 hours seems too long, we cut it down to one hour, or 24 minutes, or even five minutes.

It does not help to worry about the past, or stay mad about it. It is gone forever. But today is here, right now. We can do something about this 24 hours.

Tomorrow is not here yet. So the one time we can do something about is *right now*.

We try to do easy time, not hard time.

We Collected Lots of A.A. Material

We picked up every booklet or pamphlet (like this one you are reading) at A.A. meetings. Even the ones that did not look very interesting. Even the ones that seemed not to be for us.

We tried to get the A.A. books and read all of them.

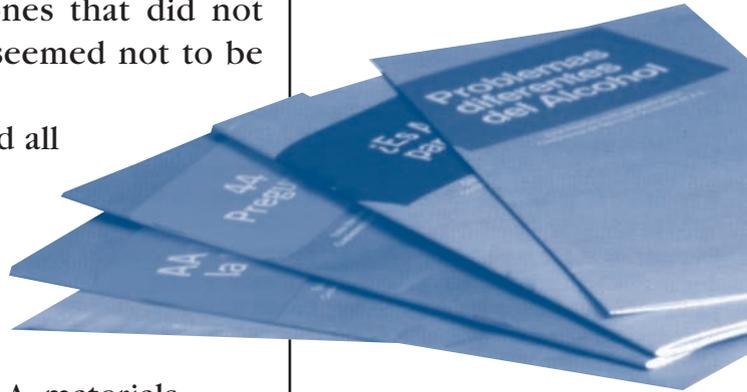
We read the A.A. Grapevine, a magazine A.A. members put out every month. It has stories, cartoons, jokes, and news in it.

Some of us made up our own kits of A.A. materials.

We would borrow from the A.A. group one of the A.A. slogans usually shown at meetings, or we made our own. We would think about what it meant, and how we could use it.

We Wrote Letters to A.A. Members

If the A.A. members you meet cannot help you do this, other



Anyhow, telling them about ourselves, and trying to help them understand A.A., really helped us.

A.A.'s can. Many of them have served time, too. Many would be glad to hear from you, and write to you.

You can write to the Corrections Correspondence Service, P.O. Box 459, New York, NY 10163, U.S.A. You will be answered by an A.A. member who will try very hard to help you. The mail you get from A.A. members *never* says "A.A." on the envelope. It looks just like plain, personal mail.

Maybe you can also write the Correctional Facilities Committee of A.A., or the A.A. central office in some nearby large city or your home town. Writing letters and getting any A.A. mail is good for us.



We Spent Less Time With Bootleggers, Pushers, and Old Boozing Buddies

We do not mean there is anything wrong with these people. Some of them have been our best friends. But spending less time with them gave us a good chance to stay out of trouble.

Good friends are always glad to see you get well. They do not want you to get into trouble. The new friends we made in A.A. understood that.

We Told Others About A.A.

After we had been to some A.A. meetings, we tried to explain about A.A. to the new men and women we saw there.

Some of the new people at our meetings decided they were not interested in A.A.—*yet!* That is okay

with us. Anyhow, telling them about ourselves, and trying to help them understand A.A., really helped *us*.

We Learned How To Handle Teasing About A.A. Without Blowing Up

Some of us got kidded about going to A.A. meetings. We had to figure out how to handle that.

Maybe someone would call out, “Going to another drunk meeting, huh?”

We would answer, “That’s right baby! The coffee is great!”

Or we might say, “Yep. I like drunks!”

Any quick answer seemed to do the trick. When other people saw they did not bother us, they gave it up.

But for some of us, the kidding never meant anything. We just ignored it.

Lots of people think *anything* you do is “shooting an angle.” We just let them think or say whatever they wanted, and we went our own way. We kept cool.

What if you have diabetes or a broken arm and have to take a pill or a shot of medicine every day? You do not let other people keep you from getting well.

For us, going to A.A. is sort of like taking our medicine. We do not care what other people think of it.

We Helped Out With the A.A. Meetings

Someone has to set up the chairs and ashtrays, or make coffee, clean up after the meeting, maybe set up signs and put out the books and pamphlets.

