

EXPERIENCE, STRENGTH AND HOPE

# Access to A.A.

Members share  
on overcoming  
barriers



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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**Members share on**  
**overcoming barriers**



## **Do You Have a Drinking Problem?**

It is difficult for many of us to admit that we have a drinking problem. Yet once over that high hurdle and willing to listen, there are many in A.A. who face additional personal barriers to accessing the A.A. message. This pamphlet will acquaint you with the stories of members from a variety of backgrounds who have experienced difficulties when trying to access the A.A. message and fully participate in our program of recovery.

In Alcoholics Anonymous our desire to stop drinking is our common bond. Since its beginning in 1935, A.A.'s goal has been to reach every alcoholic who needs and wants help.

Many A.A. groups meet in facilities or space that is wheelchair accessible; some groups have an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter (usually a hired professional who is multilingual and knowledgeable about both Deaf and hearing cultures, or occasionally a group member who has been professionally trained in ASL).

Also, there is a wide variety of material and literature (see p. 30), including the Big Book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, A.A.'s basic text, in braille, ASL, closed captions, videos and more. Some local meeting lists are coded for wheelchair accessible and ASL interpreted meetings, and there is an Accessibilities Checklist available from A.A.'s General Service Office to help groups assess their own level of accessibility.

In this pamphlet you will read the experiences of A.A. members who are blind and/or deaf, those who have hearing or vision loss, those who are housebound or chronically ill, and those who are living with the effects of brain injuries or stroke. These are the stories of alcoholics who found A.A. and are now living new and productive lives free from alcohol.

## **Jason**

*(Traumatic Brain Injury)*

***“Sobriety and A.A. have helped me to maximize my capabilities.”***

I started drinking at age 12 and by 13 I was in my first institution, a psychiatric hospital for teens with anger-related issues. My father’s alcoholism eventually split up the family: my mother, my younger brother and me. Over the course of my drinking I was in a few more hospitals and was jailed for three DUIs (one involving a high-speed chase), battery, theft and hit-and-run. Just before I turned 18, I was sentenced to an alcohol recovery program, where I was first introduced to A.A. By this time my drinking had turned violent, and I frequently picked fights with my family and friends.

I had just turned 25 when, in an alcoholic black-out, I got into a drunken brawl with my brother. He hit me in the head with a baseball bat, which shattered my skull; I suffered a traumatic brain injury because of it. They took my brother to jail and me to the hospital, where I lay in a coma for several months. I spent seven months in the hospital with therapy and reconstructive surgery, some of which failed. They implanted a plate in the right side of my skull and had to replace it twice due to infections and leakage. Upon my discharge from the hospital I drank whiskey along with the drugs they gave me at the hospital. There was some effect, but something told me, “Jason, if you keep doing what you’re doing, you’re going to die!” So with some knowledge of A.A. from when I was 18, I knew where to go. My sobriety date is my 26th birthday.

When I came into A.A., I didn’t know if I was more angry or scared, but no matter how I looked or acted, everyone always tried to welcome and

accept me. One of the first meetings I attended was a men's meeting. There I got my first sponsor and took the Twelve Steps with him. Doing the Steps with my sponsor was a pivotal point for me in letting go of the past, with my present disability and forgiveness of my brother. My sponsor stressed the importance of service and attendance at men's meetings. At times I had to wear a helmet, and at other times there was fluid leaking from my head because my implant was infected. No matter what the case, certain guys at the meetings would go out of their way to make me feel like I was one of the guys, which still is true today. I took to service pretty well, which helped to shut off my mind and gave me a purpose. As soon as I had enough time, I started telling my story to help someone else. Next I became a general service representative (G.S.R.) and a district committee member (D.C.M.). I continued to participate in institutional A.A. meetings and have been volunteering at the central office for several years and love it.

I am on disability and still suffer from the residual effects of my injury. I have some vision problems and am epileptic. I process information slowly, and my memory isn't what it used to be. My left hand is poorly coordinated, but I can play guitar a little. I don't process directions real well. My writing isn't that great, so someone helped me write my story. In my 10 years of sobriety, I have only been able to drive for 3 to 4 years due to my occasional seizures. I continue to be under the care of a neuropsychologist, a psychologist and a neurologist, and I'm also on a whole pharmacy of medications.

My doctors initially believed I would never be able to use my left side again, but sobriety and A.A. have helped me to maximize my capabilities. I got tired of pacing around my house, so I called the Brain Injury Foundation and asked them what a guy like me could do. They encouraged me to contact my state's Department of Rehabilitation, and I just completed a certificate of competence as a home health aide. To see my name alongside the word "competence" on an official piece of paper is a real treat.

Though my parents divorced, my father is now sober in A.A. 16 years. My discharge from the hospital coincided with the sentencing of my

brother for attacking me. The court asked me to make my wishes known since I was the victim. I suggested they let my brother go with time served and insist that he participate in an alcoholism treatment program. The court agreed, and now my brother is sober eight years. My brother and I present each other with cakes on our A.A. birthdays, and sometimes we go fishing with our father. I see my dear mother frequently, eat meals with her and attend church with her. None of it would be possible without the love and patience of A.A.

**Jack**

(Amputee)

***“Due to A.A., I had some grasp of acceptance, faith and hope.”***

Sports and outdoor activities were an important part of my life growing up. At 21, I joined the Army and began to binge drink. Later, in my professional life as a salesman, I always made sure that “entertaining” was part of my job responsibilities. Between DUIs, many stints in jail, arrest warrants, suicidal tendencies and job problems, I eventually hit my bottom. An intervention propelled me into A.A. and I never drank again.

During my first year of sobriety, I attended one to three A.A. meetings every day, studied the Big Book (*Alcoholics Anonymous*), got a sponsor and worked the Twelve Steps. I also got involved in institutional A.A. meetings and became active in the intergroup and area assembly. Working with others kept me in the present and out of myself. With the help of an Employee Assistance Program, I repaired the wreckage of my occupational past and soon became an asset to my company. My personal and spiritual lives were rewarded as well. All this A.A. experience and growth was critical to helping me through some medical challenges I was to go through later.

After 14 years of sobriety, I felt severely ill one day, drove myself to the V.A. hospital emergency room and checked myself in. A wound on my foot had turned into gangrene and the following day the amputations began. After three surgeries, I ended up with a complete leg amputation below



my left knee. During my hospitalization, I attended A.A. meetings on the alcoholism ward, met newcomers and sponsored the guys going through that treatment program. After four months, I was finally released from the hospital. Fortunately, due to A.A., I had some grasp of acceptance, faith and hope, and I drew from them a great deal. As a result of my actions in A.A., I also developed coping skills. What I learned in A.A. became second nature to me, and I remained sober during this stressful period of my life. Soon I would need to draw on it again.

