

**A.A.**  
*and the*  
**ARMED  
SERVICES**

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

*ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS*® is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.

- The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for A.A. membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions.
- A.A. is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes.
- Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

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**A.A. and the  
Armed Services**



## **Who has a drinking problem?**

Few individuals in the armed services (or any other walk of life, for that matter) like to admit they're having trouble with alcohol.

For most people, the word "alcoholic" is a deadly term, conjuring up images of weak-willed skid-row type, people unable to hold a job, or any type they're proud not to be. Their image of the "alcoholic" is so different from how they see themselves, that they have a good excuse to go on drinking.

Every member of Alcoholics Anonymous understands this type of thinking, because almost every member once entertained the very same thoughts. They've learned that denying there's a problem is part of the disease of alcoholism.

From the beginning, A.A. members have regarded alcoholism as an illness — a physical allergy coupled with a mental obsession.

It's important to understand that alcoholism is not determined by where you drink, when you started drinking, how long you've been drinking, with whom you drink, what, or even how much. The true test is in the answer to this question: What has alcohol done to you? If it has affected your relationships with your family, friends, former or present command, or employers; if it has affected your health; if it determines or affects your nondrinking moods or your state of mind; if you are in any way preoccupied with alcohol; if you have little control over when you take a drink, or once you have a drink, you have little control over how much you drink — then the likelihood is that you have a problem.

This pamphlet will acquaint you with some men and women in the armed services from many backgrounds who want you to know how they came to grips with their common problem — alcoholism — and how fruitful their lives have become since they became sober members of Alcoholics Anonymous.

These stories — in fact, all A.A. stories — illustrate that alcoholism comes in many different forms and in a variety of disguises. There is no such thing as being too young to be an alcoholic, or too old, or too different, or too special.

In the stories that follow, you will learn how men and women in the armed services came to Alcoholics Anonymous and found that it worked as well for them as it has for hundreds of thousands of others who suffered from the same problem — drinking. They learned to change their lives, not by themselves, but through shared experience with other A.A. members.

### **What is A.A.?**

Alcoholics Anonymous is an international fellowship of men and women who have had a drinking problem. It is nonprofessional, self-supporting, multiracial, apolitical, and available almost everywhere. A.A. is not a religious society, since it requires no definite religious belief. The A.A. program of recovery from alcoholism is undeniably based on acceptance of certain spiritual values. The individual member is free to interpret those values as he or she thinks best. There are no age or education requirements. Membership is open to anyone who wants to do something about his or her drinking problem.

## **Who is an A.A. member?**

Any man or woman — as the typical stories in this pamphlet will show — can be an A.A. member. The illness called alcoholism can strike a person of any rank, any age, any race, any social or educational background. The blackouts and the shakes, the loneliness and the fears are the same. To begin with, these shared experiences of active alcoholism make up a bond among all members of Alcoholics Anonymous. “I know what you’re going through,” every one of them can say to a newcomer. “I’ve been there. I remember what it felt like.”

If, after reading their stories, you have additional, specific questions, other A.A. members answer these in the final section, “What’s it like to be in the military — and in A.A.?”

Many A.A. meetings are held at Armed Services bases, and others can be found in neighboring communities. For those too far afield to attend meetings, there is support through correspondence, worldwide web-based meetings, and a publication called *Loners-Internationalists Meeting*. For information, see [www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org).





## Personal Stories

U.S. Army

### **“I was an alcoholic, one of those ‘guys who couldn’t drink.’”**

I am an alcoholic and I am a Soldier. I have been an Army officer for 25 years and have been sober for the last 18.

I am a third generation military officer. Alcohol was part and parcel of the military lifestyle I witnessed in my youth. My father spent many years in Vietnam, when he returned I enjoyed observing the crazy parties with the colorful flight suits and free flowing booze. It seemed like fun to me! My siblings were older than I and started to ‘party’ before me. I wanted what they had.

When I was 13 I snuck some gin to the bus stop after school, and my friends and I drank it. I liked the smooth, comforting effects of alcohol and the escape it provided. I had a new vehicle to companionship and the “in crowd.” I was one of “the brains” and did well academically. Alcohol let me hang out with the cool kids and all the other partyers. I started a double life that would last for sixteen years. My father called me a “street angel and a house devil.” I was an altar boy, Eagle Scout and in the top of my class in high school. But my drinking started to cause problems. My junior year we got drunk during lunch on our way back to school and I was driving and rear ended a car at a red light. My friend severely cut his forehead when his head went into the windshield. I was caught drinking on a Scouting trip and was almost expelled from Scouting. I got a DWI when I was a senior. Each time I was in trouble my mother and others would point to my academic and community service record and call my trouble the result of experimentation. On the other hand, my dad said I was “one of those guys that just can’t

drink.” I would spend the better part of the next two decades trying to prove him wrong.

I won an Army ROTC college scholarship and college became a struggle for survival. My life revolved around drinking and chasing girls and I quickly lost my scholarship. My drinking led to arrests, cadet punishment and an investigation into my suitability for commissioning. I was found “unfit for active duty” and commissioned into the Army Reserves.

A pattern emerged that carried me through the final seven years of my drinking. I stopped long enough to successfully complete the Officers’ Basic Course and performed well enough that I was eventually placed on active duty. The hard-drinking military lifestyle fit me well. I was stationed in Korea. Heavy drinking was accepted. People moved frequently making it difficult to get identified as a problem drinker. My behavior at a party got me referred to the Army’s alcohol treatment program. I was introduced to A.A. It didn’t stick. In Desert Storm I saw horrific scenes. I obeyed orders and did not drink. I planned to continue this after the war but my resolution failed. My bottom rapidly approached. I transferred to Washington, DC. More car accidents and another DWI. My last drunk. The Army would no longer tolerate my drinking. My lawyer said A.A. would help with the judge. I didn’t think I had a drinking problem but I was lonely and had nowhere else to spend my free time. I thought soldiers could not have a drinking problem. It was such a part of our culture and my identity. Thankfully, I went to enough meetings and heard sober fighter pilots and even a retired lieutenant general talk about being sober A.A.s. Six months in, I had a moment of clarity. I was an alcoholic, one of those “guys who couldn’t drink.”

I found a USAF major to be my sponsor. A.A. carried me until I realized I was an alcoholic and needed to work the Steps, which I did, and had a powerful spiritual experience. A.A. became my life. I moved to Ft. Bragg and joined the Airborne. I was one of the “cool guys,” but without alcohol. I was worried about the wreckage of the past and my security clearance. My sponsor said the Army was more worried about “the guys that are still

drinking.” He was right. I have since married and have moved six times and deployed to combat three times.

Everywhere I have gone there was an A.A. meeting. In Baghdad in 2005 I heard a familiar voice behind me. I turned and saw my first sponsor. Us military A.A.s are a Fellowship inside a fraternity. As our text says, “...you will surely meet some of us as you trudge the Road of Happy Destiny.”

U.S. Navy

**“Today my life is truly filled with grace.”**

I grew up as a scared, skinny kid, and everyone made fun of me. Then I went to college and discovered my savior —alcohol. On the outside I became “a somebody” but on the inside I was “a nobody”— I was still the terrified little kid. I was to spend the next 25 years drinking, trying desperately to look good on the outside, and if I couldn’t look good at least I don’t look bad.

After college I joined the U.S. Navy and became a carrier pilot. I flew with hangovers, I flew drunk and I flew in blackouts. I made two trips to Vietnam. To top it off I hated flying! Oh, I loved the image, but I was terrified of flying.

Eventually even I knew something was wrong. Many times I asked myself, “Are you an alcoholic?” The answer was always “NO,” because I didn’t look like my alcoholic mother or father, or my brother who ended up on skid row. Yes, I drank too much, but all I had to do was get control of my drinking and then I would be OK. Finally I was drinking just to survive, not to feel good. I was also desperately searching for God. I was baptized three times in three different churches. Each time I felt a peace that lasted several weeks only to return to drinking, pain, shame and guilt.

I always felt separate, different, lonely, afraid, not a part of, outside looking in, and didn’t belong. Somehow I was still able to look good on the outside but on the inside I was dying. I was doing things I didn’t want to do, with people I didn’t

want to be with, in places I didn't want to go and I could not stop. I was very depressed and suicidal. My home life was a shambles. I earned a masters degree in counseling. As a result I was assigned to be the commanding officer of the Navy Alcoholism Treatment Center in San Diego, CA. I quite drinking two weeks before I took command, not because I was an alcoholic but because I believed it would be unethical to run a treatment program and drink. Denial? —I think so. While there I attended a conference on alcoholism and had a “spiritual experience”— at the end of a meditation training I acknowledged that I was an alcoholic and my life changed forever.

However, at six months sober I was in deep emotional pain. I called my sponsor and told him I was leaving A.A. I had taken the Twelve Steps, made coffee, set up meetings, swept floors, and was going to five meetings a week, nothing was working. My sponsor asked, “Is it OK for you in your soul, to be an alcoholic?” I screamed, “Hell no it's not OK! Every member of my family is an alcoholic. I'm a self-made man, a combat carrier pilot and a U.S. Navy captain. I am a success and I will not be like the rest of my family who were all failures!” Then I started to cry uncontrollably. At the age of 45 I was a suicidal mass of fear and insecurity hidden in a uniform and a mask of arrogance and egotism.

My sponsor then said, “The longest journey you will ever have to make is from your head to your heart. If you leave today you will become just like your family, who were drunks. If you stay you can become everything they weren't, which is a sober, caring, loving and giving husband, father, and friend.” At that point my moment of grace arrived. In my soul of souls it became OK for me to be an alcoholic,

At 12 years sober dark, deeply disturbing memories of combat in Vietnam were coming to the surface and I did not want to face them. I was very close to drinking. My sponsor gave me clear-cut directions and through hours of writing and sharing with my sponsor I addressed those issues and today I am at total peace with them.