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But A.A. is different. It is not run by people with professional training. It is run by alcoholics.

Most A.A. groups have a secretary, and maybe some other “officers.” But they are not the bosses. They just take turns getting things done.

Some A.A. groups in correctional institutions put out a magazine or newspaper. No one in A.A. is ever paid for any of these A.A. jobs.

But doing these things kept us thinking about staying sober.

We Tried Not to Get A.A. Mixed Up With Religion or Group Therapy

In many institutions, residents can go to (1) A.A. meetings, (2) group therapy, and (3) religious services.

It is important to keep those three things separate in our minds.

Counseling and group therapy are run by people with professional training. They are paid to do it. Many of us have been helped by a counselor or by group therapy.

But A.A. is different. It is *not* run by people with professional training. It is run by alcoholics, and they are not paid to do it.

The primary purpose of A.A. members is to stay sober and help anybody else who wants to stop drinking. A.A. is not connected with any religion. A.A. members can have any religion they want, or none. That is their own business.

Likewise, any A.A. member who wants to can also get counseling or group therapy. A.A. does not take the place of religion, or of therapy.

Here are Some of Our Stories

Now a few of us will tell you about ourselves, just the way it happened. We show what we were like. We tell you how things changed, and what life is like for us now.

Clyde has 50 Years of Sobriety!

I started drinking when I was 14 years old. I joined the army in 1939, met a girl and got married. My drinking continued and got worse. Soon my wife kicked me out. For years I worked at logging camps, usually lasting for a couple of pay-days before the booze won out. In 1946, the cops arrested me for nonsupport, and I got five years probation. I continued to drink. I'd just been fired for being drunk on the job when the cops caught up with me again in 1948. I was sentenced to the state penitentiary, and it was suggested that I go to A.A. meetings there - I'd never heard of A.A. Admittance, acceptance and action were some of the first principles I was able to grasp. God had shown me a way, and I had hope for a sober life.

In May 1949 I was paroled, and sent to a job in the town where I was raised. I had to hire a man to work with me on the end of a power saw; and this man wanted help with his drinking problem. We started the first A.A. meeting in town—two alcoholics and a Big Book. My family returned, and I found I was using slogans I had heard at meetings behind the walls like: "If you don't like A.A., we'll gladly refund

Today I am very grateful to God and the people in A.A. who have listened to me, and shared with me, reaching out with a singleness of purpose.



*Some
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your misery;” and “Stinking thinking will get you drinking;” or “Let go and let God.”

Eventually I got permission to move to a town where I could work year-round. Clayton C. and I started a Monday Night A.A. Group in 1952, and it’s still active. I was granted a full pardon in 1956, and received permission from the warden to return to the prison once a month to carry A.A.’s message into the facility—which I did for the next 30 years.

My first marriage ended in divorce in 1978. My second wife, who was in A.A., died after ten years of our marriage. In 1990, I married a woman I’d known for 26 years. She has 34 years sober, and I recently celebrated 50 years sober. When I came to A.A. all I had to offer was a very abused body and a warped mind. There comes a time when you get on your knees with a choice to puke or pray.

Today I am very grateful to God and the people in A.A. who have listened to me, and shared with me, reaching out with a singleness of purpose. The prison group where my journey began will soon hold its 55th anniversary, and I will return there to share my experience, strength and hope with other alcoholics. Some youngsters have asked “How do you get to be an oldtimer?” My answer is “Don’t drink and don’t die.”

—Clyde

Pat Went and She Listened

My name is Pat, and I am an alcoholic. In my three and a half years on parole, I have been very aware of where I was and how I got there. One felony as a result of drinking, and a busted probation in less than three months because of more drinking.

In prison, I learned that it does not matter where you come from, even if you are a square, a housewife, nurse, or whatever. If you drink, some day you might screw up enough to do something dumb, which is exactly what I did.

In quarantine, I managed to get into A.A., because drinking had been a problem for years. But I just could not say I was an alcoholic. Not yet.

So I went, and I listened. I met people who made sense to me. I could understand other women in prison who got there as a result of alcohol. Some were doing up to 30 or 35 years.

