

# A.A. for the Older Alcoholic

—Never too late



**LARGE PRINT**

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. for the Older Alcoholic**

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This pamphlet will acquaint you with some men and women from a wide variety of backgrounds who have had equally diverse experiences with alcohol. What they have in common is that all of them came to grips with their alcoholism around the age of 60.

They began drinking at different periods in their lives. They drank for various lengths of time. Their backgrounds and circumstances were different. One man drank alcoholically only two and a half years — another drank for 50 years. Several drank to ease the loneliness when a spouse died, one to ease the tensions of a high-powered career. One woman, who went directly from the cardiac care unit to detox, merely switched from vodka to white wine.

These stories illustrate that alcoholism comes in many different forms and in a variety of disguises. Whether or not you are an alcoholic is not determined by where you drink, when you started drinking, how long you've been drinking, with whom you drink, what you drink, or

even how much you drink. 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, or former or present employers; if it has influenced the way you schedule your days; if it has affected your health; if it determines or affects your moods or your state of mind when not drinking; if you are in any way preoccupied with alcohol — then the likelihood is that you may have a problem.

Many crises accompany the process of growing older, and almost all of them entail loss of some sort. The children grow up and leave home. You move to a smaller place. Friends are fewer and farther apart. You are obliged to retire from work. Physical health is less robust and faculties diminish. Your partner of many years dies.

Sometimes these changes in circumstances make a long-standing habit worse. Whereas earlier a drink before dinner may have been a companionable pastime, it now becomes the relief looked forward to all day — and the single drink grows to two or three, and then more.

For others, the onset of alcoholism may follow a major crisis, a devastating loss. Suddenly, the bottle fills the emotional gap left by the loss of a job or the death of a loved one.

Still others suffer a long history of barely contained alcoholism, and somehow or other squeak by until the body, after years of abuse, can no longer cope with the onslaught of alcohol.

The turning point for the people whose stories appear in this pamphlet came when they finally decided to face the problem — looked at it squarely and became willing to do something about it. The decision to ask for help was the all-important decision, one that nobody else could make. But once it was made, the hand of Alcoholics Anonymous was there, reaching out.

The men and women of A.A., of all ages, have accepted their alcoholism as the disease that it is, and, in doing so, have made themselves accessible to help, recovery, and the restoration of their lives. The way we help each other is by sharing our experience, strength and hope and by following a suggested program of recovery.

Far from feeling that their lives are over, the men and women who have come to A.A. in their later years often express the opposite sentiment — that it is time to start living.

K.B., who drank for over 50 years and is now sober nearly eight, reports, “For me, life began two months before my 70th birthday.”

**J. M. (age 82)                      He joined A.A. at age 60**

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“For the first time in my long life, I realized what alcohol had cost me in ruined hopes, in lost friendships, in loss of pride, in failed relationships, and in missing out on the pleasures of intellectual achievement.”

I was approaching my 60th birthday when I came into Alcoholics Anonymous. I had been an alcoholic over a period of 41 years. I still remember, 64 years later, the burning sensation of that first drink of rye whiskey as it went down my throat. Within a matter of weeks, I knew that something was terribly wrong. I knew I was hooked,

that when I took only one drink I could not stop drinking until I was in oblivion. I've heard many people say they didn't know alcohol was the cause of their problems, but I knew it almost from the beginning.

In those days, there was no talk of such a thing as "alcoholism," and I remember seeing the word for the first time in Jack Alexander's well-known 1941 article on A.A. published in **The Saturday Evening Post**. Up to then I had thought of myself as a hopeless drunkard, bound for an early death or the insane asylum. At the time I was a freshman in college, and I was to leave school forever five years later — not even close to a degree.

By the time my draft number came around during World War II, I was a hardened drinker. I had begun to tremble and shake, and I had had several run-ins with the police and lost my driver's license. Fear and dread had become dominant feelings; I was afraid to go out in the street without first being laced with alcohol, afraid even of the most ordinary human contact.

In the basic training camps, the army was pressuring men who had any college at all to go on to Officer



Candidate School, and I was determined not to go. I was ready to accept being a foul-up as an enlisted man, but the thought of doing so as an officer, bringing that disgrace on my family, was unnerving. And so I went through almost three years of combat as an enlisted man, in as much fear and dread of alcohol as I was of enemy shells and bullets. The only time I was free of booze in the army was when we were on the front line, where no drink was available.