At 26 years sober my life could not be better. I have taken the Steps several times, I sponsor, go on

spiritual retreats, make coffee, and answer phones at the A.A. central office. I found my God in A.A. and I did not have to be baptized; a God that loves me exactly as I am, whether I am at my worst or whether I am at my best. My marriage is in its 43rd year and my wife tells me that she loves me more that she can say and that her trust in me is profound. Today my life is truly filled with Grace.

U.S. Marine Corps

**“. . . I felt at home.  
I felt that these were my people.”**

I was tricked into it: My first A.A. meeting. I was working as the unit chaplain at the Third Marine Aircraft Wing in El Toro, California. The unit was preparing for a six-month deployment to the Persian Gulf, and I was plotting ways to have access to alcohol during the month-long sea journey from San Diego to Kuwait. As a Catholic chaplain, I knew that I would have in my custody a sizeable supply of altar wine for the duration of the deployment. I had augmented my wine order by 200 percent, just in case some of the bottles “broke” during the transit. I insisted that the cases of wine be “secured” in my stateroom, since it was well known that Marines and sailors get “thirsty” during a long Pacific transit.

As the departure date approached, I began to feel anxious. I had never gone more than twenty-four hours without a drink for the previous twenty years. And this deployment thing was forcing me to take risks that made me uncomfortable.

About two months prior to the departure date, my commanding officer approached me with an opportunity for a weeklong training session in Washington, DC. I seized the opportunity to travel to the nation’s capital on the government’s dime.

The week in Washington was dedicated to the training of senior enlisted and officer personnel in the dangers of abusive relationships within our military families, such as spouse abuse, child abuse, drug abuse, sex abuse, food abuse, and alcohol abuse. We were directed to attend at least three meetings of Twelve Step groups during the

week. The only group that I could remotely relate to was the one with “alcohol” in the title.

I soon found myself at my first A.A. meeting. It was an ordinary meeting with ordinary people just like me. Some of them told blood-curdling accounts of involvement in fatal traffic accidents. Others spoke of losing jobs, spouses, lovers. None of the stories was mine. I’d never been arrested. Never lost a job. My drinking, for the better part of two decades, had been in private, secret, shame-filled isolation. But, in that first A.A. meeting, I felt at home. I felt that these were my people. I believed that my story had been, at some time in their lives, their story.

When I returned to California later that week, I committed myself to the program. I went to sixty meetings in half that number of days. I begged another A.A. to be my sponsor and to put me through the Twelve Steps before I deployed to Kuwait. And that he did.

The deployment was great. As the only Catholic priest assigned to cover an Amphibious Readiness Group, I spent many hours riding a helicopter among the three ships, doing what chaplains do. On each ship I was able to identify other Twelve Steppers to hold a meeting with, if ever so humble. One ship had an “out of weight standard” sailor in Overeaters Anonymous. We would read the A.A. Preamble, share our stories, recite the Lord’s Prayer, and call it a meeting. I was ever grateful to find another person who, like myself, admitted to his powerlessness and surrendered daily to the God of his understanding.

The altar wine that I’d planned to store in my stateroom was turned over to a fellow chaplain for safekeeping. I shared with him the nature of my disease and was relieved to learn that he was a member of Al-Anon.

During the four months we were encamped on the Iraqi border, I was never able to identify other members of the program. Though I could have managed access to alcohol during that time, I never chose to do so. However, there were times when the only “meeting” I could attend consisted of me, alone, reciting the prayers I’d learned in the program. I would close my eyes and imag-

ine myself in any one of the many rooms where I'd encountered other alcoholics. And I knew that there were so many other alcoholics around the world praying those same prayers at the very instant I prayed them in the sands of the Arabian Desert.

I returned to California after nearly seven months in the desert and on the high seas. I enjoyed returning to the rooms of A.A. throughout Orange County.

Several months after my return home, during the very week of my first anniversary in the program, I received a sobering telephone call from my commanding officer. A promotion board for the rank of Commander had recently met. There had never been a moment's doubt in my mind that I would be selected for promotion, since my official record of service was near perfect. My record had gone before the board.

But the voice of my commanding officer was darkly solemn. "Tom," he groaned, "the promotion list has come out, and your name is not on it." I have no recollection of anything said after that. I am sure there were consoling words and pious platitudes. And I am sure I said the "stiff-upper-lip" stuff that good sports are supposed to say. But my spirits tanked. Literally. For the next few weeks I was an emotional wreck. I could not eat. I could not sleep. I began to have suicidal thoughts, which I had never had before. I went to the Family Service Center on base to seek counsel. I moved through my daily activities like a zombie, wondering how God could let this happen to me. I had spent a year ardently following the principles of the A.A. program. I had done the Twelve Steps. I had begun to clear up the wreckage of my past. I had made amends. I was doing everything that my sponsor suggested. But I felt betrayed and depressed.

One afternoon I attended a men's meeting near the Marine Base. All the faces in the room were familiar to me, except for one. Off to the side of the rest of the group was a little old man with a long white beard and a toothless smile, sitting there silently. I shared my story with my fellow alcoholics. I shared my feelings of betrayal and my fearful depression, my voice cracking as I spoke. When I

finished sharing, we sat in silence. All of us, except the white-haired stranger.

And then he spoke in a raspy, throaty voice, "Tom, you're a good guy." I nodded and smiled. "And, Tom," he continued, "I suspect that you're gonna die one day and go to heaven." Several of the guys began to snicker. Silence, and then he continued. "And, when you get to heaven, Tom, the Lord's gonna be there to ask you a question . . . just one single question. He's not gonna ask how much money you made in life, and he's not gonna ask where you lived. And he's not gonna ask what your rank was in the Navy. He's not even gonna ask if you were in the Navy." The Marines began to bark and howl. The old man continued, "Tom, when you die and get to the pearly gates, the Lord's gonna ask you one single question. He's gonna ask: Tom, did you take care of my kids?"

The old geezer's raspy voice grew silent. The Marines fell still. We all sat listening to the silence impregnate the air, and then we all stood to recite the Lord's Prayer.

I went back to that room for another year, and never saw the bearded one again. I asked some of the regulars who he was. No one knew. Where he came from, no one knew. Where he went, no one knew.

But an old-time member of Alcoholics Anonymous had right-sized my life that day. He did so with a single question. "Am I taking care of God's kids?"

U.S. Navy

**"I feel so fortunate to have met brothers and sisters in sobriety all over the world."**

I joined the Navy in September 1983, when I had been sober for about sixteen months. I had wanted to join the Navy for several years, but couldn't imagine going through boot camp without a drink. Sobriety in Alcoholics Anonymous gave me the freedom to go anywhere and do anything I wanted to do.

I did boot camp in Orlando, Florida, and received specialized training in Great Lakes,



Illinois. Then I was assigned to the USS Acadia AD-42, a destroyer tender, just as the Navy was beginning to allow women to be stationed aboard. I was one of about forty women out of a crew of some 1,500 sailors. When I left some three years later, there were about 400 women on board. The time in boot camp and Navy school made it easy to stay sober as there wasn't much booze, if any, around. But onboard ship, at least in port, it seemed that alcohol played a major role in many sailors' lives.

I was very fortunate there were other recovering alcoholics onboard, and we sought each other out and had meetings; and even though I was the only female, this group became my support, as I was for them. During my time onboard, I was deployed on two Western Pacific cruises. Between the first and second deployment I got married, which made leaving again even harder. The times at sea would become lonely, even with the support of my shipmates in recovery. Mail calls were few and far between. If I received a letter from home, I would carry it around for days in my pocket, reading it again and again. I never strayed far from my Big Book or Twelve and Twelve. The words of those who had gone before me gave me great comfort and hope. I would often write out a phrase from the Big Book like "we pause, when agitated or doubtful, and ask for the right thought or direction." I would tape it to the ceiling of my rack and read it before the lights went out at night and again when they went on in the morning. The reminder that God was with me, even out in the middle of the ocean, encouraged me. In the Twelve and Twelve in Step Three, it talks about how critical being dependent on a Higher Power is. It gives examples of those in the services during WW II. It says that often the soldiers fared better than those in recovery at home because they were forced to draw strength from their Higher Power.

I also stayed in contact with the ship's chaplain so that he knew I was available to help others if he saw the need arise. Getting out of myself was often a way to forget about my troubles and loneliness. I went to church services too, any way that I could find to connect with God was helpful.

When my ship hit port in such places as

the Philippines, Japan, Hong Kong, or Korea, I searched out meetings while a lot of my shipmates hit the bars. I also traveled into the Persian Gulf to repair the USS Stark that was hit by a stray Iraqi missile, in which thirty sailors lost their lives. Traveling through the Straights of Hormuz was scary. We were the first ship with women onboard to enter the Gulf. Our unarmed ship was flanked by destroyers, and we remained at general quarters for most of the day. The tension that prevailed was constant for the entire time in the Gulf as we spent several weeks there in Bahrain. Again, I drew on my Higher Power for courage and peace of mind through prayer, meditation, and reading my books. Fortunately, there were about eight or ten local sober people in Bahrain who hung together and had meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous daily. I feel so fortunate to have met brothers and sisters in sobriety all over the world. What a joy! And just like here at home, I was glad to socialize with these folks outside the meetings too. I'm sure that as a result, I got to do and see much more than most of my other shipmates. I feel so blessed to have these experiences in sobriety, and I will never forget hearing the "language of the heart" in so many places around the world.

I finished my enlistment in September 1987 still sober, and have remained sober ever since. I'm sure that as with those who went before me, my sobriety was strengthened by my military experience. So, to my fellow soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and all others away from home, keep the faith and trust in your Higher Power for courage and strength. God's grace is with us for the asking and each day sober is a miraculous gift from God.