The following year, I developed another wound, which also turned gangrenous. My right leg was also amputated below the knee. Again, a different life began for me. I was confined to a wheelchair and became dependent on others to take me to A.A. meetings and other places. I had to ask for help. I could no longer work in my profession, and I became reliant upon my retirement savings and Social Security. People treated me differently, and my social life took a turn for the worse. I had to sell my home and seek leased property that could accommodate my handicap.

Some of these changes were positive. Because I now ride with others to meetings and spend more time communicating on the telephone, I have more and deeper friendships. I am no longer in the hustle and bustle of life, so I have more one-on-one time with people. I volunteer at our central office answering the phone and waiting on the counter.

Through acceptance and prayer, I am able to survive and stay positive. I have developed trust that God will take care of my needs. Yes, there are bad days, and plenty of them. Life is a struggle sometimes. Nevertheless, I am now blessed with the capacity to love and accept love, and for this I am eternally grateful to A.A. I am still learning new lessons with the daily challenges of life, but I am no longer alone.

**Gloria**

(Stroke)

***“...we can get through whatever life hands us without picking up a drink.”***

I was 84 years old and 11 years sober (although I've been in A.A. since 1962; I may have lost my way, but I never lost A.A.). I was living independently on Maui, going to meetings as often as I could get a ride, talking to fellow A.A.s on the phone, sponsoring and keeping busy with projects. Life was good. Then in October of 2007 I had a catastrophic stroke. My right side was completely paralyzed. I couldn't speak or swallow, and a feeding tube was put in. I couldn't walk or sit up by myself. I was hospitalized for a month and then put into a nursing home.

Many friends from the program came by when I was in the hospital, but I couldn't communicate with them — “Hi” was all I could manage to say. I had a tube up my nose, I was coughing constantly, and I was often out of it because of medication following the surgery to insert the tube. Friends and others visited in my early days at the nursing home. One good friend brought a meeting to me on Christmas day and again on my birthday, and others came by with CDs to listen to or to sit with me and say the Serenity Prayer — all of which meant a lot to me. But after a while, the visits thinned to mostly family.

Without meetings an alcoholic who is going through enormous change is not a pretty sight. I didn't drink, but my attitude was not great. My two daughters would come daily and often read to me from my meditation book. (They are both in the program.) I'm sure they knew I needed something. The readings always seemed to calm me, just hearing about powerlessness, helping me remember my primary purpose and that there was a Higher Power I could turn to through this frightening, life-changing experience. But it was hard. I couldn't share and I didn't get to hear other alcoholics share — our basic medicine.

Then another man from the program, 25 years younger, also had a stroke and ended up in the same nursing home. His friends decided to start a weekly meeting there for the two of us. After six months without regular meetings, I now had a

meeting I could attend every Wednesday at 4:30. It's a small room, seating maybe 12 comfortably. Some days we've had 16 people piled in there. Usually there are around eight of us. We call it the Adversity Group. It's a great meeting and it has been going for about a year and a half. I can speak a little now, enough to say I'm an alcoholic and grateful for everyone being there. Sometimes I get to read the Preamble. Most importantly, I listen to the others share and identify. Maybe I'm even helping another alcoholic in the room by showing him or her we can get through whatever life hands us without picking up a drink.

I do get to outside meetings once in a while with help from my daughters and the bus that transports me in my wheelchair. I showed up at my old home group on my 12th and 13th A.A. anniversaries, and I attended the Thanksgiving alka-thon this year for the first time since the stroke. But my week-in, week-out, lifesaving medicine comes through this small band of A.A. friends who go out of their way to bring the Adversity meeting to us at the nursing home. Thank you. We all have adversities in our lives, but going through them without meetings just doubles the difficulty for an alcoholic. With meetings, it cuts it in half.

**Lynn**

*(Blindness)*

***“Drinking was no longer fun,  
but something I had to do to survive.”***

I have been blind since several days after birth, but this didn't stop me from becoming an alcoholic. Alcoholism is no respecter of age, creed, religion or even disability.

I went to a boarding school for blind children from the age of six to the end of grade 12. During high school, my buddies and I would sneak out after school and go to a local bar. I would drink all I could and sometimes not make it back in time for dinner. On weekends, at home, I'd party all weekend with friends and not remember any of it. All I could recollect was that I'd had a good time, or so I thought. I graduated and continued to party whenever I could.

As time went on, I began to withdraw and drink

alone. Drinking was no longer fun, but something I had to do to survive. I would go to the liquor or beer store daily, go back to my room, lock the door and proceed to escape reality through oblivion. Since social assistance paid for prescriptions, I would use prescription drugs when I couldn't afford booze.

There were several occasions when I ended up in the hospital from overdosing or drinking myself unconscious. Gone was the party animal. Gone was the laughter and frivolity of youth. I felt my life had long been spent. My youth and health had departed. I cared little for the company of others and nothing for my own company.

On my last drunk I awoke in a hospital, bruised, beaten, ill, unable to remember my name, not knowing where I was, or how I got there. A doctor came and told me: "If you continue this kind of lifestyle, you won't see another Christmas!" It was then mid-July. He continued: "I'll let you leave here if you promise to do something about your drinking."

I tried Alcoholics Anonymous before my last hospital episode, but couldn't identify with anything I heard. Being unable to read any of the printed literature left me ill equipped to do anything about working the Steps I'd heard being read at meetings.

I was to drink once more after that horrific episode, but not to get drunk. I had a glass of wine on my birthday, served by the man who became my husband. I vowed afterward never to drink again. I knew I could never be accountable for my actions while drinking. I declare it was God, my Higher Power, who stopped me after drinking that one glass of wine.

I sought out a friend who had originally told me of Alcoholics Anonymous and he began taking me to meetings. I went at least nine times a week, just so I could hear someone read the Twelve Steps. I wanted this new way of life, but had no idea how to maintain it.

One night at an A.A. meeting, it was my turn to speak and I began to sob. I related that I wanted this way of life; I wanted sobriety as I wanted nothing else, but I could read nothing of the literature. I despaired of ever staying sober, unless I could somehow grasp by some means these Twelve Steps to a life worth living.

Six weeks later, a gentleman came with a huge

package that contained the Big Book (*Alcoholics Anonymous*) in braille! I had no idea I could obtain this book in braille and my joy in getting it was overflowing! I immediately went home and phoned my sponsor. Upon hearing that I'd been given a Big Book in braille, she replied: "Now you have no excuses. Sit down and read it!"

I began reading and working the Steps. Bit by bit, the fog and cobwebs began to clear. Being able to read, reread and work the Twelve Steps of recovery has given me my greatest treasure — my sobriety! Eventually, I got *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* and *Daily Reflections* in braille, all of which I read daily.

