

Off The Walls

Wisdom from The Road of Happy Destiny

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Serenity...

Courage...

but especially

Wisdom.

Preface

"I sit in these meetings and someone says something that really moves me. Then I walk out the door and forget it, and six months later it comes back to me as an original thought."

This collection is the result of years of showing up at Alcoholics Anonymous and other recovery meetings across the United States and around the world. There is probably nothing original in these expressions. One way or another, it has all been said before. That is the nature of wisdom...it is constantly rediscovered in new settings and circumstances and proves true and valid in all of them.

Rather, these interpretations were shared from deep personal experiences translated into individual perspectives. The medium has been called...
"the Language of the Heart."

Likewise, they were chronicled by yet another recovering individual and again interpreted from that point of view. All of which makes them the result of a journey along a way called...
The Road of Happy Destiny.

The objective is to convey the marrow of meaning that caused them to be spoken in the first place.

Introduction

"Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Thy Power, Thy Love, and Thy Way of life."

Alcoholics Anonymous p.63

This work is about sharing inspiration.

It is a collection of expressions begun after more than a decade of sobriety in Alcoholics Anonymous. I found myself passing to a third stage of the journey, having first experienced the miracle of recovery followed by the "sunlight of the spirit." Initially at the time, I was having difficulty focusing on meeting topics and discussions, becoming lost in my own thoughts and what I might say if I were asked to contribute.

Bob Graham, a sober member who I had sponsored a few years previously, had experienced the same problem. I noticed that he had suddenly become quiet, either passing when asked to share or offering only a few words. When he did speak it was obviously spontaneous and inspired. Occasionally he would produce a small notebook from his pocket and inconspicuously jot down a note. I asked him what he had done to effect such a change. It was over his answer that he became my third sponsor, we having completely reversed the roles of our relationship.

Bob's inspiration was "to listen in each meeting for something that had intense meaning to me and my experience...something strong enough to make my head nod up and down." This would not occur in every meeting, but when it did, he wrote down his thoughts rather than trusting them to memory. I wanted what he had, so I too began carrying a small notebook.

From the very beginning, I soared into a new dimension of experience. All the meetings were good, the exceptional ones produced a note, and the outstanding ones produced multiple entries. My small notebook became a journal. My interest and concentration peaked, and my enthusiasm boiled over. I was on a new mission...one with seemingly no boundaries.

Tragically, Bob Graham died suddenly only 11 months into my new journey. Continuously sober for years, he had just realized his ultimate dream, a return to his own pulpit in the Presbyterian church. He successfully transitioned to "the big meeting," having touched the lives of all of us who knew him. Of the many gifts he left us is my journal, which to this day continues to grow in ever-widening circles. I, and many others, will never forget him.

This work is now lovingly dedicated to the memory of this little minister who opened his friendship and heart to me and to us all. I know he is nestled in the arms of his Higher Power, and I pray that he looks down with a smile on this effort to share his wisdom.

These expressions were never intended as entertainment, but rather to conjure up the depths of your own journey from both joy and suffering. Meditate with them and savor their pathway to your own inner sanctum. Those who shared brought them up from hallowed places. They are the wisdom emanating from there. Without such consideration, you may have the exposure but miss the meaning. They are doorways leading back to your own realities.

Over time, I was asked when and if I would share my journal openly. At first, I recoiled at the idea...these notations represented my soul. I prayed and meditated for almost 5 years and came to believe that sharing this work and experience is what Bob and his God, and my own Higher Power would want me to do. I open these pages to you all, and pray that it does justice to the miracle that inspired it.

DG

Dedication



**The Reverend
Robert Wayne "Bob" Graham
June 8, 1952 – September 17, 2000**

"Today, I use prayer to make it through.
I used to use alcohol for that."

Bob Graham
23 December 1999

Acknowledgments

Although I never set out to publish this collection, there were many along the way who took an interest and encouraged me to share it. Jim F. of Little Rock's Cosmopolitan Group challenged me over my "responsibilities...even my rights" to keep this work from the recovering public. He edited large parts of the original manuscript and guided me to the ultimate direction of the project. My wife Cynthia ceaselessly encouraged me over four years to finish it, and she performed the final detailed edit. David P., publisher of Arkansas' ONE DAY AT A TIME newspaper never waned in his interest, ran selections from the collection in his paper, and encouraged me to publish it. And of course, the hundreds of anonymous recovering alcoholics who showed up at the countless meetings and shared from their experiences and their hearts.

Don G.
Temple, Texas
June, 2009

The Best Use of This Book

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

The 10th Step of Alcoholics Anonymous

From the beginning of recovery I was inspired by AS BILL SEES IT, a publication of AA World Services, Inc. The Discussion and Reading Guide at the front of that book was invaluable to me. Each morning in personal meditation I tried to reduce my state of mind to a single word, look for that or something similar in the guide, and read the entries. I was always comforted and sustained. Often, Bill W's words described my feelings far better than my ability to express them. And, there was great relief in knowing he had observed the same sorts of things about himself and others.

A similar glossary of topics precedes this collection. It is a guide to three dozen broad and general areas that will hopefully lead you to more and deeper personal discoveries on your journey.

Reference Guide

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Part One

What We Were Like

2. In my misguided early spirituality, I had learned to worship a God of intellect.

9. I used to laugh at the world and the way it was. But it was a gallows laugh.

17. You have to tell a drunk something ten different ways before he'll hear one.

23. My first understanding of God was that He was a "cop in the sky."

53. When I first got here, I was like an insomniac with a mission.

69. The last thing I did in a relapse situation is take a drink. I'd gone through all the mental relapses first before I ever reached for the bottle.

77. I thought my opinions were facts.

79. Until you taught me unconditional love, I never gave a gift that I didn't expect something in return.

81. Happiness is a byproduct of living right. I had asked God for a lot of things, but I had never asked Him to help me stay sober.

100. My definition of an alcoholic was someone who drank more than I did.

136. Just like Moses, I had to spend 40 years wandering in the desert of doubt.

151. I was busted on many levels.....community, family, job, and personal. If there had been one more closet to crawl into, I would have gone there.

153. I couldn't remember from one day to the next that I was alcoholic.

168. Some of my most vivid memories never happened.

169. I kept going into rooms that weren't there anymore.

178. When people come to AA, they have either completed their experimenting with alcohol or they begin their experimenting after they get here. A slip is an experiment...a very dangerous one.

179. I'm hell when I'm well. The problem was that I was sick all the time.

180. Regarding anonymity...I didn't understand giving without getting.

185. I could never grow in my life before sobriety. I had wanted to progress, but I had wanted everyone else to stay the same.

187. I got sick and tired of making the best of a bad situation. My life had become a constant bad situation.

188. I didn't get in trouble every time I drank, but every time I got in trouble, I had been drinking.

206. I extract what I need from the chaos.

209. The longer I kept a secret, the more I wanted to drink.

222. I was an alcoholic waiting to happen.

238. Hitting bottom is when conditions in your life get worse faster than you can lower your standards.

241. By the time I got here, I had developed an instant "6 gun" kind of judgmental-ism.

245. I had developed a vast capacity for misery so I could keep trying to do things the way I wanted them done. Eventually, the misery came faster than I could accommodate it.

253. I never got in trouble unless I was trying to change the way I felt right now. If I'd known I could wait, it would have passed.

256. My disease is wrapped up in a body that can't take it and a mind that won't leave it alone.

261. We were busy telling God what we want rather than asking Him what He wants us to do.

267. I could take existing earth world chaos and instantly turn it into alcoholic chaos.

292. Carrying around a resentment is like sitting on a tack...the tack is hurting too. But I'm going to persist until the tack gives up.

295. My favorite resentments were the ones I invented. Since they were mine, with no basis in fact, I could rewrite them in my memory to fit whatever situation presented itself.

297. We love our upholstered rut.

325. With the kinds of decisions I used to make, the solution became the problem...tenfold.

330. The great difference between drinking alcoholics and recovering alcoholics is that recovering alcoholics tell the truth about their drinking. The others don't.

334. I could not take a drink. I could take 15 drinks, but I could not take one.

335. I was busted, disgusted, couldn't be trusted, and sitting in a chair at an AA meeting.

345. My judgmental idea of your religion wasn't strong enough to keep me from becoming an alcoholic.

348. Regarding humor, it took a long time for me to realize that there was a joke...and it was me.

350. Sad? My life was every country song ever written.

361. I always wanted more...then I wanted better...then I wanted different. The cycle from hell.

362. All I want is more than I'll ever have.

369. The man I used to be will drink again.

373. I don't think there was anything wrong with my belief system. My problem was that when I drank, I ceased to follow that belief system.

375. When you're laying flat on your face, trudging looks like moving at the speed of light.

376. An alcoholic drinks like a fish does...just because it's in front of him.

378. I can resist anything but temptation.

383. I have a disease of perception. Just because I see something doesn't mean that's the way it is.

384. I didn't come here to stop drinking. I came here because I was nuts.

389. All my life, I turned my will and my life over to the care of God as YOU understood him.

391. I spend most of my life outside of myself. I tend to be a human doing instead of a human being.

392. I'm a bad sport. When someone is beating me in a game, I try to make them feel bad by sulking and feeling sorry for myself, another excuse for me to pick up a drink.

412. I was wrapped up so much in myself that it made a very small package.

415. I had a feeling that God was authority rather than power. I had always bucked authority.

417. Of all my fears, the biggest one was that I had a basic fear of living.

422. Alcohol can't do a lot to you unless it does a lot for you.

430. An alcoholic alone is in bad company.

433. For a long time, the only thing my spouse and I had in common was we both didn't like me.

436. My need for understanding was done away with by pain and desperation.

437. I go along until I hit a brick wall or build one.

446. Nothing ever went my way because I was in the way.

455. I liked to feel sorry for myself. I got a lot of sympathy that way.

456. Listening to that still small voice inside me is the tool that works. I didn't know how to listen until I came here.

