

MAY 2020

WITHOUT
HELP IT IS
TOO MUCH
FOR US



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The Daily Reprieve

From the Editor's Desk:

We welcome you to read this, the second edition of *The Daily Reprieve*.

Unprecedented times! Pandemic! The economy is crashing down! Isolation and social distancing, etc. etc. The world is hitting a tremendous rock bottom and all of us are experiencing the fear, the uncertainty and the impact...constantly.

We alcoholics though, are very familiar with hitting a few rock bottoms throughout our drinking careers, but there is always that one moment that changed it all - the moment that shook you to your core to wake up and to make a change. The turning point that allowed us to turn to another solution, the one that drove us to AA.

The theme for this edition of *The Daily Reprieve* is from Chapter 5, which reads: "*Without help it is too much for us*" (found on p.59 of the Big Book). All of us at the newsletter team believe that this was the key solution to our drinking problem, which can also be applied to what is currently happening in the world. Because let's face it - it is a whole lot to bear on your own.

We received some fantastic reading material: stories of hope and courage; ideas on dealing with isolation and fear; and even a few humorous images to bring some levity to this situation. We hope that this edition of *The Daily Reprieve* will bring you exactly that - a daily reprieve.

With gratitude and a deep knowing that we are not alone, until next time.

The AA newsletter Committee

“Without help, it is too much for us”

What I was like

I thought that my intervention could save any situation. I collected histories of the world so I could learn from the past and be ready in a moment to rescue humanity from catastrophe.

Foreign invasion, volcanic eruption, epidemic, or famine – I would be ready with a bon mot and a five-point plan.

As a child I fantasised about saving the wagon train from desperados or yelling savages and winning universal gratitude.

Later on, it was girls, whom I charmed with grandiose promises which I reliably failed to keep.

I fuelled my narcissism with alcohol and narcotics, and as the evident impacts of my interventions – bad debt, disappointment, anger, tears – moved ever further from my elevated view of myself, I needed more and stronger fuel.

What happened

And then, in my sixth decade, the fuel didn't work. I was a quivering heap sitting in an AA meeting. I limped from a fall, was covered in bruises, impecunious, and furious.

It was an outrage that I should be so dishonoured. What the hell was God thinking, to use me thus?

I tried a couple more times to rev my engine with more and stronger fuel. The outcomes, especially the paranoia, were worse than ever.

Then as I prepared, despite many meetings, to fly again to my special place, my sponsor (wise to my plans) said

“You have the mind of a child. Nothing you say or do makes any sense. Listen to what I am telling you and do not get on that aeroplane”.

I called him a c***, as I sobbed my toddler outrage. What infuriated me most, was that he was right, and at some level I knew it.

What I am like now

Something changed then, as for the first time I took the advice of another sober human being.

I made a list of my disasters. It was a long list. It covered many years and many places. How many times had caring friends and colleagues tried to help me, to meet with scorn and derision?

I said the step three prayer. I tried to listen in meetings instead of composing witty shares to win laughs.

I told God I was helpless. I said “You made me. I belong to You. Do with me as You will” using the words of a tiny Irish nun who had held my hand years before as I was wheeled away for cancer surgery.

And what a relief that was. Now I am well into my fourth year of sobriety. I laugh a lot, mainly at myself, and start every day with a list of things I am thankful for, and a request to be useful and of service.

The inescapable truth of my sponsor's words, offered out of love, had stopped me in my tracks, when nothing else had.

The day I gave up the struggle, and ceded control, was the day I got my life back.

Anonymous

12-STEPS: First an event – then a process’

I view the first nine steps as primarily a short-lived event that teaches how to begin the lifelong process of the living last three steps.

The event: Steps One, Two and Three are simply admitting: *I can’t; God can; then asking for help*. This is a prerequisite!

Step Four begins “*at once*” (p. 64) which may take a week or so of writing to attain honest information to allow a sponsor to show how to “face and be rid of” selfishness, dishonesty, resentment and fear—this sponsor-help procedure often takes only an hour or so. (PP 64-71)

Step Five begins “*at first opportunity*” (p. 74) which

can start about five minutes after finalizing Step Four with a sponsor. This may take only an hour or so but may vary.

Step Six begins *then*, not later. (p. 76) and Step Seven begins “*when ready*.” (p. 76) Steps Six and Seven are often completed in a rather short period.

Most of the Eighth Step “harms to others” has been *already listed* from Step four and Step Nine begins “*now*.” (p. 76) Of course, Step Nine may last for an indefinite period as continued in Step Ten.