Now, I am able to go to websites, procure such literature as the Grapevine, listen to speakers and other Big Book and Twelve Step studies; this is a blessing! There are a few books that I may be unable to read as they are still unavailable in braille.

Transportation was no challenge in a large city; however, I moved to a town where getting to meetings became difficult, and I had to ask others for transportation. I've since moved to a city of moderate size and can avail myself of paratransit and the hospitality of friends.

There is life and hope in the program of Alcoholics Anonymous, and I try to live within the framework of this program daily. I have regained my joy and health. I have had difficulties with health issues, but there is nothing that can dampen my faith in my Higher Power, nor has my enthusiasm for A.A. waned since I began working the Steps to the best of my ability.

I continue to "trudge the Road of Happy Destiny" each and every day of my life, and with God's rich blessings, I will walk with Him and continue to grow in wisdom and in sobriety.

**Lee**

(Deafness)

***“It is so good to be made to feel welcome and ‘a part of,’ especially when you have other challenges.”***

I am late-deafened, which means, for reasons that no one totally understands, I lost all of my hearing later in life. I had been Hard-of-Hearing since birth and wore hearing aids as a teenager and young adult, and I have always been blessed with the ability to read lips extremely well.

I was a heavy drinker in my early 20s and found the A.A. program in 1983. Fortunately, at that time I had my hearing, as I am not sure I would have been as successful at staying sober if totally Deaf. So much of the A.A. program, from meetings to phone calls with fellow members, depends on the ability to hear and communicate with others. Unless it is an extremely small group, my ability to read the lips of whoever is speaking is limited to how close they are. Speaker meetings are easier since I can sit in the front. This can also be difficult if the speaker moves around a lot while talking, puts their hand over their mouth or mumbles. I have found that using a sign language interpreter is very helpful. A sign language interpreter is a person licensed and certified in American Sign Language (ASL). The interpreter is a paid professional and not a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. I was able to find an interpreter by contacting my State Department of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing; they set me up with an interpreter very quickly.

If you see me or someone Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing at a meeting with an interpreter, relax. They are there under the strictest of confidentiality rules, so no one’s anonymity is going to be broken. Please say hello, ask how I’m doing. It is so good to be made to feel welcome and “a part of,” especially when you have other challenges. Using an interpreter has allowed me to enjoy meetings again. Sadly, there are drawbacks. Currently our state will only pay for one meeting a week. I used to be very active in going to meetings, often attending as many as seven a week when I was first sober. Since I have lost all my hearing, I attend one meeting a week with an interpreter. This is what works best for me.

One tool that I know many of us in the program make regular use of is the telephone. Before losing all of my hearing, I burned up many a phone line chatting with other members. I'm fortunate that today's technology has made it possible for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing people to use the telephone. It is a service known as the Relay System. While it is not as quick or smooth as being able to hear the other person, it does make it possible to use the phone. I have been blessed with program friends and sponsors who were willing to put up with the quirks so that we could talk. If you should get a call from a Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing member, try to be understanding and let the conversation flow as best as it can. I can tell you from experience that there are times I get as frustrated with making a call as I can imagine friends get with receiving them. The phone call can be such a blessing, just to know that someone is hearing me out on a problem, or helping me find some humor in a situation.

I owe my life to A.A.; without this program I would not be alive! My hearing loss has been a struggle, but one that I deal with, like the A.A. program has taught me, One Day at a Time. I have come to realize that deafness, like alcoholism, is surmountable when I make use of the help that is available. With my Higher Power's love and the support of the Fellowship, I will continue to live as best I can as a productive sober and Deaf man.

**Deborah**

*(Multiple Sclerosis)*

***“I was given the gift of desperation and became convinced that I'd better get to a meeting or I'd drink.”***

I got sober on October 31, 1989. It was my third attempt at sobriety since four years earlier, when my father had carried the message to me.

At that time, I was starring in and producing a feature film, and I collapsed on the set during the last day of the shoot. They rushed me to the hospital only to find that I was drunk. That was the beginning of my surrender and when the desire to stop drinking became real to me. I called my father again and asked him how I could get a directory of meetings in my area. Since he had moved, he sent

his former sponsor to take me to my first meeting.

I walked into the meeting with a slight limp, as I had had a fall skiing six months earlier. I had been to see several neurologists since that fall because I had numbness and tingling in my legs, feet and hands, and had difficulty walking. I had not been successfully diagnosed so I continued to use alcohol to soothe my fears and pretend the symptoms would just disappear. They didn't.

After 16 days of sobriety, I took a trip with my boyfriend. I did not drink then, but I drank two days after we got home. But already the seeds of sobriety had been planted, so I went back to my home group and started over. I went to a meeting or two daily for 18 days and asked a lady to sponsor me. I had told my boyfriend I had stopped smoking 10 months earlier, but in reality, I had just hidden it from him. I had a crazy idea that I should start smoking and might just as well have some scotch with it. So I proceeded to the liquor store and got my fifth of scotch and cigarettes before picking up my daughter's carpool. I retreated to my bedroom and passed out soon after. I "came to" shortly before midnight — horrified at what I had done.

The next morning, I called my mother crying and she told me to call my sponsor. That was Halloween 1989. One day at a time, I have since stayed sober and upright as well. My recovery story has been sweet and steady since then, even though, when I was four months sober, I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. The first 12 years of my sobriety, my symptoms remained fairly mild and I went to meetings daily, got sponsees, was an active member of the program, and performed in theater, TV and films.

My walk got worse when both my father and mother died; I had to use a cane to keep from falling. In 2003, I had an exacerbation and went to the hospital for 10 days. I couldn't walk at all upon my release. Folks from the program brought meetings to my house and called daily. I had a personal trainer working with me and was able to start walking with my cane within two weeks and was able to attend the release party for my first CD.

However, I have not been able to get around without a cane or a walker or my scooter since then. It is difficult for me to climb stairs when a meeting place is upstairs without an elevator. It is



very helpful when a meeting place has accessible parking and accessible bathrooms. Also, I really appreciate when aisles in convention and assembly halls are wide enough for my scooter to maneuver. I remain an active member of Alcoholics Anonymous. I sponsor several women and am a general service representative (G.S.R.). A.A. and my sobriety are the center of my life.

I parented three healthy, happy children and was married twice, divorced once and widowed once. I went on countless auditions, performed in TV, film and stage productions, and also produced plays and a film and about 25 cabaret shows. I did this while attending six to 10 A.A. meetings a week. Since 2004 I took over my family's business and my A.A. journey continues.