I kept my big mouth shut for a long time. I read A.A. literature, too. It was my only link to sanity, except for the free-world speakers.

While still behind bars, I released myself from the walls I had built around me for over 30 years.

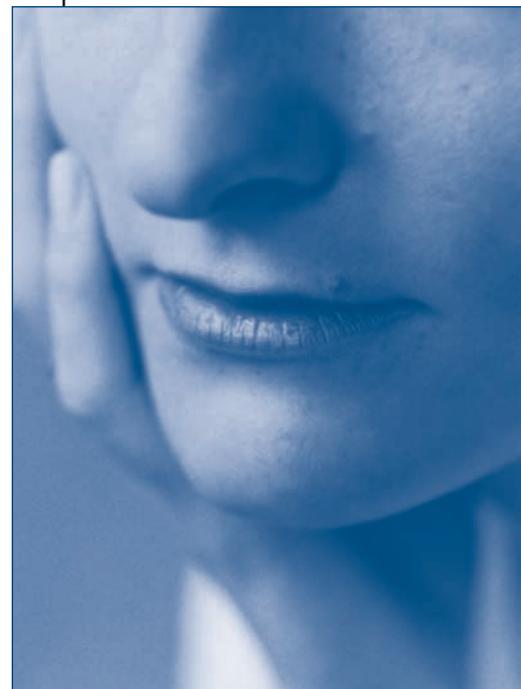
Alcohol had cost me my family. When I went in, I had no one. But I have my family back now, and we have a strong bond between us. I have now married a man who really loves me in spite of everything. No matter what I have done, it is in the past, and I cannot redo it, ever.

When I get uptight out here, I call someone, or go to a club or an A.A. meeting. I do not have to wait. If there is not a meeting going on, someone usually comes in and starts talking, or I do. I always walk out feeling like a different person. This is the miracle. The sharing part of A.A. really works. All you have to do is get off your backside and *do it*.

I had to go through two hospitals and one prison to find out how great it is to really live. I am sober, and I thank A.A. for today. It is beautiful, and I am happy I have today to do something with.

—Pat

I learned that it does not matter where you come from, even if you are a square, a housewife, nurse ...



Little Chief and the Spirits

I am called "Little Chief." Among my people, though, I was called "Big Drunk" by the time I was 14. I was not the only drunk in Canada, but I got more attention than many others.

Like other boys my age, I often stayed away from school on the reservation. I said it was all white man's stuff I did not need. I felt I did not fit in, even in my tribe.

One day, two of us saw my uncle acting very happy. Then he passed out. We swiped his bottle and tasted it. Wow! It was magic medicine. All at once, I knew who I was, and I fitted in at last. I was sure I had found the Great Spirit my ancestors worshiped. In my head, I became a great hunter, a grand warrior, and a mighty lover. But I was not old enough to be any of those.

Always after that, any spirits I could find would do. I drank them all, and was always being punished. So I would run away, and every time I woke up in jail. My grandfather said his father had warned him never to touch firewater, and looking at me he could see why.

Once, on a prison farm, some Indian men told me about A.A. I went with them a few times. But it was too much like Sunday school for me then. I thought, "More white man's stuff!" And I did not like their talk about a Great Power. So I quit going.

But I did not stop drinking. That is how I came to this prison for 10 years, when I was 19 years old. I do not remember doing the things that got me here.

I decided to try A.A. meetings again, because I remembered the laughing about drunken things.

One day, an A.A. man came to speak to us, and he was an Indian. I heard him say something about the Great Spirit he

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found in A.A. When I asked him about that, he said he would bring me something to read. He brought a pamphlet, “A.A. for the Native North American.” Also the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*. Both have stories of A.A.’s who are Native Americans. Now I know I am not alone. Many of us have this illness of alcoholism. And many of us have found a path to recovery in A.A.

We have a place for you, if you want to be happy and free, too.

—Little Chief

Roger Is Wanted, but Not by the Police

My name is Roger. I am an alcoholic. At 35, I was a three-time loser. I had been locked up 13 years. Every time I was arrested, it was because of my drinking.