460. Isolating myself may be the ultimate act of defiance that I demonstrated.

464. My Higher Power never needed to punish me. He just gave me a little time and I'd punish myself.

476. Left to my own devices, I could make the wrongest thing seem right.

478. In the end, I couldn't even get drunk from the neck up.

480. The outstanding characteristic of an alcoholic is defiance. 99% of my energy was negative.

481. When I drank, it wasn't because I wanted to be happy...it was that I just wanted to not care that I was unhappy.

482. In the end life was coming at me from all directions. I felt like a dixie cup in a storm drain.

488. I didn't know how to come to believe. When you're addicted to substances, you don't believe in much. You're just trying to get by from day to day.

490. Alcoholism may be the result of a lack of connecting. I was disconnected from everyone and everything but myself. Mostly, I was disconnected from God.

495. It's not what you stop...it's what you start. I stopped drinking...but I didn't start anything else.

500. Drinking alcohol made me strangely insane.

501. My disease was fueled by a lower power...one that was out to kill me.

509. I was convinced that I was better than all the people who were stepping over me.

516. I don't have an ego problem...I am an ego problem.

520. Using alcohol as a solution to my problems was about as useless as throwing a rock at the ground. It did just about as much good.

525. Before I got drunk my spirituality was the last thing to leave me.

526. The same person always drinks again.

527. I couldn't fix the problem with the problem.

529. I got rid of all my character defects except lying.

545. I couldn't help myself because I couldn't trust myself.

547. It took something bad in my life to make something good happen for me in this program.

548. Nobody comes in here on the cusp of a winning streak. We are the true prodigal sons and daughters.

549. You hit bottom when you stop digging.

553. As long as I had a mind and a mouth, I could get drunk.

556. If you hang out in front of a barber shop long enough, you're gonna get a haircut.

557. I was powerless over the desire for alcohol, even though I knew it was going to burn me. I couldn't even follow my own better judgment.

559. I came to AA and I had nothing, and I was nothing, and I was going to end up with less.

561. My false intellectualism was trying to show people how smart I was without having to feel anything.

563. I always caught myself writing scripts about the future.

565. My life was not only unmanageable, it was unexplainable.

566. I rejected people who reached out to me because I didn't want them to know who I was.

571. Why we came here is not necessarily why we stayed here.

579. Over the years, my life became a roller coaster of calamity and cleanup.

591. I had decided I liked myself. That made it unanimous.

592. For many years, I was a figment of my own imagination.

593. I always wanted to be better than I really am.

594. Alcohol gave me wings and took away my sky.

597. When I was drinking, I had one foot in the grave, one foot in the penitentiary, and I was riding the center line of insanity.

598. When I drank to live, I ended up living to drink, and everything and everyone soon got in my way.

607. Simplicity is the essence of spirituality. We alcoholics were handicapped because we were so complicated at first.

610. It takes what it takes, but it takes it all. Not only did I have to be powerless, but my life also had to be unmanageable.

612. I had an ego that arrived five minutes before me.

613. Whenever I tried to wear a halo, it slid down around my neck and choked me.

619. This disease tried to convince me that I'd rather be a common drunk than an alcoholic.

623. When I got here, I wasn't much but I was all I thought about.

625. I could not feel close to my God when I was feeling sorry for myself. I was in the way.

626. When I got here, I discovered I was powerless over my thinking. I was unable to shut it down.

632. The Serenity Prayer said I could be reasonably happy in this life. Before I came here, I couldn't do anything reasonably. It was all or nothing.

635. God was going to have to do something big to get my attention.

636. I saw the writing on the wall, but I thought it was addressed to somebody else.

640. I've always been this way. It just got worse and worse.

646. To get here, I almost had to die to learn how to live.

661. If I stopped drinking, I would eventually get back to the hair of the dog that bit me....those defects that would require a personality change to overcome. My drinking just covered them up.

666. When we were drinking we thought everything was coming together when it was really falling apart. When we got sober, we thought everything was falling apart when it was really coming together.

673. Dying from alcoholism or having to go find God...that choice was a tossup.

675. My addiction was like a balloon. I stepped on one part of it and the other parts would get bigger.

677. In the beginning when I was young I drank so I could fit in and be like everyone else. After I drank enough I forgot who I was.

678. If the stories in the Big Book came with illustrations, they'd have been pictures of you and me.

681. I was so narrow minded I could look through a keyhole with both eyes.

686. I was trying to live a double life but my alcoholism made it too complicated.

688. Alcoholism was suicide on the installment plan.

695. My life was like a shrinking box.

698. I'd had this schizophrenic relationship with God...screaming at Him on the one hand and begging for His help on the other.

702. I could not see that insanity and my ego were linked.

704. People who don't have it...don't get it. My friends who still drank couldn't understand what I was doing.

707. Perhaps one definition of depression is self-absorption. The more I thought about me, the more depressed I got.

717. I ended up trying to cover up the pain in my life with more misery.

722. I woke up every morning and there at the foot of my bed was my disease saying, "Glad you're up. I've been waiting for you."

724. I was telling everyone how kind and right my intentions were and never heard my B.S. meter go off.

749. I didn't know anything about character defects except those I saw in other people.

750. I thought God was there to pick up the pieces after I'd screwed up. I didn't know He was there to show me the way to not screw up in the first place.

769. I didn't know how to come in out of the pain.

775. We all had the chronic inability to feel safe before we came here.

783. I had believed that God was something you dealt with when you were near death.

787. The moment I picked up that first drink, I picked up everything I was wanting to put down.

788. I knew I had to live life on life's terms, but I couldn't see how you could do that without alcohol.

793. When I finally got honest with myself, I realized I'd fallen in love with changing my mood.

794. I thought I'd had all of my ducks in a row. But I found out that some of them were decoys, some were geese, and some of them were predators. While I was trying to figure out which was which, they all just wandered off.

796. It used to be that the only physical exercise I ever got was pointing my finger at someone.

806. From my alcoholic's perspective, I realized there's a reason why they put 6 beers in a package. What would anybody do with just one beer?

807. We could argue over words all day. I don't care what you called my problem, I had it and you knew what it was.

809. I'm the kind of person who confused peace with everything going my way.

820. I can feel like the whole world is against me. Sometimes there is no gravity here on earth and we're all here just because it sucks.

830. All people are destructive by nature. And, we all tend to think we are in charge or in control. And because of that, I was going to suffer.

832. So often I looked at what lay ahead and I made it negative just because I had to do it or go through it.

833. The day before I got here, I didn't know there was anything wrong with me.

843. I drank myself into being mediocre when I had no business being there.

846. God was out there, but the less contact we had with each other the better.

852. There were some things about me that were not just imperfect...they were downright intolerable.

855. When I was drinking, I could make a cup of coffee nervous.

859. What I didn't know was that I needed help in order to change things in my life. And that help needed to come from my side of that invisible line I had crossed.

861. Before I got sober in here, I spent a lot of my mornings on my knees "huggin' the big white."

866. My rule was the alcoholic's standard measure...too much, not enough, and perfect isn't good enough.

867. When I drank that stuff, I disappeared.

876. I treated God like a glorified vending machine.

880. When I first came in here I considered myself to be God's biggest broken promise.

887. Remember what it felt like when your shoes are too tight? By the time I got here, I felt like my skin was too tight.

889. I was forgetting away my life when I was drunk. I don't think that's why God loaned us this time on earth...to drink it away.

899. I didn't believe I was insane, but I was strange.

901. When I first came here, I was polytheistic. I had 2 Gods, me and alcohol. And alcohol was the stronger of the two.

813. I've backslid more than a mud wrestler.

906. Nothing was ever taken away from me. In my alcoholism, I either tore it up, ran it off, or threw it away.

909. After a while I absolutely needed every drink that I took.

910. I know today that I was an alcoholic before I ever took my first drink. It took every drink I drank to keep me from killing myself.

913. I used to have a "silver bullet" tongue that would lash out at everyone with cynicism, sarcasm, and judgmental-ism.

915. I used to create my own excitement. If you were asleep, I'd wake you up.

924. I forgot to remember my powerlessness.

930. If they ever put a section in the Big Book called "They almost got themselves together," my story would be in it.

932. I drank when there was good news. I drank when there was bad news. Hell, I drank when there was no news.

936. Seems like we always wanted everything by Thursday.

956. I had "addictions of intrigue." I'd make things complicated just so I could try to figure them out.

966. I was the kind of alcoholic who had more of a thinking problem than a drinking problem.

970. I was the CEO of a big construction company. My job was building mountains out of mole hills.

972. I couldn't build a reputation on what I was going to do. I wasn't doing anything. I was just talking about it.

973. My Higher Power's sense of humor costs too much. I couldn't afford to make Him laugh...it hurt too much.

974. I slid into Alcoholics Anonymous about 15 minutes before it was too late.

975. For me, contempt prior to investigation was like an old shoe. It was comfortable, but it was worn out.

976. The comfort I took in my bad old habits was the payoff I got from them.

977. If I wasn't an alcoholic, what would I be? What would people call me? A whole lot of bad things.

987. You told me the 4th step was designed to heal me. At first I thought it was to expose my baser self to the world.

992. "The committee" was all the lies that I have ever told myself-- shouting at each other.

999. You told me AA was a program of hope. Then you said I had to come to meetings. I said I hoped you were kidding.

1006. I grew up with the expression "Brain Broke." Mine is, and it's never going to get fixed.

1009. I was in and out for the first 3 years. I tried every way to stop drinking except the 12 steps.

1010. They told me that this program was one day at a time. My problem was that I couldn't remember that from one day to the next.

1012. I was always in a hurry to stay ahead of my drinking. Where was I going in such a hurry when I was going in the wrong direction anyway?