I am 20 years sober and 55 years old and my life is just as exciting as ever. I share this with all of you who are reading this and thinking, "I am too busy for A.A. meetings," or "I am too sick or tired to get to all those meetings." I laugh when I remember telling my dad I was too busy to go to a meeting every day. So what happened? I was given the gift of desperation and became convinced that I better get to a meeting or I'd drink. So I surrendered and got into action. The slogan One Day at a Time really helped me keep it together when I was formally diagnosed with multiple sclerosis at four months' sobriety. At seven months' sobriety, while attending a meeting on a hilltop, I first heard that self-pity was a defect of character. I went home and hit my knees and asked my Higher Power to remove my self-pity over being diagnosed with MS. A.A. has given my life purpose and direction. I don't drink, I work the Steps and attend meetings daily to keep my attitude positive. Working with others and taking service commitments have helped me to be more focused on others rather than obsessing about my MS symptoms. The Steps and Traditions of our program have allowed me to take great care of myself and be of service to my fellows. The concept of acceptance of what I cannot change, coupled with being given the courage to change things I can, has been a big factor in my serenity and continuous sobriety. Had I not found my way to A.A., I would have resorted to self-medicating and isolation. Instead of waking up with panic attacks, I now rise and have a design for living that has kept me hopeful and sober.

If you have diverse accessibility needs as a result of disease or injury, I assure you that A.A. can and will accommodate you. The members of the Fellowship have shown me love and been exceedingly kind and helpful over the years.

Often I realize that I am the only person in the meeting with accessibility issues, but because our Fellowship is constantly growing, I know there will be more of us. I feel a certain responsibility to be the voice for our minority and so I attend assemblies and conventions to address the effects of my MS and to educate my fellows on what these differing abilities entail. A.A. has always been supportive and most willing to listen to and meet my accessibility issues. I thank my Creator for leading me to this amazing sober life. I shudder to think that I could have missed it all!

**Janet**

*(Arthritis)*

***“I promised God that I would do what I could to make sure that the accessibility issues of people with diverse needs were addressed.”***

Due to osteo- and rheumatoid arthritis, severe joint pain had rendered me unable to walk any distance. My world had become the size of my green living room rug. To travel distances greater than those within my home, I used a motorized scooter. I truly believe that alcohol was holding my life together.

I worked from home via computer and would watch the time change in the lower right-hand corner of the screen. After 5:00 pm my time was my own. I would drink, pass out, then drink some more. On weekends, it was the same.

The thought of trying to manage the pain without alcohol was unimaginable. The only person I would come in contact with was my dog-walker and as long as the checks cleared, he did not care what I looked like. My daily event was to check the liquor supply, to make sure that there was enough. If my stockpile was low, I would go to one of several liquor stores that I frequented (to avoid them thinking that I was a drunk). It did not occur to me that it was odd that when they would hold the door open for me to get in with the scooter, someone

else was already getting the large bottle of gin for me.

I had come to A.A. twice before. I knew that going to A.A. would mean that my drinking would have to be curtailed and that the pain would become unbearable. So I continued to drink — and then I started to fall down in the house. Someone I knew from A.A. had kept in touch with me. He never judged me; he just made himself available. On the morning of my last drink, I could not remember any of the passwords that I needed to open my business computer. I was black and blue from falling, and I had splinters in my butt from trying to get up. This A.A. friend asked me if I thought that my life was still manageable.

That night, I found a meeting, which is now my home group. I truly felt like I had come home.

When I was talking to an A.A. friend about the amount of pain I was experiencing, she asked if I had considered seeing a pain management doctor. Well, I had. I knew that taking pain medication would get in the way of my drinking. Now, this problem was no more!

I found a specialist in pain management at a large teaching hospital and made full disclosure to him about my drinking history. He did a very thorough interview and examination and had me sign a treatment contract about taking medications as prescribed. I never deviated from this agreement.

As a result of A.A. and this doctor and my mind clearing, I was able to pursue better treatment options for my arthritis. After several operations, I now walk with a cane for distances and occasionally take ibuprofen for pain.

In early sobriety, I discovered how difficult it was to find wheelchair-accessible meetings. One very cold Saturday, I took the bus to two meetings and found they no longer existed. I promised God that with His help to stay sober, I would do what I could to make sure that the accessibility issues of people with diverse needs were addressed. Today I am my county's representative for Accessibilities and I am compiling a list of all truly accessible/active meetings in my county, as well as a list of people who are willing to help other alcoholics get to meetings or make visits to alcoholics who are housebound.

Working on this project has opened my eyes to the needs of many alcoholics who live in despair or

who think that there is no solution. There is a solution. It is A.A. and the hope that flows as a result of my embracing this program. I know for certain that my world is now much bigger than my green living room rug!

**Mark**

*(Acquired Brain Injury)*

***“I remember how much effort I devoted to getting my supply of alcohol, so I’m willing to do what it takes to find accessible meetings.”***

My sobriety date is March 1, 2000. I have an acquired brain injury that affects my memory, and causes seizures and painful headaches. I’m paralyzed on my right side, so I use a motorized wheelchair. The language center of my brain is damaged, so people have difficulty understanding my speech pattern, and I struggle with writing. One of my A.A. friends has typed my story.

I use a small computer called a DynaVox [a speech communication device] that employs visual clues and word processing and imitates the human voice. It is slow, inaccurate and cumbersome, but I’m grateful to have it to bridge the great divide between my mind and the mind of another. Whatever it is that makes me a unique human being is still intact. I just have a hard time expressing myself.

I was born in 1959. In high school I was tested as having an IQ of 140, and I made my living as a computer repairperson. The company I worked for downsized, and I was caught in a mass layoff. My alcoholism was well entrenched, and I became immobilized with fear over facing an uncertain job market. Eventually I ran out of money and was no longer able to afford the rent on my comfortable house in California.

I became homeless and sought relief at a local shelter, where a man tried to steal the remainder of my slender belongings. We got into an altercation, and he hit a stone over my head. I was hospitalized and doctors warned me that I had to quit drinking or I could end up in a coma, followed by death. Denial about my alcoholism prevailed; I left the hospital against medical advice and drank

again. Next, I fell down a flight of stairs and injured the same spot on my skull. This time I was paralyzed, yet I have survived six brain surgeries.

I've lived in a long-term care facility for almost a decade. The first three years I couldn't speak, write, read, or walk, and a nurse had to feed me. I still can't use my right arm. Slowly I got better, but I couldn't remember how to reach the people I cared about. My family was worried sick, and after seven years they finally found me via searches on the Internet. Words can't express how grateful I am to have them back in my life.

Eventually, I discovered A.A. meetings were being held where I live. My improved condition enabled me to also attend meetings outside the hospital. Many meeting halls aren't wheelchair accessible, but I remember how much effort I devoted to getting my supply of alcohol, so I'm willing to do what it takes to find accessible meetings.

