

Tools for Fools

for

Alcoholics and Other Human Beings

William M.

Tools for Fools

"Alas, what fools we mortals be."

Tools For Fools — for Alcoholics and Other Human Beings

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Printed in the United States of America

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First Printing, August, 1971

Second Printing, January, 1978

Third Printing, April, 1981

Fourth Printing, July, 1986

Printer Park Printing, Minneapolis

Dedicated to:
Jean Shirley

with Gratitude to:
Walter G. and Victor N.
who cared more about me than I did.

Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge with gratitude the help of Elizabeth B., Harriett M. and Shirley P. for typing, proof reading and general pushing.

I cannot begin to enumerate and thank all of the people in and out of Alcoholics Anonymous, who have cajoled, beaten and led me into a way of living that grows more rewarding as time passes. May they please continue.

I have no other way to show my appreciation for all the "Giants", living and dead, who have offered their "shoulders" for me to stand on, so I can see better than I could ever have managed alone.

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Introduction

This is a book about me. It is not written to teach a thing. It is written only to share a few things that I believe to be true today.

One of the reasons for writing it is that I am tired of hearing about this fast-paced, "dog-eat-dog," competitive world of today. In reality it is a sane, sensible, beautiful world. However, sometimes I permit myself to become a "dog-eat-dog" person. When I do, I believe I become less able to compete, less productive, and less able to grow. As a result, my life is less fulfilling, less rewarding, and I can find less reason for being. If this is true, as I believe it is, then it seems essential that I find some tools to work with so I can better live with me.

The tools I found and intend to write about here are based on the philosophy proposed in the Alcoholics Anonymous program. I am an alcoholic, but they would be just as workable for me if I were not. I do not believe that there are such things as alcoholic personalities or alcoholic traits. I believe they are human traits, and because we drank as we did, we aggravated them more, and then because we try to live by this program, we are more aware of them.

In this book I am talking to myself. Thank you for listening.
I hate long introductions

Chapter One

Alcoholism and The Alcoholic

What is an alcoholic? There are thousands of definitions. They may be all right or all wrong. There are many descriptions and explanations. Here are some words about drinking problems that I believe have some merit.

If you have ever wondered whether or not you have a drinking problem, you are probably too late. You already have it. It never crosses the mind of a completely normal drinker, because it is never a problem.

If you count your drinks, you usually have a problem. Did you ever see anyone count their calories who didn't have a weight problem?

If you get in some type of trouble or embarrassment from drinking alcohol and continue to try again, you have some kind of a problem.

Here is an example:

Let us suppose my name is John Smith, and I am a mechanic in a garage in a small town. I'm married and have 6 children. My pay is above the average in the community, but not too much for the family responsibilities.

Every night after work I stop and have a few beers with the boys. Sometimes just a few, but quite often I am late for supper, and once in a while I don't get home until the bar closes. I've never been arrested for drunkenness or drunk driving, and I've been at work every day for the last 5 years.

My wife finally tells me, "Honey, I can't make your check stretch over our budget. I think if you would stop drinking beer downtown and bring a case home so you could have one before supper, I could make ends meet."

My reaction would probably be that if I'm not entitled to a couple of beers with my friends after 8 to 10 hours a day, 5 to 6 days a week, I might as well quit work. This would be the tip-off, but let us say it continues on in the same old pattern.

Eventually, as the budget falls a little farther behind all the time, we get a final **FINAL** notice from the light company. Now some of you people who have never had this kind of trouble won't understand. What it means is that the utilities companies send out final notices they don't mean before they send one out they do mean. The last one is a final final.

This notice says that if we cannot pay our past due bill of \$15 by Saturday afternoon at 4:00 o'clock, they will shut off our lights—and we know they mean it.

So Friday night, I get my check and the wife and I go out to the supermarket and buy the minimum amount of staples we need to feed our brood until the next check. We have a couple of things we have to pay, and I've probably already paid my bar bill

Saturday noon we sit down at the kitchen table, get all the money in the house together and we have \$8. My wife gives me the \$8 and tells me to go down to the light company office, and tell them that this is all I have, and I need \$3 of it for bread and milk, but I will give them \$5 now, \$5 next Saturday, and \$5 the following Saturday. She knows if I do this, and am honest about it, that with my 6 kids at home, they are not about to shut off my lights.

The last thing she says when I leave the house is, "Don't stop on the way, and come right back to let me know how you make out."

So I leave the house full of good intentions, but the farther I get from home, the more misgivings I have. After all, you can't be a very big shot when you have to beg permission to pay a \$15 bill on payments.

I remember John Jones has owed me \$10 for 3 or 4 years, and he hangs out at Clancy's Saloon on the corner. If I could get that, I'd have \$18. I'd still have \$3 for bread and milk, and I could go down and throw that \$15 in front of that girl in the office, who calls my wife on the phone and embarrasses her. I'd tell her I would have paid it sooner, only I lost the statement, or something equally ridiculous. We would both know I was lying, but I'd think I had saved some face.

So, I go to Clancy's, and whether John Jones is there or not doesn't make any difference, because I don't get the \$10. I look at the clock. It is only 1:00 o'clock, and they aren't going to shut off the lights until 4:00 o'clock.

I now tell myself that I really haven't had any chance to think this problem out;—what with the wife talking and the kids playing around the house. It wouldn't hurt if I had one beer out of that \$3, and maybe I could come up with something. So I go to the end of the bar and have one beer. While I'm drinking this one beer, I notice they have one of those jars of numbers you pull to make money. Next I rationalize that we could get by on \$2 for bread and milk, and I ought to use the change from the dollar, I busted for the beer, for some numbers.

Then the worst thing that could possibly happen, happens. I win. So I keep pulling more numbers and drinking more beer. I even get far enough ahead to pay the light bill, but by this time, I'm going to take the wife a dozen roses and a couple of 6 packs of beer home for the weekend.

Suddenly, I'm out of tickets, out of money, half smashed on beer, it's 4:00 o'clock, and they have just shut off my lights.

Now I contend, that I'm just as much an alcoholic as I would be, if I had drunk up a family, a business, or a farm. I had had a situation in the palm of my hand, which I could control, and I let it get away.

Chapter Two

Alcoholism and The Non-Alcoholic

For every alcoholic there are usually at least two enablers. Two people that love him and disapprove of his drinking, but enable him to get sicker, because they cannot face up to the fact that he has a progressive disease. They are not responsible for his drinking, but they are responsible for their enabling.

I remember a Lutheran pastor, in a small town, who asked me to come and talk to a man in his congregation who was drinking himself to death.

I visited with the man for an hour or so. He was perfectly willing to admit to his drinking problem, but felt that his wife and children would be better off if he did drink himself to death.

My next stop was to visit his wife. After about an hour of trying to break the shell, I had been unable to get through at all. I finally said, "Mrs. X do you realize your husband is trying to kill himself - to destroy himself?" She said, "If that is what he wants to do, I guess he'll have to do it."

I told her that, that would be fine for him. Since they were all devout Christians, he would die and go to heaven. But, did she realize, that she was going to have to live the rest of her life with the fact that she had helped kill him. She had already told me that he was incapable of making sane decisions. So I said, "I don't care if you divorce him tomorrow, you are married to him today. If you know he isn't capable of making a decision, then you had better make it for him. If he had cancer or a heart attack, and refused to get treatment, you would see that he did. This is the

same thing - only a different disease. Whether or not the treatment works is secondary at this moment. You have got to see that he gets treatment so you can live with yourself."

She called the minister, and told him in no uncertain terms that she didn't care very much for that AA man he had sent around. However, two weeks later, she called me, and we got her husband into a treatment center.

It would be nice to say that he got and stayed on the AA program, and they lived happily ever after. It doesn't always work out that way. What did happen, in this case, was that he had to make several return trips to the hospital and eventually got on the program. She started to do something about herself, and the family began to go in the same direction.

I believe that alcoholism is a personal disease and a family illness. By the time the alcoholic comes into Alcoholics Anonymous, the spouse, parents, children, etc. are just as sick as the alcoholic—and have less reason to believe it. Some of this comes from resentment of the drinking, some from trying to learn to live with the drinking. At any rate, nearly everyone believes that if the drinking would stop, all of everyone's problems would be solved. This type of immaturity is pretty sick in itself.

You can hate the sickness, but if you hate the person that is sick - you are sicker than they are. Everyone has a right to be sick and a right to get well - at the rate they are capable of - not at the rate someone else thinks they should.

That is why I tell the people I sponsor in AA, that they should be just as tolerant and understanding of their spouses, while they learn how to live with a human being, as they expect their

spouses to be understanding of them, while they learn how to be one.

For example, let us use a man alcoholic and a woman non-alcoholic. It works exactly the same the other way around. We begin with two basic premises I believe to be true. One, every alcoholic wants to quit drinking if he knew how to do it without destroying himself. Two, the alcoholic's resistance to accepting alcoholism as a disease, is part of the disease.

The alcoholic then comes to AA, as a result of being confronted with pressure - either from inside or outside. In this chapter we are concerned with the pressure from outside, usually from the wife.

The first thing to remember in confronting the alcoholic, is to not mix your marriage up with the disease. If the wife, who is supposed to be well, doesn't treat it as a disease, how can she expect that confused, sick, practicing alcoholic to accept it as a disease. An approach that often works is the plan A, plan B, plan C method. It goes something like this.

Plan A - the alcoholic husband is confronted by his wife (without moral judgment) sometimes alone, sometimes with a counselor, minister or boss. His behavior and his thinking are laid out in the open with blunt, firm, but kind language. It is not kind to be gentle. Then he is told that he will stop drinking either by himself, or with the help of AA, or they will have to move to plan B.

Plan B - The alcoholic will voluntarily sign himself into a treatment center for alcoholism.

Plan C - The wife will start commitment proceedings to send him to a treatment center or hospital.

There are an infinite number of variations of this program. Don't worry about the alcoholic's threats and resentments. If he gets sober and well, he will eventually forget them. If he doesn't he will just add them on to the ones he already has, and that has been a big pile for a long time. He has got to begin to learn "cause" and "effect."

For fifteen years my father tried every way he knew to control or stop my drinking. Everything he did was wrong, and I resented each and every one of them. But after I had been sober a while, I realized that here was this poor frustrated Dutchman trying to do something for this son that he loved. He cared enough about me to do something. I'm mad because he doesn't understand my problem. I'm forgetting that I have the problem, and I don't understand it. What I was really resenting were acts of Love. How immature can you be?