1015. Instant gratification just took too damn long.

1016. My spiritual awakening was an instantaneous thing that took a very long time.

1021. People who were going back to drinking were "living the other life again."

1032. Alcoholism and Resentment gave me a case of repetitive amnesia. To survive I had to keep coming back.

1034. The craziest person was the one who didn't know that everyone else in this room was crazy.

1037. I competed when there was no competition.

1043. I didn't know there was power in powerlessness.

1047. For a person like me to get humble it took a series of humiliations.

1061. Until I got sober, I spent my life chasing happiness. When I stopped drinking, I stopped chasing, and happiness came to me.

1071. I'm the kind of drunk who pushed help away with one hand and reached for it with another.

1073. The trouble with alcoholics is that "normal" for us is whatever we are willing to put up with. And I could put up with a whole lot of misery.

1082. When I had to make someone small through criticism to make me bigger, I was not my right size.

1091. I used to think that balance was about rotating my obsessions.

1097. I can still remember the time when I used to drink my spirits instead of lifting my spirits.

1100. My dollar store reading glasses were just like the booze I used to drink....cheap but very effective.

1106. I was so quick to rush to judgment that I would attribute to malice what could be explained by stupidity.

1107. I couldn't put all my experiences together and make anything out of them. I had to come to AA to be shown where to go and what to do.

1108. Look at us when we get here. Look at who we are. All this feeling, talent, intelligence, and we end up in a closet drinking hot vodka.

1120. Being unique is something that has never worked for me.

1122. I used to believe that the louder I got the righter I was.

1129. Those of us who lived in ego backed up by low self-esteem had a problem accepting both praise and criticism.

1130. I'd been busy trying to be a people pleaser when I should have been trying to be a God pleaser.

1151. To me, the 3 "wise" men were very dangerous...they could kill me. Me, myself, and I.

1153. I was out of balance. I was the kind of person who either wanted to fix something or bury my head in the sand.

1181. "Human doings" like me were so busy fixing everything because we didn't have time to let God fix us.

1190. My brain was in a bad place. It was in my head.

1202. Before I got to AA, nobody knew what I was talking about.

Part Two

What Happened

3. Practicing H.A.L.T--not letting myself get too hungry, angry, lonely, or tired taught me that sometimes all I really need is a sandwich and a nap.

29. I finally became willing to listen at a different level....to people I didn't particularly like.

30. This is the first place I ever experienced the wonder of being accepted not in spite of what I was but because of what I was.

47. I spent the first five years of my sobriety getting a graduate degree in life.

50. You have to be really done with that old way of life...fed up with that way of living.

51. I arrived on ground that was under my feet and I learned to be at home. It wasn't comfortable, but I had to start where I was, not where I wanted to be.

52. There'll never be another year like the first one. It seems we are given so much that we spend the rest of our lives in the program paying back for it.

61. I could work on me until I discovered the real me.

73. After I got past my shame and guilt, I began to learn about myself. The good, the real good, and the real.

74. The "spirit of the universe" is a phrase that described a conception of God--one that helped when the word "God" frightened me as a newcomer.

92. Step 1 is the only non-spiritual step. It is just the plain truth...reality. To take it, I merely had to become aware.

109. God doesn't close one door without opening another, but the hallway is hell.

124. I wasn't awake yet, but I was awakening.

129. I had to want this program bad enough before I could can make it. A desire was good enough to make a start, but I needed a commitment for it to work for me.

130. I overheard one sponsor saying to another, "It seems the ones who make it in this program are those who want it so bad they try to steal it away from us."

131. I didn't believe "in" anything. But step 2 said I could believe "that" some power could change. It asked me for a commitment rather than a belief. That made all the difference.

132. The guy I got sober with was the brother I never had.

134. I hit bottoms that I didn't know were out there.

145. There was absolutely nothing that has ever happened to anyone... anywhere... that someone here hadn't stayed sober while going through it.

152. In the early program, when the fear began to lift, that's when I got hooked.

164. AA was teaching me not only to live sober, but to live life.

165. It was pretty easy to get here...it's real hard to stay.

175. Responding is a totally different thing from reacting. When I began to respond, I had the option of changing the outcome.

177. I needed to get a grip on letting go.

221. I didn't want to be the one you were grateful not to be.

237. After a couple of months, my life was getting better, but the problem was still here.

242. When I came into these rooms I thought I was different. So did everybody else, but they were getting over it. I was accepted by a lot of differences.

251. When I first got here I was like a first timer at a nudist camp. I could compare, but I couldn't relate.

269. To get me here, my higher power had to customize the calamities of my life. What got me here may or may not have gotten you here, but it was "just right for me."

270. For me, hitting bottom was when I realized my life partner felt the same way about me that I felt about me.

273. When I stayed here and used these tools, sobriety became as progressive as my alcoholism.

276. I came in here to try to make a six pack last a Sunday.

277. I didn't have a life...I had a list. I turned my will and my list over to the care of God.

280. I couldn't change my mind with the mind I had.

284. You get to know God on a real survival level.

300. My time in treatment was ending and I said to myself, "I've got to find God by Friday or they won't let me out of here."

305. I didn't have to admit to God what I'd done...He already knew.

307. It was the beginning of self-respect. Even a broken clock was right twice a day.

338. Coming into recovery is like being in a sorority but not having to do anything to be admitted....we've already done it.

342. I didn't know what an alcoholic looked like...but I knew what one felt like.

346. One time I asked my sponsor if he was God. He said, "sometimes."

351. Thank God this program is not, and was not when I was new, about virtue. I could have this thing...no matter what I had done in the past. All I had to do was work the steps.

353. I didn't find a power greater than myself. That power found me.

354. After making yet another mistake, I started to call myself "stupid" and the word "human" came out.

358. When I couldn't find the light, the fellowship of the program led me to it.

365. The real spirituality of our program came not from me loving God but from letting God love me.

372. The way I got here is a judge asked me a trick question..."Do you want to go to jail or do you want to go to treatment?"

381. After enough time living this way of life, what used to be a sense of impending doom became a sense of impending pleasure.

386. Saying the 3rd step twice replaces telling the bartender "give me a double."

390. My sponsor gave me my first Big Book and said, "When you think you don't need this anymore, I expect you to give it back to me."

394. I don't know if AA saved my life, but it certainly gave me a life worth saving.

397. To the challenge "I don't believe in God...He's never been there for me...so there's no power greater than myself..." my counselor had me lay on the floor and he told me to levitate myself. When I couldn't do it, six people from the group did it for me. My counselor said, "These people can do for you what you can't do for yourself. So you can use this group as your Higher Power."

398. Looking back, I took a whole lot of graveyard actions. My Higher Power saved me in spite of that. It's not about what I've lost, but what I've gained.

405. By the time I got here, I had gotten "a good ass whipping just right."

409. Today, I'm grateful for those people who would rather step on my toes than stand on my grave.

424. You have a right to kill yourself and I have a right to not watch.

426. You laughed at me, and that turned out to be the greatest sympathy I've ever had.

429. Showing up at a meeting was the same thing as asking for help.

435. These meeting rooms became like a communion cup...the one that everyone in church shares and drinks from.

438. I came to believe that prayer was not for God, it was for me.

439. Faith meant I had to do something when I didn't know what was going to happen.

444. Sometimes darkness was the place where I found courage and strength to go on.

447. Looking back, I could see that the struggle was the journey.

448. You told me to do the best that I could today. As I learned to do better, I traded up.

451. Things started to get better for me right away and I started to feel cocky. Someone told me, "Don't let the good stuff take you out."

454. What I was learning in here, and what I was avoiding, was reflection of my own character defects.

457. I asked God about my alcoholism and He said, "I don't know...I'm not an alcoholic. But I gave you the tools to find out. Use them."

459. I could not see or understand the change as it occurred. That came in retrospect.

461. It's not what we drank that made us what we are...it's what we are that made us drink. To find a way out, I have to work on what I am.

468. When the obsession was taken away, what was left in my heart was room for life.

471. I didn't know how to be happy, or even how to appear happy. But after being here for around a year, I began to develop facial freedom.

475. One of the significant things that brought me here was that my best was no longer good enough.

477. Thinking about picking up a drink or not, I was deciding if today there is a God, and if I am going to let Him work in my life.

479. After being here for a while, I started to find reasons not to be unconscious.

483. Some days, all there was to hang on to was not wanting to drink just a little bit more than I wanted to drink.

487. I always felt that people were interrupting me, until I realized that interruptions had been my whole life.

491. I never crossed any lines, invisible or otherwise, while I was drinking. My last drinking episode was the same as my first one...I drank all I could get and all I could hold. The only line I ever crossed was in here...in Alcoholics Anonymous.

503. Growth in this program was learning to not react to the events and circumstances of my life the way I always did.

506. AA continues to show me who I am and who's I am.

510. I was coming to AA to think, feel, and say things I couldn't on my own.

511. I could not be sure that the phenomenon of craving had been removed. But the first drink had been removed, and after quite some time, so has the obsession for it.

512. I understood who I was and who I always would be. I was reminded of it every time I came here.

513. Einstein, the genius, saw the world in a different way than the rest of us. AA's Big Book described the world as I saw it, and nothing else had ever done that for me.

514. Alcohol was not what we had in common. The solution to alcoholism was what we have in common.

517. My God had always taken care of me. It was my awareness of that fact that was new to me.

524. The first word of the 11th step..."sought..." meant I'd have to do some work.

528. My fear finally broke me of my habit of playing God.

531. Since I had gotten sober, things had gotten different.

532. I had no place else to go. I was between alcohol and the wall. A program of recovery was on the other side of the wall.

534. You put words to the feelings I'd been having. I came here and had myself expressed.

535. Your prayer asked me to try to do God's will, not to try to become God.

536. In this recovery I began to stop trying to run to heaven and started to back away from hell.

537. At first you are put off by the idea of God or a Higher Power. So I started by just making a friend in here.

543. It was not important that I get it. It was only important that I do it. And if I was going to do it, it had to be done a certain way.