It's hard to make friends because people have difficulty communicating with me. But I do have close friends in A.A. whom I care about and they care about me. Every week I attend several meetings, and people seem happy to see me when I come in the room. Someone will get me a cup of decaf and they already know how I take it. The meeting secretary always saves a spot for me where I can park my wheelchair. A small table is set up where I can rest my DynaVox and refreshments. Often the secretary asks me to use my DynaVox to recite selections from A.A. literature. If I want to share during the meeting, my friends will interpret while I use my DynaVox or my own voice. I've even been the main speaker on several occasions. This has been achieved by having my friends prepare my A.A. talk in advance, then they read it aloud and I make additional comments. If I'm not able to attend my home group, someone will notice and give me a call to see if I'm okay.

I've learned how to read again, but it's easier for me to listen. One A.A. friend goes over the Big Book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, with me. Another friend has given me a copy of the Big Book on tape. My local central office is building a CD/tape library of A.A. speakers and I'm looking forward to utilizing it.

I believe in the power of prayer and every day I thank God I'm still alive. I don't want to die;

therefore, I don't want to drink. My brain injury can also cause me to feel sad or depressed, but I believe there is magic in maintaining an attitude of gratitude. For instance, I'm grateful to be naturally left handed, because it's my right hand that is now paralyzed. I'm also grateful to have this opportunity to tell my story.

**John**

*(DeafBlind)*

***“I realized my higher power was watching over me, and my recovery blossomed.”***

I'm 52 years old and married to a naturally hearing spouse. I have low vision and wear cochlear implants. Before the implants, I wore hearing aids. I am able to speak with my voice. However, I retain my identity as a DeafBlind person and still use my native language — American Sign Language.

When I was five years old, my parents placed me in a Catholic boarding school. During breaks and holidays, I went home and I observed my family and relatives drinking alcohol. In my teenage years, I began drinking a little. When I was a freshman, I went to a party with Deaf friends in the woods where alcohol was being served. I was suspended from all campus activity for one year. However, I continued to drink.

After high school I worked in my father's landscaping business. During that time I felt like everyone thought that I was limited because I couldn't read, see or hear. I couldn't express myself well. I felt stuck. The stuck feeling turned to anger and frustration. My solution was to drink.

I then married my first wife, and soon my drinking started to affect my marriage and I decided to go into in-patient treatment. After discharge, I was sober for two months, then relapsed. I was not happy with myself and felt that my life was a mess, so I went into counseling. After a few counseling sessions I thought that I was done. My wife told the counselor about my alcoholism and the counselor told me that I had two choices: continue to drink and then die or stop drinking. Within two weeks, I quit drinking and went into in-patient therapy.

I was in an in-patient treatment program for

three weeks. I learned about alcoholism and being an alcoholic. For part of my program, the facility provided interpreters who were scheduled for two-hour blocks of time. As a result, I couldn't attend all of the recovery sessions. I remember feeling angry and frustrated because I did not feel comfortable attending class without an interpreter. Therefore, I missed out on a lot of sessions.

After my discharge, I attended Deaf A.A. meetings. The meetings disbanded because very few people showed up. I tried going to hearing A.A. meetings but I could not arrange for an interpreter. Two months later I was at a wedding reception with my wife and I saw her drinking. When we got home I relapsed.

After a warning from my doctor, I quit drinking again and returned to A.A. meetings. I could only go to hearing A.A. meetings without an interpreter. It was a horrible experience without an interpreter. Sometimes I would use an FM system [an assistive listening device that uses radio signals to transmit amplified sounds] so I could hear at the meetings. However, I was not able to understand the emotions the other group members were voicing. I needed an interpreter, but the group did not have enough money in the budget. I went to the local college and got a student interpreter, who could only interpret one day out of the week.

After I divorced and my father passed away, I moved back to the city. I contacted an independent living center in the area and was referred to A.A. meetings for the Deaf that had interpreters. With an interpreter, I felt more comfortable socializing in the Fellowship. I was determined to go up to people and introduce myself. I never gave up on my recovery. Eventually, some male hearing members of A.A. befriended me and one became my sponsor. I realized my higher power was watching over me, and my recovery blossomed. I underwent two cochlear implant surgeries. With the help of my FM system, I hear the voices of recovery in the meetings. I'm connected with more members of A.A. and still work the Twelve Steps with my sponsor's guidance. I still use interpreters as well, and I also sponsor other deaf members.

I understand how important it is for people who are Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing and DeafBlind to stay sober, and they have a greater chance of relapse if they don't have interpreters. It is vital that the

communication is there between Deaf and hearing members. I'm grateful to God and A.A. for the restoration of my sobriety and a new life.

**Michael**

*(Blindness)*

***“Alcohol was for me what spinach was for Popeye.”***

One of the great myths I loved to embrace in my drinking days was, “You’d drink, too, if you had my life.” What I’ve come to know is that I didn’t drink because I was blind; I drank because I was, and am, an alcoholic. I grew up during the boom days of the big automakers in a feisty working-class Polish-Russian neighborhood. My dad and my uncles — sons of immigrants — drank, gambled and swaggered. The corner bar was the heartbeat of the neighborhood, and alcohol was the social lubricant. Here I was, a skinny, frightened child, who at five years old found out he was going blind and there was nothing that could be done to prevent it. I had a progressive eye disease, and for the next 40 years, I endured the agonizing process of gradually losing all of my sight. My dad was a great teacher: he taught me how to gamble, how to cheat at cards, and how to always look for an angle to exploit. The work ethic was a foreign concept to him, but we managed to scrape by, even when dad went to prison for stealing.

I was a shy, gawky, awkward kid with thick glasses — so totally outside of what it meant to “be a man” in this family. As a teen and young adult, I had enough residual vision to work in supermarkets, factories, and offices, always trying to hide my condition. Until my late 20s I kept trying to pass as sighted, but not without bumping into poles, tripping on the stairs, or sitting on strangers’ laps on the bus. So early on, alcohol became a friend. Alcohol was for me what spinach was for Popeye.

I was married at 24, but truly didn’t have the ability to love or give of myself. I was unfaithful, ambitious, and willing to bend the rules whenever it suited my needs. In the meantime, as my blindness progressed, I knew my only hope was to get an education. That I did. School gave me the kind



of structure that I'd never had. During the next 12 years, I kept changing jobs, returning to school, dragging my family from place to place in pursuit of my dreams and, of course, drinking regularly. Eventually I earned a doctorate in rehabilitation administration. By this time I was using a white cane and relying on braille and large print to read. My big city gift of gab and street smarts blasted me into leadership positions. Unfortunately, my history taught me to try to control people, places and things, and to finish first at all costs. Now I was a big shot — attending conferences, traveling and being the “boss.” My two favorite phrases quickly became “open bar” and “happy hour.” One of my “aha!” moments came on an icy winter day, when I found myself crawling over a snow bank on my hands and knees, with my white cane in one hand and a bottle of vodka in a brown paper bag in the other. Such was my desperation. Some big shot!