Most of our marriages in this country are based on a Christian concept. There is no place in the Bible where it says if your husband is sick you should throw him out. The practice of divorcing the alcoholic to make him hit bottom occasionally works. However, in practice it has permanently ruined infinitely more families than it has helped.

I do not believe that anyone has the right to counsel anyone else into getting a divorce because of an illness.

It is the responsibility of the person counseling, to try to help each marriage partner to become as well and as sane as they can be, before they make a decision on their marriage. If a divorce is necessary, it should be decided by the parties concerned, when they are well enough to make a decision that is valid, by their own standards - not anybody else's.

There are a myriad of agencies and bleeding heart type individuals that are dreaming up new excuses for divorces. I do not believe AA is now, or will be, one of these.

Alcoholics Anonymous and Al-Anon are only interested in giving workable tools to the individual so he can make his own best decision.

Chapter Three

Guilt and Responsibility

Probably no elements of the human beings' standards do more to upset him than those of guilt and responsibility. I believe this happens because we are so defensive about our standards. We are defensive because we are afraid to look at them too objectively, for fear they might not be consistent with each other. We are usually right.

For the sake of discussion, let us talk about a man alcoholic coming into AA, his non-alcoholic wife, and the children.

The new AA member has usually gone through considerable trauma finding his way to the fellowship at all. He is amazed to find out that he is accepted as he is, even though they seem to know what he is. He is assured that he is suffering from an incurable, progressive, terminal disease and, although he has misgivings, he takes it in for the moment, with a sense of welcome relief. He has been given some sense of humanness to hold.

Then he starts to sober up and get a few cobwebs out of his brain. He thinks he is completely well. He isn't, but nobody really cares. He's heading in the right direction.

You see, we get well and grow about the same way corn does. The fastest rate of growth is at the beginning, and while the plant may grow more in actual measurement later in the season, it will not seem to be so much. It is more noticeable to add one inch to a plant one inch high, than it is to add two inches to a plant six feet

high.

What is happening here is, that the alcoholic and his loved ones have accepted alcoholism as a disease intellectually, but not emotionally. This comes slowly.

It would seem to me that my behavior, while I was drinking, would have been the result of an illness. Therefore, since sin would not be involved, neither would guilt. However, I would still be responsible to make what amends I could to correct those things. This is what I continually try to do in steps 8 and 9.

My thought here is that, I should do what I can about these things, because I was responsible for them, not guilty of them.

This is what I need for a cornerstone for a new, more consistent philosophy of living.

It would be helpful, but it is *not* essential, that my family feel about this the same way I do, at the same time I do.

I am going to try to be responsible for making the best decisions I can on today's problems. Not all of them. That is asking way too much. Back in Pennsylvania, my great aunt had a motto on the wall, "For every problem under the sun, there is a solution, or there is none. If there is one, try and find it; if there is none, never mind it." This was the way she lived—a day at a time—and she was happily making braided rugs into her nineties. One time, some years ago, a friend of mine asked me to talk to his pastor, and explain what I could, about alcoholism. My friend wanted his pastor made aware that there was no conflict between the teachings of his church, and the therapy suggested in the Alcoholics Anonymous program.

After about an hour's conversation, I had accomplished about as much as I usually do spitting against the wind. I told the pastor

I felt that the main block to our communication was his insistence that alcoholism was a sin. He said, "Yes, the Bible said it was." I told him the Bible did not say it was—it didn't even use the term.

He told me he had about 1200 members in his congregation. His church was one of a denomination of the Christian faith I told him that, as I understand it, there is only one prerequisite to being a Christian—you had to be a sinner. If you were not a sinner, you could not be a Christian. So, if that is true, then it must be established that all 1200 parishioners, and the pastor, were sinners. I couldn't quite believe that the Christian God sent one sinner down to earth to keep track of which sins everyone else had.

Alcoholism can't be both a sin and a disease. Nothing can. This doesn't leave us short of sins—we have plenty left. I wonder if it isn't possible that the alcoholic, who insists on maintaining alcoholism as a sin, isn't using it as one to hide behind. In other words, he knows inwardly that he can't do anything about alcoholism as a sin; but if he gives it a lot of lip service, he won't have time to do anything about the sinful behavior he could change.

If I wish to question the American Medical Association, as well as The American Hospital Association, who do treat alcoholism as a disease, let me always remember one thing. The people who treat it as a disease, are at least ten times as successful at arresting it, as the people who treat it as a sin. It is my life I'm betting on this problem. I want the best odds possible!

Wallowing in my guilt leaves very little time for me to learn to enjoy my responsibilities. Facing responsibilities teaches me that I have a right to be stupid, and a right to learn, at the rate I'm capable of handling.

By trying to do this, I begin to make my beliefs more consistent with each other, and eventually learn to believe what I know.

Chapter Four

Self Pity and Resentment

Certainly, one of the main blocks to my growing up, is the unconscious (I hope) desire to periodically feel sorry for myself. I have had the usual number of good and bad things happen to me in my life. In my more mature moments, I fully realize that my thinking and behavior have played a far larger part in the bad, than in the good. However, every once in a while I like to practice a little self-pity. That, in itself, is not so unusual, but occasionally I wallow in my martyrdom, am aware of it, and resist all efforts of my friends to get me out of it.

The last time this happened, I was playing that "poor little old me" game when someone called, said they were in trouble, and wanted to talk to me about it right now. I tried to postpone them until the next day, because I knew if I got outside of myself with them, I would be unable to revel in my self-pity any longer. And, I thought I wanted to continue. This is pretty sick. Fortunately, for me, they insisted. This is one of the ways my God seems to work.

The best tool, for me, came when I realized that self pity was nothing but conceit. For me to be sorry for myself, I have to believe that my God singled me out to give me more problems than He gave to anyone else. Otherwise, I have no reason for feeling sorry for myself. Now, for me to believe that my God singled me out for anything, I have to be colossally conceited. Once in a while I can con myself into thinking I'm justified in self pity, but I can't con myself into thinking I have a right to justified

conceit. I have enough trouble with this accidentally without practicing it on purpose.

I try to remember that I have exactly the kind of life I deserve. If I don't like it, why don't I do something about it, and start with myself? I am the only person I have any control over. This includes my family relationships, my AA or Al-Anon group, my church, my business, my social life, my world.

Another manifestation of my conceit is when I continue to hate someone or something. Just as I have a right to be stupid, so do other people. Someone once wrote, "Real friends are those, when you've made a fool of yourself, don't feel that you've done a permanent job". If I wish to be treated this way, then I must treat others the same. Any other attitude on my part has got to be a conceited one. This applies to hating myself, too.

Pessimism, too, is often a form of vanity. If I am pessimistic about myself, I am saying that I alone am smart enough to evaluate myself and my prospects better than anyone else, but I'm not smart enough to change myself.

It is just as conceited to think I am the worst person in the world, as to think I'm the best. I must try to remember that I'm a run-of-the-mill human being, with talents and potential that I am unable to evaluate one-tenth as well as I can learn to use them through living.

If I am pessimistic about others, then I am putting myself in a seat of judgment. I don't understand all the facets of myself to know why I react as I do. How can I possibly know about you? The more time I spend judging, the less time I have to spend

living and learning how to live.

I am the center of my universe. I have to be - these are the only eyes I'm able to look out of. But every other person in the world is the center of his or her universe. If I am aware of my limitations today, I should try to respect theirs.

Closely akin to self pity is resentment. Underlying resentment is a similar type of conceit. For me to resent myself, others, or situations, I have to be overly self centered, and unwilling to use my faith in my God and my fellow man.

This is best relieved with the practice of forgiveness. Forgiveness is easier if we are able to pray for the people we resent.

When I find my praying for other people is not adequate, I go farther, and try to use another tool that has been very helpful to me.

I make myself realize that I have no right to forgive you, because I had no right to condemn you. That is God's prerogative. Whatever you did or said, was what you thought was right at the time. We both have a right to be wrong. I am not capable of judging your motives. I'm not even always sure of my own. Once I am aware that most of the things I do have more than one motive behind them, then I can start learning how to be less judgmental on both of us.

Chapter Five

Self and Family Discipline

The Beginnings of Honesty

One of the problems for an AA member and his spouse in the rebuilding of the family is the setting and following of workable discipline standards for the children.

As we said earlier, both parents have been sick, and now they are on the road to recovery. As they get better, they become more aware of the games each one had been playing. Everyone is full of gratitude, but, in all probability, everyone has not accepted Dad's alcoholism as a disease. So everyone, to some degree, continues to play variations of the same old games.

Example - here's one:

Your daughter is a senior in high school - good marks, good behavior, good help around the house. She comes home on Friday and asks if she can go to a dance that night. You have had a bad day or a bad week, and immediately say no, and will listen to no further discussion on the subject.

But, you find out later that this was exactly the kind of dance you would like to have your daughter attend. A fine bunch of young people, well chaperoned and beautifully managed. And, when you think about it, there was no real reason she shouldn't have been allowed to go. So, on the next Friday night she asks to go to a different dance. You are very apt to say yes, because you were wrong the last time when you said no. And, you are very apt to be wrong again. This may turn out to be exactly the kind of dance you do not want her to attend.

In other words, you cannot compensate for your old mistakes. In the above instance, each request should have been handled and decided on its own merits.

Otherwise, you end up like the World Series baseball umpire, who makes a bad call, allowing an American League player to get on first base when he should have been called out. He cannot deliberately make a bad call later on to allow a National League player to get on base wrongly. He knows he is going to make enough mistakes accidentally without making them on purpose.

This is an important basis for developing standards. I can start being responsible for my honest mistakes.

I am not big enough to carry on my shoulders today the blame for all the mistakes I have made in 57 years of living, so I had better not take the credit for the things I did right. I can't have one without the other, so I'd better forget the ledger entirely.

I believe this. I believe that every day my God gives me a brand new slate and a brand new piece of chalk, but he never gives me an eraser. What he does with the old slates, I have no way of knowing. He may file them away for future judgment, but he said he wasn't going to judge me until I died, so that is not a problem for now. He may break them up, or erase them and give them back to you or me. (He has an eraser.) None of these things are any of my problem. My problem is, what am I going to write on the slate I have now? He will give me a new slate every day, every hour, every minute, every second. What am I going to write now?

When I am asked to speak at Ala-Teen meetings or at Young Peoples' groups about alcoholism, I start out with two basic premises.

First, I tell them they are all No. 2's. They are merely the product of the love their father and mother have for each other. They will not be a No. 1 until they grow up and marry someone for themselves. So, if they are not in the driver's seat at home, be grateful—and if they are, get out of it. This does not mean that their parents love them less, but that they love each other more.