The Process: I view the above, Steps One through Nine, as a learning *event* that has a beginning and an end.

Once this learning has taken place it is time to put what has been learned into action by following the clear-cut directions of Steps Ten, Eleven and Twelve for a lifetime. (PP 84-103) Of course, “learning” continues as we go along.

I view the important difference between an *event* and a *process*, as that the former has a timeline, of sorts, but the latter is non-ending.

First, we learn how to do it—then we do it.

Bob S, Richmond, IN

Getting Back to Planet Earth



On April 3rd, I found myself sent home to start the working from home protocol that my company decided to self-implement.

Not long after that came the government directive that workplaces should shut down and then came the first circuit breaker.

As a single man living alone this seemed like a perfect situation at first. Not having to get up as early, only doing as much work as was required whilst dipping in and out of Netflix and snacking on all sorts of unhealthy stuff from the kitchen.

That euphoria, however, was short lived once the reality of the situation kicked in.

There was only so much Netflix that could be watched each day and the standard of my work started to drop. The isolation began to feel like incarceration as opposed to

freedom. My mind started to plumb the depths of negative thoughts and self-pity.

I have only been sober for 5 months and most of my drinking had been in isolation at home so the cravings really started to become rather overwhelming. What was I to do?

Thank goodness for modern technology and the AA zoom meetings. I try as best as possible to join a meeting every morning and that jump starts my day and gives me a reason to get up. I did find initially that the shares of happy family life sent stabbing pains to my heart – my past relationship might still be ongoing if it hadn't been for my behavior - those feelings of resentment were palpable and for me very real. Why should other people be in a happy loving relationship and not me? But those feelings are very much in my nature and are in all of us to a certain extent. The important thing is that I didn't act on it, it didn't lead me to taking that drink. And once the initial resentment was under control I realised that I should feel happy for my fellows who are finding the forced family time a godsend as opposed to a chore.

So I listen for those similarities, I listen for those nuggets that we are all the same deep down and it is those shares and similarities that brought me down from Planet Tim to Planet Earth.

Don't get me wrong, this isolation is extremely hard – as someone who craves human interaction and attention!

However, I have started to try and keep to a routine. Get up, attend a zoom meeting and then off for a cycle. Nothing overly strenuous – otherwise I would find an excuse not to do it! – just 10k a day. Back for breakfast and a shower and then work till at least 12.30. Then lunch and watch the news.

In the afternoon do some weights and then more work. It is so important for me to set work goals each day or I will procrastinate and put it off for the following day. I am one of the least disciplined people I know, and my emotionally stunted inner child will allow me to get away with not doing something if I know I can get away with it.

Evenings are a bit of an effort, but I try to meditate regularly and read instead of slobbering

out in front of the tv and that helps. Then an early night

There are still quite a few weeks to go and I will attempt to keep my routine up in order to reduce the negative thoughts and my self-pity.

I also know I should pick up the phone more. So here is my promise to you lot - I will be making more calls. It could be you next!

I hope to come out of this situation stronger than when

I went in and it is the support of AA and the fellows who will help me achieve this goal because without help it is definitely too much for me.

Tim

Helping me, is helping you.



I remember when I got into the rooms, just over five years ago. Defeated, is the only word I can think of. Misled by my own belief system, that 'this time it would be different' had me wrung out to almost nothing. I was a shell of a person; with no money, no place to call home, friends and family have given up on me and still the bottle promised me that I should have it, one more time.

Currently, there are days where I feel kind-of similar because all of the things that gave me a sense of purpose, or hope - are basically illegal. I can't really work, I am not allowed to see my friends for a coffee, let alone hug someone I haven't seen in a long time and this also, makes me feel defeated.

But, I am thankful for the AA program; where the steps which show me a solution to this situation. I am powerless over Covid-19 and I believe that a power greater than myself can help me... I can

see that by doing a step 4 on the pandemic - it allows me to see clearly, how my defects of character are standing in the way of the truth. And the truth is - life doesn't happen the way I want it to, and all I can do is to adjust my attitude to what is happening. I can keep on doing my step 10 inventory to keep my side of the street clean, but most importantly, I can connect with my Higher Power through prayer and meditation - because I now have loads of time to do it...where I didn't have as much time as before.

Then, there is another wonderful way for me to connect through to my Higher Power - and that is through other fellows. I love the fact that I have a sponsor, who is taking me through the steps just like she was guided to, so that I can see my defects for what they are and not for what I think they are. Connecting with other alcoholics through various digital platforms - allows me to see that each and everyone is going through this and not just me. I am so thankful for the fact that what ultimately separated us (alcohol...and this pandemic) is also bringing us together.