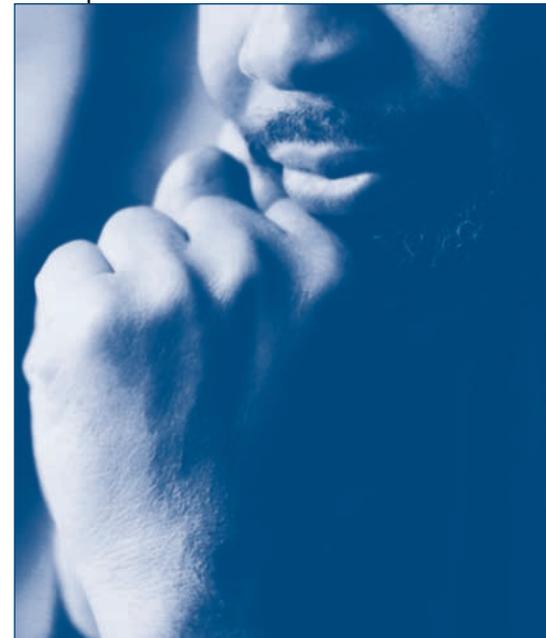
I knew I had to do something. I remember sitting in the judge’s chambers. In front of him was my record. He told me I had better clean up my act. If I ever appeared in his courtroom again, I would be sentenced to life.

At my first A.A. meeting behind the walls, I was sitting in the back row, wanting to spill my guts. But I was afraid. It was a couple of weeks before I finally talked. After that, it became easier each time.

I heard things in A.A. I could use in the penitentiary or outside. I call them “tools,” and I still collect them—words I hear at A.A. meetings now. I try to apply them to my new way of life.

My ideas of what I wanted began to change. I wanted sobriety and peace of mind. To live in a place

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where I would be wanted—not by the police. Where I would be welcome, comfortable, and treated like a normal human being. I looked forward to finding work so I could be independent. I wanted to be with people like myself. These were things I looked forward to upon release, a hope held out to me by A.A. speakers.

Since my release, it has not been a bed of roses. In this free world, there is nothing free. Even my sobriety. I work at it one day at a time. If I do not, I will end up in prison again. Or become unbalanced and put in a mental institution. Or die of alcoholism.

Good things have happened to me—new jobs, new friends. I have problems, and sometimes I hurt. But I hold on to the promise I hear at A.A. meetings: We will understand serenity. We will know peace. We will not regret the past.

I am free.

—Roger

Carmen Was The Grooviest

Hispanic chicks like me never have trouble getting a drink. At first, I just drank beer the boys from school gave me. But when I was 15, I looked like a grown woman, and older men would buy me fancy drinks in bars.

I held my liquor well, and got more cool with every glass. I was the grooviest woman in my block, some people said, and I agreed. For a long time, there was no trouble. I had a job and several men who liked me. Then I fell in love with a bar owner. I thought I did wild things because I was so in love. But he said it was because I drank too fast. I would slow down, but get bored and then sneak some extra drinks.

I began to get into fights. I hit a woman, and she fell against a rail and almost died. I told everybody it was not my fault, because she slapped me first. But I was put in jail and finally sent to a women's penitentiary.

One day, two Mexican women came to see me. They said my mother sent them and they were in A.A. They did not preach. They looked terrific, and they were not square. I was surprised there were Latin American women in A.A., but they gave me A.A. leaflets in Spanish. Two were all about women alcoholics.

I was mad at my mother for doing that, but lying on my bunk later in that smelly old cell, I started thinking about myself. The more I thought, the lower I felt, and suddenly I was crying. That surprised me. I never cried. But it made me feel better, and I began to look at the pamphlets the A.A. women had given me.

I was scared to go to A.A. in the joint, but when those women came back they fixed it for me. I went to every A.A. meeting there for 16 months and got released last year.

Now I have a new apartment and a better job. I do not carry a knife and miniature brandies in my shoulder bag any more. I am beginning to look better, and I have a new boyfriend.

I go to Spanish-speaking and English-speaking A.A. groups. If I do not take the first drink, I cannot get drunk. I never liked jail. This is much better.