U.S. Navy

**"My mind would convince me that next time it would be different."**

"By a vote of 3 to 0 you are to be separated from the United States Navy, with a General Discharge Under Honorable Conditions." Those were the last words uttered by a panel of three senior officers which presided over my Separation Hearing. After 18 years of honorable service to our nation, the

multiple legal consequences of my alcohol-sponsored debacles brought my professional military career to a screeching halt.

That career began 22 years ago when I enlisted in the Air Force. My drinking commenced shortly thereafter. I was a military policeman. I did well and accelerated admirably through the enlisted ranks in a short time. During that period, I developed an interest in the law enforcement profession. I began my undergraduate studies in Criminology and had aspirations to become a civilian police officer after completion of my first six years of active duty. My drinking habits grew right along, too. By then, I was a regular binge drinker. I would drink to escape any “troubles” at home, work, or life in general. My drinking bouts were now frequently ending with episodes of alcoholic amnesia. I was the bitter, angry type of drunk, which meant my fear of not knowing what happened in the last twenty-four hours was an unnerving and alarming feeling. Yet, my mind would convince me that next time it would be different. Pure insanity!

After successfully becoming a police officer in a large metropolitan area, I earned my first DUI charge and was immediately fired. There I was, a cop behind the same bars I was placing other criminals behind the day before. . . how ironic! Because I was well liked, I had plenty of emotional and financial support from family, friends and former colleagues. Although that support helped me get back on my feet, it certainly did not help me to investigate whether I had a drinking problem. Before long I was consuming alcohol again. Fortunately, I had kept military ties as an Air Force Reservist and was allowed to resume active duty status after my arrest. However, I still carried enough shame and guilt over having been arrested and losing my police job that, although drinking again, I set out to redeem myself by finishing college and being rehired as a law enforcement officer. I achieved both.

While I was on this self-propelled drive to succeed, I also entertained switching from the Air Force to the Navy, but as a commissioned officer. I had always dreamed of flying jets for the Air Force, but I was too old at the time to be considered for

their flying program. The Navy, however, afforded me the opportunity. Not only did I become an officer, but a Naval Flight Officer. To this day I have no idea how I managed to complete flight school while actively drinking. I did not pass with flying colors, but I did earn the coveted “Wings of Gold.” I was selected to fly among the tactical, carrier aircraft community of aviators. However, being an aviator in the military, especially in the Navy, meant I was also part of an established drinking society. My association with alcohol became a way of life. Everyone in my squadron wanted to drink with me and that made me feel special. In fact, my drinking popularity got me appointed as the squadron’s DAPA (Drug and Alcohol Prevention Advisor) by the commanding officer. Insane, but to the Navy I was the perfect fit for the job. I was a regular at the Officers’ Club and always expected to be there by fellow aviators of all ranks. The bartenders always had my drink ready for me — top-shelf Scotch on the rocks. They even had a personalized glass for me. The problem in a drinking community of this kind was that it is hard to identify the problem drinkers. I was just like the others — a heavy drinker. And since I had no problems in work performance, it never mattered. That meant I was a functional alcoholic.

Soon after I returned from my first carrier deployment, I was arrested for DUI. Shame, guilt, fear and embarrassment came to visit me again. Now when an officer gets arrested for DUI, it is a hundred times worse, an instant career killer. Somehow, however, that likeable character and reputation I earned kept me practically unscathed and back in the cockpit. Because seven years had passed since my last arrest, I thought it was just another isolated incident and that I still did not have a drinking problem. My pride kept me blind from seeing that I had reached the height of my progression in alcoholism, that insanity had set in, that I had mastered denial. I was not sent to treatment. I again managed to escape a conviction, get my driving privileges back; basically, not a whole lot happened. The worst consequence, if that, is that I was removed from my duties as DAPA (that was a no brainer). Oddly, my formal training in that position did not help me to examine whether

I was developing a serious problem with alcohol either. Before long, I was once more drinking like a champ. I felt as if it were required in my line of work. My peers were happy to see me back in the groove. Yes, as it turned out, the groove back into yet two more subsequent DUIs after I had moved on from flying tours of duty. Back-to-back convictions. My life was in shambles. I entered a severe depression. The emotional pain, desperation and hopelessness were unbearable. A plethora of personal chaos, precipitated by my dangerous drinking, brought me to my knees seeking the help of God because, in essence, He was all I had left in my life. I knew this was it. Time to say goodbye to everyone I knew, my job and everything else I had. I entertained suicide — I wanted to die! But, in the midst of all that incomprehensible demoralization, I experienced a brief moment of clarity. I said to myself “enough is enough, this stops now!” It was at that moment that I sought out help from A.A. Now, like most people, I had a general idea about A.A., which is to say I knew what the letters stood for and that it was where drunks met, but that was the extent of it. Although the Navy finally sent me to treatment, it was through A.A. that I found and achieved sobriety.

As Robert Frost eloquently put it, “how many times does something have to happen to you before something occurs to you?” Well, I am convinced that the collection of DUIs I amassed through my career as a professional alcoholic were instrumental in my decision to surrender and become a member of A.A. Thanks to A.A. I not only got sober, but I have learned to live contently in sobriety. A.A. helped me to endure the ordeal of being discharged from the military, and with the daily difficulties life brings about every day. It has helped me to reclaim my mind, body and soul. It helped me to deflate my arrogant, aviator ego and embrace a life filled with humility. It has given me back the life I once enjoyed, the life I knew before I befriended King Alcohol. My life now feels purposeful and meaningful. I miss wearing a uniform, but I am proud of my service to America and the wonderful memories.

Today I give back by helping other service members and fellow veterans who may be suffer-

ing from the deadly disease of alcoholism. I openly share my story in hopes of preventing others from going through what I went through. The mystery imbedded in the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous has become the most rewarding experience of my life. To know that no matter how difficult things may be, all will be OK. That is an amazing and serene place to be. God is certainly doing for me what I could not do for myself.

U.S. Army

**“Even if there is but one other person,  
we need to stay connected.”**

When I got sober almost two years ago, I had no idea how my life would change so quickly. In a few months, things began looking really good, I finished college, had a good job, and was working through the Steps. Then, as I was beginning to really get a handle on my life, I got a telephone call from a sergeant that changed everything.

I had joined the United States Army Reserve half a decade prior and hadn't really done anything with it. I was constantly on the verge of discharge due to my wild binge drinking, but I managed to hang on somehow. Not even sixty days sober, I received that telephone call that many service members dread. I was to be deployed to Iraq. I thought my life was over, that I would relapse, that I would die, either from drink or enemy contact on the sands of Iraq. However, none of that has happened and, while it is not easy being here, I'm here to tell you that it is possible to stay sober in war.

By the time I finally got on active duty, I had about six months sober, and was unsure how I would deal with not going to a meeting every night. I packed lots of literature and, of course, the Big Book. I mobilized with a unit that is not my own, so I did not know any of the other soldiers when I arrived. I was embarrassed to ask my leaders to excuse me from training to attend A.A. meetings, so I just kept it to myself. For a newly sober person it was difficult going without meetings and the Fellowship. I stopped reading and got lost in my Army training. I started to feel like I was losing

everything, and so I reached out. God willing, the Fellowship was there for me.

My message is simple. Getting and staying sober is tough, and doing it alone is even harder, as we all know. Many have tried to do it alone, and many have failed. As alcoholics, we need to work with others like us to stay sober. Even if there is but one other person, we need to stay connected.

A few months later, we touched down in sunny Iraq. I had a year sober now, and was certain I could endure. Pretty soon however, it was over 120°F in the shade, and stress was at an all time high. My unit and I faced enemy attacks with explosives and bullets, and we were stretched to the edge of sanity. I watched as my peers turned to alcohol to deal with the stress. I watched how whenever we had special holidays and breaks, alcohol was served up as if it was the only privilege we got as soldiers. I felt left out when people were drinking. I felt alone.

Then God reached out to me, and told me to connect with the Fellowship back home via the Internet, phone calls, and writing letters. And it worked. As a deployed alcoholic I find that just simply reading the words in the Big Book is not enough. To stay sober in Iraq, I have to maintain my relationships with the Fellowship, and that's the bottom line.

My advice to any soldier who is either deploying or already in the war zone is to find at least one other alcoholic that you can talk to. Even if they aren't a formal sponsor, just sharing your experiences as an alcoholic is extremely beneficial for the both of you. Pray, read, and most important, keep those lines of communication open with other alcoholics. Without each other we are surely lost.

U.S. Army

### **“I heard a message of hope...”**

I worked hard to get to Alcoholics Anonymous. My alcoholism progressed slowly and painfully. I joined the Army right out of High School and found that drinking gave me the “liquid courage” I needed. I fit in. At first I could drink like “normal” people;

I could drink just one or two and take it or leave it. I got pregnant at 18 and married at 19. My first deployment was Desert Storm. When I came back my drinking changed. I no longer drank to fit in, I drank alone and to escape. I did this for two or three months and then just quit. I didn't think about or touch another drop of alcohol for four years.

I got off active duty in March 1992 and joined the National Guard in Texas. Two years later I moved to Maine and transferred to a unit up there. This unit was a maintenance unit and very good at what they did. They also partied as hard as they worked. My first Annual Training with them I learned very quickly how to drink again and to fit in. Those two weeks were a total two-week drunk. I didn't touch another drop the rest of the year. I did this for the first three years I was with them. Then, after drill one month, someone invited me to the Military club for a drink. At that time I was still able to drink one or two and stop. I then started having one or two drinks once a month and a two-week drunk a year. Then I got a full time job at the State HQ in 1998. I started stopping into the club after work for a drink. I was transferred to another unit for promotion in 1999 and somewhere along the line my alcoholism took control, and I was drinking every night.

From 2000-2005 I had three DUIs. I did things in blackouts that should have gotten me either busted or thrown out of the military. My CSM said he could get me a transfer to the JFHQ into an administrative position, but I would have to deploy to Iraq with them first. I did, but at MOB station my drinking was way out of control. I was able to get alcohol only once while I was in Iraq, but other than that one time, I didn't drink for a year.