That gives me peace.

And the only way for me to keep this peace, is to then give it away. I am so thankful for every person who is helping me through this, because with your help - I can help others.

Peace out, *Adrian*

New Beginnings

The current situation and the global life changing circumstances, present a lot of challenges to everyone - but also some opportunities.

I can relate to this myself, as after returning from my 2-week holiday in March; my life, my sobriety and my sanity were severely tested.

I got caught up in an administrative mix-up. Not of my own doing, but it did prevent me from working and created serious consequences and uncertainties going forward.

Here I am, on my own, back in my flat, doing my 14-day SHN. Unable to go outside or meet with anyone - and dealing with this situation while trying to protect myself from the emotional effects.. anger and resentment were spilling over.

In that moment, my relatively new sobriety was tested, and it did not stand up to the challenge.

I picked up a drink, put it down, picked it up again, put it down again. Blamed the situation, blamed the lockdown, even blamed my Higher Power. Of course, it was not my fault, I did not do anything wrong, how dare something like this happen?!

Thankfully, there were people around me to help. People who must also deal with their own challenges that are currently presented, but still they're there to help another alcoholic in time of need. For that I will be forever grateful!

Eventually my problem was sorted out and in the moment of - what it supposed to be a joy and unbelievable relief - my alcoholic mind guided me to drink even more! It was 2-3 days that made it onto my Step 1 list and reconfirmed, once again, that I am powerless over alcohol.

But again; with the help of AA I found a way to stand up, clean up and do the right things.

And that is my new beginning, my new opportunity - once again to turn away from the

obsession and insanity. Keep learning how to live my life and how to become a better person.

Today I am not going to drink, and I will be grateful for being alive, healthy and in a much better situation than a lot of unfortunate people out there.

Greg

A Poem

*Sometimes I fantasise
How would I do it?
What excuse might I give
In this strangest of times?*

*I just need some air
I have to just go somewhere
A walk round the block
Tense excited breath scared*

*And briskly I'd walk
And briskly I'd nip a spit
Dampen my dry top lip
With acidic swill*

*My nose filled with fumes
My mouth wet and cleansed
The top of my head, ah!
My quickening steps*

*My shoes walking lighter
My shroud of concern
Took off me like clouds
Revealing the moon*

*Then snap I am back and
The sky is still there
I am not that person
But are they somewhere?*

*Sometimes I fantasise
Or am I the fantasy?
Which is the real me
I can't do this alone*

Anonymous

Step Four, at a Glance

Selfishness

My sponsor, wisely, did not allow time for fear to develop before writing my Fourth Step. He pointed out that the Big Book indicates that we are to begin Step Four “at once!” (p. 64).

It seems like only seconds after we prayed the Third Step Prayer that he laid out four sheets of paper with respective headings of Selfishness, Dishonesty, Resentment and Fear.

I was to write: “God help me I am writing my inventory” under each of these words. I was informed that I was not capable of enough honesty to do this alone. I needed God to help me. (After all, a week or so before I had marched into a bar and *almost* spoke out: “Gin and tonic, please—Thank God I didn’t). Obviously, my mind lied, so I did, indeed, need God’s help! The Oxford Group called this ‘automatic writing.’ If the words did not come from deep within, I was not to write them. No thinking allowed! I believe more honesty landed on those papers in a few minutes than many weeks out of my good-keen-intellectual-alcoholic-mind.

This was not *exactly* Step Four, but it brought about *honest* information for the upcoming Fourth Step function.

Then from page 65 of the Big book I learned how selfishness, dishonesty, resentment and fear had negatively affected me—and others. These were the very ingredients of the “bondage of self” I had asked God to remove in the Third Step Prayer! I needed to learn how to face and be rid of these aspects of my personality. How? I didn’t even know what they were! I believe such understanding is a vital function of this step. The Big Book refers to the above four character defects as our “Grosser handicaps.” (p. 71)

I was taught how to face and be rid of repeating thoughts of anger (resentments) on page 67. The same for irrational fears on page 68. I came to realize how dishonest and selfish I had been in my sexual conduct on pages 69 and 70. This vitally important information was necessary to adequately do Step Five with my sponsor and to be willing to ask for God’s help in Steps Six and Seven. (p. 76) Honest information from this step was even helpful in Steps Eight and Nine because I had listed my harms to others on page 70.