As my A.A. friends say each night, "*Vaya con Dios, amiga!*" I am not religious in the usual ways, but I love those friends.

—Carmen

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He Would Rather Be Billy Than Anyone Else

I am an alcoholic, and my name is Billy. I started drinking at 17 and right away I liked it. Because of drinking, I started doing things I did not want to do.

I went into a life that took me to 13 penal institutions. I attended my first A.A. meeting at 18. I went to get my name on the list. I knew I would meet the parole board. If I had to call myself an alcoholic to hit the street early, that was fine with me. I would attend the meetings to get a cup of coffee or a cigarette, or mainly to get out of that cell.

When I left jail, my intentions were sincere. It was going to be different. I would get a legit job, meet a nice girl, and get married.

And, after leading the A.A. way of life doing time, didn't I deserve a drink? I would have only one. It led me to more drinking and into more trouble.

For the next 22 years, I was in and out of prisons. Things got worse, and I got sicker through the progression of this illness, alcoholism. I was so sick I thought I was well. I wanted to be anybody else in the world but Billy. But I had to take myself every place I went.

Then I started listening with an open mind. I got honest about my booze problem. I became willing to do anything to stop drinking. I did not feel ashamed of what other cons thought. I asked the A.A.'s for the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*, and pamphlets. I started to enjoy my cell, and started living one day at a time. I became a free man in prison, because I started accepting the A.A. ideas. I started having time work for me, instead of doing time.

Then I started listening with an open mind. I got honest about my booze problem.

Six months later, I was released. Something inside me had changed. I felt frightened of outside. I went to an A.A. meeting my first day out. The people in A.A. there were exactly like A.A.'s who visited us in prison. They were warm and friendly, and they made me welcome.

Now I would rather be Billy than anyone else! Through A.A., I found the real and sober me.

—Billy

Jim Now Has Lots of Fun—Sober

My name is Jim, and I am an alcoholic. Most of the things I was sentenced for were direct results of alcohol.

In a penitentiary in Canada, a couple of guys I knew told me they were in A.A., and asked if I would like to go. I still cannot remember exactly why I went, besides the coffee and outside guests coming in. I sort of hoped maybe A.A. could help me.

I did not really want to stop drinking. But learning that alcoholism is a disease helped me a lot. For the first couple of months, I fought everything else I heard.

Then it was suggested I get involved with my A.A. group. I took the job of secretary, and decided to throw myself into it. I began to have a change of attitude. Not just toward A.A. and drinking, but toward life in general. I had been on a terrible self-pity trip. It had not been leading me anywhere I wanted to go.

A.A. started making sense to me. Sometime, after 8 to 10 months in A.A., I realized I no longer wanted to drink. I worried about what other inmates, not in A.A., thought about me. I found it did not really matter to them what I did.

I got an outside sponsor. He brought me A.A. literature, and I read the books as often as I could.

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As soon as I received parole, I joined an outside A.A. group. Going to my first outside meeting, I had a lot of fear and anxiety. It did not last long. After only a few minutes, I realized that to these people I was just another alcoholic, like them.

I found out there are many things to do for fun, without drinking. This was one of my greatest fears when I first joined A.A. It no longer is.

—Jim

Gary Finally Woke Up to Reality

Someone once said “Reality can only dawn on an unclouded mind.” At 44 years old, and having served 25 of those years in prison, I’ve seen a host of clouded minds; my own being perhaps the murkiest of all. Thanks to God, the Twelve Steps and the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous, and a focused effort on my part, I’ve been blessed with over 10 years of contented sobriety. It’s a rare inmate who acknowledges that his troubles are basically of his own making, and that selfishness, self-centeredness are what caused his woes. I certainly could not.

I’ve spent many a lonely night sending fearful, self-pitying prayers to God. I repeatedly petitioned this Power to “please get me out of prison,” knowing deep within that my first stop would be the liquor store, because I was too afraid to face society without the sense of ease and comfort of booze. I’d always felt tense and uneasy around people, shy and very uncomfortable. I felt I wasn’t as good as anyone else, and my biggest fear was being found out. So, I kept this angry scowl on my face, and an “I don’t care” attitude.