My second point to them, is that they frequently feel my generation doesn't understand them. As a matter of fact, we understand them better than they know. However, that is not the main problem. I am not trying to get into their world, but they are trying to get into mine. I am not trying to become a teenager—they are trying to become adults. So they had better spend more time trying to understand me and my generation. The generation gap can only be closed by young people growing up, not by adults reverting to puberty.

With these two points clear, I find we have a great deal more empathy for each other in our efforts to communicate.

It seems that the finest gift parents can give children, providing the greatest emotional security, is to be madly in love with the other parent—and show it—and be glad of it!

In far too many families today, one parent will be too strict, and one will be too liberal. The children end up playing one parent against the other in a chaos of game playing. If the parents will just sit down and agree on some compromise for their standards of family discipline, everyone will benefit. Even though they may find it necessary to make them firmer or looser later on. As long

they do it together. There is no battle of the sexes in a marriage. The husband and wife are on the same side, and if they are lucky and grow up they will find it out.

This will not only prevent some problems, it will also give sound tools to work with that the whole family will come to understand and appreciate.

I remember one time in my youth, my father and mother had a heated discussion on something or other, and I took my father's side and let them know it. My dad immediately took me into his den and spent the next fifteen minutes explaining that any differences he and my mother had were none of my business. That they had nothing to do with the love they each had for me. That I was a neutral and I would stay that way. And if I didn't believe him, he would tear off my head and stick it in my ear. It was a good lesson. I believed him then and I still do.

My brothers and I never got allowances. My folks told us that everything the family had was partly ours. So the work and chores we did around the house were our responsibility of being equal stockholders in the family corporation. However, we were not connected in any way with management. We could suggest and present reasons, but dad was chairman of the board and mother was president. They would make the final decisions.

How do we start developing family discipline? We begin by self discipline, by trying to make our rules of living consistent with each other, and with the things we believe to be true at the time. This is the beginning of real honesty. When we say and do things because it is our best judgment, not because we are trying to maintain a role.

Chapter Six

The Complete Tool — Love

Virginia Peterson in her book, *"A Matter of Life or Death,"* wrote "Love by its presence, like God by His, makes everything not necessarily clear or right or even good or but acceptable Whereas in its absence, as in His, there is no hope." This is a philosophy of hope, so it must be one of Love.

A great many people these days are trying to analyze Love. They seem to want to define it, divide it, and catalogue all the divisions. I think they are wasting their time.

I believe it is as impossible for me to reason a God, as it is to reason no God. If God is Love, as I believe Him to be, then it is impossible for me to reason Love. But I don't have to reason Love. It is there and here. It is! It is as real to a human being as breathing, often more so.

All we are concerned with here, is how to use it so it gives us strength, rather than weakness.

Some years ago, a Japanese philosopher said something like this, "It is impossible to love another human being or an ideal, until you are willing to lay your heart open where it can be broken." I don't believe until we grow up a little emotionally that we find out it is worth it. Then when we grow a little more, we find out our hearts aren't going to break anyway.

What this means to me, then is, that if I do something nice for someone I love, the only reward I can possibly expect, is the good feeling I get inside of myself for doing something nice for

someone I love. Whether or not they appreciate it, or return it with an act of love, has nothing to do with it. If I get it, it is frosting on the cake.

However, if I do something nice for someone I love, and am prepared to resent the way they don't seem to appreciate it properly, there is no love involved. It is still a nice thing I've done, but I am shooting angles. I am playing games.

Practically every couple that comes to me has a problem in this area. One or both of them will say, "I've been doing acts of love for him (or her) for years. When is some of it coming back?" It is the easiest question I have to answer. I tell them that if these were acts of love, you must have gotten a great deal of pleasure out of doing them. If you didn't, then you had better check your own motives.

In our society when two people get married and live together for any length of time, as man and wife, two things become true.

One - they have more things going for them than against them. Regardless of what all the pseudo-scientists and bleeding hearts might say to the contrary: Marriage vows have more meaning than a contract to buy a new refrigerator on time.

Two - once you have loved someone, you are stuck with it forever. You may hate what they say and do, but you can't help loving them. There is no faucet to turn love on and off with.

I'm not saying that some couples should not be divorced, but they are rare. Divorce results in a great deal of upset and confusion for the children; but the main trauma is with the two people who get divorced. It is a failure for both of them. Divorce, then, should be for the reason that is completely valid to the

persons getting the divorce . . . according to their own standards. It should not be because some type of counselor told them to divorce.

After my own divorce, I tried to hate my ex-wife. The effort was too upsetting and confusing. I finally realized that if I was going to be able to hate her, then our children would have to have been a product of something less than love. No one can live sanely with that thought.

What do we use to get our perspectives back on the right track?
We learn to love.

St. Francis DeSales said:

"You learn to speak by speaking,
to study by studying,
to run by running,
to work by working;
and just so you learn to love God and your neighbor by loving,
All those who think to learn in any other way deceive themselves."

The greatest tranquilizer, discovered or not, is our ability to love. This is the name of the game. It is the whole ball of wax. My ability to accept love is only another manifestation of loving.

If you have someone to love, and you're not loving them, you're wasting time. You are out of your mind.

Once I learn that my ability and willingness to love you, regardless of your reaction, is a position of strength, I can begin to grow. I don't have to do it perfectly. I just have to try. The

growth and the fun are in the practicing. Most of us need a lot of practice. And we try to do it without judgment.

As Pinero said,

"Those who love deeply never grow old;
they may die of old age,
but they die young."

I have to care about you because I want and need to care about me! Caring without scorekeeping. Isn't that what love is, really?

Chapter Seven

The 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous

The next 12 short chapters of this book are one man's interpretation of this great program. If there are 500,000 members of the fellowship, there must be 500,000 interpretations of the steps, and each one is right for that individual today. These will be mine.

Some people call this program a way of life—some call it a way to live. I call it living!

I believe every alcoholic has two diseases. One is alcoholism, and to arrest that, he has to stop drinking alcohol. This does nothing for him, except to get him in a condition of awareness so he can do something about the other disease. The other illness everyone in the world has. It is emotional immaturity. It is what the human being does about his living, through this program or something similar, that determines how well he will get to be in his lifetime and how much he will enjoy the way.

Alcoholism had been treated for many years from three basic approaches. The medical people treated it as a physical problem, and the psychiatrist as a mental, emotional or behavior problem — the clergy as a moral problem. All of these people were dedicated and sincere. They worked in parallel lines. None communicated with the other. They were not very successful.

In 1935 two men got together with a germ of an idea that grew into where they were very inexpertly using all three – and it

worked.

The best description of alcoholism that I know is this: It is a physical allergy with a mental compulsion that left me spiritually or morally bankrupt. This answers more questions for me than any other description or definition I have heard.

We know infinitely less about curing the disease of alcoholism than we do about cancer. But we do know something about arresting it.

I look at it this way. Let us suppose that I treat alcoholism as basically mental, moral or spiritual, and I achieve sobriety and maintain it for a period of time. I regain my place with society, my family, my church, etc. I become extremely emotionally mature and spiritually stable. Why wouldn't I test it to see if I am still an alcoholic? However, if I treat it as basically physical, I can grow emotionally and spiritually as much as I'm capable of, and still not feel tempted to test the change, if any, in the physical disease.

The Alcoholics Anonymous and Al-Anon programs are worked through these 12 steps. Not so much with doing them as in trying to do them.

It seems to me that the founders took all of the principles of the great philosophies and religions, and put them into a workable plan that I could understand and use.

After I had been in the program for a few years, I knew a great deal more about AA and alcoholism than I ever have since. At that time, I was a little resentful that the original founders hadn't waited for me. I thought that if there had been three of us founders, I could have kept some of the bugs out of the steps. I found out later that the bugs weren't in the steps. They were in me.

So I quit looking for hidden meanings in the white spaces between the words and the lines. I found the meanings for me in the words themselves as they were written.

My father used to say that it took a man five to ten years in a new field before he found out he didn't know anything. Then, if he was lucky, he could start to learn. Now, whenever I think I've learned something, I get my wings clipped back again.

If, in my life I have opened any door of wisdom, all I have ever found on the other side, are five or six more closed doors that I didn't know existed. I have only learned that there was more that I didn't know, than I thought there was.

But this program is not based on a knowledge of alcoholism. It is based entirely on my admission that I have a problem I can't handle. Everything is built on that admission.

I believe there is no such thing as a woman alcoholic, or a man alcoholic, or a rich or poor, or Negro or Indian alcoholic. When I put on that type of qualification, I am no longer treating alcoholism as a disease. I am complicating it for the person who is looking for help. The woman who comes on the program is going to have different problems than the new man will. But they have nothing to do with the sickness of alcoholism. What I am trying to say, is, that being a woman is not a disease.

In my experience, then, the more quickly I can get the person I am sponsoring to separate his alcoholism from his other problems, the more quickly he will begin to find himself.

Sometimes you will hear someone say, "If you are not happy sober then go out and get drunk." I don't believe it. If I'm so

unhappy, but stay sober, I have a chance to be a little happier tomorrow. If I get drunk, I may never get another chance.

So let's treat the alcoholism as a separate illness which compounds other problems. Let's not say that the other problems compound the illness. I am an alcoholic because I am one. Whatever other problems I have are mine whether I'm drunk or sober, whether I arrest my illness or not.

Just as everyone else in this world, man or woman, I am peculiarly equipped to handle my living problems, if I am willing to get the equipment out of storage, and learn to use it.

"Here are the steps we took, which are suggested as a program of recovery."

Chapter Eight

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

Step 1 I came into AA just as full of fear as I was when I went into the army, before World War II. The unknown is always terrifying. I don't remember too much of those first days. As the old cavalryman says, I looked like I'd been ridden hard and put away muddy, and I felt worse than I looked. Two men grabbed me, and made themselves my sponsors. I remember, I couldn't believe they weren't mad at me. I didn't think I had missed anyone. I didn't know then, that they needed me as much as I needed them. They practically slept in my pockets for the next three months, until I got sober enough, to get sane enough, to begin to understand a little of what this program was about.

Nowadays, you hear some people say that the word admitted should be changed to accepted. Don't you believe it. I didn't accept anything without a struggle. To accept that first step, at that time, would have destroyed my manhood, my independence, my freedom. Or at least I thought so then. I just had to admit it for that one day. I could do that.

