



The Voice Within



A Way Out

Through the abuse of alcohol I had dug myself into a deep hole. It was dark, deep and wide with no apparent way out. Slumped down on the bottom I found myself trapped, disheartened and alone. The walls blocked all light and buried me in a state of despair.

As I gazed upward with my arms open and head tilted back, I cried out in desperation. A man appeared and lowered a ladder into the hole. This ladder consisted of 12 steps with a set of directions attached to each step. A Big Blue Book outlined a way to utilize the ladder and escape my trap. The Man suggested that I began by reading that Big Book. Trapped and lost, stuck down in a hole and not going anywhere I grasped at the Book and words began to jump off the pages. I read the Doctors opinion by Dr. Silkworth and the "phenomenon of craving" description opened my mind. I knew at that moment that I am an Alcoholic. Now what?

I absorbed the directions on the Roman Numerated pages and the first 43 that followed. With great caution I stepped up onto the first rung per the book's directions. Climbing this first rung simply required admitting to being an alcoholic with an unmanageable life. Doctor Silkworth's description of the "phenomenon of craving" did the trick. I started to climb.

Coming to believe was harder so I spent a long time stuck on that first rung. When I finally did identify a "power greater than myself" my body filled with energy. God became a Group of Drunks and I quickly stepped up to the third. I could now see the top of the hole and craved what I saw. The directions for the third step were easy to follow as I was now willing to turn over my will and lives. Whenever I became confused standing above was that Man, constantly offering encouragement and instructions. He knew the way because he had made the climb himself. I stepped up again.

Climbing the next three sets of rungs was done two at a time. The fourth and fifth required research and writing down my findings. Then with the help of God and another human being I began identifying the causes and conditions of my past behavior. After taking these two steps I started to feel the gorilla of guilt falling off my back. The load seemed to become lighter and I bounced up to the sixth and seventh rungs.

Being willing, sincerely humble and asking for more burdens to be removed allowed me to climb the next two rungs. After identifying wrongs I had done and becoming willing to make amends my burden lightened even more, and now standing on the tenth rung I started to see the world around the hole I had been in. I realized that the world had not changed during my climb but that I had. My directions were clear. Continue to do what I had done during this adventure and promptly address any situations when old behaviors adversely impacted my sense of well being. The work was not done.

Then I climbed up onto the eleventh rung and came into the sunlight of the spirit. The warm glow of God's light enveloped me and for the first time in decades I felt peace. My racing mind began to slow and as I learned how to pray, contemplate and meditate the walls blocking me from the sunlight of the spirit began to crumble. I felt serenity for the first time.

I wanted more and climbed onto the twelfth rung. The directions were clear. Step out of the hole, pick up the ladder and find other sick and suffering Alcoholics trapped in their own holes of despair. I looked up and the smiling face of my teacher welcomed me. He reached out a hand and pulled me out. He told me that to stay out I must now pass on the ladder. If I want to stay out of that pit I must continue to look for others that are trapped and lower the ladder in, give the directions that had been given to me and observe the miracle of another climbing out of their pit of despair.

A power greater than myself, the twelve steps of the program of Alcoholics Anonymous, the fellowship that surrounds our program and the wonderful teachers then and now keep me out of that hole that alcohol had burned in my soul.

ALK

Chapter One The Homeless Shelter

The day was September 15, 2004. I was lying on my back on a 2-inch vinyl covered foam mattress. I was sweating profusely and didn't have an ounce of physical strength. I felt like a child in stature; alone, helpless, sick.

The first image I could make out on that day was that of a man. Not just any man but a half-naked one of 350 pounds with long orange greasy hair. He was swaying back and forth like some kind of massive Muppet from Jim Henson Hell. He was mumbling something to people only he could see and perhaps more monstrous than he was. What made it all the more horrendous was the fact that in my condition I wouldn't have been able to defend myself from an angry butterfly! I didn't have questions like "Where am I? ", "How did I get here?" I knew exactly where I was and I knew in certain terms how I got here.

As the giant Muppet passed I was able to make out the layout of the room. Twenty bunk beds mostly occupied and 40 or so 2-inch mattresses spaced apart evenly - also occupied. I squinted my eyes shut and knew I would be stuck here for an undetermined amount of time.