On August 22, 1989 my character defects, driven by pure selfishness, had caused me to hate myself so badly that I could-

n't stand the sight of myself in the mirror. I surrendered my will and life to God, as I still don't (and probably never will) understand Him. I started going to A.A., got a sponsor, started working the Twelve Steps. And I woke up, as it were, to reality. I won't say it's been easy. I've lost both parents, and other loved ones. At one point, my release date was extended 11 years. But, I can honestly say that the past 10 years have been the best years of my life.

Today, I went on a gate pass to an A.A. assembly. The warm reception I received from the beautiful A.A. fellowship has made it possible for me to hold my head up a little more today than yesterday. And though I still don't understand God, that's okay. He understands me; and when I put my will in His hands, life gets better and better. Thank God for Alcoholics Anonymous.

—Gary

Rodger is More Grateful than Words Can Express

I am a grateful, recovering alcoholic, and an inmate in a state correctional institution. We have a really good Wednesday evening A.A. meeting here in the prison. I am serving a sentence of 25 to 50 years (25 years mandatory) as a direct result of my addiction to alcohol and other substances. I have been in more than 13 years, and I've been sober and going to meetings ever since.

In the prison where I did the first eight years of my sentence, before I got transferred, it was almost as easy to maintain an alcohol or drug habit as it is on the outside. But the Fellowship

I have witnessed miracles happen in the lives of men whose families, the "system" and even the men themselves have given up on.



*We tried not
to daydream
about release
day. In A.A.,
we try to
live one day
at a time,
remember?*

helped me - not only to stay sober, but to change and mature, to begin to develop into the kind of person that my Higher Power intended me to be in the first place. I am more grateful than words can express.

I try to stay involved in A.A. by serving whenever called upon in a number of capacities. I like working in the background and sponsoring guys. I have witnessed miracles happen in the lives of men whose families, the “system” and even the men themselves have given up on.

Hardly anyone I know wants to be in prison, yet many guys sincerely working the program have admitted to being “rescued” by coming to prison. Like it or not, this is where we find ourselves, doing sentences from months to life-times.

Those who are fortunate enough to land in a seat in A.A. are some of the luckiest people on the planet - inside or outside of prison. Because, for those who want it, in A.A. lives are salvaged. There is a healing of mind, body and spirit that you would be hard pressed to find anywhere else on earth. For those who want it, miracles await!

—Rodger

What We Did on Our First Days Out

What we do the first few hours after release—even little things that do not even seem important—can make all the difference in our future lives.

Looking back, we are sure of one thing. What we did that first day on the streets decided whether we would stay free or be sent away again.

Here are some tips about the first day out. They show the ways many of us have stayed sober and free.

We Remembered That Release Day Is Just One More 24-Hour Period

We tried not to daydream about release day. In A.A., we try to live one day at a time, remember?

By doing this, we avoid disappointments. And for some of us, release day turned out to be better than we expected.

When the day to get out comes, we can stay cool. It is just one more day in our recovery. The main thing is not to take even one beer, one glass of wine, or a sip of anything with alcohol in it, *today*. That is basic for staying out of cells.

We Made Some Plans

Before release, we had to make some plans. We had to make sure we had a place to sleep. To tell family or friends we were coming home. To set up some kind of plan for getting a job, or to go through some kind of red tape.

So without worrying too much about how these plans would turn out, we just did what we could today.

We Set Up A.A. Contacts

Because many correctional facilities have rules restricting outside A.A. visitors from exchanging telephone numbers or home addresses with inmates, we made certain to write to the General Service Office three to six months prior to our release date. We found that G.S.O. would then contact the local Correctional Facilities Committee to ask them to find an

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A.A. contact in or near the town in which we would eventually be living. Sometimes, the local C.F. Committee is able to arrange to have an A.A. member meet us, and take us to A.A. meetings outside.

In addition, G.S.O. sent us a directory of Central/Intergroup Offices and a copy of the pamphlet "Questions and Answers on Sponsorship." We wrote to the central or intergroup office nearest to the town in which we would be living to obtain a local meeting list and to see if they also might be able to arrange for an A.A. member to be in touch on the day of our release.