We live in a funny society. All my life, I'd heard so and so referred to as a "good drinking man." The women heard, "she drinks like a lady." So, naturally, I began to associate my ability to

handle my liquor with my manhood. Every time I went out, and made a south end of a north-bound horse of myself, I was that much more determined to put the other boys to bed the next time. Sometimes it worked, but less and less often.

It wasn't until I came to AA that I learned that alcoholism is a disease. I accepted this intellectually, almost at once. Accepting it emotionally took a great deal longer. It took me two more years to absolutely know they had been talking about me.

By the time I had finally learned it, I was deadly afraid. I wasn't afraid that the AA program wouldn't work. I was scared to death it would. And how was I going to be able to live with reality, without having that bottle to hide behind. How was I going to maintain that image of me that never existed, except in my own mind.

My sponsors convinced me that nobody gets well at the rate they want to, or at the rate we want them to - not even us.

I was speaking on this step, one time, at a treatment center in a Veterans' Hospital. After the meeting, one of the patients came up to me, and said that he was willing to admit he was powerless over alcohol, but he certainly didn't believe that his life was unmanageable. I said, "Fine, but tell me then what are you doing in that blue pajama suit, on the 8th floor of the alcoholic ward, of the addiction section of the hospital? If your life is so manageable, I'll sit here and watch you manage it." Then I told him something I had learned about myself, after I had been in AA for a while.

I realized, that when I came to my second meeting, I had taken my first step. The first meeting didn't count (I didn't know what I was getting into). But when I attended my second meeting, I had admitted that my life was unmanageable, in one

area, for one hour, or I wouldn't have been there. Once I had cracked the shell of my invulnerability, and found it didn't make me less of a man, it became easier to get myself into a more real perspective.

I don't believe I would have to fight the world's heavyweight boxing champion, even once, before I would be willing to tip my hat, and admit he was a better man in a fight than I was. But I fought that bottle, a thousand times, and it whipped me worse than the world's champ could have, and I came back and fought it a few thousand times more. That isn't proving manhood. All it proved, was that I was incapable of whipping alcohol. So who cares? No one cared that I couldn't beat it; but everybody close to me cared that I kept on trying. Now I believe the reason why I was so stupidly stubborn was this: My resistance to accepting alcoholism as a disease, was part of the disease.

One of the tools I use for staying sober is this. Once it was established that I was an alcoholic, or at least had a drinking problem, two things became true. One, if I didn't take a drink I had every right of every other citizen — no one could push me around. Two, if I took a drink, I didn't have any more rights than a rabbit. Everyone, my family, friends, society, could all push me around. If these two statements are true, as I believe they are, then when I take a drink, I am deliberately saying, consciously or unconsciously, that I want someone else to be responsible for me.

What establishes the fact I have a drinking problem? Well, if I go to an AA meeting, a treatment center for alcoholics, a hospital for drinking, a jail for drinking, I have some kind of a problem with alcohol.

There are no hopeless ones. I believe that everyone, who has a drinking problem, wants to quit drinking—if they thought they could do it without losing face. Our problem is to learn how to reach them—to learn new ways of making these tools available.

I don't believe that I will take a drink in the next twenty-four hours, unless I forget two things. One: I have a progressive, incurable, terminal disease. I don't care whether any of the other four billion people in the world believe this or not. Two: I am incapable of understanding how to live longer than 24 hours at a time.

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

Step 2

Do we come to this way of life in order that we might begin to believe, or do we begin to believe after we are in? Maybe it is a little of both.

After my last slip (so far) one of my sponsors brought me back to the AA group, and I was pretty unhappy about it. My pride was hurt, and I was feeling pretty sorry for myself. One of the other members came over and told Vic, "Isn't it nice he came back?" and Vic said, "Where else could he go, who else would have him?" I think my coming to believe was through the back door.

It is so hard to creep before you crawl, crawl before you walk, and walk before you run. But remember, for the person who has been standing still, creeping can be a pretty heady speed.

This step does not require me to define a power greater than myself, or even to believe there is one. It asks me to believe that if any such power does exist, it *could* restore me to sanity. I can't utilize the maximum good out of these steps, until I can use the minimum. How much farther I go depends upon me.

Some years ago, a new group was being formed in a small town, and three of us were invited to attend their first meeting. One of the members was terribly concerned with the spiritual part of the program. He said, "I can't believe that any God, I

could have any respect for, would have any use for anyone who has done all the terrible things I've done." To which one of the men with me remarked, "You've got to remember, that God is so mad at Himself for making that stuff in the first place, that He will do practically anything to help us." If you can get any faith out of that, grab it.

I like to think that, when I came to my second meeting, I had taken the first step. So now, if I wanted to try to be honest, I had to admit I was powerless over alcohol and my life was unmanageable. Along with this, I didn't come to AA until I had tried every other way I knew of to control or stop my drinking. This was my last resort. Well, this program has some sort of God in it. So, I'd better hope there was a God, or I was all through. There had better be one, or I was all done. If I can't conceive of a conventional God, or my relationship to Him, why not take one of the older members word for it, that there probably is one, and quit worrying about it. Maybe it's like the program. If I keep coming around long enough, if I don't find the faith, perhaps it will find me.

The mere fact that I came back to the second meeting, indicated I had some faith in something. I believe that every day I've been sober, in AA, I've had as much faith as I've been capable of understanding or handling.

At a meeting in Iowa, once, a member complained, "I can't find God." And someone else said, "I didn't know He was lost."

Don't complicate it. They call it the K. I. S. S. Program.
KEEP IT SIMPLE, STUPID!

Don't worry about how much, or little faith you think you have. If you are concerned about it enough to even let it cross your mind, you have enough for today. This step does not say that this Power WILL restore me to sanity. It says the Power COULD. In other words, it gives me a chance. And whether I knew it or not, this was all I really wanted.

The insanity part never scared me too much. When I came to AA, I was relieved to find, that I had the kind of insanity I could do something about. I didn't completely believe them, but it was nice to hear them say it.

Insanity is a pretty common ailment. I suppose, to be completely sane, I would have to be completely emotionally mature in all areas. I've never known anyone like that, so it must not be a prerequisite for happy, rewarding living.

If I were to drink tomorrow, I would not necessarily be insane, after I was drinking. My thinking and actions, at that time, would be manifestations of an illness running amuck. I would have to be insane before I took the drink. With the record of unhappiness and mental misery, I have suffered from the use of alcohol, my marbles would have to be rolling, to contemplate a drink of alcohol, as a possible solution to any problem.

What is faith? It is my ability to believe in something I cannot prove. If, later on I am able to prove this thing is so, then it will no longer require any faith to believe it.

I believe that if I could understand God, then I would be God. Since this is so outrageously impossible, then I must do the best that I can. This is to try to understand me. I did not say that I have to understand me. I said I had to try. It is in

the trying that we begin to live. And, it is in the awareness of living that we begin to have faith.

Chapter Ten

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

Step 3 This, too, is a step for humans – not necessarily alcoholics. My first look at this was with considerable trepidation and fright. What were they doing to me? They had made my image of my manhood and individuality teeter with Step 1, and now they were going to bring it crashing down about my ears.

My sponsors and friends in AA made it worse when they told me to "Get out of the Driver's Seat," and "Let go and let God". It was only my absolute horror at the thought of going back to what I had been that made me go along with it at all.

For several years I was afraid to dig into this, for fear that it would conflict with my interpretations of other parts of the program.

I remembered, that after my last slip (so far), I had changed my morning prayer from asking God to keep me sober, to asking God to help me keep myself sober (and sane).

Finally, I drummed up the courage to read this step as it was written. This is the way I try to use this tool today.

If I made a decision to buy a new car, it wouldn't put a new car in my driveway - I would have to do something else to implement that decision. If that is true, then this step does not

say that I turned my will and my life over to the care of God, as I understood Him. It says, I made a decision to do this. And since AA is a one day program, the decision is only good for today. So, it seems to me then, that I must do something today to implement that decision.

Now, how am I going to do this if I'm not in the driver's seat? Obviously, I can't. So now I tell myself to get back in the driver's seat - get that alcohol and/or pill out of there - along with all the yah-buts, excuses, self pity, and conceit that went along with that image of me that never existed. I'm going to have to pilot my own ship. My God is not going to move that tiller one ten thousandth of an inch. That isn't where my God is. He's the navigator. Now, I'm going to try to learn how to read those charts He's been sending down to the pilot house, that I usually pitched over the side of the ship. The occasional ones that I did read, I rationalized to come out the way I thought I wanted them to read. And, with that befuddled, immature mind, I don't think too well.

Does this take away any of my human dignity or individuality? Absolutely not! It makes me responsible for everything I think or say or do. I don't like this. I often would like to go back to saying, "yah-but, you don't understand my peculiar circumstances. Yah-but, you don't understand the pressures of my social position. Yah-but, you don't understand what my home life is like. Yah-but, you don't understand the pressures of my job. Yah-but, you don't understand that I'm extra sensitive." Yah-but, yah-but, yah-but - it's all a bunch of happy hog-wash.

An AA member once wrote a beautiful prayer. In this prayer he said, "I believe this. I believe my desire to please God does in fact please Him." In other words, my God is not so concerned with what I'm doing, or how perfectly I'm doing it. What is important is that I am doing what I think my God wants me to do, to the best of my ability.

I do not have to do things perfectly. If it was absolutely essential that everything I write in this book be perfectly right, my God wouldn't let me write it. He'd have written it Himself. But I must try to do the best I can, with the tools I have, and the stage of development I'm in today.

Who is this "God as I understand Him"? Naturally, with my limited powers, my understanding is very limited; but it is sufficient unto my needs. As my needs increase, so does my understanding.

This step does not say that I made a decision to turn my spouse's life and will over to God; or the life and will of the person I'm sponsoring in AA or Alanon; or that of my children or parents or in-laws or friends or enemies. I can only make the decision for myself.

How expertly do I read my Navigator's charts now? Very badly. I have spent a great many years practicing how to read them badly. But I'm doing better than I did, and today I may do better yet. I hope and pray I will.

Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

Step 4 The interpretation I give to this step is not intended to be the only one possible. It may not even be the one I will have tomorrow. It is the way I try to use it now.

An inventory is what is on hand now. A moral inventory then would seem to be a count of the good and bad qualities I have right now - according to my standards today. Certainly, I can't take a moral inventory of me based on your standards. I can't even take one on my own standards of last year or next year. Since this program teaches us to try to be non-judgmental, I don't believe I can even rate the quality of my own standards.