After the war I just went berserk on alcohol. I ended up two years later weighing only 98 pounds, with a liver on the sidelines, a kidney disease, inflamed stomach and intestines, and badly malnourished — in a state of physical collapse. Friends found me in my apartment, lying in the doorway, unable to get up. They got me to a wonderful doctor who understood something about alcoholism. Knowing that I was broke and unable to afford either a hospital or a psychiatrist, she treated me over a period of months, seeing me often and helping me talk out my troubles.

There were to be some bad times after this, but for

a while the worst was over. I was to pick up a drink a couple of years later, but by now I had a wonderful wife and a close and loving marriage that would produce two fine sons. For some years I tried controlled drinking, and you know how that ended up. I would lose control three or four times a year until, seeing the anguish that it caused my wife, I gave up drink altogether. I was to be completely dry for six years — or until her death. The fact that I gave her those six precious, happy years is one of the joys of my life.

After her death I didn't know that I was in mortal peril. I knew nothing of the A.A. program, that it was the first drink that I had most to fear. I had gone to one A.A. meeting many years before, at the insistence of my doctor, but I left before it was over. A.A., I thought, was not for me. And, as I later came to learn, one drink was all it took to put me back in the power of alcohol. I was to be out there four more years, years that would include hospitalizations, losing a job, and, finally, a trip to a rehab. It was there that I began to see that A.A. could be my salvation.

The realization that A.A. was the answer came suddenly, and I understood that what A.A. people were telling me was what I needed to hear. Upon release I began to go to meetings on a daily basis. I offered my services to my group, first in the work of keeping the premises clean, then in making coffee and other service positions. All these activities, as my sponsor kept telling me, helped in building self-confidence and a feeling of self-worth.

For the first time in my long life, I realized what alcohol had cost me in ruined hopes, in lost friendships, in loss of pride, in failed relationships, and in missing out on the pleasures of intellectual achievement. A.A. was to lift the fog that had enveloped me through the abuse of alcohol, restore me to the loving bosom of my family, and once again allow me to enjoy the beauties and wonders of nature. All my life (dimly in those alcoholic years) I had dreamed of being a writer, but I had done myself so much damage that it was to take many years of sobriety before I could make a modest start in this direction. At 81, after 21 years of sobriety, I sold my first essay; it would gain me further recognition when

it was chosen to appear in an annual collection, **Best American Essays of 1999**. Now, at 82, I am deep into a novel. None of these things would have been remotely attainable before I joined A.A. And now, with wonderful years of sobriety, anything is possible.

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**M.B. (age 70)                      She joined A.A. at age 61**

**“Every day I was determined to never again allow alcohol to rule me. Every day I failed.”**

One day at a time, my life changed from mostly misery to mostly joy and comfort. How? I entered the A.A. Fellowship when I was 61 years old. I was a success professionally, but otherwise a mess — physically, emotionally, spiritually. I believed my inability to control my drinking was solely at fault. Little did I know.

I was an ordinary, garden-variety drunk. In public I almost never appeared or sounded drunk. I almost never staggered, fell, or got a thick tongue. I was never disorderly, never missed a day at work, and was never hospitalized or jailed for drunkenness.

But excessive, uncontrollable drinking caused me misery, self-loathing and self-disgust. I'd awaken each morning wondering what I had said, done, eaten the night before — and frequently was greeted by silence from my loving family. Every day I was determined to never again allow alcohol to rule me. Every day I failed. Before the day was out, I repeated my performance.

I was never jailed, even though driving drunk in a station wagon filled with children was a regular event. For years and years I lived in a jail of my own making. I did not know that it was the first drink that got me drunk.

Once I put alcohol to my lips, I was driven physically and emotionally to consume more and more and more. I longed to be able to drink socially as so many of those around me were capable of doing. Vodka was my drink of choice, but anything with alcohol would do, even Scotch.

I traveled extensively and trembled each time I went through the hand luggage check-in because my knitting bag always contained my bottle of vodka. Those tiny bottles aboard the plane were ridiculous. I was driven

to keep my supply at hand, even though the thought of discovery filled me with fear.

I had an iron determination to live my own life guided solely by self-will. I was supersensitive, shy, frightened on the inside, and grandiose and defiant on the outside. I was a woman who desperately needed a prop to keep going. Alcohol was that prop. I didn't see how I could live without it.