After three children and 30 years in a stressful and eventually loveless marriage, my wife and I finally divorced. The day I left my wife was the day I took my last drink. I walked out of that house and into the doors of Alcoholics Anonymous. This could only be the work of a Power greater than this ego-driven, know-it-all, blind guy. God was doing for me what I could not do for myself.

The following years were extremely difficult because I was living with an enormous amount of guilt and shame for all of the carnage I had visited on so many people. I kept going back to try to talk to my ex-wife; not to reconcile, but to manipulate her into forgiving me so I could feel OK about myself. I just didn't “get it” that this was still all about me. I was a slow learner, but the more I embraced the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous, the more I learned that what others thought of me didn't matter. My relationship with my Higher Power came first. If God could forgive me, who was I not to forgive myself? Forget “90 meetings in 90 days” — that first year I must have attended over 400 meetings! I also discovered that there were many ways for me to gain access to some of the same A.A. materials as my sighted “friends of Bill.” The Big Book (*Alcoholics Anonymous*), the “Twelve and Twelve,” *A.A. Comes of Age* and many other A.A. Conference-approved materials are available in recorded versions, and the Grapevine can be obtained online with audio

capability. My friends and I trade recordings of A.A. Conference speakers sharing their stories, and one loving member of the Fellowship surprised me with a copy of the first 164 pages of the Big Book in braille. These resources have become an important part of my daily recovery.

Although much has been done to make A.A. fully accessible, there is still much to do. The more active I became in service work, particularly as chair of the area accessibilities committee, the more I noticed barriers that hinder full participation for alcoholics with disabilities. I have attended area and district conferences and local A.A. meetings held in locations that are not fully accessible to people with various disabilities — no ramps, no braille, meetings held on the second floor of an old building with no elevators, the use of printed signage outside of conference rooms to indicate the sessions, and materials (handouts, programs, information) not available in alternate forms. It is also true for me and many others with disabilities that transportation is always a challenge. However, I am blessed to find so many members of my home group who are willing to ensure that I can get to meetings.

As my time in recovery passed, I gradually stopped wallowing in guilt and shame. What was my secret? Just what Bill and Bob (co-founders of A.A.) said it would be — service. I left my big shot image behind and learned the beauty of humility. I made coffee, opened the clubhouse, cleaned up after meetings, helped other alcoholics, and got involved in A.A. committee work.

That's when the promises really started to come true. I began to pray and meditate. I wanted to establish a deeper relationship with the Power that was transforming my life. Since then, I have come to know God (as I understand God) and I have come to know peace. My conscience has narrowed, and I now have more than a nodding acquaintance with the truth. Thanks to Alcoholics Anonymous, I have never seen more clearly.

**Robert**

(*Mental Illness*)

***“For a brief time I tried controlled drinking — and that didn’t work out.”***

I had my last drink when I was 26 years old. I bounced in and out of the rooms for several years before then. This time I came back beaten and hopeless.

My first A.A. meeting was when I was 22 years old. At the time I didn’t think I was an alcoholic, even though my drinking became almost daily. One night I was lonely, depressed and feeling worthless. I started drinking a beer, then two, and then decided to take more of a prescribed medication. I called a friend and told him I wanted to kill myself, and then an ambulance came. At the hospital I was told I had a problem with my drinking. I went to my first A.A. meeting, didn’t identify much, and didn’t think I was that bad. For a brief time I tried a few methods of controlled drinking, and that didn’t work out. Then I began drinking alone and it got worse.

I was thinking at the time it was my learning disability that was my problem, and I thought that I was too stupid to get the program. The truth was, though, I had no knowledge yet of the Steps. I tried reading both the Big Book (*Alcoholics Anonymous*), and the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* and couldn’t understand anything because of my disability. I had only short bouts of sobriety, from two weeks up to five months. Around that time I was bouncing in and out of institutions, so I was having a really tough time.

Finally, I began to regularly attend young people’s meetings and I began to understand the Fellowship there. They threw sober parties, and went to dinners and dances, A.A. young people’s conventions, and other fun activities. I put together nine months of sobriety. I thought it was the Fellowship that was going to keep me sober. I still didn’t understand the program, Steps and higher power. I struggled more.

During that point my spirituality was going out the window and I was doing the wrong things. I went off one of my medications at that time. I also suffer from bipolar disorder (manic depression). A relapse was in the making at that point.

Also, I was chasing women around, and I became obsessed with a specific girl in the rooms. Life was certainly unmanageable. I was disregarding what my sponsor said. It was really no surprise that I relapsed yet again. I was so spiritually and mentally sick at that point nobody wanted to be around me, including people in A.A. I had a few suicide attempts around that period, perhaps in part because I suffer from mental illness. One suicide attempt involved drugs. My mom was on the verge of kicking me out of my apartment, and a lot of nights my dad stayed with me.

I decided to try to get sober again, so I checked into a detox. At that time I decided to go back to the sponsor who began helping me with the Steps when I got out of the rehab. I was having resentments with the clients there, and I couldn't get the girl I had become obsessed with off my mind.

In detox, I began reading the Big Book, but because of my disability I couldn't fully understand what I was reading. I was looking for answers on how to find God and was still thinking I had a punishing God. My mind was going insane, and I walked out of rehab, bought a pack of cigarettes and drank a few beers. Then the guilt and remorse came in. I knew if I went back to the rehab I would be kicked out, so I ran in the middle of the street. Somebody called the cops and I went back to the psych ward. While in the psych ward I knew then, for sure, I was powerless over alcohol and drugs and that my life was unmanageable, with or without alcohol. I told my sponsor my doubts about a higher power, and he explained "God is everything or he is nothing" and that God is all about love and not punishment. For the first time, I felt some sort of relief and hope that I could be restored to sanity. I always blamed having a learning disability and a mental illness as the reason I could never stay sober. I was wrong; the program is about trusting in God, accepting the things I cannot change and finding the wisdom to know the difference.

After I got out of the psych ward I did the Third Step by going to a meeting and then to church to say the Third Step prayer. However, there is no permanent effect unless I continue to take the other Steps. I realized throughout my life I have been running the show and alcohol is just a symptom. The root of my problem is selfishness and self-centeredness that is driven by a bunch

of fears. By doing Step Four and taking a moral inventory by writing out all resentments, fears and harms (including sex harms) that I have done, I have learned to release a lot of skeletons. Doing the Fifth Step helped me a lot. Steps Six and Seven are all about having God remove my character defects, which I was willing to do.