I was taught to remain continually aware of these “Grosser handicaps” because they crop up in Step Ten all through the day and in Step Eleven before going to bed at night. Step Four is a learning process to be used in the maintenance steps: Steps Ten, Eleven and Twelve, for the rest of my life.

Bob S, Richmond, IN

Today, I can be sober

I took pride in never needing to ask for help, alcohol was all the help I needed. Whenever I had to deal with rejection, loneliness or shame I would drink my feelings away. This eventually accumulated and left me with little to no self worth and complete misery. I did not know what to do, how to stop drinking.

In my first AA meeting, people shared their stories and there was a sense of identification. They were telling my story. I eventually learnt that I could not do this on my own. I needed people who understood alcoholism and who could love me for who I am. With the help of our fellows, I found my higher power that is defined as love, compassion, kindness and forgiveness. Today, I can be sober, grateful and happy.

Anonymous

With a little help from my friends

*What would you say, if I asked for a drink
Would you stand up and walk out on me?
Lend me your ears and I'll share you some things
No one else would be able to see*

*Oh, I get by with a little help from my friends
Mm, don't get high with a little help from my friends
Mm, gonna try with a little help from my friends*

*Tried it alone it was too much for me
Put my faith in the rooms faith in you
Isn't it strange how a smile and a tale
Puts me back on the path straight and true?*

*Oh, I get by with a little help from my friends
Mm, don't get high with a little help from my friends
Mm, gonna try with a little help from my friends*

*Do I need anybody?
I need somebody who knows
Could it be anybody?
I just need someone who knows*

*Would you believe in the power of god?
Yes I'm sure someones guiding my way
What do you see when you picture your god?
It's a feeling that words cannot say*

*Oh, I get by with a little help from my friends
Mm, don't get high with a little help from my friends
Mm, gonna try with a little help from my friends*

*Do I need anybody?
I need somebody who knows
Could it be anybody?
I just need someone who knows*

*Oh, I get by with a little help from my friends
Mm, don't get high with a little help from my friends
Oh, I get by with a little help from my friends
Yes, I get by with a little help from my friends
With a little help from my friends*

We Can't Do This Alone

One of my favorite phrases from the program is, **"Without help it is too much for us."**, found in Chapter 5; How It Works.

I need to be told and retold that it's OK to reach out for help, and in fact it's an integral part of the program. Left to my own devices, I feel separate from others, that I don't belong, and that no one could possibly understand what I'm going through.

That is the crux of my disease.

Reaching out and finding that I am not alone, and I am part of something bigger than myself, has been one of the most healing aspects of my journey. My default thinking tells me I'm bothering people, but I am reminded that if we're working the program then that includes the 12th step; to be of service to others. For me, it is such an important reminder to be told in almost every meeting that *"Without help it is too much for us."*

Today, I lost my AirPods on a long walk I took in the morning, and while I was pissed off with this first world problem, a fellow called who is suffering during this pandemic with being stuck at home. Immediately I noticed how my anger and frustration fell away at the loss of my AirPods as I listened to their struggle.

So, please, reach out! I'm here to listen, and if I can't take the call right away, I will call you back!

Margaret

Without Help – Not Even God Knows

“Without help, it is too much for us” has always been apparent to me.

Intellectually, I have always known that I was powerless over my spiritual malady or illness of alcoholism. This time, I have been in recovery for about three months after being out of the rooms for three years. Before that, I was in the program for three years where I every day surrendered myself to my higher power and acknowledged my defects of character. That made me see that I was not in the driver's seat of my own life and that no recovery would ever be possible if I did not involve others in my recovery.

Without my higher power, it is too much for me.

My long relapse was not because I thought I could drink responsibly. I have known since my early twenties that I was an alcoholic. However, I did not have a desire to stop drinking then though I was spiritually and emotionally bankrupt. I was uninformed and lived my life according to my own will. I am still analyzing the reason or reasons for my relapse, but in my daily life I focus more on my spiritual fitness than on my past.

Without the program, it is too much for me.

The program means to me that my pursuit of, and commitment to, progress is enough. I don't have to deliver perfect accomplishments or live up to people's expectations except those I set myself. Of course, often those expectations that I set for myself involve other people, but I am now a lot more conscious about what I agree to do or say. This gives me an immense sense of spiritual freedom, especially when I live my life in accordance with the spiritual principles of our simple program.

Without connecting with people in the program, it is too much for me. These days, I speak to at least four or five people in the program every day.