Twelve years ago, on a day no different from any other day, I asked my daughter if she would take me to an A.A. meeting. No dramatic event had occurred. Just day-in, day-out self-loathing. Her positive, mellow response alleviated my anxiety, and she made no big deal about the request. I asked her what to say, what to do, how to act. She said, "Just be yourself, Mom!"

When they asked if there were any newcomers in the room, I raised my hand and in a trembling voice said, "My name is M. I think I may be an alcoholic. This is my first meeting." Applause followed. The response overwhelmed and baffled me. I was asked to keep coming back and was told that I was the most

important person in the room. Amazed, cheered and filled with hope, I listened and listened and now remember almost nothing of the meeting.

I promised myself to do just what was suggested to me. I immediately asked another “chronologically gifted” (old, that is) woman to be my sponsor. I discovered that a sponsor was synonymous with a guide to finding the sober path. She suggested daily meetings; told me to read the Big Book, **Alcoholics Anonymous**; and most of all, said not to drink — one day at a time.

At that group I found a home away from home. In a sparsely furnished and simple room, smiling, bright-eyed, friendly, beautiful, handsome strangers welcomed me with open arms. I found the new, fulfilling way of life I had longed for — the A.A. way. A huge weight was lifted from my shoulders. At that very first meeting, miracle of miracles, I lost my obsession to drink!

It has been 12 years since I walked through the doors to my first A.A. meeting. While newly sober, I battled and successfully emerged from a devastating, life-threatening illness. These years of continuous sobriety

have afforded me the greatest joy, serenity and peace of mind I have ever known.

I attribute it all to the blessings I have found in A.A. and to the tools of the program: A.A. meetings, working the Twelve Steps, calls to my sponsors, prayers and readings, carrying the message to others, and finding a God as I understand Him, to whose care I turn over my will and my life.

Through the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous, I have found God's true will: unconditional love with uncritical acceptance. Nowhere else on the face of this earth has that ever happened to me.

**C.S. (age 83)                      He joined A.A. at age 68**

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**“I'd get up at night and drink. I had to drink to feel good, but I was always sick and feeling bad.”**

My drinking career only lasted two and a half years, but it almost killed me. As you get older, alcohol works harder on you. It takes a toll on your body. I didn't really start drinking until I was 66, but I quickly became a



blackout drinker. At the end, I attempted suicide.

I come from a family that is very religious. There were no alcoholics in the family. None of them drank, and I drank very little when my wife and I were busy raising our three sons. I worked 31 years as supervisor of maintenance at a large corporation.

When I retired, the boys were all educated, married and out of the house. The wife and I did a lot of traveling then — trips to Hawaii, the Caribbean, Mexico. She was in delicate health, though, and on one trip she suddenly got sick. A week later she died of heart trouble.

Now I was all alone. I went to see friends, but they were always busy. I went to my kids' houses, but they had things to do. So I just stayed home. It was like the house was just coming in on me. I was going nuts.

I'm a diabetic, and one day I woke up trembling really badly. I don't know why I thought about it, but I got myself a big cup of coffee. I filled half the cup with coffee, and the rest with bourbon. By the time I finished drinking that cup of coffee, the trembling was gone. I

felt good. I thought, “Heck, there’s no better medicine than this.” So every time I was trembling, I’d get a cup of coffee and some whiskey. It came to a point where I’d make myself tremble just to drink.

Lent came, and I quit drinking. On Easter Sunday — I don’t know why I did it — I put a bottle of whiskey in the car. After church, I picked up that bottle and took a big drink. From there on, I was drinking night and day. I’d get up at night and drink. I had to drink to feel good, but I was always sick and feeling bad. I was so darned sick one night I didn’t want to live anymore. I wanted to kill myself.

I went out and got a pistol. I put a plastic drop cloth on the bed, because I didn’t want to get it full of blood, and I lay down on the bed. I was feeling bad. Without warning, I went into a diabetic coma. One of my boys found me and called the paramedics. They took me to the hospital. I was in intensive care for five days. After 27 days, the doctor told me, “I’m going to discharge you, but first I want to see you in my office.” He was pretty blunt. “Do you see what alcohol is doing to you?” he asked. “You’d better go to A.A.”

He discharged me on a Saturday, and on Monday I went over to an A.A. meeting near my house. “Who’s the boss?” I asked a man as the noon meeting started. “I want to see the boss.”