What I wanted was to drift back in to where I had come from, that could turn this situation into not only something manageable but to something interesting, perhaps literal i.e.: Hell! I might even try to spark up a conversation with this massive alien. That was the freedom that inebriation afforded my mind that my sobriety (without recovery) could never afford me. That is what it gave me, what I was forever looking for - *the ability to be interested in life, to be able to live without having to be accepted by others, to not need things. To be free of care, worry, boredom, life.* These things haunted me more than most. That is until I took my first drink for "pain ". When that would hit my mind, it's at that instant, whether or not it takes 2 years or 20, I knew whatever it did it made me feel complete for the first time in my life.

Unfortunately for me there are only two roads - sober or not - and I had to take the second one to get to the first one. And for me the second one took me eighteen years to go down. Eighteen years to get to this weigh station, this linoleum floor in a homeless shelter. I gave up my job, my wife, my 2 kids, all relations with family and friends, my car, and 3 front teeth. I weighed one hundred twenty pounds.

I had just spent eighty thousand dollars of my mother's Last Will in six months. Without a single earthly possession at thirty-three years of age and not even the strength to cry I lay waiting; waiting for an old man with a flashlight to send that energy through my eyelid to my already conscious mind and tell me at 4:30 in the morning I would be eating breakfast and then I would be asked to leave. Leave? Where was I going? It's the middle of September in New Hampshire.

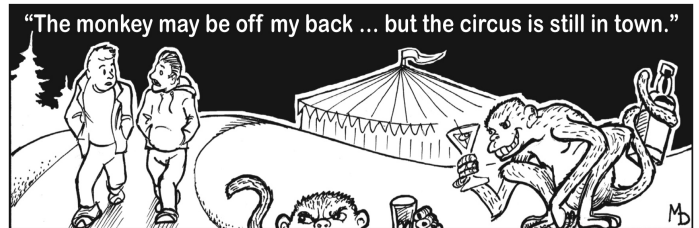
Matt L.

Believe more deeply. Hold your face up to the light even though for the moment you do not believe. Bill W.

My sober anniversary is Groundhog Day

The legend of Groundhog Day traverses centuries; its origins clouded in the mists of time. Myths such as this tie our present to the distant past when nature did, indeed, influence our lives. It is the day that the Groundhog comes out of his hole after a long winter sleep to look for his shadow. If he sees it, he regards it as an omen of six more weeks of bad weather and returns to his hole. If the day is cloudy and shadow less, he takes it as a sign of spring and stays above ground.

I like to look at my sobriety something like that; if I don't drink and I continuously look at my shadows I will know where I have been and I will stay above ground. -Anonymous



Do you think the circus is in town?

Today I don't have a drinking problem. I haven't had a drink. Today I do have a thinking problem, and I certainly do think. **A lot.** This reminds me of the story of the sponsor and the sponsee sitting in a meeting. The sponsee, seeing the banner "**Think, Think, Think**" behind the podium, whispers with righteousness indignation to the sponsor "Hey, you've always told me **not** to think!"

The sponsor replies "That banner doesn't apply to you."

Found in Step Eleven in the Step book, "the thoughts that seem to come from God are not answers at all. They prove to be well-intentioned unconscious rationalizations...he may have forgotten the possibility that his own wishful thinking and the human tendency to rationalize have distorted his so-called guidance."

And in Step Five: "It is worth noting that people of very high spiritual development almost always insist on checking with friends or spiritual advisers the guidance they feel they have received from God".

And so I remember, "*The Circus is Still in Town.*" And that this is a "We" program, where our sponsors are guides to help us through the steps, but are also "sounding boards" where we can get "direct comment and counsel on our situation." - Lance





Wanted: Group Historians

Compiling and writing your groups history will be an exciting and rewarding experience. You will gain better understanding of what group members went through to establish and maintain your group.

The ideal history should trace the evolution of your group in story form; if your group has been in existence for a few years, the story would be a couple of paragraphs, a long established group may be several pages. Don't worry about form, the most important this is to get the information down on paper.

With member's consent you should include their full names. The use of full names helps historians and researchers separate members with similar first names. It is important to note nicknames.