554. I didn't so much like to drink...I liked to get drunk. When they told me alcoholics drank for the effect, I knew what I was.

555. Not drinking hasn't been so hard as living without drinking.

558. If I could have made it without a sponsor (help), I wouldn't be here.

568. I didn't want what you had. But I wanted to get rid of what I had. I would have to keep coming back.

573. I'd thought there was no way I could ever surrender to this program...or to a Higher Power. Then I realized that I had already surrendered to alcohol, so why not?

574. Pain was not the enemy. It had brought me to the greatest and most valuable discovery in my life.

578. The only place I could see that "invisible line" I had crossed was in the rear view mirror.

584. Step 1 was a statement of despair. Step 2 was a statement of hope. Step 2 was not about God, it was about hope.

588. In trying to find a balance, I crossed the median from time to time and from ditch to ditch.

589. There was an earnestness about those of us who were really trying to stay sober. They seemed to realize that this was a matter of life and death.

595. I was given a lot of tools in this program. But they're power tools, and I had to go plug them in.

604. I decided to come to this meeting every day and use this group as my "Higher Power for an hour."

608. Somebody said, "Lets have a moment of silence followed by the serenity prayer for those who pray." I could live with that.

614. Around here, your true friends walked in the door when the rest of the world walked out.

617. You showed me the way to a God of my understanding who I no longer want or need to understand.

620. Regarding my life, I finally managed to admit that I wasn't managing.

622. I realized that this is a battle sometimes. Would you rather go into battle by yourself or with an army?

624. This stuff was not easy to do but it was easy to understand.

628. My sponsor said to me, "I can't tell you how I got where I wanted to be...but I can show you."

630. At first I learned more information than I had the ability to use. Gradually, my knowledge and my ability grew closer together.

639. All we needed was somewhere to go, something to do, and someone to love.

644. I was different from a lot of people, but I wasn't not different from all of you.

647. I wanted to put enough good in my life on top of the bad I'd done so that when people dug into my history they wouldn't dig too deep.

653. You told me that wanting to drink was not necessarily having to drink.

659. There's something within the process of the things we are addicted to that effects the places our breath comes from. I felt I couldn't breathe without them. When I came in here, it was the first time I could breathe again in quite a while.

662. I had been confused about the difference between taking action and taking control.

663. I have finally gotten to where I can pray every morning without having to use my adjustable wrench. Once my prayers changed from the immediate troubles in my life to becoming a truly sober person, they started to remain the same and ongoing for me.

664. My sponsor spelled out his role for me: S.P.O.N.S.O.R ... Sober Person Offering Newcomers Suggestions On Recovery.

669. One of two things about me was going to change...my attitude or my sobriety date.

670. Not only did I change, but I got someplace where I can go and share about that change. I couldn't do that in church.

674. I didn't know how bad I was until I got a little sobriety.

676. I fell on my face, I fell on my ass, but it wasn't until I fell on my knees that anything happened.

683. The only thing I hated about AA was that it took time. I couldn't get it all at once.

684. I kept showing up and not drinking got easier and easier. Life didn't, but not drinking did.

685. My life had not been a dress rehearsal. My life had not been a dress rehearsal.

693. My case was not unique, but my experiences were my own.

694. Coming to spirituality was like coming out from behind all my masks and standing naked before the world. The emergence of my spiritual recovery was like getting dressed one garment at a time.

696. I didn't have to shut the door on my past, but I didn't have to live there either.

710. Around here, everyone else appeared to be normal until I got to know them.

713. Hearing the same things in meetings over and over again is like sucking your thumb as an infant. It's such a comforting feeling.

715. Because of a decision I had made, my life began to change. For the first time, I could see that making a decision was an action.

718. Today I am a pickle...I'll never be a cucumber again. I'm dill, I'm sour, and today that's Kosher with me.

720. Most of my life I thought that power was either in other people or other things. Once you showed me where power really was, I could see a way to begin to recover.

725. It took a while, but I finally treated myself to what had been preached to me in here. I started doing what was being suggested.

731. I thanked God for helping me find AA, and I thanked AA for helping me find God.

732. I received faith through results.

733. I said I didn't believe in God, but I knew I was scared of Him. How could I be scared of someone I didn't believe in? That's when I started to believe.

734. I couldn't open the door of willingness because I didn't think I'd closed it. I thought God had closed it. Today I believe God opened it for me.

737. It says "self-seeking will slip away." It doesn't say it will get up and run. Today, it's still slipping.

756. I realized that one way or the other, you're going to change if you stay here. You're either going to get better or you're going to get worse, but you're going to change.

759. I never found myself until I came into these rooms.

761. I looked around. We all had a message to carry. Some of us carry a message of life, and some of us carry a message of death.

762. When I got here, I needed answers, and right now. So I got the answers first. Then the questions came later.

763. My life changed because of the changes that happened in your life.

764. I used to meet alcoholics in bars, and now I meet them in coffee shops.

766. This was not divorce anonymous, but sometimes marriages made in sickness cannot survive in good health.

767. I had a mind-lift instead of a face-lift. There's a big difference.

774. I couldn't stop drinking, but I couldn't stop going to meetings either. Eventually, the meetings won out, and it's all been downhill from there.

777. I got here through a severe municipal administrative blunder.

778. Happy, Joyous, and Free was a buzz very much like the buzz that used to come from early drinking.

797. Today, I haven't met anybody yet who I'd rather be than me.

798. My garbage became my glory.

802. You can't coast uphill. If you're going to grow, some work is going to have to be involved.

812. I didn't believe that this program worked. But I believed that you believed that it does.

813. When there are consequences, there are changes. I had consequences, so I was sure ready for some changes.

818. This program has taught me how to let my intuition work. My intuition tells me whose coming around the mountain and what they're bringing.

824. I didn't think you could fake the peace I saw in people's eyes when I came in here. Seeing that peace is where my hope came from.

826. You know you're getting better when you're not thinking about yourself anymore...you're just pissed off.

827. When I came here, I had to forget about what I wanted and be grateful for what I got.

836. I used to say, "It's my way or the highway." It took me a long time to learn that God's way is the Highway.

837. It is circumstance that brought me here rather than virtue. And as disastrous as those circumstances may have been, I was so fortunate to have been in them.

838. If humility could work out for me, I could find out who I was, who I can be, and begin to strive for that.

844. The person I honestly am, beneath my ego, turned out to be far better than the one I tried to convince you I was.

847. I like to think of AA as the party I always go to. It's the only party I know where they remember my name and they ask me to come back.

848. My sponsor said, "Don't make any decisions for 6 months except what to wear and what to eat, and lets see what happens when you're not in control of things."

851. I was a moving target. I came in here, did these steps, and lived this life, and I'm always moving...moving forward.

863. Today I understand the triumph of defeat. I learned there are very good reasons why there are some things I cannot do.

864. All of the 3 Gs got me. I gave in, gave up, and gave out.

868. A man asked me if I was proud of how long I had been sober. I said, "No, I'm grateful."

875. The neatest way to get well quick is to sponsor someone. It's a wonderful way to learn a lot about yourself.

881. Whenever I was beating up on myself, my friend said to me, "Forgive yourself and choose again."

884. At first I thought that anything I accepted I had to like or agree with. Finally I found out that isn't so.

894. When grace began to enter into my life, I realized that I wasn't in charge of this, and I didn't want to be in charge of it either.

896. On the first morning of what turned out to be my recovery, I woke up and I didn't want a drink when I should have.

900. The spirit came over me and said, "It's not about you. Get up off your ass. Grow up and take care of everyone who needs to be taken care of, including yourself."

904. I started spending a lot of time getting over myself.

905. This program was about learning how to humble myself. If I can't figure out how to do that, God would do for me what I couldn't do for myself.

907. The program taught me not only to tolerate but to embrace my imperfections.

911. Because of my imperfections, my goals would need to be adjusted along the way.

914. My wounds that brought me in here. What connects us in here are our imperfections.

919. My life is still a roller coaster today, but a much better one than it ever was. I never go down as far as I go up, and it keeps getting better.

928. The changes in my life in the program were dramatic, but were not been sudden.

938. They told me to go to 90 meetings in 90 days. I did it to prove they were wrong. It's been a long time now, and I'm still not at the conclusion of this experiment.

939. I've been here 3 times. The first time I needed to quit. The second time I wanted to. And the last time I couldn't.

948. I came here long enough for my "reasons" for drinking to become excuses.

955. The man who stepped me said, "you don't have to live like this, and you don't have to die like this either."

967. For the longest time I thought I had been in a rut. Then my sponsor told me that when you can't see out of either side, it's deeper than a rut.

971. The only way I was going to prove anything to anybody was to prove it to myself first.

982. They told me suggestions were for visitors.... people who were not finished drinking. Maybe they were calling them suggestions, but I'd better be ready to do them like they were orders.

983. Step 1 was the only one that can and must be done perfectly. The rest of the steps were guidelines to measure our ongoing progress.

984. In AA, when you go from suicidal to homicidal, they applaud you.

986. Alcoholism is the only disease where the symptom must be treated as well as the problem. Other diseases observe the symptoms and treat the problem.

993. You taught me how to feel and touch in here. Today, I can touch with love...not just other people...but I can touch my God too.

994. I went from being a religious icon to a spiritual moron.

1002. To stay sober, I would have to recognize and accept reality. To be able to tell what reality is, I had to do certain things every day whether I understood them or not.

1003. Without this program I would be just another person who didn't believe, and that's a pretty bleak place to be.

1005. One of the things God's will might be is to ask myself "Is this what I would choose for myself if I knew what was best for me?"

1014. You taught me how to take this program seriously and not to take myself seriously.

1025. I don't have a second job, which is drinking, anymore.

1026. Even though I've got the monkey off my back, the circus is still in town.

1027. I was ultimately saved by the holy spirit inside me that I had not been able to drown in alcohol.

1030. I realized when I got sober that I had been nothing but fear, and that scared me.

1038. Somebody told me "It's OK not to drink." I didn't know that until they said it.

1045. Until the moment I got sober, I can blame everything I ever did on alcohol. From then on, alcohol was gone and I had to become responsible.