But something might delay a friend, a relative, or an A.A. member who planned to meet us. So we made it our *own* business to make our *own* contact with A.A. We did not wait around for anybody else to do it for us.

After all, it is our own health, our own life, we are protecting. We took no chances.

It was great when someone helped us. But our own life is our own job in the long run. *So we made sure we got to as many A.A. meetings as we could.*

One more thing: If someone was supposed to meet us, we made sure it was not in a bar. We also took our trips to the rest room before we got off the bus or train.

Probably you already know why. Many of us meant to stay sober, but as soon as we needed a washroom, or change for a telephone call, you can guess what happened: We headed into a bar before we thought about it. It was just the old habit.

A no-good old habit, for us. We need new ones now, to stay well.



We Remembered H.A.L.T.

Those four letters stand for four things to avoid. When we remembered them, we felt better.

We tried to avoid getting *hungry, angry, lonely, or tired*. Any one of those made us feel down. It is easy to think of a drink at a time like that.

Too Hungry? Eat!

No matter what, we ate breakfast the day of release. Excited or not, we forced it down if we had to. Eating something can make us feel better. Even if it is just a candy bar. The idea of a drink is not so good after a piece of cake or a chocolate shake.

Angry? Hang Loose!

For some of us, the release date was smooth. But sometimes things went wrong that day.

Papers got delayed, or lost

Bus and train schedules got mixed up.

People did not do what we wanted them to.

Nothing went right. Everything got fouled up.

So what did we do when we got angry? *Anything*, but drink.

Change the subject. Read. Tell a joke.

Whatever made us mad is not worth another sentence.

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Lonely? Talk!

In a jail or prison, you almost never get any privacy, unless you are put in solitary. There are always people around. Too many.

So we wanted to be by ourselves, in some quiet place, where no one was yelling or snoring or crying. Where no metal was being banged. Where no heels were clapping on cement.

Only thing is—being alone can be bad news for anyone trying not to drink!

Feeling lonesome was no good for us. When we are alone, our thinking can get screwed up.

In A.A., we are lucky. We can always find a person like us. Someone who knows exactly how it feels to be lonesome, or to want a drink. So we get to an A.A. meeting, or call an A.A. member.

Tired? Rest!

Besides not getting too *hungry, angry, or lonely*, we try not to get *tired*.

Some of us did not sleep much the night before release. And then, the first night out, some of us had trouble sleeping.

Being too tired can be dangerous for us. Before we knew it, some of us were thinking about drinking.

So we slowed down. Maybe even grabbed a nap. Even if we could not sleep, just lying down and closing our eyes helped.

(Later, we learned to quit worrying about sleep. When our bodies are tired enough, we sleep. Anyhow, no one ever died from staying awake!)

To sum up: When we were feeling down, we checked these four things. Were we-*hungry? angry? lonely? tired?* (H.A.L.T.)

We felt better as soon as we took care of one of these. The idea of a drink just went away.

We Put Off the Party, or Tried a Different Kind

A lot of us daydreamed about what we would do as soon as we got out. Those dreams almost always included having a “few” drinks, and getting some loving.

But the party started us back on the road to trouble. Just because we have not had a drink for a while, that does not mean we are “cured” of a drinking problem.

No matter how long we stayed dry, we could *not* drink again, safely.

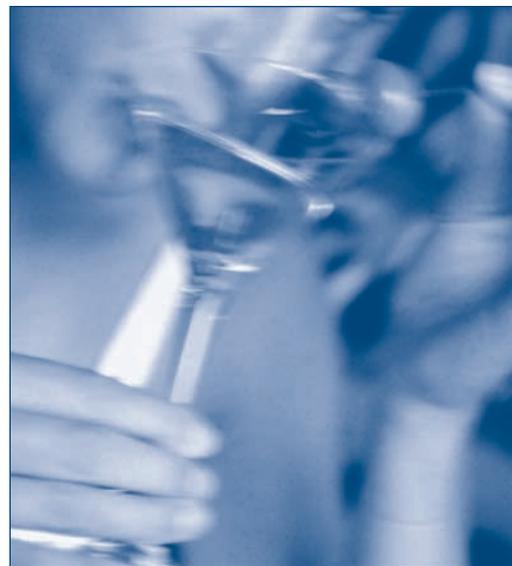
We did not want to go before the judge again any time soon, so we changed the old routine.