Your first step will be to talk to old-timers in your group. With their help you can make a list of names with earliest members. You might have a meeting of old-timers; you'll be amazed on how they can jog each other's memories. We are particularly interested in some anecdotes and "color".

Our history will be more interesting if it is about the people as well as the facts. Ask other members to tell about the most unforgettable characters they know in AA. Which members have been most helpful and dedicated? There must be some wonderful stories in our area. Let's preserve these for posterity.

We are trying to build up extensive records, which will be of value to a future historian... "It is highly important that the factual material be placed in our files in such a way that there can be no substantial distortion..." "We want to keep enlarging on this idea for the sake of the full length history to come..."
Bill W., 1957

If you want help with writing your group's history and finding what items you might add contact your district Archivist Karen R. When you feel your group's history is complete, make a copy for your group and a copy for your District Archivist and mail the original to:

**Karen District 12 Archives 674-3717
PO Box 3814 Manchester NH 03105-3814**

**Check out your District 12 website!
Here you will find a meeting list and other information
about the district, including the Voice Within
Newsletter.**

<http://www.aadistrict12.org>

Thought to Ponder . . .
Life is a steady drizzle of small things -- carry an
umbrella.

Women's Noontime Meeting
Correction from December newsletter. It's on
Wednesdays (not every day).
Grace Episcopal Church
Corner of Lowell & Pine St

District 12 Volunteer Open Positions: Public Information/CPC

District meeting held at St Raphael Church, corner of Third and
Ferry Sts., 3rd Sunday of the month 6-8 pm.

"It Gets Better Group"

Friday 8-9 PM

Speaker Discussion

Holy Rosary Church

21 Main St. Hooksett, NH

RTE 28 north past Riley's Gun Shop.

Bear Left at "Y" on Main St. 3/4 mile on left

This issue of The Voice Within was sponsored through the 7th Tradition.

Submitting Articles

Length and format: The newsletter may publish work of different lengths, from snappy one-liners and one-paragraph anecdotes to full-page articles (word count 400-800max) **Text** sent by e-mail should be submitted in the body of the message or as attached files, saved in "Word," "Simple text," or "Rich text." **Handwritten text** should be written clearly on one side of the paper. Include your phone number please. **Articles are reviewed and selected by the editorial team.**

Dark Pen Line drawings, cartoons, crossword puzzles, etc., are also welcome. Please scan and email these items.

Absolute Deadline to be considered for April .

Sunday March-15th at the District meeting

The Voice Within News

voicewithinnews@gmail.com

District 12 Newsletter

PO Box 3814

Manchester, NH 03105-3814

Statement of Purpose:

The Voice Within is the newsletter for AA District 12. It communicates District business, provides a forum for individual stories of experience, strength and hope from District 12 members, and provides other information relating to the pulse of AA District 12. Opinions or content in articles and letters are solely those of the contributor. The editorial team reserves the right to edit materials for length and content. Quotations from AA literature are copyrighted and reprinted with permission from its source.

Newsletter Chair: Lance C.

Editor: Cindy C.

Where Money and Spirituality Mix

Seventh Tradition Basket donations are lean; therefore we are forced to cut back on the services that the district can provide its members. All Committees have had to cut back; one small example besides the reduction in pages of this newsletter is the district meeting lists.

Many people think this is a free item for groups, however each printing costs over \$100.00. The Registrar states that they can now only be updated and printed four times a year. The Grapevine raffles have been eliminated and office supplies and printing costs have been eliminated at every level.

The principle of self-support affects every member of every group. An A.A. who got sober before the Traditions were officially adopted wrote in the October 1970 Grapevine: "On my first approach. . . already A.A. had effectively declared itself independent of all handouts. It was managing, somehow, to pay its own way. . . If it had turned out to be a government-financed project or a charitable branch of some church, my feelings about it could not have been so instantly warm and comfortable. The fact that it was just us drunks. . . lessened my shame at having to ask for help."