The man gave me a funny look, and then looked around the room. He said, “You sit down. The boss isn’t here yet.” So I sat down, but the boss didn’t come in.

“You come tomorrow,” the man said after the meeting. “The boss will be here tomorrow.” I came back, but the boss still didn’t show up. I’ve been going there for 15 years, and the boss hasn’t shown up yet.

At first, I didn’t really think I was an alcoholic. But I remembered what the doctor told me: “If you start drinking, you’ll be lucky if you live a month and a half.” So I kept going to meetings. It’s a darn good program. It’s a beautiful life.

**F.M. (age 79)**

**She joined A.A. at age 72**

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**“My best friend became 80 proof alcohol.”**

I was born in the beautiful mountains of western North Carolina and lived there most of my life. I married a childhood friend at age 16, had my first son at age 17 and another son 10 years later. Our life was fairly uncomplicated for a number of years, and only on special occasions did it include alcohol.

Then my husband was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, and our world came tumbling down on us. At that time, he was an accountant at a local hospital, and I had always been a stay-at-home mom. He began to put great pressure on me to take some courses so I could find a job, which I did. I took typing, shorthand and business English, and when I completed the course, I landed the first job I applied for, at 43 years of age. It was at a wholesale hardware and floor-covering company located very close to our home.

The job was much more complicated than my courses had prepared me for, but I was able to hang in until I

learned it. But when my job was secure, that was the beginning of my story of alcoholism.

My husband began to drink daily when he came home from work. I would pour his drinks, and sometimes, if I got them too full to carry to him, I would drink some. In no time, I was fixing another drink for me. This went on for several years without a big problem, but during that time my husband retired on disability at 55. Three years later, he died.

Now I was alone. My children had finished college by then and were working away from home, so my best friend became 80 proof alcohol. I worked every day, but when I got home, I drank. I began to have blackouts. I would talk on the phone to my kids and friends, and could not remember the next day what I had said. This went on for a few years, and one night I drove home from my best friend's house and could not remember anything. I decided I must have a problem, so I called A.A., and a lady picked me up and took me to a meeting that same night. I was 62 years old.

I attended meetings and made coffee, chaired meetings, served as secretary, went to a rehab on Saturdays and helped with meetings there, and stayed sober two years. But all the while, I kept thinking that someday I could do some “controlled” drinking.

Shortly after completing those two years of sobriety, I went on a cruise to the Bahamas. I just had to have one of the “umbrella” drinks, and I started to drink again.

I got married again to a man I had known for years. He had lost his wife to cancer. He called me, and after a year we married. I told him of my problem with alcohol, but since he didn’t drink, he didn’t have a clue what it was about. He was very indulgent, and always saw that I had something to drink at night before our meal. He was a dear enabler, but he worried about my drinking. He died of a heart attack, but just before he died he said to me that if he died first, I would likely drink myself to death. For three years after his death, I almost did.

Something happened to me one night, and no matter how much I drank, I could not feel it. Something told me to call an old friend in A.A. Two friends came quickly

and talked with me, and I promised I would go back to a meeting, or even go to rehab if necessary. I kept my promise and went back — shaking, fearful, full of shame and remorse. All I remember of that first meeting is, “Try it one day at a time.” I was willing and ready, but I wasn’t sure about “able.”

I started that day, at age 72, without drinking, and have just finished seven years of the greatest life I have ever known. In this wonderful program of A.A., I have found peace and serenity as well as a Higher Power who is doing for me what I could not do for myself.

I saw a bumper sticker recently that said, “If you are on the wrong road, God allows U-turns!” A.A. has been my U-turn.

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**D.O. (age 67)                      He joined A.A. at age 66**

“...my preoccupation with work was replaced by a preoccupation with alcohol.”

My alcoholism got a late start. However, with diligent effort, I made up for lost time and found myself entering

A.A. at age 66. But that gets ahead of my story.

I was born to a first-generation Irish Catholic couple in New York City. My father was a lawyer, and my mother was a traditional homemaker. Although I had an uncle who was an alcoholic, my parents were social drinkers. Alcohol was always easily accessible in my home throughout my elementary and high school days. However, I was never tempted to try it.

Alcohol was an active ingredient in weekend life at my Ivy League college. Although I readily drank, it was rarely to excess and never a problem. Alcohol was similarly part of life in my post-college days and as an officer in an Air Force fighter squadron. But again, it had no special appeal to me, despite heavy use by my comrades.