Around that time, my friends in the Young People's groups were hosting the Eastern Area Convention of Young People in A.A. (EACYPA7). I got into doing service and became the co-chair for outreach, with only three months sober. It was a bit challenging to do some of that service, especially because I have a disability, but the chair for Outreach showed me what to do.

I went to the convention and reserved a room for myself, as I couldn't find anybody to room with. Someone found another person who had a disability; he had MS and he ended up rooming with me. This fellow had 32 years of sobriety. I helped move him around during the convention and even put him to bed at night. That was God's gift, that I was able to be of service to him. I was so proud of being part of the host committee for EACYPA7 and it was a great convention. The people are great and I'm happy to have them part of my life. During that time, the Eleventh Step became clear and I continue to grow my conscious contact with God.

I went to the International Conference of Young People in A.A. (ICYPA) in Atlanta, and was part of New York City winning the bid. They hosted the ICYPAA Convention in August 2010 in Times Square. I showed up at the host committee and was elected alternate chair for Accessibilities for the 52nd ICYPAA. It is great to be a part of service. I hope to form an Accessibilities meeting and help alcoholics who have any form of disability and mental illness. I really want to be helping as many people as I can and not be selfish and self-centered. On a good note, today I live a much more manageable life than I did before.

**Ashley R.**

*(Deaf)*

### ***The Inclusion of Deaf Alcoholics in A.A.***

When I first came into A.A., there were only two A.A. meetings in my city that provided American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation. I was so desperate to stop drinking and I was new — I wanted what you all had and I was willing to go any lengths to get it. I could not stay sober with only two meetings a week, and I was scared, lost, confused and felt hopeless. One day, I was blessed with a hearing non-signer sponsor who would not let me give up: she wouldn't let me use my being Deaf as an excuse to leave the program and screw up my life. She saved me. She pushed me hard to go to meetings to show the groups that I wanted recovery and then to ask for an interpreter at those meetings. The groups turned to the Traditions, first to the Fifth Tradition: "Each group has but one primary purpose — to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers." The groups realized that if they wanted to carry the message to the Deaf alcoholic, they could use the Seventh Tradition to help pay for ASL interpreters. The word started to get out to other Deaf alcoholics about these meetings, and more Deaf members who wanted recovery showed up. Today in my city we have eight meetings with interpreters — an ASL-interpreted meeting every day of the week! We have entered a new era of inclusion of Deaf members in our A.A. community.

As time passed, we had more Deaf alcoholics at the meetings who were not only staying sober, but who also wanted to be of service to the group. While Deaf and hearing alcoholics were eager to work together, it was uncomfortable at the beginning because we spoke different languages. But we slowly started to learn how to communicate with each other. We all began learning how to work together and to carry the message together, to join in fellowship and to be of service. Deaf members were finally having the spiritual experience of being of service to the group.

It is not surprising that we now have Deaf members who want to participate more fully in A.A. as whole — that is, we want to serve at the district and area levels. Full participation is a sticky issue

at this level of the general service structure, where the lack of funding for ASL interpreters can present a barrier. Things are improving: three districts in our area provide an ASL interpreter at their monthly meetings, and each has Deaf members representing them on the Area's standing committees. In addition, many workshops and conferences offer ASL interpretation, and our intergroup webpage has a Deaf-specific link to offer ASL translation of English text on the website and clearly shows which meetings provide an interpreter.

But there is still a ways to go. It must be remembered that both Deaf and hearing members benefit from greater participation by Deaf members. In my group, I often hear members saying how grateful they are that we have ASL interpreters: they are happy to see Deaf members in meetings and they know how much we learn from each other. Many hearing members include us in their Fellowship activities and some of them are even learning ASL. Everyone benefits. And if Deaf members have valuable contributions to make to the group, we also can be of service on a broader scale, at the district and area level. If we exclude our Deaf members by failing to make General Service accessible to them, we risk cutting ourselves off from good leaders.

As Concept I says, "Final responsibility and ultimate authority for A.A. world services should always reside in the collective conscience *of our whole Fellowship.*" This is a beautiful concept! Not just for the Deaf members but for other members who are from different backgrounds or who have different accessibility needs — in other words, for everyone. We do not want financial concerns to get in the way of practicing our spiritual principles. Rather, we can shift our views from small-mindedness to open-mindedness — from worrying about money to appreciating how powerful it would be for hearing and Deaf A.A. members to work together.

Since I came to A.A., I have been of service by serving as a greeter at meetings, helping set up meetings and cleaning up afterwards, making coffee, attending workshops, advocating for ASL interpreters, creating service projects to connect Deaf and hearing members, being of service at conferences, attending district meetings, serving as a district accessibility committee chair and par-

ticipating in area committee meetings. I want to be part of General Service, and so do many other Deaf members. We do not want to see money become a barrier for our access to A.A. as whole. We want to work with you as we help to carry the message to everyone! We want to stay sober, yes, but we don't want to just show up to meetings and not be part of General Service. Tradition 1 says, "Each member of Alcoholics Anonymous is but a small part of a great whole. A.A. must continue to live or most of us would surely die. Hence our common welfare comes first. But individual welfare follows close afterward." My life and the lives of other Deaf alcoholics are getting better. We are not dying; we are thriving because the members in A.A. see that we are part of a great whole. We want to be part of General Service and to continue being of service to *all* the suffering alcoholics who are still out there, who need our hands to help them. This is our spiritual principle: inclusion.



## **A.A. Literature for Alcoholics with Diverse Accessibility Needs**

### **American Sign Language (ASL) books:**

*Alcoholics Anonymous* (a.k.a. the Big Book) on DVD  
*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* on DVD  
“*Access to A.A.: Members share on overcoming barriers*” on DVD

### **Audio Formats:**

*Alcoholics Anonymous* (a.k.a. the Big Book)  
*Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*  
*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*  
*Living Sober*  
“*Access to A.A.: Members share on overcoming barriers*” (on DVD)  
“A Brief Guide to A.A.” (recording on CD of several pamphlets)

### **Braille books:**

*Alcoholics Anonymous* (a.k.a. the Big Book)  
*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*  
*Daily Reflections*

### **Braille pamphlets:**

“This is A.A.”  
“Is A.A. For You?”  
“Frequently Asked Questions About A.A.”

### **Subtitled videos:**

*Hope: Alcoholics Anonymous*  
*Markings on the Journey*  
*It Sure Beats Sitting in a Cell*

### **Easy-to-Read, Illustrated:**

“Is A.A. For Me?”  
“Twelve Steps Illustrated”  
“What Happened to Joe?”  
“It Happened to Alice”  
“Too Young?”  
“A Message to Teenagers”

### **Large Print books:**

*Alcoholics Anonymous* (a.k.a. the Big Book)  
*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*  
*Living Sober*  
*Came to Believe*  
*As Bill Sees It*  
*Daily Reflections*

### **Large Print pamphlets:**

“Frequently Asked Questions About A.A.”  
“A.A. For the Older Alcoholic”  
“This is A.A.”