(Best of the Grapevine, Vol. I, p. 114)

Sober members were able to demonstrate that an alcoholic is not always someone who must be helped. One A.A. reflected: "When I arrived at the doors of Alcoholics Anonymous, I had no job, very little money, and a life that was rapidly turning into a shambles. Even so, I contributed 25 cents at every meeting I attended. This was my first step back to regaining my self-respect and responsibility." The Tradition allowed A.A.s to be givers, not takers, and went far to build public confidence in the movement. As Bill W. commented in Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, "When a society composed entirely of alcoholics says it's going to pay its bills, that's really news." (p. 160)

While no A.A. group requires contributions from those who attend its meetings, the return of self-respect, an awakening sense of responsibility, and gratitude for sobriety spur even the newest A.A. members to contribute whatever they can. Some also send contributions to local or national A.A. offices to celebrate their sobriety date each year. Contributions are as important to the giver as to the recipient, for they allow the giver to participate in carrying the A.A. message around the world.

Yet speaking of money and A.A. in the same breath makes some members nervous—A.A. is a spiritual program, they feel, and should not concern itself with money at all. More pragmatic alcoholics contend that without enough money, it would be impossible to provide the services essential to carrying the message. Bill W. saw the resolution of this dilemma in "the hat" (the group's collection basket), where money and spirituality mix, and the familiar announcement "We have no dues or fees, but we do have expenses" is an integral part of virtually every A.A. meeting.

By paying its own expenses — rent for the meeting room, the cost of A.A. literature and local meeting lists, coffee and refreshments, support of local and national service entities — the group ensures that meetings will be there for the suffering alcoholic, literature and information will be available, and the message will be carried around the world.

NHAA District 12

Today, with widespread public awareness of A.A.'s recovery program and the proliferation of alcoholism and other substance abuse agencies, Alcoholics Anonymous faces all the problems of a struggling society. We alcoholics can live the problem or be part of the solution.

Spirituality as a cure for alcoholism

Carl Jung's influence can sometimes be found in more unexpected quarters. For example, Jung once treated an American patient (Rowland Hazard III), suffering from chronic alcoholism. After working with the patient for some time and achieving no significant progress, Jung told the man that his alcoholic condition was near to hopeless, save only the possibility of a spiritual experience. Jung noted that occasionally such experiences had been known to reform alcoholics where all else had failed.

Rowland took Jung's advice seriously and set about seeking a personal spiritual experience. He returned home to the United States and joined a Christian evangelical movement known as the Oxford Group. He also told other alcoholics what Jung had told him about the importance of a spiritual experience. One of the alcoholics he told was Ebby Thacher, a long-time friend and drinking buddy of Bill Wilson, later co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Thacher told Wilson about Jung's ideas. Wilson, who was finding it impossible to maintain sobriety, was impressed and sought out his own spiritual experience. The influence of Jung thus indirectly found its way into the formation of Alcoholics Anonymous, the original twelve-step program, and from there into the whole twelve-step recovery movement, although AA as a whole is not Jungian and Jung had no role in the formation of that approach or the twelve steps.

"Anyone who wants to know the human psyche will learn next to nothing from experimental psychology. He would be better advised to abandon exact science, put away his scholar's gown, bid farewell to his study, and wander with human heart through the world. There in the horrors of prisons, lunatic asylums and hospitals, in drab suburban pubs, in brothels and gambling-hells, in the salons of the elegant, the Stock Exchanges, socialist meetings, churches, revivalist gatherings and ecstatic sects, through love and hate, through the experience of passion in every form in his own body, he would reap richer stores of knowledge than text-books a foot thick could give him, and he will know how to doctor the sick with a real knowledge of the human soul." -- Carl Jung

Why We Call It The Big Book

A printer in Cornwall, NY, named Edward Blackwell, had been highly recommended to Bill Wilson. Blackwell was the President of Cornwall Press. So Bill and Hank Parkhurst (author of the personal story "The Unbeliever" in the first edition of the Big Book) went to Cornwall to see Blackwell. There they were told that the book would probably be only about four hundred pages when printed. That seemed a bit skimpy. They wanted to sell the book for \$3.50 per copy. That was a very large sum in those days, probably the equivalent of about \$50 today, and people might not think they were getting their money's worth. They picked the cheapest, thickest paper the printer had, and requested that each page be printed with unusually large margins surrounding the text. This made for an unusually large book. Thus, the book came to be nicknamed the "Big Book."