I also attend online meetings, which I find very convenient and practical as it allows me to cement my sobriety one day at a time, but also I get to have meaningful days connecting with other alcoholics through these meetings. Being an introvert by nature, these corona days could easily have been an internal and unsound excuse for me to pick up the next drink. I was told in the beginning that it's best not to drink between meetings.

Connecting with others and being vigorously honest with those closest to me in the program always helps me have a great day. As they also say, my best day drinking never exceeds my worst day in sobriety. That still holds true for me.

Without my sponsor, it is too much for me. I feel blessed to have a sponsor that I work the steps with, but that I also feel emotionally close to. I guess that having this kind of accountability helps me stay on the beam and carefully consider the next right thing for me to do rather than consulting a lifeless book.

Without being of service to others, it is too much for me. When I work with other people in the program, and it may be something as simple as a brief telephone conversation or performing a selfless gesture such as helping other members with small practical matters, I take myself out of my alcoholic space. It is evident that all the time I spent drinking and nourishing hangovers is now being converted into time that creates something meaningful for others. At the same time, it keeps me sober and I demonstrate to myself that I can be accountable and of service, that I have a God-given purpose on this planet.

Without the program, my life would be radically different – and not in a positive way. For knowing that, I am grateful.

Peter E

Without help it is too much for us

When I first came to the program, I knew I needed to stop drinking. But I didn't know how to do it, let alone by myself and my own will. I was so grateful when I was told that I was now no longer alone.

I had the hand and heart of my new AA family, and my higher power. I now had help to guide me on this recovery journey. I had a sponsor who let me call her everyday. I made friends who reached out to me multiple times a day. I had (and have) a God to talk to and walk with during the day. I realized that it took, and takes, a village to keep me sober.

Today, I still do the same as I did when I came in. I have a sponsor who has a sponsor. I have friends. I have a God in my life. Without help, it is too much for me. I cannot stay sober by myself. I cannot stay sane and of service by myself. I need the full AA package and with it, comes my sobriety, peace of mind, happiness. A life beyond my wildest dreams.

I believe that all that I've been through has prepared me for Covid 19. As an alcoholic, I've done some crazy things, been in some questionable/dangerous situations. I've drank and used into oblivion, yet by the grace of God I survived. It shows me that the care of God was upon me even at my darkest.

Today, while quarantined from home, I'm not alone. I have tools. I have the program, online meetings, my spiritual practice and relationship with God. Whenever I fall into fear, I just look back at all the insanity I've been through. It's a good memory that if I walked through all of that,

I'm more than equipped to walk through this pandemic - because I have the tools of the program.

Sending all gratitude and love!

Holly

Connectedness

A life with many soon became a room filled with only one. The world vast of forthcoming experiences dwindled into an endless abyss of hopelessness.

King Alcohol drowned me in the elixir of false hope; robbed my desire to connect with any world outside of its own kingdom. The Dictator stood omnipresently still, lurking in my shadow, always one pace ahead as I crawled shackled behind. The end was near, yet the groundhog burrowed back each day only to reappear as my eyes opened, devoutly re-living pain religiously so that the next day always repeated the prior.

Whether waking in a daze, or on cold metal beds behind bars the world over, on a broken wooden bench circled by the homeless on a chilled night, or next to nameless warm bodies too many to recall, the state of oblivion became the new blackout and the comforting slurred norm of discomfort. It starts with one and ends with never enough. While one DWI quickly trifecta'd, a once gifted life swirled deeper down the gutters.

"Please help me!" whispered from a far corner of my mind. The echo of that singular thought blossomed into words from a voice once forgotten but unconditionally remembered. One step into a church where fellows roamed in free release, the chords became a symphony of people coming together in a flawed but ever-so harmoniously perfect chorus of we.

My journey through recovery, relapse-riddled, is my own, and it is with my hope that it doesn't have to be yours. But the path towards sobriety is ours, as one once again becomes many sharing our experience, strength and hope. Down but not locked, the key connects during this tumultuous period of forced isolation but not solitude.

I get drunk. We stay sober!

G.

You talkin' to me?

The youngest of three boys, I was a defiant son, a precocious student and a talented athlete. I paid scant attention to the advice of well-meaning teachers, coaches, older brothers or even my own parents.