Two of the hardest lessons I get in daily living are these: One - when someone gives a talk that is absolutely the opposite of what I believe, I must try to remember that what they are saying is right for them today, for the tools they have, and for the stage of development they are in. The second one is even harder. I have to remember too, that they may be ahead of me, that it may be their philosophy I will grow into, instead of them growing into mine. I have no way of knowing.

In a moral inventory then, I would not be concerned with my past or what might have been, could have been, or should have been. My past wrongdoings come up in another part of the program, and the other things die a little more every day, as I

try to gain a little maturity, and lose a little more conceited self-pity.

So, in my inventory, I make a column on the right hand of every good quality I could have. And, because I'm a human being, I have a little of all of them. Then, on the left side, I make a column of all the bad qualities I could possibly have, and because I'm me I have more than a little of all of them.

Now, I try to evaluate myself to find out what I am. What I have to work with and what I need to work on most. If I am so honest, then I must be so dishonest. I remember the first one I ever took; I decided that I was about 60% honest, which didn't sound too bad until I had to write down 40% liar and cheat, which certainly didn't sound good. So on down the columns.

I know that the first inventory I took, and probably a great many succeeding ones, were very poorly evaluated. My wife, mother, father and brothers could have taken a much better one of me than I did. However, three things would have been wrong. One, I wouldn't have done it. Two, it would have been on their standards. Three, I wouldn't have understood it.

I had taken as good a moral inventory as I was capable of understanding! And a terrifying thing didn't happen. It didn't destroy me. It didn't make me less of a human to face a little reality. There was a spark of hope still there inside me, and I had fanned it a little. Some of the promise of Step 2 became believable. Perhaps I could become more sane than I had been. No graduate degrees, but maybe I could pass the entrance exam for the first grade.

Every time I catch myself taking someone else's inventory, I find my own makes me want to throw up. Whenever I am finding fault with you, and judging your motives, I am thinking or doing something in which I have no pride.

None of this has anything to do with my drinking problem. It is something I do to enable myself to become more well, by becoming a little more emotionally mature.

The only connection this step has with drinking is that it is humanly impossible to evaluate myself as well under the influence of a drug, as I can when I don't have the drug in my system.

I have never been able to make a completely honest inventory, as I have never been completely honest. Neither have I ever met a completely honest person. However, I am less dishonest than I used to be; consequently my fourth-step inventories are becoming a little more accurate.

Chapter Twelve

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

Step 5 Before we get into this step, I believe it is time for me to say again, that when I talk about the disease of alcoholism, I am only speaking of the concepts of sick and well. I fail to see how there can be any sin connected with my being an alcoholic. Alcoholism cannot be both a sin and an illness - any more than tuberculosis, cancer or any other illness. It can't even be a little bit sin and a little bit illness. I have got to treat it as one or the other.

If I no longer have alcoholism as a sin, it won't leave me short. I have plenty of others. And they are the kind I can do something about.

So the terrible things I did as a result of my drinking come under two separate headings. Guilt, which is between me and my God; and Responsibility, which is between me and my fellowman. Now, doing something about my responsibilities, to my fellowman is taken up in Steps 8 and 9, so in this step I am going through them so I can live with me.

My primary purpose here is to help get myself back into perspective; to quit playing God and being my own judge, jury and executioner; to separate guilt and responsibility.

To me this is not a step that I take for counseling. Nor, am I asking forgiveness from the man or woman with whom I am

taking the fifth step. This would not be fair to them or to me.

As I see it, I find someone whom I trust, and ask them to let me use them for a sounding board, so I can hear myself say these things out loud. Not only to hear them, but because saying them makes them so; makes me try to be more honest about them.

When I took my first 5th step, I found that some of the things I had hidden in the deepest recesses of my mind, because I was so ashamed of them, were not as bad as I had built them up to be. Conversely, so-called funny things turned out to be absolutely vicious when I heard myself say them out loud.

I can find no place here for me to enumerate any of the good things I've done in my past. I'm trying to quit being a scorekeeper. I want to learn to leave that up to my God.

The fifth step comes in handy a great many ways. It gives me a chance to know myself, which in turn gives me an opportunity, hopefully, to gain a little humility. Whenever I find I am becoming more judgmental about my friends and critics, a fifth step gives me every reason to quit criticizing someone else. When I, insanely, think that my life now is no better than it was before, a fifth step reminds me of the living I do not want to go back to. It not only helps to keep me in perspective, it frequently gives my God a chance to lift some of the burden of my past from me.

There is a tendency of some people to believe, that the fifth step is the key to the whole program. I do not think this is so. It is one of the twelve most important steps in the

program. It does not seem to me to be a solution to any problem. Rather, it is a tool I can use to get myself and my problems in a condition I can possibly handle.

Every time I have taken a fifth step, and then neglected to do anything constructive about the ninth and tenth steps, I have accomplished nothing. It is like finding the right wrench, putting it on the nut, and then never trying to turn it.

So, while I may feel a tremendous sense of relief after taking a fifth step, it will probably not have a lasting effect unless I do something about the things I have talked about.

To me, the confessional aspect of the step is strictly incidental, and a fringe benefit. It is primarily a therapeutic method of getting me to understand myself.

When should I take this step? Every time and anytime I need to. No one takes their 5th step. They take a 5th step. The program only lasts for a day. My first one was probably not too good, but it taught me that, talking about my wrongdoings would not destroy me as long as I did it without self-pity.

With whom should I take it? Any person or several persons who have my confidence. In a few isolated areas you may be told to pick someone who is qualified. For the great majority of us, we have never known anyone qualified to decide who is qualified. Wasn't there an old Roman saying about who guards the guards? I still believe that each AA member decides who is qualified to listen to his or her 5th Step.

There is one very noticeable difference to me in the tone of

my recent 5th steps compared to my earlier ones. That is, each 5th step finds me talking about the nature of my wrongs, and being less sorry for myself. I think this is gaining perspective.

It is a beautifully written step. It says the "nature" of my wrong so it can be as broad as I want it. It says "exact" nature, so it can be as specific as I need it.

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

Step 6 Simple? – Yes. – Easy? – No! At first I couldn't see why the founders and early members of the AA program said that this was the step that separated the men from the boys. It didn't look that hard. I frequently don't see too well.

I think that I was always consciously or subconsciously aware of what my character defects were. And, I was perfectly willing to have God remove them. But only if He would make my father and mother, my wife and everyone else quit doing what they were doing. I read this step many, many times before I actually realized, that nobody's name but mine was mentioned. That this is completely worked by my attitude.

As I understand this step today, I am saying this. I am trying to be entirely ready to have God remove all my defects, (even the ones I enjoy) even if He never changes another living soul. At this moment, I am not particularly concerned with whether my God removes these defects. I am only concerned with my willingness to have them removed.

My first reaction to this is that it will leave me completely defenseless. I will no longer be able to preserve my rights as a human being. If someone tells a lie about me, don't I have a duty to strike back? How else can the society I live in learn that I'm someone to be reckoned with?

In the first place, I have to learn to live with me, before I can learn to live with society. And the acid I am preparing to pour on you eats me up infinitely more than it damages anyone else.

My strength is not going to come from my ability to knock you down; it will come from my willingness to hold me up.

In the continental Congress when the founding fathers were tempted to compromise ideals in the name of immediate expediency, George Washington made a memorable speech; "It is very probable that no plan we propose will be adopted. If, to please the people, we offer what we ourselves disapprove, how can we afterwards defend our work? Let us raise a standard to which the wise and honest can repair. The event is in the Hand of God."

Isn't this just as true of the individual and his behavior?

First, I must try to develop a consistent set of standards for myself. My list of defects today is quite a far cry from my list of defects when I first came on the program. My partially drugged mind was incapable of consistently rational thought. I was either excessively hard on myself, or rationalized an apparently legitimate excuse for my behavior. Frequently for the same type of action.

It is a continuously hard lesson for me to remember, that the people I resent have motives at least as good as mine. It is even harder to remember, that it is not my problem whether or not they are passing judgment on my motives.

When I was younger, it disturbed me a great deal that almost everything I did was prompted by more than one

motive. Usually, one of the motives seemed more desirable than the others. When I would let myself think about this, I would see myself as a terrible hypocrite and something less than human.

As the years went by, and I tried to gain a little more maturity, I came to realize that this condition of "multiple motives" was part of being human. I was not unique. I have a right to grow and to grow up emotionally.

As I see it, growing up emotionally is sort of like having the mumps. If you go through it in your youth, when you're supposed to, it isn't too painful or too serious. If you wait until you are 30, 40, 50 or 60, it's pretty painful and darned serious.

One of the qualities of youth that makes the young attractive is this immaturity. It is not attractive in the adult. I held on to my immaturity a great many years after it ceased to be attractive.

When I finally became willing to try to grow up emotionally, I found it very, very difficult. I still do. But even though I am unable to grow as fast as I would like, I find it very satisfying to try. What held me back so long? I believe now, that it was my fear of failure. I had not yet learned that maturity begins with my willingness to try to do the things that I believe my God would want me to do according to my standards today. To *DO* them - not necessarily to get them done perfectly.

Someone very wise once said that right actions will promote right thoughts more quickly than right thoughts will

promote right actions.

I believe this begins when I become entirely ready to become completely emotionally mature, knowing that I'm going to fail the goal, but gain the direction.

Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

Step 7 In this tool, the word *humbly* seems to give the most trouble. Let's look at the word humility, and try to get it workable for me.

In the first place, humility is an impossible goal. Just like serenity, happiness, and a good many others, they are not targets. We cannot aim at them. Rather, they are by-products of the way we live and think and do. The minute I make a statement, "In all humility," I just lost it. Humility is the one thing in the world that, the more certain I am that I have it; the surer it is that I "ain't."

Since I have never been able to define humility for my own complete satisfaction, and I don't know any direct route to get it, I decided I would hope to try to get it as I try to get the AA Program, and to gain faith. If I keep coming around and I don't get it—maybe it will get me.

Here again I am reminded that this way of life requires me to continually try to be non-judgmental. To not keep score on you or on me. To quit trying to prove I'm a man (or a woman). If I have to prove I'm a man, I am in trouble. I must accept the kind of man I am, and do something about me to the best of my ability today.

Now I bring out the left hand column of my 4th step inventory, and I ask my particular God to remove all of them, plus any I couldn't think of to put down.

Here is the catch. I know He isn't going to do it. I'm sure He could, but I'm just as sure that He won't. Oh, He'll help me get rid of them; but I'm not going to get well at the rate I want to.