When I came home in 2005, I had nightmares, paranoia, and unexplained periods of rage. My drinking started back up right where I had left off. After my third DUI I realized I had a problem. I went through the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) program at the VA, which helped some with those issues. I stopped drinking again for four years. I deployed to Afghanistan in 2009 — sober. When I returned I decided that having one drink with dinner would be ok. I was alone and one drink became two, and then a whole bottle of wine back



at my hotel. I woke the next morning with not only the physical pain (hangover) but remorse, shame, regrets. This was something new. I couldn't admit to anyone for a couple of months that I had given up over four years of sobriety for one night of stupidity. I was going through counseling to get my license back and the counselor said I had to go to one A.A. meeting. I chose a speakers meeting at the VA close to my home. I figured I could sit and listen to a bunch of people talk for an hour.

I went back the following week and have been going since. I heard a message of hope and thought, "maybe they know something I don't." I started going to other meetings and have even started opening a Monday night meeting at the VA. I have a sponsor who asked me what I wanted from A.A. I had to think for a bit and decided that I wanted to know how to live life instead of running from it. I have started to make changes in my life, actions and thinking. Life is still hard, but I'm starting to learn how to "deal with life on life's terms" and without hiding behind a drink. This program works because as long as you follow the principles, it can take as long as it takes for you to get it. There is no set time limit and really no "graduation day" for the A.A. program. I am growing and learning about myself every day. I am still in the Guard. Still have my job at the State HQ. And I am still sober, one day at a time.

U.S. Marine Corps

**"There were nights I had to walk through a blasting sand storm to get to a meeting."**

I am an active duty Marine with 24 years of service. In January 2010, I deployed to Camp Leatherneck, Afghanistan. Prior to leaving, my sponsor had reiterated to me the importance of finding a meeting once I deployed and maintaining contact with my fellowship in the United States.

Once I arrived in Afghanistan, I immediately began my search for an A.A. meeting on the camp. It took me only one day. The meeting was held in a small chapel on the eastern edge of the base. I

arrived at the meeting my customary 15 minutes early, the meeting before the meeting, and sat on one of the pews. 7:00 p.m. rolled around and no one else had showed up. I checked the schedule on the door to make sure I was at the right place. By 7:30 p.m., I was still the only person in the chapel. So I used this quiet time to reflect and strengthen my connection with my Higher Power. For the next three weeks, I went to the meeting and, again, I was the only one to show up. By this time, I was full of uncertainty, questions and self-centeredness. I kept praying to my Higher Power, asking for an indication to my next step.

On the night of my one year of sobriety, March 18th, I again went to the meeting. As I sat there in the quiet of the chapel, reading from the Twelve and Twelve, a Marine walked in and asked me if I was there for the A.A. meeting. I told him I was and he sat down across from me. We began our conversation with some idle chit chat and then started the meeting. We discussed different topics the difficulty of being away from family, loneliness, the Fellowship, and the importance of maintaining a strong contact with our Higher Power. At the end of the meeting, this Marine told me he was the person that started the meeting aboard Camp Leatherneck. He pulled a binder out of his pack and handed it to me. It was the secretary's book. He said, "Now you can continue what I started." I was completely overwhelmed. Here I was in this barren place, feeling loneliness and despair, and on a very important day of my life, I was given this commitment. I, of course, accepted it with enthusiasm, and said good-bye to the Marine. The next day, I contacted the camp chaplain and asked him if it would be possible to use the main chapel for an A.A. meeting. He immediately put the meeting on the schedule. We also changed the name to Friends of Bill. On the first night of the new meeting, we had four people show up. By the time I left Afghanistan in July 2010, there were more than 12 people regularly attending the Friends of Bill meeting twice a week. We were able to secure some literature from our home groups in the United States and even began the process of getting the meeting registered with A.A. Central.

For those who have never served in the military

and deployed to some remote country of the world, times away from family and friends can be difficult for all, but this time can be even more difficult for an alcoholic. When I arrived at Camp Leatherneck, I was sure I would meet others like me, but as the weeks went by, I became despondent and disillusioned that I would ever meet a fellow A.A. member. My faith in the program and faith in my Higher Power began to weaken. My work began to suffer. I began to isolate and have mood swings. My conversations with my fiancé became very troublesome and often did not go well. There were nights when I had to walk through a blasting sand storm to get to the meeting but I would not be deterred. As I walked through the blinding wind and sand, I said a small prayer. My time in Afghanistan would have been even more difficult had it not been for the meeting, the fellowship we built, and the strength, hope, and experience we were able to share throughout the deployment.

## U.S. Marine Corps

### **“I climbed inside a bottle . . .”**

Shortly before my 18th birthday, I received a letter from Uncle Sam which began, “Greetings!” A friend who had received the same letter and I decided to celebrate by tying one on. Somewhere in this period of insanity we called the Marine Corps recruiter, who was only too happy to hear from us. I was at this time a rather naive Texas country boy. Shortly before my 19th birthday, I arrived in Vietnam. I served with the 3rd Marine Division in the Quang Tri Province.

After finishing my enlistment, I returned home to Texas and I went to work in the oil fields “roughnecking.” I had a taste for drinking and excitement. During this period my dad took me to a VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars) dance. While there one of his cronies informed me that I “had lost my war!” I have never seen fit to enter another VFW since. I met the then love of my life, and for a while we had the American dream, the three-bedroom home, two children, cars, motorcycles, bills, etc.... Then one day I began having problems. I began to sleepwalk, and my

poor wife found me outside our home several times. Thank God she had talked me into wearing underwear. I began to have night terrors; I became wary of sleeping. Then one night I awoke to find my wife pounding me on the chest and my hands were around her neck. Shortly after I wound up in my first VA hospital. When I tried to tell anyone about Vietnam I was informed that this was not my problem. There was an influx of Vietnam veterans almost overpowering the VA, and they came up with the diagnosis post-traumatic delayed stress syndrome (PTSD).

On my second trip to a VA hospital the following year, my wife divorced me. I rocked along for a while, managing to stay employed, although drinking had become a way of life. I averaged only two to four hours of sleep a night, no matter how much I drank. I had met another lady and was fixing to marry again; my ex had remarried. I paid child support and did my best to be a good dad. One weekend I called to get my children and she informed me that her husband didn't want me to see my children. I told her I was going to put him in one of two places, "the hospital or the morgue!" By the time I got to their house, they were gone. I would have no contact with my children for 14 years.

I climbed inside a bottle and lived there for the next nine years; in and out of jail and VA hospitals, committed to a state hospital four times. I was given every diagnosis in the book — manic depressive, schizophrenic, paranoid schizophrenic, antisocial personality disorder — and finally the correct one of PTSD and garden variety drunk!

In 1985 and 1986 I spent an entire year in three VA hospitals, the last a VA domiciliary where a doctor told me I would never leave that hospital alive.

Slightly over a year later I wound up at my first A.A. meeting, more dead than alive. By the grace of God and with the help of A.A. I have been sober more than 15 years now. At two years sober, I went to a PTSD clinic, exorcised some ghosts, and began to average six or seven hours of sleep. At five years sober, my children came back into my life; I am a granddad twice now. I am employed and have been for years. I am a member of my

hometown honor guard and color guard and am finally getting some healing there. Today I am proud to be a sober veteran!

U.S. Army

**“Going to rehab was the best thing the military ever did for me.”**

I joined the military after 9/11, so being a procrastinating drunk I started basic training in 2003. Despite what many people might believe about soldiers, I had no patriotic sense of duty or a selfless desire to fight for my country. No, I was simply a scared 20-year-old kid who could not hold down a job or make the grade in college because I was too busy drinking and drugging. After some close calls and a few bad situations, I did what I always did, I ran away. I needed to “get the hell out of Dodge” and not look back, but as I would later learn: wherever I go there I am. I was looking for a geographic cure, thinking that if I could remove myself from the temptation and get myself into a disciplined, structured environment then I would become the person my parents and everyone else wanted me to be. I had no idea who I was, what I was doing or where I was going. I just knew that my life was unmanageable. I really thought that I wanted to change. However, I learned to make adjustments so I could keep doing what I'd been doing, expecting a different result.

I got to my first unit in January 2004 and learned we were deploying to Iraq in less than two months, so I hit the bottle hard and got in some trouble, including a night in jail for public intoxication. My chain of command saw it as blowing off steam or jitters before going to war so there were no real consequences. I thought I would be more focused and prepared for war but once we got there we found out that we could trade water and food for Egyptian rum, that cough syrup mixed very well with soda, and that pain killers were handed out like candy.

After we returned home from Iraq in 2005, we all had a lot of stress and frustration to release and my drinking got heavier. I was drinking for break-

fast, lunch and dinner. I was drinking and driving almost every day and inevitably I was arrested for a DUI in August 2005. Again my chain of command was lenient on me and sent me along to my next unit overseas. I was more than happy about another geographic cure and this time it was to Germany and I could not wait to drink my way around Europe. I quickly got involved with the wrong crowd and was not only drinking heavily but I was also using drugs. My life was still spiraling out of control and like many drunks I was not prepared to hit bottom. I got arrested by German police for reckless drinking and driving in February 2006, six months after my first DUI. My life was over; I thought I would leave the military in disgrace with a dishonorable discharge. I had let down my family, my country and myself. I knew I needed to stop drinking but I didn't know what I would do or what was going to happen to me. My chain of command gave me a lawful order not to drink and sent me to the Alcohol Substance Abuse Program (ASAP) where I met with a counselor, and for the first time in my life I made the honest mistake of being honest. I told him everything and after two hours, he looked at me and strongly recommended I come back and see him on a regular basis. I was ok with that, it felt good to get some things off my chest, but I was still not sure if the military would keep me around much longer. By the grace of God I was not kicked out of the military, instead I was severely punished and sentenced to attend a six-week inpatient alcohol/drug treatment facility. Going to rehab was the best thing the military ever did for me and I'm grateful for it. I was introduced to an amazing staff of counselors and A.A. members who helped turn my life around.