Once I learned to tie my own shoes and ice skates I pretty much stopped asking for help. Mom and Dad tried to be loving but they were clumsy parents. At the time I didn't have the vocabulary to describe it as such but Dad's codependency to Mom's drug addiction rendered both of them unqualified to help me with much of anything. As I grew up, I lived a life of self sufficiency and stubborn independence, pretending at times I was an only child - or even an orphan - convinced that sheer determination, faked confidence and overall competence would cover for the insecurities and shame I had over my chaotic home life. By the time I discovered alcohol just before heading off to college, that survival mask had fused to my face. My act had become my reality.

Outwardly friendly and gregarious, I pretended to appreciate advice, but was inwardly dismissive of anyone who offered it. My whole party-hard-live fast-die

young-leave-a-good-looking-corpse act teetered on a foundation of false pride, self sufficiency and independence, so my first reaction to anyone who had the temerity to make even modest critiques or suggestions and thus threaten my carefully constructed false persona, was to resent them, avoid them, or both.

Outwardly it worked. I was seen by most people to be successful and confident, with money in the bank, cars in the garage, a beautiful doting wife, cute babies and a glamorous lifestyle. But in my late 20's-early 30s, alcohol was systematically dissolving the sinews of my character and the problems began to mount.

My flawless-appearing life was beginning to unravel.

In rare moments I admitted to myself that perhaps drinking may have contributed to my problems. But the way I saw it was that maybe sometimes I drank too much. Literally drank one or a couple of drinks more than I should have. By my assessment, it was the fourth bottle of wine that got me into trouble, or the fifteenth beer, or the sixth double scotch. There was an nth drink that caused my problems. If I could avoid

getting to the nth drink, I reasoned, I would be fine. If I stopped before the nth, there would be no lies, no cheating, no gratuitous arguments, no screaming, no hangovers, no blackouts, no regrets, no shame. The idea of not drinking at all never occurred to me, nor in fact did it to my then-wife, who used to say, "You don't have to quit! Just drink less. Like before, when you were fun."

That false narrative was music to my ears! *'Even she doesn't want me to quit'*, is all I heard.

But one day, for reasons I still don't understand, I received the "gift of desperation" and checked myself into a treatment center. I was inwardly defeated, shattered and humiliated, fearful and confused. But outwardly I still displayed an attitude of "I got this".

But I didn't. I didn't know diddly squat. I had no idea how to get sober or to stay sober. For the first time in my adult life I had to ask for help. I didn't even know how to.

But you all did. Here are some of the many AA's and friends I recall with deep gratitude for being there to, first, show me how to ask for help, and then to give me the help I needed, one day at a time:

Joey, my treatment center counsellor who had me figured out from the get go. She made me spend three weeks of the four week program on Step One, the only Step I can honestly say I have done to the best of my abilities every single day of my sobriety. And I will never forget her advice: " You can do whatever you want in life, as long as you keep your program of recovery at the center of that life. If your career, or hobbies, relationships, adventures, etc... become more important than AA, those are precisely the first things you will lose when you drink again.

My first sponsor J, who would later struggle in sobriety, who sat patiently over endless cups of bad coffee and listened to my Step Five without judgement, helped me map out my first round of amends, and later, when I was searching for work, unhappily single, and nearly bankrupt both financially and spiritually, let me stay in a back room of his house for eleven months, during which period I had nothing to do but work steps, read relevant books, go to meetings, make my remaining amends, spend time with newcomers and begin to turn the corner and start to experience the promises of recovery.

Kurt, my "sponsor of convenience" in a country where there were only three

of us English speaking AAs. Outwardly, he and I were like chalk and cheese. He wore skinny leather rocker jeans, had spider tattoos on his knuckles, and sported a big silver skull and bones ring capable of breaking, well, skulls and bones. He used to take a drag from his cigarette, exhale dramatically and say, "You know, all YOU need to do to get this program is GET DUMB! Stop @#%- ing overthinking it!" He was right. AA's suggested program of recovery is not complicated. But I needed his reminder, delivered with the subtlety of electroshock, of that fundamental point. (He remains a dear friend... we were on a Zoom meeting together recently, first time at a meeting together in ages).

Joan F, who sat with me near her fireplace and patiently listened to me read seventy four (sic) letters I had written but would not send to people I had been harboring resentments towards. She then prayed with me after each letter to have that particular resentment lifted. Then I crumbled up and chucked each letter into the fire. I don't know how it worked but it did; each of those resentments, which like cigarette embers had been smoldering in my brain (for decades in some cases) faded and disappeared in subsequent weeks. I could not have done that alone. So many of my mental

obsessions and other defects that had confounded me for years were no match for the loving presence, attention and counsel from another AA fellow. I can't taste my tongue, I can't see inside my eye. And my own brain cannot heal itself. With your help though as facilitators for God's healing, my mental and emotional health has improved dramatically.