This is the big difference between the AA Program and a religion. In a religion, it not only tells you what to ask God for and when and how; it also tells you what God will and can do.

In AA it never tells you that your God is going to do anything - not one thing! Apparently then, we do these steps because *it is good for us to do them!* Perhaps, so we can grow up enough emotionally to realize that the rewards are in the doing, not in keeping score. It's a little like making love to your wife or husband. If you ever get it finished, you don't have anything left. The fun is in the doing - not in getting it done! I don't believe it is possible for me to teach myself to stop doing wrong things. Nature abhors a void, and I'm afraid this is what I would have. I can't stop being selfish, hating, being dishonest, etc. But I can spend more time loving, so I have less time in which to hate; more time being honest, so I have less time to be dishonest, etc. And in this effort my God will help me. So to remind me to use this tool, I ask Him to remove my shortcomings. My request is only good for today. When tomorrow becomes today, I had better ask Him again.

One defect which has been a terrible problem for me was, and is, resentment. Before I learned this was a kind of conceit, I found a tool that seems to help.

After I had been sober some years, I went through a divorce. A very traumatic affair for my wife, myself, and our

six children. In addition to the problems caused by myself and my wife, the situation was made worse by some counseling of a minister, and some people whose concept of marriage was considerably different from that of my wife and myself.

For several years, I resented terribly these other people who had become involved in our marriage problems. Since I make an effort at being a Christian, it kept me so very upset that I couldn't forgive them. I tried praying for them, and I didn't feel it did any good. It may have helped them, but it didn't seem to help me. The fault was in me, and I couldn't do anything about it. Finally, I found an answer. I didn't have any right to forgive them; I never had the right to condemn them. This was my God's prerogative, not mine. These people had done and said what they thought was right, according to what they thought they knew, and according to their standards. Who am I to judge? I am not the only human who has a right to be wrong. My problem was the mistakes I had made.

I try to make my standards and beliefs consistent with each other. I try to use these tools to make it easier. I find I do it very badly. But I do it a little better today than I did last year, and I hope to do a little better next year. It is a slow and sometimes painful process.

But, if I can remember to keep asking, I have a far better chance to keep trying. And my trying is what makes it work

Chapter Fifteen

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

Step 8 This was one of the first steps my sponsors had me work on. I wasn't sure why at the time, but as I look back, I think they wanted to make me feel more like a decent human being. They didn't rush step 9 at me, but they certainly encouraged me to make this list. I've been making it ever since.

All these years, since I came in the program, I have been adding new names, and as my brains gradually come out of hock, I am remembering old ones I had forgotten, (or was too ashamed of to put down).

In my drinking days, I had often made lists of this general sort. The trouble with my lists, was that they involved a good bit of score-keeping. So I started out on the list. Every person that I even thought I might have harmed. If there was any doubt, I put them down. No matter how great or small the harm.

I thought at the time, that this must be one of the hardest jobs in the world, and for me, at that time, it was. But, it was nothing compared to the second part of the step. That part is still tough; became *willing* to make amends to them *all!*

Here they hit me again - you cannot judge! Much like the 6th step, I must try to develop an attitude where I am willing to make amends to everyone I have harmed, no matter how much harm I think they may have done to me. We are not talking

about sin or guilt. We are talking about my responsibility as a human being.

Let me give an example of how this reads to me. I'll use a husband and wife relationship, but it applies to any relationship of any two people. In this husband and wife relationship, let us say that we were capable of rating who was to blame for each problem that had come up between them over the years. And to be ridiculous, let us say we found out that 90% of the blame was the husbands, and 10% the wife's. Now, I contend, that if the wife is going to try to be emotionally mature, she can't even look at the husbands 90%, until she does something about her 10%. And if she thinks she can hurry and straighten up her 10%, so she can yak at him, she's crazy. For by the time she clears up her 10% she will have done another 10 or 20 or 50 or 90% herself.

In my approach to this, I am learning a little better to operate on a 24 hour basis. I cannot include in this anything I may have done to help these people on my harmed list. I am responsible for everything I think or say or do.

I have heard people say that the only people they harmed were their family. That was not true with me. I got everybody I could. If I thought there was a chance, I turned around and got them again. I not only cost them money, but also their trust, love and affection. I also enabled them to more easily lose faith in the rest of their fellowmen.

About half of my drinking time, I worked for someone else. The other half, I had people working for me. I cheated them all.

When I worked for someone else they were entitled to the

best job I was able to perform. They rarely received this. Certainly, I functioned reasonably well a great deal of the time; but they never got all of me, and that was what I had hired out to them. When people worked for me, they deserved to have their boss operate at the peak of his ability. This seldom happened.

I think this would be an example. Say I had been a surgeon, and performed a difficult life saving operation on a patient while I was under the effects of a hangover. Even though the operation had been successful, I believe I would have cheated the patient by not respecting him and human life enough to be in the best possible condition.

I am not God, and I hope I never again regress to the point of trying to think I am.

One of the important features of this step, to me, is that it doesn't expect me to immediately be willing to make amends to everyone. It says, "became willing." This denotes a passage of time giving me opportunity for some growth.

So, I "became willing" to make amends to some people - made a few of them - and became willing to make some other amends that I was not willing to do at first.

As I said before, I found out none of these actions had anything to do with my alcoholism. They did help me to become aware that I had a right to be a responsible human being; and with that awareness, came the renewed realization, that my having this illness, and admitting it, didn't make me less of a person.

Chapter Sixteen

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

Step 9 As we start trying to work this step, let us remember that these people we have harmed have not been waiting at a standstill for us to make our amends. As we are no longer the same persons that did the harm, they are no longer the same persons we harmed. They have been living their lives to the best of their abilities, accepting the fact that the world has people in it like we were.

So we will probably never know how far reaching the results of our making amends may extend. It seems to me then, that we make these amends primarily to get some of the cluttered-up trash out of ourselves.

For example, let us say that I have owed you \$100.00 for five years. I have promised to pay in full on many occasions, and have promised to pay in part even more often. I come in the program, and get to my first try at this step. I hate to contact you at all, because I have failed so often; but I get my finances organized, and I write to you that I will send you \$5.00 the first of July, and will let you know then when I can make another payment.

So far the situation has not changed a bit. But, on the first of July I send you \$5.00, and tell you I will send another \$5.00 on the first of August. The whole relationship has changed. I have made a commitment which I have kept. The change in you is

probably a great deal more than you are aware of. Your attitude to your fellowman is going to be affected whether you know it or not. This is the fringe benefit.

The primary benefit is to me. I have found that I can live up to a promise, and that I am not a small person, because I am a "little shot." How you react to this outwardly is not my problem. Whether or not you believe I'm an alcoholic, and that alcoholism is a disease is none of my business. It is my business that I'm beginning to function as a growing human being.

What I am trying to say is, in effect, that I make these amends so that I can live with me. Not because I am guilty, but because I am responsible.

Direct amends—so I can't tell my wife to tell my mother-in-law that I'm sorry. I will have to make my amends to my mother-in-law myself.

Robert Louis Stevenson once said, "Soon or late, everyone must sit down to a banquet of consequences.". From long and frequent experience, I can assure you that the menu is terrible, and you can get very un-hungry at times like this. Swallow it anyway, the aftertaste is terrific. It makes it all worthwhile.

I have to remember that I am one of the persons who could be harmed as a result of making some amends. However, I am quite a con-artist, so I occasionally try to avoid making an amend for this reason. I have found that if I go to my sponsor, or someone else whose judgment I trust, with the problem, he is better able to tell if making the amend will

harm me or just my pride. If it's just my pride, he always recommends I make the amend.

Frequently, we wonder what kind of amends are to be handled differently, or left alone for this time. The old classic is, that if you have been stepping out with your neighbor's wife, don't apologize to your neighbor - just stop it!

I always liked the one about the two men that worked in the same appliance store. Both had a drinking problem, and one night they stole a \$25.00 radio from the boss, and hocked it for more booze. A couple of years later, one of the men has come into AA, and is struggling with step 9. His buddy is still drinking and working in the same store. He can't give the boss \$12.50, and tell him he stole half a radio. But, I'm certain we are all inventive enough to figure an indirect way of taking care of some of these things.

I believe that the way the step is worded, it implies that we should make indirect amends when it is impossible or imprudent to make direct ones.

I found that a great many people I had harmed had either moved where I couldn't find them, or had died. I try to remember this when I find myself becoming intolerant and judgmental of someone else's sincerity.

There are two very real major benefits to me from working at this step.

First, I begin to come back to the human race; and strangely enough, I find that, that is exactly where I belong. It is just as conceited for me to think I am the worst person in the world, as to think I'm the best. I'm just a run-of-the-mill human being,

trying to find the right road, and I have a right to be on that road.

Second, I find that the world is full of fine people, in and out of AA. They are at least as much on my side as I am on theirs.

So we work at this step the rest of our lives, a day at a time; and we find the next time we take a 5th step, that we have cleaned up some of the garbage that we worried about at the last 5th step. Best of all, we have done something and it feels good.

Chapter Seventeen

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

Step 10 This is a good tool we will use daily, either consciously or subconsciously. Some members do it on a daily schedule. Some do it as an action or thought is completed. Some do it weekly or monthly. Some do it only in facing a crisis. If it works for you, it has to be right for today.

The first part of this step does not seem to me to be only a continuation of step 4. In step 4, it says, a searching and fearless *moral* inventory. In this step, it says a *personal* inventory; which I think should include physical, mental and spiritual, as well as moral.

Everything my God has given me to work with and change, is encompassed in my body. This is the tool He has given me. I am not absolutely certain why He has done this or what He expects me to do with it the rest of my life. I do not have to know.

As a friend of mine in Omaha says, "It isn't what I don't know that gives me trouble, it's what I'm absolutely sure of that just isn't so."

So far, whatever purpose I interpret my God has placed me here for, it would behoove me to keep the tools He has given me in the best possible condition. These tools would be my body, my mind and my spirit as I understand it.

My personal inventory, then, would begin with my care of my body. Am I doing the things today that will help to put, and keep, me in the best physical condition possible? I don't have to train for the Olympics; but I think I should keep my body in the kind of shape where it is an asset to my living, and not a detriment.

Next on the list would be my mind. Am I exercising my mind on ideas more than on judging people? Am I reading the type of material that will force my mind to grow? Am I talking and listening to people who have something to give me, as well as to people to whom I can give?