We decided to wait at least one day, maybe a week or two, before we went to a party.

We put off the sex part, too, at least for a while, if we were afraid it might get us drunk.

We Went to A.A. to Keep From Drinking

There is one safe, friendly place for anyone wanting to get over a drinking problem. That is an A.A. meeting. Even if we have never met the people before, they understand about wanting to stay outside the bars.



But the party started us back on the road to trouble. Just because we have not had a drink for a while, that does not mean we are “cured” of a drinking problem.

We got to know people in A.A. a little bit before telling them our whole life story.



We Tried to Tell the Truth

Those of us in A.A. have tried to give up our old habits of lying. Some of us used to lie just out of habit! But we now believe it is easier, and safer, to try telling the truth. That way, we do not get mixed-up.

Maybe the following questions bother you. They bothered some of us.

1. Should I tell my friends and family I am going to A.A. meetings?

Each of us has to decide that for himself or herself. What is good for us may not be good for you.

Let us get one thing straight right now. The word “anonymous” does *not* mean we keep our own A.A. membership a secret from families, friends, or anyone else we want to tell privately. Most of us told our families and friends that we were in A.A.

Alcoholism is a disease. It is not a disgrace to be recovering from it. *Anonymity* means we do not have our full names and A.A. membership published in newspapers or magazines, or used on broadcasts or glorify ourselves. Of course, we *never* tell about other people in A.A.

2. Should I tell other A.A. members I am just out of a correctional facility?

Again—we cannot tell you what to do. That is up to you. Some of us think we should not mention it for a

while. We got to know people in A.A. a little bit before telling them our whole life story.

On the other hand, many of us felt it was a good idea to tell the truth right way. That way, we did not have to go around hiding anything.

Most A.A. members understood. It did not bother them at all. A lot of them have done time, too. When we show we are really trying to stay sober, A.A. members do not care about our past.

And there was one big extra bonus: When we told the whole truth, it helped others who had been locked up. Those as scared and lonely as we were. Other men and women with records had helped us. About the only way we could thank them was to help someone else.

We Tried Not to Expect A.A. to Do Certain Things

Members of A.A. have had bad days and good ones. Some are friendlier than others. Some have big problems in their lives. Some are relaxed, happy, and helpful people. Others are still afraid. Some A.A.'s are more likable than others. So we learned not to expect A.A. members to greet us with open arms.

But most want to talk (and listen) about how it feels to be sober.

From reading A.A. material, and talking to A.A. men and women, we learned that A.A. does *not* do certain things. We should not expect these things. For example-

1. A.A. does *not* give anyone a place to live, or clothing, or food, or money.
2. A.A. does *not* help anybody get a job.

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*Anyhow,
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3. A.A. does *not* solve family problems.
4. A.A. does *not* give medical or legal advice.
5. A.A. does *not* fix people up with romances or sex partners.
6. A.A. does *not* give psychiatric advice or treatment.
7. A.A. does *not* promise anyone a social life or have a center for arts, crafts, sports, and other hobbies.
8. A.A. does *not* force us to do anything we do not want to do.
9. A.A. does *not* provide letters of reference to parole boards, lawyers, court officials.

Those things are not what A.A. is all about.

A.A. members just told us how they stayed sober one day at a time. When we wanted to, we would try the things that helped them. If anyone wants a drink, A.A. lets that person alone.

We try to help someone with a drinking problem for one reason: It helps us stay sober. Trying to help someone else is good for *us*. That is why we do it.

What can you lose? Today may be the first day of your new, permanent freedom. Anyhow, A.A. sure beats sitting in a cell.

*The Twelve Steps
of Alcoholics Anonymous*

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

I am responsible ...

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

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