## **Where to find A.A.?**

There are A.A. groups meeting in large cities, rural areas and villages throughout the world. “A.A.” or “Alcoholics Anonymous” is listed online or in your local telephone directory. The phone listing will most likely connect you to an A.A. intergroup or answering service. The person will then be able to direct you to a meeting in your community and, if need be, point out A.A. groups that are wheelchair accessible, and those who provide services to alcoholics with accessibility needs.

If you cannot reach a group in your area, contact the General Service Office, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163, (212) 870-3400, or visit our website: [aa.org](http://aa.org).

## 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.

## THE 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 nonprofessional, 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.

## THE TWELVE CONCEPTS FOR WORLD SERVICE

I. Final responsibility and ultimate authority for A.A. world services should always reside in the collective conscience of our whole Fellowship.

II. The General Service Conference of A.A. has become, for nearly every practical purpose, the active voice and the effective conscience of our whole Society in its world affairs.

III. To insure effective leadership, we should endow each element of A.A. — the Conference, the General Service Board and its service corporations, staffs, committees, and executives — with a traditional “Right of Decision.”

IV. At all responsible levels, we ought to maintain a traditional “Right of Participation,” allowing a voting representation in reasonable proportion to the responsibility that each must discharge.

V. Throughout our structure, a traditional “Right of Appeal” ought to prevail, so that minority opinion will be heard and personal grievances receive careful consideration.

VI. The Conference recognizes that the chief initiative and active responsibility in most world service matters should be exercised by the trustee members of the Conference acting as the General Service Board.

VII. The Charter and Bylaws of the General Service Board are legal instruments, empowering the trustees to manage and conduct world service affairs. The Conference Charter is not a legal document; it relies upon tradition and the A.A. purse for final effectiveness.

VIII. The trustees are the principal planners and administrators of overall policy and finance. They have custodial oversight of the separately incorporated and constantly active services, exercising this through their ability to elect all the directors of these entities.

IX. Good service leadership at all levels is indispensable for our future functioning and safety. Primary world service leadership, once exercised by the founders, must necessarily be assumed by the trustees.

X. Every service responsibility should be matched by an equal service authority, with the scope of such authority well defined.

XI. The trustees should always have the best possible committees, corporate service directors, executives, staffs, and consultants. Composition, qualifications, induction procedures, and rights and duties will always be matters of serious concern.

XII. The Conference shall observe the spirit of A.A. tradition, taking care that it never becomes the seat of perilous wealth or power; that sufficient operating funds and reserve be its prudent financial principle; that it place none of its members in a position of unqualified authority over others; that it reach all important decisions by discussion, vote, and, whenever possible, by substantial unanimity; that its actions never be personally punitive nor an incitement to public controversy; that it never perform acts of government, and that, like the Society it serves, it will always remain democratic in thought and action.



**A.A. PUBLICATIONS** Below is a partial listing of A.A. publications. Complete order forms are available from the General Service Office of ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163. Telephone: (212) 870-3400. Website: aa.org

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**BOOKS**

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS  
TWELVE STEPS AND TWELVE TRADITIONS  
DAILY REFLECTIONS  
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS COMES OF AGE  
AS BILL SEES IT  
DR. BOB AND THE GOOD OLDTIMERS  
'PASS IT ON'

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**BOOKLETS**

LIVING SOBER  
CAME TO BELIEVE  
A.A. IN PRISON: INMATE TO INMATE

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**PAMPHLETS**

**Experience, Strength and Hope:**

WOMEN IN A.A.  
A.A. FOR THE BLACK AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN ALCOHOLIC  
A.A. FOR THE NATIVE NORTH AMERICAN  
YOUNG PEOPLE AND A.A.  
A.A. FOR THE OLDER ALCOHOLIC — NEVER TOO LATE  
LGBTQ ALCOHOLICS IN A.A.  
THE "GOD" WORD: AGNOSTIC AND ATHEIST MEMBERS IN A.A.  
A.A. FOR ALCOHOLICS WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES —  
AND THEIR SPONSORS  
ACCESS TO A.A.: MEMBERS SHARE ON OVERCOMING BARRIERS  
A.A. AND THE ARMED SERVICES  
DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DIFFERENT?  
MANY PATHS TO SPIRITUALITY  
MEMO TO AN INMATE  
IT SURE BEATS SITTING IN A CELL  
(An illustrated pamphlet for inmates)

**About A.A.:**

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT A.A.  
IS A.A. FOR ME?  
IS A.A. FOR YOU?  
A NEWCOMER ASKS  
IS THERE AN ALCOHOLIC IN YOUR LIFE?  
THIS IS A.A.  
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON SPONSORSHIP  
THE A.A. GROUP  
PROBLEMS OTHER THAN ALCOHOL  
THE A.A. MEMBER—MEDICATIONS AND OTHER DRUGS  
SELF-SUPPORT: WHERE MONEY AND SPIRITUALITY MIX  
THE TWELVE STEPS ILLUSTRATED  
THE TWELVE TRADITIONS ILLUSTRATED  
THE TWELVE CONCEPTS ILLUSTRATED  
HOW A.A. MEMBERS COOPERATE WITH PROFESSIONALS  
A.A. IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES  
A.A. IN TREATMENT SETTINGS  
BRIDGING THE GAP  
A.A. TRADITION—HOW IT DEVELOPED  
LET'S BE FRIENDLY WITH OUR FRIENDS  
UNDERSTANDING ANONYMITY

**For Professionals:**

A.A. IN YOUR COMMUNITY  
A BRIEF GUIDE TO A.A.  
IF YOU ARE A PROFESSIONAL  
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS AS A RESOURCE  
FOR THE HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL  
A MESSAGE TO CORRECTIONS PROFESSIONALS  
IS THERE A PROBLEM DRINKER IN THE WORKPLACE?  
MEMBERS OF THE CLERGY ASK ABOUT A.A.  
A.A. MEMBERSHIP SURVEY  
A MEMBER'S-EYE VIEW OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

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**VIDEOS** (available on aa.org)

A.A. VIDEOS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE  
HOPE: ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS  
A NEW FREEDOM  
CARRYING THE MESSAGE BEHIND THESE WALLS

**For Professionals:**

A.A. VIDEO FOR HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS  
A.A. VIDEO FOR LEGAL AND CORRECTIONS PROFESSIONALS  
A.A. VIDEO FOR EMPLOYMENT/HUMAN RESOURCES PROFESSIONALS

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**PERIODICALS**

AA GRAPEVINE (monthly)  
LA VIÑA (bimonthly, in Spanish)

## 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.**