1048. You gave me tools, and it's good to have tools when you have loose screws.

1050. My disease had other ways to come at me besides alcohol. Sometimes it came at me with people, situations, and others.

1054. I was so self-centered I thought everything was about me. Somebody told me, "The sun don't shine on the same dog's butt every day."

1056. My sponsor told me "The worst is over and the best is yet to come."

1060. I always wanted to drink more than I didn't want to drink. Today it's opposite, and if that's not God, I don't know what is.

1067. Quitting drinking and getting into recovery, I'd have to change my way of living, which is what got me into drinking in the first place.

1074. AA cannot show you what to do after you take a drink. At that point, your choices are gone. But it can show you what to do before you take that drink.

1081. "Life unadulterated." That's what you get when you don't pick up that first drink.

1087. For us at first, we may start to get better before things start to get better.

1090. I know that alcoholism is my problem. Whatever substance I may or may not be using at any time is my drug of choice. But alcoholism is, and always has been, my problem.

1092. I'll never have a bigger problem than the problem I had when I first had to stop drinking.

1093. Perhaps the greatest gift of this program is that it has given me my mind back.

1101. The old timers used to say to me, "Stick around till you see what you've got."

1102. One of the things that saves us before we get to this program is we don't have to turn it over until after we've tried everything else.

1111. I stayed here with 51% commitment. 51% was just enough to get me over the hump.

1117. People I met in my group were examples to me like pages in a living Big Book.

1121. I have 2 kids. When I got sober I had to learn how to not be the 3rd child in a 2 child family.

1127. It's tough growing up in public. I had stopped maturing when I started drinking as a teenager. Now I'd have to grow up with everyone watching.

1133. It took me a long time, but I finally stopped kicking God's grace back in His face.

1136. When I crashed and landed in here, I knew it was the end. I didn't know it was the beginning.

1137. When I got here, I had lost a lot of things, but the most important one I'd lost was myself.

1138. I wanted to be comfortable, but I had all these needs. In here, you taught me how to have those needs removed rather than having them satisfied.

1147. I realized I'd finally hit bottom when I found myself in treatment trying to eat a pork chop with a plastic spoon.

1160. My sponsor was standing on the steps, and I had to take his hand. Once I did, he walked me up the steps.

1162. If you change the way you look at things, the things you look at will change.

1178. The only thing that makes this program hard is my desire to take shortcuts.

1180. For me, the beginning of open-mindedness was when I finally realized for the first time that I didn't know. I had always not known, but up until then I didn't know I didn't know.

1196. Around here, it's the teachers who go out and the students who stay here. The teachers come back and tell us how it still is out there.

1203. People told me how sick they'd been. Then they told me how well they'd become.

1204. The 12 steps are on the wall. You work them off the wall, then you get off the wall and into recovery.

Part Three

What We Are Like Now

4. I get up every morning and move forward. If I run into a brick wall, I turn left.

10. If I'm going to write a critical letter to someone, I address it to myself first rather than them, and read it from that perspective.

14. In the process of forgiving other people, I am saying that I am willing to change myself.

15. I may not be much, but I'm all I've got. I have to be willing to start where I am and to work with what I've got.

16. I spend a lot of time looking for ways to spend my time.

17. Self pity may be the most serious form of mental illness. It's about self-hatred, among other things.

19. I can't ask people for things that only God can give me.

20. I'm slowly becoming the person I want to be.

21. Sometimes the best I can do is be a bad example.

22. Anymore, I try to keep a "Divine Third" in every relationship I encounter.

25. I will bloom wherever I am planted.

27. My group gives a safety pin to each newcomer. That way we can help them without them hurting themselves.
28. I may not be perfect...but as long as I'm trying as hard as I can, I am excellent.
33. What I think about.....I bring about.
34. I have a deep and abiding faith that comes and goes.
40. Happy, Joyous, & Free. Happy because I am alive...Joyous because I know where it came from...Free of the bondage of self.
54. Step 1 Part B.....(our lives had become unmanageable)...There's a difference between management and control.
55. At meetings, I want to be more of a gatherer than a hunter.
57. The program is like circles that go around and around and as they do they run deeper and deeper.
58. If I take a drink it will be because I am an alcoholic. That's what alcoholics do...they drink. It will not be because someone or something else made me take that drink.
59. How you feel about other people doesn't matter. The only thing that will keep you sober is how you feel about you.

60. The miracle is not that I didn't drink today. The miracle is that I didn't want to drink today.

62. From where I was 12 years ago I am a changed person...a permanently changed person. The only way for me to go back is to pick up a drink again.

63. When I am wanting to stay around other people all the time, it's because I don't want to look at myself.

64. I don't need to try to impress anyone. God accepts me and loves me just the way I am.

65. The inside job is what it's all about. If I can take care of the inside, the outside events will fall into place.

66. As a gift to myself for Christmas this year, I have lowered my expectations.

67. Today, I use prayer to make it through. I used to use alcohol for that.

68. The problems that I have today are in areas that did not exist when I came here.

70. Every meeting begins with a moment of silence...
A moment of silence for each to use in his own way.

76. We need to remember that untreated people don't know what they don't know.

78. Christmas is an up and down season for us. Anyone who tells you otherwise is lying.

82. I must learn to separate the person I love from the person of the disease.

83. Practice of the 11th step forces me to align my actions with my convictions.

84. Living with alcoholism is like staying in a room with a wasp. I know it's there, and it knows I'm there.

86. I have to exercise my faith just like I have to exercise a muscle.

87. Today, I can have faith in something other than a chemical.

90. "To thine own self be true." Before taking an action, I ask myself "would I do this in front of God?"

93. Doing nothing is an action, but it still requires work. In a situation, if the proper response to my powerlessness is inaction, I must not deny my grief and my sadness.

95. You can't get sober on the fellowship, but you can't stay sober without it.

96. We respect each other's experiences with pain.

98. If you want to see my character defects, just get in my car with me. Sharing the road with others still strikes at the heart of my character defects.

103. Feelings are nothing more than emotional energy. But when I'm in them, I can't always see that.

107. Nothing has ever challenged me more than to go after someone who is emotionally unavailable.

108. If I will merely die each morning, I'll receive the gifts of the program. Every day, I have to leave my old life behind and step into the new one I've found.

111. It's not that I am a slow learner, but rather that I am a quick forgetter.

114. Sometimes there's another way--don't just do something...sit there!

115. I view myself as sane....but I'm not.

116. Every person here is a flower on my blossoming tree.

117. What God and I know is all that really matters.

118. When I jump into a situation uninvited to take charge and try to fix it, I get a high similar to the kind I got from alcohol. My actions and emotions get just as drunk as my body used to.

119. I don't really have much choice but to deal with things.

126. We're not fighting anymore...we're cooperating.

128. I know what I can do alone, and it's miserable.

133. We're more normal than anybody else...because we know what's wrong with us.

140. I may not have control over my drinking, but I do have control over working my program.

141. There are so many things in recovery that are at odds with one another...and one of them is consistency vs. complacency.

144. Sometimes "going sane" seems as strange as "going insane." It depends on how long you have been insane.

148. My God has a love affair with me, but sometimes I play hard to get.

149. This program is an apprenticeship for living life without alcohol.

150. I sit in these meetings and someone says something that really moves me. Then I walk out the door and forget it, and six months later it comes back to me as an original thought.

154. If I am unhappy it's because there is something I think I want. I must seek God's will to find out if what I want is really for me.

156. Every time I bottom out in life once more, I am a newcomer in the program again.

157. Recovering alcoholics are weller than well.

158. Often times, taking the action is dressing up and acting sane.

160. The line between helping and controlling...between enabling and helping, blurs and clears from day to day.

161. I am on a spiral staircase going up.

166. I have to watch out to make sure my gratitude does not become part of my arrogance.

167. The "earth people" out there are usually mood-altering to me. I must not submerge into this to the depth that I lose myself.

171. I go to church...so I can go to heaven. I go to AA so I can live on earth.

173. The difficulties I have the most trouble with are the ones that are not mine...they are the ones I try to take away from others.

182. I don't put anyone before my sobriety. I don't know anyone for whom I would risk my sobriety.

183. I am not against anything that works.

186. Knowing the good stuff is more important than knowing the bad stuff. Focusing on ourselves, we have an opportunity to allow the good to flow in rather than the bad.

189. My life has gotten much simpler today, but it has a quality that was never there before.

191. I don't understand everything I know about that.

194. I don't know what is God's plan for me...but I do know that His plan for me is better than my plan was.

195. Because this program has brought me to a God of my understanding, I know that if I seek Him I will find Him. When you wrap fear in faith, you get coverage.

197. I'm not a person who moves towards comfort...I am one who moves away from pain.

200. I am the only one who can meet my needs.

203. I come here to learn to give and receive love.

204. I don't know if I've quit drinking today or not, but I do have a desire to stay sober today.

211. Anyone who gets some peace and serenity cannot get it and have it without some of it rubbing off on me.

212. A friend of mine once said, "I like you a lot better since you've been going to AA instead of church."

213. I'm with me all the time, so it's hard for me to see change in myself.

218. One definition of humility is to allow people to be better than me...to do a job better than me. Things I really care about...not just stuff I'm not interested in.