The guys in a men's group I helped start, who listened to me talk for months about a relationship that had begun when I was drinking (and married) and which had run its course in early sobriety. They helped me get the conviction to end it, and - for the first time in my life- to do so honestly and properly and without making her feel at fault. Without those fellows to talk through both the reasons for that excruciating decision and the manner by which I would communicate it, I would have put my sobriety at risk. (God works in funny ways.. one of those very fellows married her a few months later, and they are happy together to this day. That I was and am genuinely happy for them is testament to the miraculous change in my personality that you all have helped me achieve).

My many AA sisters who taught me that women can and should be essential friends without the intent or

expectation of romance; and all the AA members of different race, nationality, skin color, religious affiliation, cultural, gender or sexual orientation, who helped me understand that whoever we are and however we got into our addictions, we are all led out by adherence to the same program of recovery; and the old timers who were more tolerant of my bullshit than they needed to be when I was new; and the newbies who endure my ramblings now that I am old, and who give me the opportunity to pass on whatever I have learned from those who preceded me; and even those fellows I found to be annoying but who have nonetheless given me the "opportunity for growth", some of whom subsequently even becoming dear friends.

Those who slipped or relapsed and had the courage to come back and share their experience, and in so doing reinforced my conviction that I did not myself need to go out there and do additional research on the nature of my illness.

Every AA who gave me a ride to or from a meeting, asked me

out for a coffee, gave me their phone number, patted me on the back on the way in, or out, of a meeting, gave me a shoulder to lean on when I needed it or gave me the opportunity to be a source of strength and hope when they needed me.

My brother, who is a minister, and who encouraged me speak to God in my prayers as a friend. He said that if I believed that God is all knowing He in any case knows what is in my heart and that I need not worry about the structure, or formality, or the beauty of my prayer's language; rather, he said, I should just focus on my truth of the moment, expressed however I want to. Thus paving the way for a much more real, relatable and fulfilling relationship with my Higher Power.

The Singapore fellow who stood in for my absent sponsor when I had to grind through Steps 4-8 in one desperate weekend not so long ago

The many sponsors, sponsees, brothers and sisters in the program, gong masters,

Buddhist monks, retreat counsellors, friends and others trudging along the path, who have inspired and guided my attempts to learn how to meditate.

Thousands of AAs, around the world, whose incredible shares keep me coming back to the meetings, helping me stay sober in the day, each day being another bead added to the beautiful tapestry that my sober life is. Honesty, drama, humor, intimacy. You share your lives, your fears, your hopes and dreams and, especially, your solutions, with me. AA meetings are the best show in town. Without you at the meetings, whether in person or virtual, I would be lost.

Clearly, without help, it would have been too much for me. I would not have been able to get sober or stay sober. But with your help, alcoholism has not been a constraint to living a happy, joyous and free life as a sober man for now for more than 30 years. Thank you for giving me that life!

Anonymous

Fear, Terror, or Peaceful Apprehension

An A.A. Solution for Irrational Fear!

The following definitions of fear, terror and apprehension are my own; probably not to be found in a dictionary—they are simply a bright idea I came up with of late.

First, let us go back to the days of when our hunter/gatherer ancestors were sometimes chased by hungry wild animals. One of these three emotions would have taken over:

Fear: Body is overcome with extra energy to either fight the toothy beast or take off on a fast hike—this surge is what I consider as anger. (Think about it!)

Terror: Frozen stiff and gets gobbled.

Apprehension: This emotion allowed our cave dwelling ancestors to think

clearly—maybe climb a tree, etc.

The ones who survived left an imprint on the genes* (DNA) of their offspring sapiens, e.g.: you and me! Consequently, when aroused, I automatically tend to become tense and angry and seemingly out of control. It just pops up from those genes from yore—and it ain't going anywhere! If I don't find some way to circumvent this inherited genealogical process, I will be running around town all day long like a wet hen or dry drunk. What to do?

Well, I can thank God for providing AA tools. I can now—at least at times—place those disastrous devils of fear and anger on the back burner and feel calm apprehensive concern instead. When I feel wronged, I can forgive the evil doer, see where I may have

been at fault, or simply ask God to remove these two demons. (pages 67 and 68) Also, there is a prayer on page 552 which is not part of the Twelve Steps, but it has worked for me on several occasions (look it up!).