An Ivy League law school followed the Air Force. But by then, I was married with two children and several part-time jobs, one as a bartender. I was really quite abstemious in those days — prompted more by economics and a busy schedule than by desire.



Upon law school graduation, I moved my family — by then three children — west to join a prestigious city law firm. After five years, I was invited to become a partner in the firm. To celebrate this accomplishment with my wife, I bought my first bottle of whiskey — at the ripe age of 32.

The years at the firm were happy years and financially very rewarding. But they were marked by 50-to-60-hour work weeks and inadequate time with my wife and family, which now included four children. I eventually became managing partner of the firm, which had grown from 15 lawyers when I joined it to over 200 lawyers and a support staff of 250. That original bottle of whiskey similarly flourished; and while it originally provided one drink before dinner, over 30 years it grew to two or three plus a nightcap. Still I felt no craving and experienced no alcohol-related problems, at least none of which I was conscious.

I completed 10 years as managing partner at age 62 and returned to being “just another partner.” During those 10 years, I had devoted nearly all of my time to management — which I truly enjoyed — and had given

much of my client responsibility to younger partners. This left me with insufficient legal work at a time when the firm culture was emphasizing “billed hours” and giving less recognition to management responsibilities.

I quickly felt a loss of prestige because I was no longer managing partner, and a sense of inadequacy and estrangement because I was not generating enough billed hours. Concurrently, I encountered problems at home because of my long inattention to family and my drinking. These problems were probably there all along, but I was too busy to notice them. My three drinks before dinner plus a nightcap had grown to include a drink at lunch, a drink on the way home, and sometimes a morning drink. By now, the craving had arrived, and my preoccupation with work was replaced by a preoccupation with alcohol. Fortunately, my four children were grown, happily married and well into their own careers, and largely unaffected by my drinking.

While my alcoholism blossomed, my wife was diagnosed with cancer and underwent two major surgeries and two years of chemotherapy and radiation

treatment. As her health declined and my feelings of inadequacy increased, I felt I had to make some changes, so I voluntarily retired from the law firm after 39 years. This solved nothing! My wife's health continued to deteriorate, and my drinking accelerated to meet the increased cravings. Fortunately, I managed to avoid the more typical consequences of drinking, such as automobile accidents, D.U.I.s, etc. I'd like to believe I was careful in my drinking, but I really think I had a very zealous and talented guardian angel.

My wife of 44 years died, and my life was a shambles. I voluntarily entered a treatment center two months later and started going to A.A. meetings upon my discharge, but within 30 days I was drinking again — even more so. Again, I avoided the typical consequences of drinking. Then a friend invited me to his home to watch a football game. There I encountered seven long-time, dear friends and three of my children. This was a masterfully executed intervention: by 11 o'clock that night, I went to bed 900 miles from home — at a treatment center in the Midwest. Upon returning home, I entered a six-month outpatient

aftercare program and resumed going to A.A. meetings — only this time I paid attention. Except for one short-lived relapse — itself a powerful lesson — I have remained sober. I have a sponsor and I continue to attend A.A. meetings three or four times a week. I regularly speak to patients in local treatment programs about the need for, and benefits of, the A.A. program.

It's never too late to enjoy sobriety. Gone are the cravings and the preoccupation with the "next drink." I feel and look a lot better. My step is lighter, my mind is clearer. The depression and the gloom are gone. I feel much more at peace with myself and — more importantly — with others. I no longer feel the need to please others to prove myself. Yet I get much satisfaction from helping others, especially when done anonymously. I know I helped and that's all that really matters.

At most A.A. meetings and at nearly all treatment center meetings, I am an older, if not the oldest, participant. I have managed to accumulate a modest amount of wisdom over the years and it has quite often proven useful. It's never too late to enjoy sobriety.

**C.H. (age 60)**

**She joined A.A. at age 59**

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**“I had passed the point of drinking to feel good;  
I was drinking to live.”**

The surgeon looked down at me lying on the hospital bed and said, “I have repaired your heart and you will be fine, but if you take a drink, you will undo all that I have done.” I heard his words, but they had little meaning because I had already given up on life. I was so weak, and I wondered if I had the strength to commit suicide by using my bed restraints and the IV stands next to the bed. But I knew I didn’t have the energy; in fact, I didn’t even have the energy to protest the doctor’s plan to send me from the cardiac unit to the detox unit in the same hospital.