220. Over time I have developed a taste for this serenity thing you all talk about.

224. AA is not real life. Real life is out there. It's what we learn in here being applied out there.

225. I must not get sober at someone else's expense.

228. In turmoil, most often self-imposed, God cannot reach us unless we find a way to let Him in.

230. I'm not real good at praying. Coming to meetings makes me pray and think about God.

231. How do I make it through holidays? Alcoholism doesn't take a holiday, and neither does AA.

232. You told me I had to admit I was powerless. Now I happily admit that I am "supremely powerless"

240. We have all failed so often that we don't hold each other to unusually high standards anymore.

243. The volume on my conscience has been turned way up.

246. From time to time, I relapse into my old way of thinking. I got my "blame thrower" out this week.

247. I've gotten over my fear of economic insecurity, but it still pisses me off.

248. I'm standing on a rainbow knee deep in sunshine.

252. Sometimes I can settle myself down enough to ask, "What would you do if you were not afraid?"

257. It's not that I'm afraid of God, it's just that I don't want to disappoint Him.

262. In other people is where we practice our patience and tolerance.

272. Having time in sobriety is a big deal, although I am not.

275. Everybody in here who shares from their own experience is saying the right thing. For me, what matters is whether I am ready to hear it or not.

281. I'm not a preacher or a teacher...I'm a "re-searcher."

282. Because of the alcoholic mind I've got, in any difficult or fearful situation, I am "standing in my tension"

285. My mind would kill me if it didn't need my body for transportation.

289. We're trying to reshape our lives on very simple principles. So many other theologies have been too complicated for us.

290. I need to serve, but not to be servile. I need a balance between these.

291. I still have insane thoughts. But it's not those thoughts that make my life chaos, it's my action on those thoughts. Today, I don't translate my insane thoughts into insane actions.

306. An alcoholic is a person who is bottled up with love. The program is about unbottling that love.

309. This began as a meeting for newcomers, but the newcomers stayed and it became an old timers meeting.

310. Maintaining my daily sobriety has become the most important thing in my life. I didn't get up this morning to take my grandson fishing...I got up this morning to come to this meeting.

312. There's always been a God out there, but until recovery, there wasn't a God I could do business with. For me, doing business with God is living these steps and trying to practice these principles.

313. You have to be tough to stay sober... to be willing to suffer some discomfort.

316. My life hasn't really changed. I've just been given the opportunity to do everything differently.

318. There's more than yes and no answers to the prayers we send to God. Sometimes He says "wait."

324. There is "a rippling effect of recovery" that can only be seen when you're past its beginning.

329. In order for me to pray effectively, my "set aside" prayer has to come first. Before I make contact with my Higher Power, I say a prayer asking to set aside all my defects, preoccupations, resentments, and all the rest, leaving only my true self.

333. It's the insanity of the plot that sounds so good to me. Just like having a drink often sounds good. Also when we're sober, bad ideas sound good to me. Our thinking is sick. Conscious contact will relieve that obsession to act without thinking.

337. My cup is overflowing, and I'm drinking from my saucer.

343. The pain of seeking God has never been as great as the pain of drinking and drugging.

344. For all of us in AA, our benediction is, "We're all OK today."

352. If I can slow down long enough to stop thinking, I can find some peace of mind.

355. If you pray too long, you're either begging, bitching, or bragging.

360. Things look more manageable on a day to day basis.

363. God could and would if He were sought...not God could and would if He were found. I have experienced God through seeking Him.

366. This program is not something you can think your way through...you have to feel your way through it.

367. As long as I don't want to be the center of attention at any event, everything will go fine.

368. My advice is worth what you're paying for it...nothing. My experience that I share is worth what I paid for it...everything.

374. It's easy to be humble when your whole life is one big humiliation. Getting sober is one thing...staying sober is another.

377. At any given time, I believe I'm right where I'm supposed to be...because I believe in a power greater than myself.

379. Many hands make light work. That's why this program works when we do it together.

382. I am never alone. The Higher Power that I misunderstand is always with me.

395. We must keep our program in front of us rather than dragging it behind us.

396. Today, the 12 promises may be a semblance of my mental health.

401. Today, I don't have to ask God to keep me from taking a drink. I have to ask Him to keep me from taking the actions that will lead me to a drink.

406. I'm not here because I've got a drinking problem...I'm here because I don't want one.

411. The program is designed to move us from a getting mode into a giving mode.

420. I'm an alcoholic who drank for the effect it had on me. I stay here in the program for the effect it has on my life.
432. Every day I can change the world by the count of one...just by my actions and my attitudes.
440. As long as we're on this earth we're going to need AA and we're going to need each other.
443. Everyday in prayer I ask God what would make Him happy. If I can find what makes God happy, I will be happy.
452. My goal is not to incorporate sobriety into my life...it is to incorporate my life into sobriety.
462. Twelve stepping is about carrying the message...not about the alcoholic. So you plant a seed. The alcoholic will water it if he's not ready yet.
470. For me, the fellowship is kind of like the glow around the program.
474. Now, when I am faced with a situation, I try to melt into it and let it happen.
486. The best examples of recovery don't talk a lot about the AA way of life. They don't have to. They live it.
494. My responsibility is to keep showing up.

496. They asked one of the oldtimers why he still goes to so many meetings. He said, "Because I forget what I know."

521. I can't stay sober by myself.

533. The program's greatest gift to me is a clear conscience. Mark Twain said a clear conscience is like a warm blanket.

539. I couldn't hear anything because I was caught up in the daily act of drinking. Today I stay sober the same way I drank.

544. This program is the only thing I've ever done in my life that I haven't gotten tired of or bored with.

546. I hear what I hear in here because I'm here.

564. I go to meetings to find out what happens to people who don't go to meetings.

582. Around here, we don't shoot our wounded.

585. Today, I've got the best problems I've ever had.

596. For me, this program works because I want it to.

601. For me, faith has to be a verb. I have to take some action with it.

605. I'm a high maintenance alcoholic. I need to go to a lot of meetings.

606. When I come to a meeting I feel safe and I feel forgiven.
609. The life I have today is the result of a slowly built discipline.
615. I perceive my God as having a conscious interest in me, and that makes everything else OK.
621. Today I don't think drinking is an option for me. But unmanageability is still an option for me.
649. I always tell my children, "I know it's tough raising parents, but bear with me."
651. Today I'm willing to accept someone's critique of me over things I cannot see myself.
679. Today, I have a core inside myself that is separated from the outside world. My true insides are not connected to everyday things out there.
680. When you shared with me, you even talked about the way I felt. It's not that we're all the same, it's that we're the same in different ways.
682. If I show up, He will.
689. I am an alcoholic. That's not an excuse, that's a reason. And today, I can do something about the reasons.

697. Sometimes I can't get a thought or feeling from my head to my heart. So, I have to get from my head to YOUR heart, and then from your heart to my heart.

699. I never got sober enough not to need this program.

701. Today, I am willing to be disappointed. It's not one of my favorite things, but I am willing to do it.

703. I like it here today. I'm striving for mediocrity.

705. Today, I tend to look at things from only one side. That's the side behind my nose.

712. I have to get up every day and do something with my sobriety.

723. Coming to AA meetings reminds me that I'm an alcoholic. Meetings are like keeping a wheel rolling by using a stick. Without the stick, the wheel falls over.

736. I am most comfortable in a church when it's empty.

741. Today I'm part of a life that almost didn't happen.

742. Tomorrow I'll do the things that worked for me today.

744. I can't refer to the time before I started drinking as "sober." That came after I stopped drinking. So, I call those earliest times "when I was undrunk."

746. I've been sober long enough now to where some of the committee members in my head are starting to get sober.

752. Stuff keeps coming back, along with me, to meetings.

754. I feel "wrecklessly " blessed.

757. I have the chronic inability to feel safe anytime without God in my life.

760. Today, my biggest fear is that you and these rooms won't be here anymore.

765. When one person comes to the program and another does not, they don't grow together, and they do grow apart.

773. Today I need to be assertive, not aggressive.... thoughtful, not angry... concerned, not fearful, and grateful, not grumbling.

784. When I don't ask God to remove my shortcomings, they stick around.

789. Today, I am present in my life.

791. Today, the only thing I need to be selfish about is my sobriety.

795. Today, I don't take a drink. I don't even read the label on the bottle.

803. You taught me that alcoholic thinking was destructive imagination. Sober thinking is constructive thinking.

805. Today I don't really have any problems... just situations. And I seem to cause most of those.

814. I've had a lot of problems over the years, and I can't remember what they were.

816. I can remember my first drink like it was yesterday, and I can remember my last drink like it was today.

817. I have been the most successful in my life when I am removed from self.

822. The diligent way I work my program every day is a demonstration to me of what has changed in me.

829. As a drinking person, I couldn't do anything but drink. As a sober person, I can do anything of which I'm capable.

834. My best friends are in here.

835. I come to meetings to bask in the similarities.

839. I'm as honest as I can be today.

854. Today, in most situations, I assume I'm baffled by it so I shut the hell up. It's an opportunity to not screw it up.

856. All I need to do is show up and take notes.

857. In my life, I have tendencies. In AA, when these tendencies are out of whack, we call them character defects.

858. Today I have an ongoing project...and that's to become a better person.

860. I had been trying to paint a picture of what my life was supposed to be, and trying to make the parts of that picture fit. Today I let the picture paint itself. And I try to stay away from picking up paint brushes.

865. I want to profit by and learn from other people's mistakes. I won't live long enough to make them all myself.

871. God and I are gonna dance today.

872. What a blessing to not be afraid anymore. I was afraid all my life. It still feels strange not to be afraid anymore.

873. If you come around here for a while, you'll hear a miracle. If you stay a while longer, you'll see a miracle. And if you stay long enough, you'll be a miracle.

878. I try to pray only "Okie-Dokie" prayers. Those where God's only response can be "Okie-Dokie."

879. I'm not afraid of self-sufficiency. I'm afraid of misdirection.

885. Today I am truly engaged in the lives of the people in these rooms. It makes me show up a lot.

886. I'm grateful for everyone whose here today. If you don't show up, I get messed up.

890. If I were to run into a bear in the woods, the first thing I'd do is put a tree between me and the bear. That's how I stay sober today. I keep God between me and the bottle.

891. In canoeing, if you need a rest, you "eddy up." You turn out of the current into the still water. That's what going to a meeting is in life.