So now, when my emotions are under attack, I can enjoy a normal calm apprehensive response by following these clear-cut directions in the Big Book, so long as I rise above what my immediate emotions are shouting at me. I have a choice!

Bob S, Richmond, IN

**Gene: a unit of heredity which is transferred from a parent to offspring and is held to determine some characteristic of the offspring.*

AA & Breaking the Isolation Fear-Cycle

During the recent events I have noticed patterns in my behaviour, whenever a new measure was introduced I was triggered and reacted in exactly the same way.....

In roughly the same order I felt an overwhelming urge to:

1. I want to drink
2. I want to smoke
3. I want to lay in bed all day and eat pizza and ice cream and watch Netflix. Or the walls.
4. I don't want to see or talk to anyone.
5. I don't want to put on a brave face and be strong.
6. I want to cry and grieve for days gone by and past decisions.
7. Then I want to slam the f**k out of the f**k it button.

These reactions are triggered through learnt behaviour. My inner self telling me that these coping methods will make me feel better. I now know this not to be true.

But that still doesn't stop me from wanting to seek comfort.

Through Alcoholics Anonymous I have discovered

that I react like this because I am in fear.

And guess what? That's ok.

It's ok to feel like that, to be scared because it is frightening.

My reactions and wanting to flee to the safety of my bedroom are because that's how I have taught myself to cope, my entire life, with difficult situations, I have always run away - emotionally that is.

But running away has left me feeling even worse, my addictive behaviour heightens and it's all because I am scared.

Scared of a myriad of things of which very little are fact based or actually happening right now.

So I've learnt to lean into the programme and practice self compassion.

I allow myself time to get my head around the new measures and I ask my HP to help me.

I don't beat myself up. I allow myself to feel what I'm feeling. And I hand it over as best I can, on repeat. Can't

face another work video call, hand it over, can't face another Zoom meeting, hand it over, want a drink, hand it over. I always thought this was a bit of a cop out but, guess what, they were right again - those AA old timers - and it works. Not instantly but it takes the edge off enough that I can do the Zoom meeting, or the work call.

In addition to handing it over, I practice self compassion and I force myself to get into the solution by sticking to my Circuit Breaker routine.

I dig into meetings and try being of service to other people. Especially those in recovery.

I try to keep myself in the present moment as much as possible.

I write my gratitude list and I look for the good in life.

I listen to positive happy music and I sing and dance in the privacy of my apartment or outside amongst my beloved trees.

I look around me at nature and I realise the universe is so much bigger than I am.

And then after a while, something shifts and I start to feel a bit better again.

I still get lonely, still have times of sadness and fear and that's ok. I just keep handing it over and repeat my mantra of faith not fear.

A few more days and I realise I have done a 180..... I'm loving that I don't have to go to the office and I have all this new flexibility in my life. I love that I can go for sunrise walks and chat to the turtles and go

to online meetings without any makeup on and I don't care!!! I'm grateful I have a job and so many wonderful people in my life.

I know that I'm on a journey and I know I will always feel scared when things happen that I don't like, want, or understand.

But I'm learning that I can get through all these things without running away.

It takes self compassion, self care, self awareness and

SERVICE. Service helps more than anything to get me out of my fear based thinking.

Give myself some time to get it balanced out in my head.

First and foremost though I use the tools of the program, often begrudgingly (rigorous honesty) but I do it and sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly, I am able to let the sunlight back in.

Tina

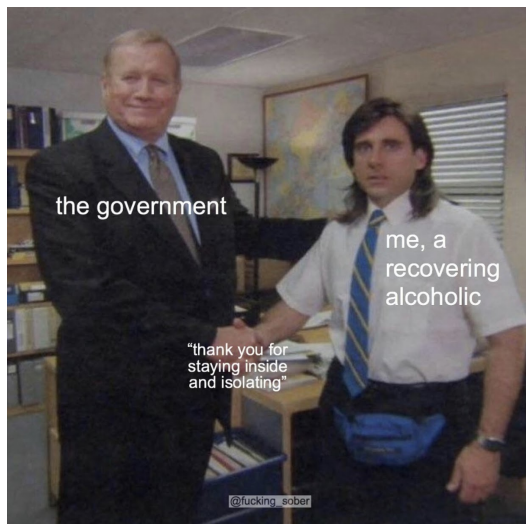
STEP 2



Me, 5 years sober on a Friday night, living a life beyond my wildest dreams



Me suffering from share shame during the lockdown because it's impossible to regulate what I say when I'm talking into a computer microphone while isolating in my bedroom



Literally everyone who got sober in March, 2020





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