After rehab, I did what was suggested: I went to meetings, got a sponsor, worked the Steps, and got involved with service. I gave back what was so freely given to me and continued to work with the ASAP program carrying the message of A.A. to other soldiers, civilians and family members. My military career started progressing along with my life and I was promoted up the ranks and entrusted with more responsibility. I was deployed twice to Afghanistan while sober and was successful with

the help of my home group, online meetings, the Big Book and the Grapevine; one day at a time.

## U.S. Marine Corps

### **“I head into combat areas with spiritual tools and principles . . .”**

Loaded down with six months of training, my sea bag, M4 service rifle and everything else on the gear list, I left Camp Pendleton, California, and headed to Southern Afghanistan with a company of combat-ready Marines. I was ready and eager to launch out on the next phase of my development. As a platoon commander with three other combat deployments, it has always been satisfying for me to know that I am surrounded by the best and brightest warriors America has to offer. As a sober member of Alcoholics Anonymous, with 16 years of Recovery, Unity and Service under my belt, it is also comforting to know that I head into combat armed with spiritual tools and principles that will enable me to stay focused on the task at hand.

Alcoholics are not a rare commodity in the military, but recovered alcoholics are sometimes hard to find, especially in a combat zone. The normal operating procedure I used in Iraq was to hang flyers in high visibility areas asking for fellow “friends of Bill.” My pick has struck gold on numerous occasions, finding fellowship and recovery in the hardscrabble camps of Fallujah, Haditha and Ramadi. Connecting with the chaplain and asking for the use of his tent for an A.A. meeting has never been a problem and I suspected the base in Afghanistan would yield some fellow members and perhaps there would even be an established meeting.

Upon arrival into theater we were sent to a remote base in the south that had not previously been occupied and was in the heart of the fight. The operational tempo kept us all busy and on edge and it was a month before I was able to reserve a tent and post a flyer announcing a weekly Wednesday night meeting. Following direction from my sponsor, I knew I needed to remain in fit spiritual condition, so each morning

I found some time to sit quietly, read a passage from *Daily Reflections* and ask my Higher Power for help. I know that those morning disciplines in Afghanistan kept the four horsemen away, and spiritually connecting each day made the rigors of combat — and yearning for home — more bearable.

As the weeks passed, I was the only member of the Wednesday Night, Camp Dwyer A.A. meeting. I trudged forward with my commitment, despite secretly wondering what the point was. I was grateful to have the time to myself but asked myself why should I continue holding a meeting that no one attended? Every few days I would check on the flyer I had posted, watching it grow brittle and sun-soaked. It was an excellent reminder of the program, the willingness required to hang in there and the importance of suiting up and showing up.

On an extended patrol to pick up supplies from a base up north, I stumbled upon a similar brittle, sun-soaked sign hanging on the chow hall door that called out “Camp Leatherneck A.A. meeting Wed 1900 at the Chapel.” After realizing it was Wednesday, I immediately got A.A. goose-bumps. I arrived 30 minutes early and sat alone reading. Fifteen minutes later a fellow Marine walked in and looked at me with eyes as wide as the Liberty Bell. There was a moment of silence and the customary greeting followed by a hopeful, “Are you here for the meeting?” Replying yes, I reached out for a handshake and was pulled in for a hug. Tony had been looking for a fellow member for two months, showing up each and every Wednesday with little contact. His spirit and dedication was yet another reminder of the importance of the fellowship and the willingness and effort required to stay serene one day at a time. After hours of sharing, he and I agreed to meet for breakfast before I left the wire and headed back “home.”

It states in our Big Book, “The main problem of the alcoholic centers in his mind, rather than in his body.” Even with no alcohol available, Afghanistan put my disease to the test. Every so often I found myself thinking about a fake future with little hope, or a regrettable past that I could have lived differently. But my experience in Afghanistan also taught me an invaluable lesson, I know that I no



longer need to be afraid of being away from the physical fellowship of A.A. My faith in a Higher Power and trust in this program has been a source of inspiration and strength. And sitting alone in that tent each Wednesday night week after week I realized I wasn't truly alone, proving to me again that it truly does work if I work it.

## Canadian Armed Forces

### **“That seed of hope that was planted . . . began to grow.”**

Hi, my name is Carolyn, and I'm an alcoholic. I grew up in a home and my own drinking began early and escalated quickly. Among my peers, I was considered a “natural leader” when I was not seeking attention by getting drunk and doing crazy things. When I was 13 I attended a New Year's Eve party where there was a bunch of army cadets. There was a lot of drinking at this party and I wasn't the only one doing crazy things. I had found where I belonged and I joined the cadet corps the following week. The next four years were full of slipping grades in school, youth detention centers, and outstanding achievements as a cadet. Drinking was the bright spot in my life.

When I was 17, I joined the Canadian Armed Forces. My original enrollment was for the military police, but in the bar, the night before I took my oath, some of my new friends said that it would be a disaster if I joined the MPS and encouraged me to change my trade to Mobile Support Equipment Operator.

I was a truck driver and I had never had a driver's license. The first time we went on an exercise someone told me to drive a two-and-a-half-ton truck. I was too embarrassed to say I didn't know how, so I just pretended I knew what I was doing. I was to repeat this response whenever I didn't know what to do, in all areas of my life, for many years to come. Drinking seemed to be central to military life. We had regimental drinks, drinking contests and drinking games. When someone was promoted they bought a round of drinks, and when someone “rang the bell” another round was

coming. The junior ranks mess was the first place I reported for duty on every posting. I won praise for my hard work and I received many awards as well as an advanced promotion to master corporal. My drinking escapades were considered “antics” and won me as much status as any of my hard work did. In fact, I was elected president of the junior ranks mess, which meant I was in charge of the bar. I felt immune to serious consequences for my drinking because I hadn’t suffered any yet.

My drinking continued to escalate, and over the next two years the Canadian Armed Forces sent me to treatment for alcoholism three times. I called it a “spin dry” and didn’t take it seriously. It didn’t occur to me that I needed to do anything different, except not get caught. Then came “the big one”: in a blackout I stole one of our battalion’s trucks and had an accident; well actually, I flattened a light standard. I was in a lot of trouble; my blood alcohol was 0.32 and I went to jail. Finally I was put on counseling and probation for “misuse of alcohol,” which, according to the Canadian Forces Administration orders, is the final attempt to save a member’s career; I was 20 years old. For the next five years I served only part time in the reserves. I tried desperately to control my drinking while on military property; I was miserable and failing badly. Many well-meaning people covered up for me to prevent the dishonorable discharge that was looming. I left the Canadian Armed Forces for one reason and one reason only — I couldn’t control my drinking.

The next several years were a torturous cycle of building my life up in new city after new city, always followed by the horror of watching it all fall down around me. I eventually hit my bottom. I couldn’t face another day of my life, and through the grace of God I called Alcoholics Anonymous rather than end it all. I had no hope, no faith, and I was incapable of trusting anyone. My first three months in A.A. I was full of fear and unable or unwilling to tell anyone what was really going on. I drank again and God saw fit (in spite of me) to bring me back to A.A. This time around I still didn’t have much hope or faith, but I learned to “act as if.” I learned not to pretend that I knew what to do when I didn’t, as I always had, but to fol-

low suggestions and take action, even if I couldn't believe it would make a difference.

I attended meetings every day. I found a home group and a sponsor, and I began my journey through the Twelve Steps. I started to feel excited about life. I hadn't picked up any hobbies while I was drinking so I had a lot of time on my hands, and I started doing service work. I began to form real relationships with people in A.A. and that seed of hope that was planted around Step Three began to grow. Through Steps Four through Nine I discovered a new world; I formed a new relationship with the God of my understanding, and I gained a new relationship with myself. Steps Ten, Eleven and Twelve are the gifts that allow me to build on what I have been given and to give some away to the next suffering alcoholic. I've only been sober for 18 months, but even the worst moments have been much better than my life was before; and in the best moments, I have experienced a joy of living I had never known was possible.

U.S. Army

### **'But I owe it all to A.A.'**

I am an alcoholic and a Vietnam vet. I was 14 when I took my first drink; I got drunk, blacked out, passed out and had a horrific hangover for days. But I don't remember even thinking about not drinking ever again. For the next four years I drank all I could when I could. I had some minor scrapes with the law, eventually quitting high school and enlisting in the Army. That was September 1964.

After basic, AIT, helicopter maintenance and everything about the M16 and M60 machine guns, I left for Vietnam in May of 1965. I was a crew-chief/doorunner on a Huey gun ship. When I returned to the states, a year later I was drinking every day and blacking out regularly. I never knew when I started drinking if I was going to blackout or not. But that didn't stop me from drinking and I drank like that for the next 22 years.

I eventually ended up homeless, unemployed, broke, on my way to prison and suicide was an option. I had collected three ex-wives, twelve

arrests and too many jobs to count. At that point I went to the VA hospital for a 28-day detox, then on to a residential recovery home for another 92 days. After that first 120 days it was obvious to me that I was an alcoholic, that all the troubles in my life were results of my drinking. A.A. taught me that I didn't have to not drink forever — I had to just not drink one day at a time.

I still had a felony and six misdemeanors in court. Because I spent 120 days in recovery and had been sober for seven months the DA dropped four of the misdemeanors and dropped the felony to a misdemeanor. I was sentenced to five months in county instead of two years in prison. After being in jail less than four days I was released on sheriff's parole — one of the many miracles to occur in my life. That was more than 22 years ago and I have lived happy, joyous and free ever since.

A couple of years ago I came to realize, I have been suffering with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) all these years. I have been in the VA health care system for a couple of years. We are working on those issues now, with great success. But I owe it all to A.A.; because A.A. allowed me to live long enough to find out that I have PTSD. I am forever grateful to Alcoholics Anonymous and all the marvelous, wonderful people.