The spiritual inventory is probably the degree of satisfaction I have in my relationship to my Power greater than myself. While it must often be a nebulous thing, it will not be any less real. If my spiritual beliefs require me to become active in one of the conventional religions, then I had better do it. Whatever decision I make in this area is only good for today anyway. I may grow to a better one tomorrow.

The moral inventory, I conduct, like I did in the 4th step. The two columns and the percentages. There hopefully will be some improvement.

I feel that, the thing I must watch out for most in this personal inventory is to make it non-judgmental. I am not sending myself to Heaven or Hell. I'm trying to learn what I am.

In doing this, I begin to understand what I believe. I begin to make the changes that are needed to make my philosophy of living consistent. This is a lifetime process - frequently painful. But, I may learn to laugh at myself. This will

make it easier.

What should happen here is that we begin to become more aware, and to find that awareness is not frightening. I listened to three young men, who were out-patients in a day clinic for emotional problems, talk about why they were there. They all seemed to agree that the reason they were so disturbed, that they needed this treatment, was because their fathers hadn't loved them, or at least not enough.

One of them asked if I was going to start on the day clinic and I told them, "No, but I was interested in what they were saying". They gathered around and asked what interested me.

I told them what I had heard - that they were disturbed because their fathers hadn't loved them enough.

And then I said, "It's quite possible you are right. Probably not, but it *is* possible; but do you realize now that you are going to have to find another excuse? You have just used that one up. Now that you are aware of it, you can't use it anymore. Once I realized that I have an explosive temper, because my father had one, it's no longer my father's problem. It's mine!"

So we take our inventories, and gradually become more aware that the problems involved belong to us and to us alone.

Will these inventories be completely honest? Hardly. If I can't honestly mark myself 100% honest in my inventory, my evaluation can't be 100% honest. But, of course, it doesn't have to be. It just has to be the best I can do today.

The second part of this step, "and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it", is a new lesson in living for some of us. The better job we do of this makes the repeat efforts at step

five and nine much easier. I believe that this means we should admit our wrongs promptly to our families and friends, as well as people in work and other parts of society. We should learn to treat the people we love with just as much respect as we treat strangers. It's part of growing up. The main benefactor of this is us of course! We are learning to live with ourselves as we are. And, we do it on inventories based on our standards today

Chapter Eighteen

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.

Step 11 Until I first took a try at this step, I believe all my contact with my God had been a matter of feeling. Usually it came through my new friends in AA, and the people who had loved me before. Now I was to try through prayer and meditation, to improve my conscious contact with Him.

This upset me a little at first, because if I was going to try to contact Him, I was making it pretty definite that I believed He was there; wherever "there" was. But I had already gone too far to back up, so I went all the way. Besides, things were a lot better than when I had been drinking.

I have gone through quite a few phases in my approach to prayer. I have had a hard time making my prayers consistent with my concept of God.

For example: when someone I love is sick, I believe it would be a little presumptuous for me to ask God to help someone He loves. I'm certain the loving God I believe in is aware of my loved one's trouble, and is doing what he knows is right. I can pray that I can be made aware of new ways for me to help my loved one, and this usually works.

Beau Jack, the world's lightweight boxing champion in the 1930's, prayed before every fight. When asked what he prayed for, he said that he prayed that nobody would get hurt, and that it would be a good fight. When one sportswriter wondered if he never prayed to win, he said, "Oh no, suppose I pray to win and the other boy, he prays to win, then what's God gonna do?"

Meditation I define as mental exercise on my spiritual beliefs. This too, helps me to become more consistent in my beliefs. I can no longer be as ridiculously sick as the man who says, "There are two things I hate - prejudice and Jews".

So we come to what this step says we should pray for: "*Only* for knowledge of His will for us, and the power to carry that out." Like in step three, "please keep sending me the charts, and help me to read them better".

It's like the Lincoln story during the Civil War. The South was belaboring the tar out of the North, and President Lincoln called a meeting at the White House of his General Staff and Cabinet. They tried all night to come up with some way to turn the tide with no results. As dawn was breaking over the Capital, Secretary Seward said, "I guess there is nothing for us to do but go home, and pray that God is on our side." To which Mr. Lincoln replied, "I'm not nearly as concerned with whether God is on our side, as I am whether we are on God's side."

How do I try to use this? Before AA, if I had a situation that gave me three possible choices, I would choose the one I thought best; and possibly even pray to my God for help in

having this choice successful. Now, in a similar situation, I try to pick the one that most nearly fits my concept of what I think my God would want me to do. I don't have to ask my God for help. I already have.

This I believe, is praying for knowledge of His will for me and the power to carry that out. In trying to work this step, I have no right to pray for anything else.

Many of my prayers, when I was drinking, were not answered. I'm sure they were heard, but they weren't answered. When I began to be able to look back at them, I was very grateful. I had prayed that all of a dozen nationalities be removed from the face of the earth; that dozens of communities and companies be blown into oblivion; that everyone I ever cared about either collectively or individually be given long, lingering or immediate deaths.

Indeed, if my God had acceded to all my prayers, I would have removed my future sponsors and AA, before I ever got lucky enough to be available for help for myself.

I rather imagine my God heard me as responsible parents listen to their child having a temper tantrum in the playpen.

I found out later, that God was sending to me all the time. I kept tuning Him out. Most of His messages, at that time, were pretty darn personal, and I didn't think He really understood all the things that made me do the things I did. I figured that He had been misinformed with a lot of gossips from some very sick people. It wasn't until I came to AA that I began to work on my receiving set.

Since then, I have learned that I hear things differently.

When I first came to AA, every speaker I heard was beautiful. A couple of years later, the same speaker, saying the same thing, sounded pretty meddlesome. After a few years more, the same talk didn't attack me quite as much as before.

Just as I can't give you a drink of water out of my bucket if I have nothing in it; neither can I carry the message of the next step if I do not keep my receiving set in order, and try to learn the language that is coming in on it.

Chapter Nineteen

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.

Step 12

Here is the greatest tool of all. The ability to love. It's the name of the game. The one that says to me, "I have to care about you because I want to care about me".

"Having had a spiritual awakening" at first seems to put some curb on my right to use this step. On closer scrutiny, I believe it means that even when I read the steps through the first time sober, I had had some kind of spiritual awakening or I wouldn't have read that far. If I am only sober today and you are not, I have something you want; and I don't dare not try to give it to you.

This is one of the oldest and greatest therapies in the world. It's using one drunk to cure another drunk - not necessarily for the sake of the second drunk; but to keep the first drunk cured for today.

You see, the step doesn't say that we carry the alcoholic, or even that we carry the message. It says that we tried. So, if I make a 12 step call, and I stay sober, and do my best to carry the message, then it is a perfect 12 step call. Whether or not the other party gets on the program is something entirely different. If the person I 12-step today, gets drunk

tonight after I leave, and calls tomorrow for help, he or she will be a brand new person, in a brand new world, in a brand new day, looking for a brand new program. And I needed someone to give it to anyway. Am I to judge whether or not they deserve my help? I think not.

If, when I first came in the program, everyone else had stayed sober and sane on the first effort, I would never have dared to try again after I slipped.

I have been sober all day. This is the best I've ever done, but it ties a record. No one has ever done any better on this program.

It's a little bit like Christianity. When Christ sent the Disciples out to preach the gospel, I don't believe He told them that anyone would listen, or that they would convert anyone. Then they must have been preaching for their own good. It was their responsibility to put it out; it was yours and mine to pick it up. How else can good things be done without being judgmental?

Some years ago a young friend of mine became interested in AA. He was a Roman Catholic priest, not an alcoholic; but through helping a couple of his flock, became a great help to many AA and Alanon people. One night after he had attended about six or eight AA open meetings, we were drinking coffee after the meeting in a general bull session, when he said to me, "You people do a great deal of good. Aren't you troubled with self-glorification?" I said, "No Father, if we get any self-glorification, we usually get drunk, but we get a lot of self gratification." He chidingly remarked that there probably wasn't too much difference, and kept

needling a little.

I finally asked him, "Father, when you do something good, don't you feel that you do it with the help of God?" He said, "Of course," and I said, "We try not to be that conceited. We believe that God does it, and occasionally we are privileged to help Him a little bit." He said, "You dirty Dutch Protestant, I'll never be able to use that phrase again."

When it comes to sobriety, this is the way I think it works. Have no faith in me. Have no faith in your sponsor. It's the program that works—you and the program. It does and will work, and that is the message we try to carry.

Who is ready to make a 12-step call? The person who has something to give, and he is not the best judge of that.

Who is ready to receive one? I think everyone with a drinking problem. I believe that everyone with a drinking problem wants to quit drinking, if they knew how to do it without losing face. Our problem is learning how to reach them. Learning how to make these tools more easily available.

It's like the story of the substitute school teacher who found a book, and thought she recognized the boy's name in it. When she tried to return it, he told her, "No. Teacher, that isn't my book, it's my brother's. He's six months older than I am, and a half year ahead of me in school." Before she had a chance to put her foot in her mouth, he said, "One of us is adopted, but I don't remember which one."

That is the attitude I believe we are working toward.

Let us suppose that you are someone I have been 12-stepping and sponsoring for months, or even years. You

have slipped repeatedly and come back repeatedly. Finally, you reach a point where you would like to call me for help again, but feel you have no right to bother me anymore.

If I understand this program correctly, in the above situation, you have no right to not call me. You have no right to deprive me of my opportunity to maintain my sobriety, and possibly to grow a little more - anymore than I have a right to not answer when you call.

Have I ever sobered anyone up? No, but neither have I failed. I'm just a messenger boy carrying around a bunch of tools, and trying to learn how to make them more available for people I love. I am not big enough to carry on my shoulders today, the blame for all the people I have 12-stepped and sponsored who have not yet made the program; so I better not take the credit for the ones who have. I can't have one of them without the other.

What have we accomplished in these 11-plus steps? We have brought ourselves back up to ground level. We are ready to be on our way for today. Now comes the real action part of our lives in the program. We try to practice these principles in all our affairs. We find it more difficult to sell ourselves on the idea that a good end justifies our reaching it by dubious means. We find that, to the best of our ability, we must try to do the right thing for the right reason.

Help for us is everywhere. The Arabian says, "When the student is ready, the teacher will appear." The only times I question this is when I'm not as ready as I think I am.

The Talmud tells us, "He who destroys another, strikes a blow at the Universe. He who helps one person find himself,

supports the world". This is our world, and this is one of our reasons for being.

Chapter Twenty

Traditions

Those are the steps as I see them today. No rules, but tools. For the first fifteen years of the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous they stood alone. In 1950 the 12 Traditions were adopted. I am not going into them at any length in this book. This does not mean that they are not important. They are. There is just as much meat in the 12 traditions as there is in the 12 steps. I have to dig it out if I want to use it.