The room in the detox unit looked similar, but I felt real panic when I realized I was locked in. I just lay in bed and let the days pass while my surgery healed. I could hear voices in the hall and knew that other patients were having visitors and going to A.A. meetings, so I finally agreed to go. I was shaking, twitching and unable to

concentrate, but I kept going to the meetings, trying to find some answers.

When I was released from the hospital, I returned to the home that had been the scene of my solitary drinking for many years. As I looked around my home, I realized what a prison it had become for me. At the time of my divorce years earlier, I had taken a job with the administrative branch of the county and, in my mind, I was a “big deal,” with major responsibilities and much prestige. Even then I had some major health problems, including asthma, arthritis and stomach ailments, but I was determined to keep my position, so I took more and more medication. I never told my doctors the truth about my drinking, so I didn’t know what a deadly combination of alcohol and drugs I was taking over the years.

My son had always been my great joy, but as my drinking progressed, I lost the ability to communicate with him and deprived him of the love he deserved. My relationship with my mother had become strained, causing me guilt because I couldn’t be the kind of dependable daughter she needed. My only sister had

joined A.A. and lived across the state. She had once arranged an intervention, which was a disaster and made me furious, and as a result, we had become estranged.

So I was alone in my beautiful home with alcohol as my only companion. I kept my job for 17 years, but the last few years were torture. I lost interest in my appearance, and because of my swollen feet, I could only wear big ugly boots to work. My great concern was that no one be able to smell alcohol on my breath, so I brushed my teeth often and had an endless supply of breath mints.

I took pride in not drinking during the work day, but the moment I got home — even before taking off my coat — I would pour a tumbler of vodka and drink it standing up in the kitchen. Finally the strain was too much. Several attacks of tachycardia at work ended in my receiving a long-term medical disability leave from the county.

Now I was home full time, with no responsibilities, no reason to get out of bed, and no reason not to drink whenever I wanted. I switched from vodka to white wine, which I had delivered by the case. I no longer drove, I

rarely went out, I seldom talked on the phone, I never read — I just lived in fear.

I had passed the point of drinking to feel good; I was drinking to live. I welcomed nightfall because then I could legitimately close up the house, lock all the doors and windows, and drink before getting ready for bed. (Actually, I was usually ready for bed because I rarely got out of my robe and slippers.) My paranoia was so great that I would check and recheck the locks on the doors and windows throughout the night.

It is no wonder that my decline was rapid and that in less than five months after leaving work, I had undergone major surgery, been through detox, and was now ready to attend A.A. meetings.

My sister came to visit and took me to meetings every night. This is the same sister who had tried the disastrous intervention 10 years earlier, but now I was ready to hear everything she had to say! She showed me the local meeting schedule, and I was stunned to realize that there were over 200 meetings a week. She introduced me to local women in the program, and they



took over the responsibility of getting me to meetings because I couldn't drive.

I was afraid to go to A.A. meetings, but I felt I had no choice. I was still shaky and found it hard to understand everything that was being said, but that didn't matter. I was welcomed with such loving arms. I had always felt left out, and now suddenly I had all kinds of people caring about me. I literally felt a new life beginning. I tried to do everything I was told: I went to meetings every day, read the literature, got a sponsor, worked the Steps, and became grateful to be alive and sober.

I had been dreading my 60th birthday, but when that day arrived and I realized I was sober and celebrating with people who cared about me, I felt healthier, stronger and more optimistic than I had in years.

With alcohol, my life had become narrow and bleak; with sobriety, the world has opened up for me. I am taking watercolor classes and have bought new clothes for the first time in years. My home group thinks I may be ready for a service position, and my son has sent me an airline ticket to visit him!

As one good A.A. friend says, just like **The Wizard of Oz**, my life has gone from black and white to glorious technicolor — and I owe it all to A.A.!

**K. B. (age 77)                      He joined A.A. at age 69**

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**“For almost 50 years... alcohol controlled my life.”**

I am an only child, born in the middle of the Great Depression, to parents who lived and breathed religion and controlled every aspect of my life, and I hated it. I was convinced that I was different from other people, a feeling that would stay with me until well into my first year of sobriety.

I had my first drink about my junior year in high school, and although I did get drunk a few times and loved it, poverty saved me at that time. I went on to complete two years of college before being drafted into the military, where I served the next five and a half years, eventually flying B-25s in the Pacific Theater. Alcohol was beginning to play a large role in my life.