U.S. Army

**“Giving up is not an option.”**

I am a husband, a father, a son, a brother, an infantry officer in the United States Army, and above all, a recovering alcoholic. I aspired to be all of the above except an alcoholic. It took me 20 years of trying to prove that I could drink like a normal person, only to come to the profound conclusion that I had the disease of alcoholism. During these 20 years I have gone through high school, college, had a few civilian jobs, fought on the front lines of Iraq and Afghanistan, married and started a family. Through all of this alcohol has been a constant in my life.

I took my first drink when I was 12 years old. My friend's older brother had a party at his house

and all the high school kids were drinking. I remember very little about that night, but looking back I realized I suffered my first blackout, my first hangover, and told my first lie to cover up my drinking. This pattern would follow me for 20 years until the day I surrendered. When my parents found out I told them I would never drink again, but somehow I ended up doing it all over again the next weekend.

In high school I used alcohol to fit in and eventually I gravitated to the outsiders. I hung out with an extreme crowd who liked to party and drink. It never affected my grades and I did very well. I played sports, was an honor student, but was always rebellious. I got caught drinking in school a couple of times but nothing serious ever happened. My senior year I would come to school drunk almost every day.

College was no different. I hung around with the same crowd and became a daily drinker. I made sure to surround myself with other heavy drinkers so I wouldn't stand out. I had some health problems due to drinking but brushed them off as the cost of doing business. I barely graduated and before I left I received my first DUI, which I brushed off as bad luck.

After college, still drinking heavily, I entered the real world. I went through two jobs and performed poorly due to excessive drinking. I would always quit before I got fired. September 11th occurred and I found a new purpose, to go and fight the War on Terror. I figured that the Army would give me a chance to fight for my country and at the same time give me the discipline I so desperately needed.

I enlisted in early 2002 and was put through basic training, advanced individual training, and airborne school. I almost got kicked out of airborne school for drinking, but another lie and I was right on track. When I got to my first unit we immediately deployed to Afghanistan. I was scared and excited all at once. I made it through and also got a taste of combat.

When I came back I made up for nine months without booze in about one weekend. It continued for the next five months until I was deployed again,

this time to Iraq. The fighting was heavy and I saw young men, who I called friends, lose their lives. I will never forget what happened over there and I tried to drink it away when I came home.

I was selected for Officer Candidate School, graduated at the top of my class, went on to advanced schooling and was assigned to another unit that was set to deploy. I did another two deployments with this unit and continued my drinking in between. The fighting, the family stress, and the drinking were starting to take its toll. My next assignment was a selection to more advanced schooling and would eventually land me in recovery.

I received my second DUI while I was attending this school. The Army came down hard on me and I was served with a reprimand that most called a "career ender." I fell into a deep depression and wanted to end my life. I felt like a failure to my family and to myself. Everything I worked for had collapsed.

When I came home from jail I saw my one-year-old daughter and she smiled. She didn't know her father was a drunk, had just spent the night in jail, and had just ruined his career. She just saw the man who had always held her and cared for her. It was at that moment I conceded to my innermost self that I was an alcoholic. I broke down in tears and asked God to help me. He gave me the daily reprieve that I needed to find my way into the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous.

It has been a year and a half since my last drink and things have gotten better. I now deal with life on life's terms. It has not been easy and I still am facing the consequences of my actions. The Army tried to eliminate me from service due to my actions, but through doing the next right thing I have been blessed to have been retained for service. Things have not gone my way but I continue to work them God's way. I work the Steps to the best of my ability. Even though I am currently on my fifth deployment and there is no A.A. here, I still work Step Eleven and read my Big Book every day. I have a long way to go, but with the help of my Higher Power there is nothing I cannot accomplish. As we say in the infantry "Giving up is not an option."

**“I have a peacefulness inside that I have never known.”**

As with most alcoholics a litany of my alcohol related incidents from first drink to last could fill volumes. The path that got me here seems less important than the life I have now thanks to the grace of God, friends and Alcoholics Anonymous. The story would start when I was 15 years old and finish when I was 41. My road is littered with the usual casualties of addiction, including friends and loved ones, self-respect and dignity. Through self-will and stubbornness I completed college, graduate school and eight years of post doctorate training. During this time I also joined the Navy. The assets that allowed me to be successful in education and the military (self-will and stubbornness) would become my biggest obstacle to recovery. The idea of admitting powerlessness and failure were things I just could not accept.

My family tree is littered with alcoholics. Despite that I started drinking young and from the first drink responded to it abnormally. I drank to get drunk every time. Forced periods of abstinence, secondary to educational commitments and extended deployments, were the only periods where I was free from alcohol. I transitioned from a beer drinker with occasional vodka to drinking vodka almost every day. I would start on the drive home and end when I passed out prior to going to bed. This became a daily cycle. The periods of geographic abstinence during deployments were evidence to me that I did not have a serious problem. But upon returning home I would begin drinking almost immediately, progressing quickly to my predeployment form and beyond. It was after returning from the latest deployment to Afghanistan that the free fall came very rapidly, ultimately bringing me to the lowest point in my life.

The bottom I reached is not at the level of some. I lack the ability to accurately articulate the hell I found myself in — spiritually and emotionally. I was riding an emotional teeter-totter between extreme sadness to anger. Alcohol had brought

me to my knees. I had been kicked out of my house for drinking to the point of blacking out and in my stupor had threatened my 13-year-old son. When I was told to leave I put up no resistance other than a few pathetic excuses and pleas for an additional chance. Thank God my wife had enough strength to say “No, you need to leave.”

In an effort to find a place to live I called the manager of a sober house north of my family’s home. The manager, a recovering alcoholic, did not have a room, but sensing I was hurting he talked to me for over an hour before telling me I should go to an A.A. meeting, share what was happening and then call him afterwards. Broken and defeated I went to that first meeting, head down and ashamed. I was welcomed by several people, hugged and encouraged to keep coming back. I was astonished to find that I was not the only person to have trouble quieting my thoughts; that isolation and problems dealing with frustrations associated with people, places and things was something common among alcoholics. I had no idea why a man I had never met would take the time to help me get on a path of recovery or why people at a meeting I had never met would treat me with such caring and dignity. This was my introduction to the Fellowship that would change my life.

Since that first day I have rarely missed a meeting. Truly willing to do anything in order not to drink I resigned myself to do everything that I was asked to do. I have a sponsor. I am thoroughly working through the Steps. I take a personal inventory in a journal everyday. I make phone calls to other alcoholics in the evening and have several service commitments. The more vigilant I am about these things the better I feel. I have had some difficult days. There have been times when I did not understand the things that I was feeling. By continuing to work a program of recovery my vision has become clear enough that when my Higher Power places the answer in front of me, I am able to see it. I realize that for me a life run on self-will would be filled with anger, shame and unhappiness.

My life has slowly come back together. I have had wonderful experiences with my family that I never thought would be possible. I have a peaceful-



ness inside that I have never known. The promises continue to come true in my life. As long as I don't drink, try earnestly to run my life by God's will, not mine, and stay heavily involved in Alcoholics Anonymous, I know that I will be okay.

U.S. Army

**“God sent me the Fellowship through the mail.”**

I got sober at the age of 18 and began learning how to live through the Twelve Steps. Gaining from the experience, strength and hope of A.A. members on living skills, like holding a job and paying bills, I began living sober. After five years of sobriety, tired of struggling to get an education and work at the same time, I looked into the Army as a career that might open doors. Using the tools of A.A., I did an inventory and shared it with a friend. Turned out that he had grown up an Army brat. He gave me an honest appraisal of what to expect, sharing only his experiences. To be the first in my community to make such a career decision was a real act of faith. Despite my fears, my home group supported me and gave me encouragement, including after I shipped out to basic training.

Basic training was the first time I was unable to attend A.A. meetings. Long training days kept me so busy I hardly had time to think about a drink. I shared my recovery with the chaplain and, out of necessity, substituted chapel on Sundays for meetings during eight weeks of training. I stayed sober and sane, but was grateful to attend meetings during Advanced Individual Training.

At my first assignment I joined the Fort Bragg Group. Since this group was not my original home group, I had to adjust to changes and regional differences for the first time. After finding that the group would not change, I began to learn the hard way that I needed to change. No matter how fond I was of the group where I found freedom from alcohol, the Twelve Steps are the same everywhere. I only had to pray for the willingness to adjust and take action by trying.

Eighteen months after I joined, we were notified we were going to Saudi Arabia. Desert Shield turned to Desert Storm, and I tried to create a meeting in a remote desert compound. I placed a notice on a bulletin board that read: "Friends of Bill W. meet here every night at 1900 hours." I waited by that board every night, Big Book in hand, for another alcoholic. Each night ended with me in my tent reading and praying. I had written the General Service Office before departing and had photocopied a page of local meetings from the International Directory. The letter eventually resulted in cards and letters from everywhere through the *Loners-Internationalist Meeting (LIM)*. The Fellowship had done, through general services, what the group couldn't alone — carried the message overseas.

In the midst of my most lonely moment, when I desperately wanted to drink, missing family and friends and living with daily fear of the real threat around me, God sent me the Fellowship through the mail every day. It came in the form of letters, cards from groups, literature, and A.A. speaker tapes. Some of these people I have since met personally and we have become steady friends. The miracles of A.A. were available in the middle of the desert. It occurred to me: It works, it really does!

Since this experience, I have sponsored A.A. members who have stayed sober in Bosnia, Kuwait, and Afghanistan. Today online meetings help bring the message to these remote areas. The *Loners-Internationalist Meeting*, the same loving service I benefitted from, have helped other members in the military remain sober and useful to both A.A. and their country.