Just as the Steps are suggested, the Traditions are prefaced with "Experience has taught us that . . ." It is very difficult for the person coming into AA, or the non-alcoholic, to understand how this fellowship operates. No rules or regulations, no membership lists, no discipline measures, no anything. There is a General Service Organization, and there are a great many Intergroup, - and other service organizations - but they don't control anything. This is the only place I know of where the fellowship rules the organizations.

Visualize, if you can, a group of men and women who join each other every morning, in a cause which will only last one day. There must be nearly a half million of us that joined this morning. There will probably be a few more tomorrow.

Some years ago I wrote this. I ran into it the other day and it still makes sense to me.

We come to AA for sobriety. What do we do after we have achieved a measure of it? We say this is wonderful - why have

they been hiding it? Now we must start a program of public education. We want the public to understand this problem and this wonderful program. But - here is the catch - why do I feel this way? Maybe this will answer that question.

One, will I be satisfied if my public education program helps one suffering alcoholic find himself through AA because of this public education?

Or two, will I only be satisfied if enough of the general public (especially my friends and neighbors) understand enough of this so I am (with my problem) more acceptable in their society.

This, then, is the crux of the matter. Why am I doing this? If the answer is reason number one, I feel I am heading in the right direction. If the main reason is number two, then I feel I had better go back to my inventory.

I must try to do the right thing for the right reason, if I expect to grow as a person in the sight of God, as I understand Him. No matter how good the end may be, it does not justify my trying to reach it by doing so knowingly by the wrong means.

The Traditions serve as a tool to keep me, my AA group, and my AA fellowship in our places. They remind me that I can do anything in the field of alcoholism as John Doe, who happens to be a member of AA, but I can do nothing as John Doe, AA.

It is the AA program that works, and I want it to be just as available for you as it was and is for me.

By trying to follow the traditions, the AA group gives the

new member something he usually needs very badly - communication. He finds people that even love him when he lies. They lied the same way, and for similar reasons.

Most of the other people who loved us came through like Mark Twain's wife did about his swearing. The story goes that she tried to break him of swearing without success. One of her friends told her that if she would start swearing, he would be horrified and quit it himself. So, when he came home the next evening, and asked her what kind of a day she had had, she broke out in a torrent of cussing. He walked about half way up the stairs, turned around and said, "Honey, you've got the words right, but you don't have the tune."

Because the program teaches us to try to be non-judgmental, we recognize each other's melody. It is impossible to respect someone else's right to anonymity without learning to respect the person.

When my brother and I first went to work for our father, he taught us a similar lesson without us being aware of it. He told us we couldn't call anyone we worked with by their nicknames, unless we were absolutely certain that they liked their nickname. He said that the man's name might be all that he had to be proud about, and we should respect it. Years later, we realized that you can't respect the man's name without respecting the man.

The Traditions operate for me in a short prayer that I have to use frequently. It is "Lord, help me to find my place, help me to put me in my place, and help me to keep me in my place—all day today."

Chapter Twenty One

The AA Program and the Treatment Center

In the late 1940's, treatment centers for alcoholics using the suggested steps of Alcoholics Anonymous began to come into existence. Since then, various interpretations of the program have come into use in new treatment centers, detoxification centers, hospitals, referral centers, etc.

There is a misconception, I believe, among a great deal of the general public, and even among some of the alcoholics, that these are operated according to AA or are even a part of AA. This is an obvious impossibility. Alcoholics Anonymous is completely a suggested program. Treatment centers are operated on a prescribed therapy. However, it does seem that the most successful ones are the ones that are the most AA-oriented.

The treatment center is not supposed to cure the alcoholic. It makes no claim that it will. It detoxifies the patient, gives him some time to think, gives him some insights into himself, and provides some tools for him to keep himself going when he leaves. The majority strongly recommend that he attach himself to some AA group to use these tools, and learn new ones.

The treatment at most of these centers is from 3 weeks to 2 months duration. Since it seems to be true, from experience, that the alcoholic will usually change more in his second year of sobriety than in his first, we should realize that he is only creeping in the right direction when he is discharged.

The alcoholics who are recovering through AA, and direct or counsel in treatment centers, are in a rather peculiar and sometimes difficult position. The Alcoholics Anonymous program seems to be based on its being completely non-judgmental. In

a treatment center some judgment has to be used. So the counselor has to wear two hats. One when he is talking to patients, or setting up a program for treatment; and an entirely different one when he is working on his own recovery with the help of AA. He counsels for the sake of the patient. He does 12-step work, sponsorship and attends meetings for his own sobriety and growth.

An alcoholic who comes to AA, stays sober, attends meetings, and is actively sponsored, will know just about as much about the program and himself as he would if he had spent the same amount of time in a treatment center. However, the one in the treatment center will have been exposed to more information which will come back to him as he continues in the program.

No matter where he is, the individual will only be able to absorb so much in a given time. Most of this will be pretty well misinterpreted. That, in itself, is not important. My interpretations changed as I was able to handle a more mature look at my beliefs, and frequently changed back and forth. This, hopefully, will continue.

Some years ago I used to get disturbed because alcoholic treatment centers which were primarily AA-oriented when they opened began to rely more and more on other disciplines. Now, I believe this to be good. Any good judgment I have learned has come from bad judgment. What some friends thought was bad judgment, at the time, has turned out to be good. Some of the practices of other disciplines in the treatment center have been very helpful. Others will be. And not always in the way that the innovator forecast. It not only teaches us a few things that will work; it teaches us a great many things that won't work.

One suggestion I would offer to the new man or woman in AA is to go back to "normal" society for at least a few

years after you come into the AA program. Do not get into counseling in alcoholism, or any related fields at this time. There are at least two basic reasons for this. One - no matter what your background, talent or desires may be, it is going to be several years before you get your own brains out of hock. If you are going to try to teach graduate school, before you are out of the first grade, you will deprive yourself of a great deal of potential for growth. You will begin to believe yourself before you are able to recognize your own honesty. Two - the person who goes into alcoholic counseling, either as a counselor or trainee, too often has put himself in a protected area throughout all his sobriety. He has never stayed sober in a reasonably normal society and met life's problems sober. This makes it very difficult for him to tell the patient how to live soberly in a realistic world he has never experienced.

One major difference between the AA Program and the Treatment Center is that the program is entirely suggested, while the treatment center is prescribed therapy. It is made almost mandatory that the patient take a 4th Step and a 5th Step before he leaves treatment. It is excellent therapy. But, I don't believe it should be looked on as an AA 4th and 5th Step, which the individual will take later on when he is ready to take it as a part of the AA program.

Everyone in all these areas is trying to help the alcoholic. Who knows which word or action at which time helped each alcoholic start on the road to recovery? It is like the fellow that asked, "If you backed into a buzz saw, would you know which tooth cut you?"

Chapter Twenty Two

More About Love

If I were to try to put my concept of the Alcoholics Anonymous program into as few words as possible, it would be something like this: Don't take the first drink; and try to love everybody.

Love is the most realistic element in the world. Some people say that love is too idealistic. What difference does it make?

My thought on this can possibly be explained this way. Set a round ball on the table. Draw a line on the surface of the ball from the table to the top of the ball. Draw another line on the opposite side of the ball from the bottom to the top. Call one line realism and the other idealism; and where the lines meet at the top, call it human maturity.

If A tries to reach maturity by being completely realistic and B by being completely idealistic, we see that as they climb, they get farther and farther apart. But when they pass the center of the ball (when accumulated experience begins to become wisdom) the more they grow, the closer they get together. Finally, if complete human maturity is possible, they find that perfect realism and perfect idealism is the same thing. There are an infinite number of lines going up the ball with varying percentages of realism and idealism. Look at the persons whom we respect and who are the easiest and most pleasant to be with. They are the more mature ones. They have one thing in common. They have the willingness and ability to love without being threatened.

Every week several men and women will say some thing

like this to me. "I believe what you say about love, but I don't know if I want to grow up that much." We seem to have a terrible fear of failure—especially in loving. We have a hard time learning that there can be no failure in loving if we just try to love.

One of the most terrifying experiences for couples today is this. When they were twenty years old, they thought that when they became 40, or 50 or 60 or whatever age they are now, if they would just have companionship that would be enough. But now that they are that age, they realize that they have a great deal of love to give, and there doesn't seem to be anyone to give it to. They become panicky and lose all perspective. It is very difficult to believe that that great love of theirs is sitting across from the breakfast table going through the same needs and fears.

I know of no case of this nature where both parties started practicing loving at exactly the same time and went at the same rate. Someone has to start first. If I am one of the parties, then it is my responsibility to start myself.

The story goes that some years ago at the Menninger Clinic a writer questioned one of the doctors on the practicability of using love as a therapy tool for disturbed patients. Dr. Menninger told him that manifesting love to the patient was wonderful for the patient, and even better for the staff. When the writer asked what they did if it didn't work, Dr. Menninger replied, "That's easy, you double the dose."

The capacity of the human heart to love is infinite. I have six children. I do not love each child with only a sixth of my

heart. I love each child with my whole heart. Don't tell me it can't be done, because you all do something similar.

The only important thing my God gave me to give was myself. If I give of myself without keeping score, I am loving. If I am loving, I am gaining in growth, direction and serenity. I am learning to understand myself, what I believe, and my place in those beliefs.

When I can live with myself, then I can live with you and all of society. The English Digest puts it this way - "To handle yourself, use your head; to handle others, use your heart."

When I can learn to live with me, then my relationship with my family, my church, my society, my world will improve as rapidly as I am able to handle it. One of the worst things I can do is to try to get too well too fast. I will leave out some of the foundation blocks and build too shaky a structure. I need the fundamentals so I will be able to "stand on the shoulders of the giants before me."

If I will try to use these tools suggested in the AA program, I will learn that to give of myself to you, without moral judgment on how you accept it, gives me the greatest pleasure possible. This is why and how it is a selfish program.

My sponsors in AA told me that it would probably seem nice to me if they would pick me up, and carry me through the stages of growing, and put me down in the stage I would probably get to. But they said they wouldn't do it if they could. They cared too much about me to deprive me of the pleasures and pains of living. They were right. The only way I have ever learned any good

judgment was from bad judgment. They loved me enough to respect my right and ability to live.

My God is still in His heaven - and in His earth. I know He loves me because He gave me the ability to love. Now it is my problem - all day today.