898. Surrender is great, but it doesn't mean much without obedience.

912. I share my experiences because God uses them to connect.

918. It's been very difficult, but I've slowly learned to separate worry from fear, and to see each one for what it really is.

921. When the holidays arrive, all the normal people try to cram into 6 weeks what we in AA practice all year long.

923. I wish that knowing how to live came along with sobriety. But it doesn't, so I have to keep coming back here.

927. I'd really like to promote all the wonderful things I've learned in this program, but I can't because I really don't understand them. I know they work, but I don't know why.

929. I've been here long enough to where I'm starting to think that the normal people are in here.

931. Today it's OK for me to be an alcoholic because I don't drink anymore.

933. God loves me very much. He also loves everyone else just as much as He does me. So I don't need to worry about fixing others I have no control over.

937. When I have to wait, it bothers me because I'm afraid of the unknown. So now I pray when I have to wait..."yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of the unknown..."

940. AA keeps you sober and makes you happy about it.

943. Even if I don't know you, I love you if you're in this room.

945. I'm not going to say that I'll never drink again. If I say that, then I won't need to go to a meeting.

950. Somewhere between full tilt boogie and stop is reality, and that's where I want to be. That's the speedometer I want to live by.

953. For me, there's something that comes before not taking a drink today. That's making a plan to not take a drink today.

957. This program is like a page-turner...like a good book. I want to find out what's next, but I don't want it to be over.

961. I'm not searching for God. I'm letting Him find me.

962. If I take a drink, I'll have to cancel everything else. And I've got some plans I'd like to keep.

963. Where I come from, we call people who go back out "scouts."

964. When I begin to get angry or whatever, I've learned to stop and ask myself, "Do I want to make that deal today?" That's the deal where I let my disease take me back where I came from.

965. I have to be extra careful because I'm an alcoholic and I'm allowed only one-carry on bag.

985. When we hold hands at the end of the meeting, you can see everyone in the circle except yourself. But as you look at the other people, you see yourself at one stage of sobriety or another.

996. My escape used to be alcohol, but today my escape is meetings.

1004. In my drinking life, my quiet communion was with the bottle. Today, it is with my God.

1011. Out of self, into others, and into God.

1013. I live alone, and today I like everybody there.

1017. My prayer has become not for an easier, softer way, but for a strong back to carry the load.

1018. My only responsibility today is not to drink. You all will take care of the rest.

1022. I read the Big Book every day a couple of times a week.

1023. Those of us who have remained here were chosen to be sober. Because of that, we no longer have the privilege to remain neutral. We're charged with the responsibility to carry this message.

1024. If I stay sober, then I will always have a purpose in my life. That will be to help carry this message.

1035. I'm an alcoholic. I don't care who knows it as long as I don't forget it.

1036. All my life I had to be treated special in order to feel normal. Today, I know that to be the essence of self-centeredness.

1041. I can't do anything about what I did wrong in the past except not take a drink today.

1046. In the garden of my life, sometimes it's my job to plant things and sometimes it's to pull weeds.

1049. The way I meditate is I go to an AA meeting and try to listen.

1052. Sometimes the list of people I pray for gets so long that I just say to my Higher Power, "I pray for everyone whose on the list." He knows who they are.

1053. Life is good when I do my part...when I do the things you've taught me I must do to stay sober. When I don't, it isn't.

1057. Today I don't have everything I want, but I want what I have.

1059. The old me has to die again each day for me to keep this way of life.

1063. Today, if the police pull me over they're gonna give me a ticket and let me go. If that's not a new freedom and a new happiness, I don't know what is.

1069. The desire to drink is no longer part of my decision process. That's sobriety.

1072. The secret to my life being happy and serene is learning to control my mental state. I do that by trying to stay in an attitude of gratitude.

1078. Today I take my Higher Power with me. He's the driver, and He never drops me off.

1080. I keep coming back because of the feeling I get when I come into these rooms. If I got that same feeling other places, I'd go to those, too.

1084. In AA I learned to take it...everything except a drink.

1085. Am I an alcoholic or am I not? People who sit around wondering...are.

1094. As a sponsor, I used to get angry at things newcomers did. How can you be angry with someone who does the same things that you did?

1096. It's not important who I call...it's only important that I call. It's not important what meeting I go to....it's only important that I go. It's not important what I read...it's only important that I read.

1099. It's delicious to be sober. I know this because I can taste life for the first time in years.

1103. What has not drinking alcohol done for me? I hope it has led me to living an honest life.

1104. When problems arise for me, if I have to ask "why me?" When blessings find me, I have to ask the same question. So I've learned not to ask anymore.

1109. My heroes have changed.

1110. The kind of alcoholic I am, the only time I have is before I get started. So I'd better learn to think first.

1112. I have to live slowly. Often my purpose gets lost in the details.

1113. It has taken me a very long time, but I have learned to turn fear into respect.

1119. Since coming here the transformation of my life is so great that I can't come in here anymore without feeling like Cinderella.

1123. Today, my recovery...trying to get better...is my full time job.

1124. Sometimes when I need to feel better I go to a meeting to verbally throw up.

1130. The main thing I have come to accept in this program is that today is today...and it's enough.

1132. From one perspective, an AA meeting is meditation on a group basis.

1140. I'm the kind of person whose good at fooling himself. Today, if I'm feeling confident, I ask my God to help me not betray myself.

1145. For me, Alcoholics Anonymous is a sufficient substitute for alcohol.

1155. I may not have Attention Deficit Disorder, but I do have spiritual deficit disorder.

1156. I'm a member of AA. I don't have friends I drink with. I have friends I listen to and share with.

1158. An awful lot of people who have a relapse have worked the steps and then they have started working them backwards.

1159. In here I learned that I had to listen. I found out that I never got in trouble with my ears.

1165. Around here, when you reach out, people reach back.

1172. I've had both my best day and my worst day during sobriety, and I haven't had to drink to either celebrate or to mourn.

1173. After all this time, I still have a lot of rough edges, and sometimes, even now, I can still feel like I'd like to have a little something to take the edge off. So I come here instead.

1179. We are not "old timers." We are "long timers" in the program. If you live one day at a time, you're never old.

1182. The way I can tell if you've surrendered or not is if I can look you in the eye and tell you your life is none of your business and you don't get mad.

1183. Sometimes it feels so good to remember how bad it was.

1185. The point is not that I am not perfect. I don't even try to be perfect anymore.

1186. In my life, my dreams may not have come true, but at least the nightmare is over.

1191. There's a whole lot of 'we' holding up me.

1197. My acknowledgment of my God is the top priority in my life.

1198. Good things happen to alcoholics who don't drink.

1201. AA is like playing country music backwards. You get the dog back, the kids back, the wife back, the house, the truck....

1205. Today, I think God speaks to me in gentle whispers. I have to be listening well enough to hear Him.

1210. This path began as a journey and now has become an adventure.

Part Four

Wisdom For The Journey

1. For people like us,there is no such thing as a legitimate resentment.

7. Pain is really a good thing. It lets you know you're still alive.

8. Pain wants to make me feel like a newcomer again. It wants to take me back to all the kinds of feelings and fears that made me drink.

11. Feeling guilt is like having a resentment against yourself.

12. No one ever does anything TO me...they do something FOR themselves.

13. Apologies are nice, but an apology is not an amend. An amend is the correction of a wrong. It infers that in correcting it, I am not going to do that anymore.

24. You can't stay sober tomorrow. It's one day at a time, and today is that day.

26. Laughter is the sound effect of recovery.

35. Some things cannot be explained....they have to be experienced.

36. We need to rise to a higher plane in our life to become what our Higher Power really wants us to be.

37. Forcing a solution is the same as looking for power.

38. Feelings are not facts.

41. The Big Book tells me, "We must or it kills us." God will let our selfishness kill us if we do not take steps to stop it.

48. If patience is a virtue, love is a trust.

49. Treat your anger like it is an argument or a debate. Take time to consider your rebuttal, as you would in a debate.

56. It is the step one that determines if I am a real alcoholic or not.

75. When things are bad, they're not half as bad as they could be, and when they're good, they're not half as good as we deserve. God always has two to one odds on us.

80. God will not spare us from the adversities of life, but He will not desert us when the chips are down.

85. Arrogance is covering up shame. Feeling shame is one thing. Hiding it is another.

89. Defining who you are and what you want is an important part of getting and staying sober.

91. Powerless does not mean the same as defenseless. What we defend we make real. the difference is in the action.

94. The purpose of grieving is acceptance.

97. Humility is "willingness to learn."

101. Those who have been given a lot must give a lot.

104. A man who can't change his mind can't change anything.

105. What you think about.....grows.

110. Gratitude is a tool, to be used as such. When I actually use it, whether I feel it or not, it becomes the substitution for fear, resentment, and all the other negatives.

112. Progress is not always in a straight line. It may have a spiral shape that circles around and around.

113. Issues are like tissues...you pull up one to work on it, and up pops another.

121. If you're sober and work the steps, you can't screw them up enough to get drunk...and if you're drunk and work the steps, you can't do them a way that will make you sober.

122. Life is a roller coaster and God is the seat belt that holds us in.

127. Isolation is the same thing as being "emotionally incognito."

135. We're responsible for what is possible, and God is responsible for what is impossible.

137. The times we are afraid or in doubt are the times we are the closest to God. We are so vulnerable then. That's the time to draw closer and let Him in.

138. More tears are shed over answered prayers than over unanswered prayers.

142. There's a difference between loving yourself in egoism and loving yourself in humility.

143. The book tells us we should be hard on ourselves. But there's a difference between being hard on ourselves and morbid reflection.

146. Whatever is in my heart will eventually come out through my tongue. If you want to know where you are, listen to the words you speak.