My career has taken me all over the country and overseas. Since that first experience in North Carolina I have been the "new guy" in several groups in many states and countries. It forces me to reach out my hand and be the newcomer again. This loving action keeps me humble and sober. I appreciate the differences in format and have a deep appreciation for the fact that A.A.'s Twelve Step program of recovery is identical no matter where you are. What was once a job has become a career. After becoming a successful NCO, I was selected for Warrant Officer. I have worked

in some selective and demanding positions, enjoying success by any measurement. A.A. absolutely works!

Because the military attracts people who have often not hit bottom, most groups I have been involved with provide ample opportunity to carry the message. The experience of staying sober and enjoying a successful military career has allowed me to share strength and hope with the hopeless. If you are among the hopeless today, know that the military does not require drinking as a prerequisite; there are many of us who enjoy sobriety and careers who will be grateful for the opportunity to help. You never have to take another drink again, if you don't want to.

## Canadian Armed Forces

### **“Everytime I did something different I could feel a change happening.”**

I grew up in a military environment. Alcohol was not a problem in my home. I joined the Canadian Armed Forces and had completed nine years, when I was honorably discharged. Shortly after joining the military, things started to change and I started to drink. I drank of my own accord; no one forced me into taking the first drink, but I thought I had to be accepted.

During recruit training I had a loaded weapon in my hand and pointed it at another recruit. This is the first time people started to cover up for me. I was driving drunk one night and attempted to run over a local police officer. I got away with it, and I realize now that “someone” was looking out for me. Later I fell off the side of a ship out at sea. Around this time I started to get in more and more trouble. I remember that one night out at sea when I was on duty I dropped five gallons of milk down a hatch and used the excuse that the ship had rolled as I was coming up. Then one night I hit a hydro pole, totally demolished a car and ended up in the hospital. When the blood tests were done, they found .27% alcohol in the blood system (after 7 hours). The medical assistant who got the report when it was returned to the hospital accidentally

lost it so no charges were ever laid. Again, I had God on my side.

One Good Friday, I was asked to leave Israel, due to some of my actions. Three days later, on Easter Monday, I was expelled from Syria. That same week I was on a plane out of Egypt and on my way back to Canada. Back in Barrie, Ontario, I was driving back to the base when I ran the city police off the road. Once again God was looking out for me. Yes, I got away with it, as I know how to conduct myself while being talked to by the police. A short time later I was out drinking one night, ended up drinking with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and drove home drunk once again.

Soon I was back in Egypt, where I spent the last two weeks in a jail. I had a number of charges hanging over my head, both criminal and noncriminal. Some of them could have meant spending time in a federal prison. The morning I was put on the plane to return to Canada, I was told I was still under open arrest and had to report to the military police in Germany. This was not important to me, so I went drinking with friends and consequently AWOL. But someone said I had reported to the police as instructed, when actually I hadn't.

When I got back to Canada, I was told to report to my base. Instead, I went AWOL, and then made up an excuse when I returned. I was sent to a psychiatrist, not about my alcoholism, but about the incident in the Middle East. After the police completed their investigation, I was offered help and accepted. I went into a military hospital for two weeks, during which I admitted that I was an alcoholic, and that I was gay. I was discharged from the military. My journey in sobriety started at the age of 27.

I was mixed up and confused at my first A.A. meeting but heard something that I liked, and wanted what everyone else had. The compulsion did not leave me right away, but I could feel a change inside myself. I started to get active by picking up ashtrays and moving chairs; then I was allowed to stand at the door and greet. Eventually, I was even allowed to chair a meeting, and then I started to share. Every time I started to do something different, I could feel a change happening.

After a time, however, I still couldn't find the happiness and contentment that other people talked about. Then I realized that I had not gone beyond Step One. So I started to work the Twelve Steps and found a little bit of inner peace. This was happening because I was asking for help each morning, then saying thanks at the end of the day. Even today I ask for that help and usually have a pretty good day.

Eventually, I became general service representative of my home group. A year later I was elected the Area Institutions chair. I moved to Ottawa, and very quickly got active in service. After many 24 hours of sobriety, I continue to be active, not only in my home group and the district, but also in carrying the message into prisons. I have found working for the same employer — different departments of the federal government — for almost 27 years gets easier, one day at a time, due to the fact that I am sober. I have also been able to help colleagues who have come to me. Today I am no longer the liar, thief and cheat that I once was. People can depend on me to do what I say I am going to do.

My journey in sobriety has taken me to some beautiful places. No matter where I go around the country I can find a meeting. I have been to meetings where everything has been in French, but the same feeling is there. When I share or try to share in French, the people around the room listen. I have been to meetings where everything was in Spanish, but the handshake, the smile, and the sharing are all the same.

As I watch the newcomer or the person who is coming back, I realize that it is no better out there today than it was over 22 years ago. Today I can be there to welcome them.

Every day I look for three or four things that I can be thankful for. I have found sobriety, contentment, and happiness one day at a time through the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. God is with me as I write. It is through His guidance and direction that I have been able to share this.

**“Everywhere I went  
I was still an alcoholic.”**

I'm 28 years old and have been in the Navy since I was 19. I got sober in the Navy.

I've liked to drink as far back as I can remember. At a very young age I was introduced to alcohol. I would be at parties or dances and people would let me taste their drinks. I liked it. I liked the warmth that almost immediately followed the first couple of drinks. I really liked the way it made me feel — like I was no longer skinny and ugly. It made me feel like I could dance without caring who was looking. It made me feel like the total opposite of what I normally felt like. It was the solution.

I had my first drink somewhere around six or seven years old, but the opportunity to drink rarely presented itself at that time. I was only able to drink when there was a big enough party where I wouldn't be noticed getting tanked. I could get my mom, dad, or a number of other people to give me a sip here and there until I was lit, but this only happened once or twice a year. When I got into junior high school my drinking picked up a bit, but was still largely in check due to adult supervision. Through some family upheaval that started when I entered high school, I bounced from house to house a bit. I stayed with an aunt and uncle for my first two years, then stayed with my mom again for the last two years. I was still not drinking every day or even every week (at first). I had quite a bit of supervision and positive influences in my life. By the time I was a senior in high school, though, I was drinking every weekend. By then I was also smoking marijuana almost on a daily basis.

I never planned on joining the military, but I eventually realized that with the way my life was progressing I would never be able to make much of myself if I didn't find a way to get an education, get motivated in the right direction, and get away from all of the bad influences that were in my life. When I was in my senior year of high school, I joined the Navy. This was going to be my calling.

I was going to be in the Navy's nuclear power

program when I joined, but after being arrested for an alcohol-related petty larceny I was disqualified. My date to leave for boot camp also had to be moved up because I had to spend a second year as a senior. It seemed that I was unable to succeed in school by going two to three days a week and always trying to catch up. I eventually ended up in Great Lakes Recruit Training Command. I was on my way.

At my first command I found out that there were a lot of people who liked to drink in the Navy. My roommates and I would party every weekend. All weekend. During the week we would only have a forty-ounce or two a night. Things were pretty wild. I somehow managed to stay out of trouble.

Toward the end of my first enlistment I met a girl and eventually moved in with her. That is when I started to really think about my drinking. I wanted to drink all night on the weekends and she didn't drink, so the logical thing for me to do was to stay up all night by myself and drink myself into oblivion.

One night, while watching the television sign off and wishing it wouldn't because I wasn't done drinking, I saw a commercial just before the picture turned to snow. It was an Alcoholics Anonymous public service announcement. I don't remember exactly what it said, but it was enough to spark an interest in me to call. They directed me to a meeting the next day. I wish I could say that that was my last drink, but I wasn't done yet. I went to that meeting with the intent of getting some information. I still wasn't quite sure that I was an alcoholic, but knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that I had a drinking problem. What I found at the meeting is that I could relate with the people who were there.

I came in and out of A.A. several times over the next six years. I changed commands. I got married. I moved to another apartment in the same town. I moved from Virginia to California. Everywhere I went I was still an alcoholic. I was never able to stay sober, until I had reached a point where I was willing to do anything that was suggested. My bottom came while on recruiting duty. I had been fighting with my wife almost constantly. She was very sick of my drinking and

alcoholic behavior. I was too, but wasn't ready to stop yet. Then one morning I woke up after a long weekend of drinking and decided that I would give A.A. one last honest attempt. If that didn't work I'd blot out my existence the most painless way I could think of.

My first meeting back was at a group called There Is a Solution. It is a Big Book study with a lot of structure and sobriety. I told them that I didn't have a sponsor and one was given to me. I didn't know, but I wasn't done with my pain yet. It took a long time and a lot of work to get some sanity and manageability back into my life. The Navy sent me through rehab at the Great Lakes Naval Hospital. This was a great opportunity for me to do a lot of soul searching and get away from the stresses of home and work for a little while. My sobriety date is the day after I checked into rehab.

The Navy has been very supportive of my staying sober. While stationed at my second command I was able to attend A.A. meetings aboard ship. In recruiting, the chain of command has been very supportive of my attending aftercare meetings at the Great Lakes Naval Hospital every week, just an hour and a half from where I work. For a long time I attended meetings almost every night. Once a week I would meet with my sponsor to discuss homework he had given me and to work on the Steps.

The saying is that "when the student is ready the teacher will appear." I really feel blessed to have come to this place where I got sober. Everything seems to be in my favor. The quantity and quality of sobriety here are incredible. The people are the friendliest I've ever met in A.A.

After getting sober, my life continued to get worse for a while. I had made a wreck of things at home and at work. It took a while for things to get better. In God's time, though, they did. I've become one of the top recruiters in the recruiting district while still attending aftercare once a week. My recruiting station is on track to receiving a Navy Commendation Medal for production. My personal life has improved dramatically. My wife and I still fight now and then, but we work things out. I owe all of this to my higher power, whom I call God, and to Alcoholics Anonymous.



## **What's it like to be in the military — and in A.A.?**

### **How is advancement affected?**

“I have reached the top of the enlisted ladder, which is a great deal better than being on a greased slide ready to go to the bottom.”