For almost 50 years after I left the military, alcohol

controlled my life. I was married three times, having two daughters by my first marriage and two by my second. I married my third wife because she approved of my drinking, never criticized me, and always took care of me when I was drunk. That was 30 years ago, and from the time I met her in a bar she never saw me sober, a condition she definitely did not like. She told me she preferred me drunk.

Throughout those years I held many jobs, and several times was in business for myself, most of which ended because of alcohol-related incidents or prolonged periods of drunkenness. There were lost homes, financial problems, wrecked automobiles, neglected children, times in jail, and much more, but never did I suspect that alcohol was my problem.

One morning I woke around 5:00 a.m. I remember going to the bar, where I had an eight-ounce cup of vodka with a straw in it that I had poured the night before. This had become a nightly ritual, because it had been many weeks since I had been able to fill the cup in the morning and get it to my mouth without spilling it.

My wife of 22 years would be getting up soon to go to work, and I wanted to get over the horrible shakes that had greeted me every morning for several weeks or months (I am not really sure — it could have been years). I knew that once I had enough alcohol the shakes would go away and life would be okay for a few hours. I had no idea of what was in store for me for the rest of that day. Somewhere around 2:00 in the afternoon I had drunk about two fifths of vodka. I was alone, scared, and blaming everyone and everything for all the problems in my life, but for some unknown reason I was not drunk. It suddenly occurred to me that I could not solve these problems alone, and that for the first time in my life I had to tell another human being that I needed help.

I knew very little about Alcoholics Anonymous. I had tried a few weeks earlier to go to a couple of A.A. meetings but believed that I was different from all those people and that A.A. was not the solution to my problems. I was determined to start cutting back on my drinking, but I realized that not only could I not cut back,

I seemed to be drinking more. I remembered someone at an A.A. meeting talking about going through a treatment facility, and suddenly I felt that was probably what I needed.

For unknown reasons I picked up a telephone directory and saw a local hospital advertising help for chemical dependency. And after what seemed an eternity, I dialed the number and told someone that I could not stop drinking and needed help. They asked a few questions and told me to come in immediately. When my wife came home from work, I told her that I had to go to the hospital, and she agreed to take me even though she said she didn't think I was that bad.

My memory of events for a few days after this are hazy. The time spent in a wheelchair — being fed by someone else because I could not lift food to my mouth without dropping it; being pushed across a street to a church to attend an A.A. meeting; the nights without sleep as I lay in bed with my body shaking.

After 20 days in a treatment facility I was released into a strange new world that I did not understand. I got a

sponsor and went to many A.A. meetings, but I could not convince myself I was an alcoholic until Christmas Day and seven months of sobriety. My oldest daughter, who had been in A.A. 12 years at that time, traveled 700 miles to go to a meeting with me that day. She shared her own story and how proud she was of her dad now that he was sober. Then she said that she and her sister never knew what time their father would come home at night, what condition he would be in, or if he would come home at all. She said they were afraid to get in a car and ride with him.

I sat there with tears in my eyes and admitted to myself that I was an alcoholic and that my life had always been unmanageable. I had just worked Step One and realized at that moment that my life in sobriety was just beginning. I have served as secretary of many groups, spent three years in general service work, sponsored several people, and have loved every minute of it. Yes — I still make coffee and help set up meetings.

As of this writing, I have seven and a half years of sobriety and have celebrated my 77th birthday; I have

a successful business, a host of friends, four adoring daughters, and a great social life. For me, life began two months before my 70th birthday.

**J.H. (age 75)**

**She joined A.A. at 61**

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“Rarely was I truly happy — rarely truly anything!  
A sham!”

I just celebrated 14 years of sobriety! Hard to believe; there was a time when I couldn't go a day without alcohol. When I came into A.A. I was 61 years old, and I did not think about what I'd be doing in 14 years. I was sure the better part of my life was over. I never could have believed how great my life would become!

My life took an immediate turn for the better when I woke up one morning and said, “I need help.” These words were in response to my husband's question, “Did you have a good time last night?” We had had dinner out with friends and, once more, I had my usual vodka before we even left the house, several more with dinner, and ended up in another argument with my

husband. Once more I went to bed angry, and awoke in the middle of the night wishing I could die and telling myself, “I can’t go on like this. I don’t want to do this anymore.” How many times had I prayed “to have the desire to drink removed — help me to not want alcohol tomorrow”? Yet each tomorrow brought another losing battle with my former friend, now turned into my enemy. I just couldn’t stay away from it.