“Since joining A.A., I've been commissioned and have gone in five years from first lieutenant to captain to selection for major. I've had the usual succession of overseas and stateside duty tours, each one a little better than the last. I've been awarded at least one medal for meritorious achievement or service at every assignment. I never got any in the seven preceding years as a practicing military drunk.”



“I have been extremely fortunate to be promoted quickly. Active drinking sometimes causes problems that lead to reduction or elimination. Often these folks earn the respect and rank back after joining A.A. in either the civilian community or the military.”

### **How do we cope with the social aspects of military life?**

“When we're drinking heavily, we tend to think that everyone else must be doing the same. But we're not in A.A. long before we find out that this just isn't so. At first, I avoided social events where there would be heavy drinking, but this didn't last long. Today, now that the physical craving for booze is gone and my self-confidence is up, I can go to a party and have one hell of a time — entirely sober. In my seven years as an officer and an A.A. member, I've never been cited for bad behavior.”

•

“Military life requires attendance at social functions where alcohol is present. As the A.A. Big Book suggests, I ask myself if I have a good reason to be there. Whether I need to attend briefly or for most of the evening, it is always amazing to me that there are others who choose not to drink and that the peer pressure I suffered from was imaginary. Usually the event goes great, but if I am uncomfortable or tempted I always reserve the right to leave. Sobriety is the most important thing.”

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“I’m a sailor — a chief petty officer — who doesn’t drink. Preposterous, yet true. Just what is there for a career military man who doesn’t partake at the club now and then? Plenty. No matter where I go, I have a lot of friends I haven’t met yet — A.A. friends. From Gitmo Bay around the world in both directions, I have met men and women just like me. Folks who understand and are always willing to help. These are friends — not the kind you’ll find in Mary’s Bar or the Texas, and not the kind after a sailor’s buck. They are friends who open their homes and hearts to welcome the traveling person and perhaps continue the sharing of experience, strength, and hope.”

### **Is difference in rank a problem?**

“When we go to A.A. meetings, we leave our rank outside. Each member is addressed by his first name, and just as much respect is shown a member of low enlisted grade as is shown the higher-ranking officers.”

•

“Over the entrance to our meeting place is a sign: ‘Abandon rank, all ye who enter here.’”

•

“One of my closest A.A. friends,” says an Air Force enlisted man, “was a Marine Corps major. We spent much of our off-duty time together at A.A. meetings and on Twelfth Step calls — to help alcoholics who wanted to stop drinking. On these occasions, we called each other by our first

names, of course, and we were in civilian clothes at the meetings. But when we met in uniform, neither of us had any difficulty showing the proper respect to the other's grade. We felt that, because of our fellowship in A.A., we respected each other more as individuals in our profession."



"Because I'm an officer, A.A. newcomers who are enlisted men are always hesitant about our relationship. I make a point of discussing this problem and reiterating that my rank remains outside the meeting, even when we are forced by circumstances to wear uniforms there. And I find that the problem rapidly dissolves and is soon forgotten."

### **What kind of A.A. meetings do we attend?**

"I joined in Arizona, where there were civilian A.A. groups," says an Air Force man. "I'd been sober for a year when I was sent to Okinawa. I thought I could stay away from a drink on my own there, but after a month I got drunk. The next day, I headed right for the armed forces A.A. group. I stayed sober the rest of my 18 months on Okinawa, thanks to that group. It was composed of military members, dependents, and civilians connected with the military. Two of the civilians had been in various armed forces groups for many years, and had worked with military leaders, hospitals, or chaplains to establish new A.A. groups in different places."



"The captain of my squadron explained a little bit about A.A. to me and then said, 'You are going to call them and you are going to a meeting if there is one in this area tonight.' I called the A.A. central office in San Diego, and was told that an A.A. man would meet me and see that I got to a meeting that night. He was right on time, and we had a good talk over coffee, and then went to the meeting. I was uneasy, of course, but I did accept everything that was said there. Above all, I was happy to hear that A.A. was not controlled by some religion or other. That night, I met many people I could put my trust in, and it was unusual

for me, as it is for every alcoholic, to put any faith in anyone or anything. That was 10 years ago, and I haven't had a drink of alcohol since."



"I have always attended any kind of meeting I could. In the U.S. meetings are plentiful in my native language of English. I make a point of contacting A.A. as soon as I arrive, or before, if possible. Overseas there are many English-speaking groups and I have also attempted to learn the local language and attend those meetings also. The language of the heart is always welcoming and local groups appreciate the effort and reach out to the visitor and newcomer."

### **How do I reach A.A.?**

Almost anywhere in the United States or Canada you will find a listing for A.A. or Alcoholics Anonymous in local telephone books. These Central Offices and Intergroups can provide you with meeting lists for your community. If you are more used to electronic searches, you can find a listing of these same offices, and other local meeting sources, on G.S.O.'s A.A. Web site at [www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org).

Your chaplain or your medical officer may be able to tell you whether there are civilian A.A. groups nearby and will certainly be familiar with any armed forces group at or near your base.

You can also write to the A.A. General Service Office for an international directory of English-speaking meetings and other A.A. contacts. Write to: Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163.

## **How do we stay in touch with A.A. when there are no meetings nearby?**

The General Service Office can provide you with information about the *Loners-Internationalists Meeting*, a correspondence service through which you can write to and receive mail from other A.A. members.

There are on-line A.A. meetings and telephone A.A. meetings. In addition, some military personnel overseas have been able to stay in contact with A.A. members in their home communities through various Internet video connections.

For those who must go for a while without contact with other A.A. members, there is a wide variety of A.A. literature, both paper and electronic, and the Grapevine, A.A.'s monthly magazine.

## **How to Order A.A. Literature**

Purchasing A.A. literature can begin in an A.A. group. Groups and others can order from a Central/Intergroup Office, Area, or District Office. If you are unable to reach a local service office, please contact the General Service Office at the address below to request a catalog and order form. You can also find information on purchasing A.A. Ebooks on G.S.O.'s A.A. website at [www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org).

**Alcoholics Anonymous**  
Grand Central Station  
P.O. Box 459  
New York, New York 10163  
212-870-3400

THE TWELVE STEPS  
OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

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

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

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

4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

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

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

7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

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

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

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

11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

## TWELVE TRADITIONS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.

2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.

3. The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.

4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.

5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

6. An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.

7. Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers.

9. A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.

10. Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.

11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films.

12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.









**A.A. PUBLICATIONS** Complete order forms available from  
General Service Office of ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS,  
Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163

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ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS (*regular, portable, large-print and abridged pocket editions*)  
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS COMES OF AGE  
TWELVE STEPS AND TWELVE TRADITIONS  
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DR. BOB AND THE GOOD OLDTIMERS  
"PASS IT ON"  
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LIVING SOBER  
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**PAMPHLETS**

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT A.A.  
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MEMBERS OF THE CLERGY ASK ABOUT A.A.  
THREE TALKS TO MEDICAL SOCIETIES BY BILL W.  
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS AS A RESOURCE FOR  
THE HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL  
A.A. IN YOUR COMMUNITY  
IS A.A. FOR YOU?  
IS A.A. FOR ME?  
THIS IS A.A.  
IS THERE AN ALCOHOLIC IN THE WORKPLACE?  
DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DIFFERENT?  
MANY PATHS TO SPIRITUALITY  
A.A. FOR THE BLACK AND AFRICAN AMERICAN ALCOHOLIC  
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON SPONSORSHIP  
A.A. FOR THE WOMAN  
A.A. FOR THE NATIVE NORTH AMERICAN  
A.A. AND THE GAY/LESBIAN ALCOHOLIC  
A.A. FOR THE OLDER ALCOHOLIC—NEVER TOO LATE  
THE JACK ALEXANDER ARTICLE  
YOUNG PEOPLE AND A.A.  
A.A. AND THE ARMED SERVICES  
THE A.A. MEMBER—MEDICATIONS AND OTHER DRUGS  
IS THERE AN ALCOHOLIC IN YOUR LIFE?  
INSIDE A.A.  
THE A.A. GROUP  
G.S.R.  
MEMO TO AN INMATE  
THE TWELVE CONCEPTS ILLUSTRATED  
THE TWELVE TRADITIONS ILLUSTRATED  
LET'S BE FRIENDLY WITH OUR FRIENDS  
HOW A.A. MEMBERS COOPERATE  
A.A. IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES  
A MESSAGE TO CORRECTIONS PROFESSIONALS  
A.A. IN TREATMENT SETTINGS  
BRIDGING THE GAP  
IF YOU ARE A PROFESSIONAL  
A.A. MEMBERSHIP SURVEY  
A MEMBER'S-EYE VIEW OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS  
PROBLEMS OTHER THAN ALCOHOL  
UNDERSTANDING ANONYMITY  
THE CO-FOUNDERS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS  
SPEAKING AT NON-A.A. MEETINGS  
A BRIEF GUIDE TO A.A.  
A NEWCOMER ASKS  
WHAT HAPPENED TO JOE; IT HAPPENED TO ALICE  
(*Two full-color, comic-book style pamphlets*)  
TOO YOUNG? (A cartoon pamphlet for teenagers)  
IT SURE BEATS SITTING IN A CELL  
(*An Illustrated pamphlet for inmates*)

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**VIDEOS**

A.A. VIDEOS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE  
HOPE: ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS  
IT SURE BEATS SITTING IN A CELL  
CARRYING THE MESSAGE BEHIND THESE WALLS  
YOUR A.A. GENERAL SERVICE OFFICE,  
THE GRAPEVINE AND THE GENERAL SERVICE STRUCTURE

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**PERIODICALS**

A.A. GRAPEVINE (monthly)  
LA VIÑA (bimonthly)

### **I am responsible...**

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

### **A Declaration of Unity**

This we owe to A.A.'s future:  
To place our common welfare first;  
To keep our fellowship united.  
For on A.A. unity depend our lives,  
And the lives of those to come.