When I admitted I needed help, I never dreamed how much help I would receive. We fairly flew to the hospital. I answered “Yes” to all the questions except the one that asked, “Did you drink in the morning?” I found it quite hard to face a drink in the morning! They asked, “Did you go to luncheons or have lunch with friends?” Well, yes, I did. “Did you have wine or a bloody Mary?” Well, yes, I did. “Then you did drink in the morning!” I was an alcoholic in need of help. I, who got up every day and went for a three-mile walk! I’d been convinced that if I could do that I couldn’t be alcoholic.

I knew I did not want to go on living a life with alcohol in charge, taking me where I did not wish to go. Rarely



was I truly happy — rarely truly anything! A sham!

Having been born in the 1920s, my husband and I had grown up during the Depression. We married in 1943, in the midst of World War II. All our partying was done on weekends. It was eat, drink and be merry (for tomorrow we might not be able to). I looked forward to those weekends. Alcohol was very much a part of our good times. It loosened me up for dancing, for talking, made me a party girl. Yes, the early years of marriage were full of fun, with the exception of our times apart.

As an Air Force wife I was determined not to be dependent (wives were referred to as “dependents”). I tried to be self-sufficient. And whenever I was required to do something difficult, I tried to prove I could do it — on my own if necessary. My first trip overseas was in 1953: my first time on an airplane, with four children, ages 2, 4, 6 and 8. It was not easy to get us to New York and then to Germany.

In Germany I learned how good wine could be. I enjoyed the various wines — a lot! These were still beautiful

days. But too much wine could spoil those beautiful days, and I remember spoiling a few.

Our Air Force career lasted 32 years, ending at the Pentagon with back-to-back assignments and a few trips to Europe. I tried desperately to be careful and not drink too much. But I was not always successful. I spoiled some very beautiful times. We were so lucky to have been given such assignments and to have had a continually successful career. At least I do not think that my drinking stood in the way of my husband's promotions. I tried hard to be a good Air Force wife.

When I entered the rehab I was able to look at myself for the first time as a person — not just somebody's wife, mother or daughter. I began to find out who I was and what was inside that made me who I am. I also learned that I did not have to pour alcohol into myself every day.

Free at last! I am grateful to my Higher Power and to A.A. that I am no longer a slave to alcohol. I am a free woman with a brand new life. I look forward each day to an A.A. meeting; I used to look forward to that first drink! Thankfully, I don't have to do that anymore.

## How do I find A.A.?

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Almost anywhere in the United States or Canada, you will find an A.A. telephone number in the local phone book. If you decide to call, you will be put in touch with another alcoholic. And your call will be private — you don't even have to give your name. Just ask where the A.A. meetings are.

Wherever an A.A. group meets, it has one purpose: to help alcoholics stay sober. A.A. groups meet in all kinds of places. Some meetings are held in schools or churches; some A.A. groups meet in hospitals or even office buildings. But it's important to keep in mind that an A.A. group is not connected with the church, school or government office where it happens to meet.

There are several kinds of A.A. meetings:

**Open meetings** are open to anyone, alcoholic or not, who is interested in A.A. At open meetings you will hear stories such as the ones in this pamphlet.

**Closed meetings** are limited to those who have a drinking problem themselves (or think they may have). Here, we are free to speak up and ask questions. Here we get practical suggestions on how to stay sober.

**At beginners meetings**, we discover that we are on the same level with anyone who is new to A.A. Even if there's a business executive or a grandmother next to us, we're all starting from scratch together, tackling the basics of A.A.

If there is no A.A. group nearby or if you are physically unable to attend meetings, help is still available. You may write to Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163. That is the mailing address of the A.A. General Service Office. The A.A. members who work there will share their experience with you. And, they will be glad to offer suggestions for getting an A.A. group started.



# THE TWELVE STEPS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

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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.

# THE TWELVE TRADITIONS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

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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 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

**PLEASE CHECK WEBSITE**

[aa.org](http://aa.org)

**FOR COMPLETE PUBLICATION LIST**

**ALSO AVAILABLE IN LARGE PRINT:**

**This is A.A.  
Frequently Asked Questions**

# 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.

## 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.**

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