147. If I want to truly change myself, I need to know where it is I want to go first.

159. A definition of attitude is the angle of your approach.

162. It's the chiefest point of happiness that a man is willing to be what he is.

170. It is when we pray that we really are.

176. In the end, everything comes down to working the steps, being with God, and sharing with others.

181. One day at a time is not a suggested minimum...it is the suggested maximum.

184. The secret of life is enjoying the passage of time.
192. God will not get in my sand box. I have to go get in His.
193. It's not that drinking is an issue...it's that life is.
196. When you wrap fear in faith, you get coverage, just like insurance.
199. Today I just don't take that act of defiance that will kill me.
201. Imagine reversing the direction of the 3rd step prayer.....God prays to me..."Child, I offer myself to you... I will relieve you of the bondage of self that you may better do my will....I will take away your difficulties. That's a deal I'd take.
205. It's a lot more painful to be aware.
207. Just because you think you're alone doesn't mean you are.
208. There is no "time-out" in life. Everything counts...every day--every minute.
210. The desire for excess drags me out of acceptance. What I have is enough. Desire for excess opens the door to expectations.
226. If you drive through someone's fence, you don't say you're sorry....you fix the fence.

233. It's easier to fight for your principles than it is to live them.

234. I've never had to accept anything that hasn't already happened.

244. I don't think I can improve on silence.

250. It's hard to be hateful when you're grateful.

258. It's good to keep an open mind as long as you don't let your brain fall out.

259. My drinking life had no direction. At the fork in the road, Alice asks the Cheshire Cat which road to take. The cat asks where are you going. Alice says she doesn't know. The cat says "Then it really doesn't matter, does it?"

260. If you want self-esteem, do "esteemable" things.

263. It takes a whole life span to overcome our character defects, a little at a time.

265. Surrendering my will and my life to God's care is like floating down a fast river on a log. Any feeling of control I might have is an illusion.

266. The way I "understand God" is to go and "stand under" Him and his protection. If I'll just do it, the understanding will come along later.

271. The difference between hope and expectation is control. If I truly have control, it may be reasonable to expect.

274. If "pink cloud" days become less frequent, good things that happen less often have greater meaning. Things will always balance out if I will let them.

278. All the time you've got in the program will fit in the bottom of one shot glass.

279. It's not how I fall....it's how I pick up the pieces.

283. It doesn't matter what you believe...but that you believe and that you explore it with passion.

288. If you tell me something, I'll forget it. If you show me something, I'll remember it. If you involve me in something, I'll understand it.

293. Don't let superior knowledge of the program and the steps delude you into thinking that it's not necessary to keep putting one foot in front of the other.

296. This journey that we are on is punctuated by the events of life...births, deaths, and all the rest.

302. My 2 year old daughter says "hope me" when she needs some help. I found hope when I learned how to ask for help.

303. "Be sincere whether you mean it or not" means "fake it till you make it."

304. Your parents, Mother Nature and Father Time, will take care of your character defects.

315. The best way to learn how to pray is to pray.

317. Defects of character are like satin sheets. You can't get a good toe hold on either.

320. My soul is in a room with only one door knob, and it's on my side. In order to let God into my life, I have to open the door for Him.

326. It's easier to have a relationship with God than it is to have one with somebody else.

327. A problem shared is a problem cut in half. When we share with each other, our problems lose their power.

331. Spending all my time concentrating on the problem instead of the solution is like watering the weeds instead of watering the garden.

336. God is either everything or nothing. I cannot "compartmentalize" my relationship with Him. If I do, then I'm creating cubbyholes where I can put things to keep them away from Him.

339. Don't put a question mark where God has put a period.

341. There are only 2 things I need to remember about prayer...I need to start, and I need to continue.

347. The manner in which I forgive others is the model God uses to forgive us. If I want God's forgiveness, I'll have to forgive like He does.

356. I've never seen anybody drink who said "please" in the morning and "thank you" at night.

357. It's hard, maybe impossible, to take a drink when you are grateful to be sober.

359. My past without Alcoholics Anonymous is my future without Alcoholics Anonymous.

364. God doesn't love me because I'm good. God loves me because He's good.

371. God didn't give me the spirit of fear. That's something got on my own.

380. People you hate will come around more than people you love, especially in my thoughts.

393. To live daily in the devastation of alcoholism is a waste of time.

399. We teach best what we need to learn most.

400. Don't ever draw a line in the sand for God...He will step over it.

402. Understanding the joy of living is the highest form of prayer.

403. Sobriety is a journey. Life is not an endurance contest. It is to be savored and enjoyed. Death is merely a punctuation mark.

408. There's a wrench for every nut in AA.

414. Could the spelling of the word GOD stand for Group Of Drunks?

416. If your God is small enough for you to understand Him, then He's not big enough for Him to help you.

423. Spirituality is about living before you die.

425. The program is day by day support of like minded people.

427. Some day a real alcoholic will stop drinking. It's best to be alive when that happens.

428. When I leave here, the only thing I'm going to be allowed to take with me is my soul's integrity.

431. There's a solution for every problem. If you don't find a solution, then you don't have a problem.

441. Freedom is being restored to the power to choose. But the most powerful tool for freedom in the program is honesty.

442. If alcohol doesn't bring you to your knees, sobriety will.

445. Spiritual people have an idea of what life is all about.

453. This entire program is spiritual. Talking about the spiritual part of the AA program is like talking about the round part of a basketball.

458. You're always going to have feelings. Just don't let them lead you around.

463. God's gift to me is a new day. My gift to God is what I do with that day.

465. No problem can be solved by the same mind that created it.

466. Life goes on, even after amazing discoveries and changes. After enlightenment, there's always laundry.

467. A truth told with bad intent is more damaging than all the lies.

472. "Why" the program works has to remain a mystery. If it didn't, the program wouldn't work as wonderfully as it does.

473. Start acting like there is a God and you'll find out that there is one.

484. You know it's from God if it touches your heart and clears your mind.

485. There aren't solutions to imaginary problems.

489. Believing in God and believing that there is a God are two different things.

497. Rigorous Honesty—the absolute absence of the intention to deceive.

498. The truth is the perfect disguise for whatever I'm trying to hide.

499. An emotion should not make a decision for you.

502. They say the road to hell is paved with good intentions...the road back is paved with humility.

504. I cannot make life go. I've got to let it come.

515. It's hard to get lost if you stay in the shadow of the winners.

518. Hope is a power greater than yourself.

523. Success is standing in the presence of God unashamed.

540. The search for God is our greatest adventure.

550. Forgiving is when you give first.

551. If God is everything or He is nothing, and you are something, then what does that make you?

552. God and alcohol cannot coexist in this body and mind of mine. But when I remove one, the other comes in.

562. That still small voice is the guardian of the integrity of my soul.

570. There's a difference between selfishness and self-interest.

572. Self-interest is where serenity is found.

576. When someone shares from their heart, you have to listen. You really have no choice about that.

580. God is not asleep, and that means I'm going to be OK.

583. I thank God for helping me find AA, and I thank AA for helping me find God.

587. It's not the quality of the play but rather the intensity of the effort that makes the difference in here.

590. If you and God have drifted apart, which one of you moved?

600. Like an employer who doesn't want you to misrepresent him or his company, my Higher Power doesn't want to be misrepresented to people I meet. In this new way of life, need to always remember I am one of God's employees.

602. In every situation and every problem, when I pray, I need to pray for all concerned, not just for me.

603. It's OK to look back, but don't stare.

611. Life is not about being happy. Life is about being whole.

627. Expect Nothing...Blame No one...Do Something.

629. People of faith have a logical idea of what life is all about.

631. Don't dance with the devil...he wants to lead.

634. Happiness for me today is enthusiasm minus expectation.

637. Pray for rain and carry an umbrella.

641. God doesn't love me because I'm good...He loves me because He's good.

642. No matter what step you're on, the process of relapse works in reverse.

643. He who goes away and does not return stays gone for a very long time.

648. We will always receive adequate grace before opportunity.

650. Life is hard, but God is good.

652. One of the great secrets to happiness in this program is not getting what you want but realizing you want what you have.

655. There is not only impending doom...there is also impending joy, and impending OK.

671. If something doesn't work, throw it away.

690. "A tornado in a glass of water." It's no big deal unless you're the glass.

692. Whenever there's 2 people honestly sharing with each other, God is right in the middle.

700. Fear is looking back, hope is looking forward, and faith is looking up.

706. It's easier to be a part of life than to try to control it.

711. How I receive and feel love, and learning how to pass that on. This is a good purpose for my life.

714. I'm facing a very difficult but not so unusual situation. There's no "why me" about it. It's just my turn to go through it.

716. God never runs away. We just back up.

719. In this program, you've got to be willing to eat a lot of crow if you want to grow.

726. The distance between me and a drink never changes. But I can maintain that distance indefinitely.

727. God does for me the things I'll let Him do.

728. Self will kill me...God will save me.

729. The testimony we give comes from the actions we've taken because of the faith we've been given.

730. The way I understand it is I don't understand it.

735. My life is unmanageable...but I need to remember that it is unmanageable by me...not by my Higher Power.

739. If you're too busy for prayer, you're just too busy.

745. There are powers other than God out there. They're not more powerful than God, but they're more powerful than me. As long as I stick with God, I can stay out of the other's way.

747. The steps are the program and the fellowship is like a guardrail.

748. Start where you are, do what you can do gracefully, step forward with faith, and expect your Higher Power to help you.

753. In amends, many times "I'm sorry" just doesn't represent how we really feel. "I regret that this happened and my part in it" is more correct.

755. Faith is a gift all wrapped up in the package of letting go so God can take charge of my life.

758. If you ask God to guide your life today, you might ought to let Him do it.

768. If you can't laugh at yourself, you're missing the joke of the century.

771. Before I can be humble I need to be right-sized and centered.

772. Adversity does not suppress character, it reveals it.

776. If you're feeling good, you're feeling God.

779. Our laughter is a barometer of our self-esteem.

780. The truth will set you free although the messenger might piss you off.

781. There are 3 kinds of business...God's business, other people's business, and my business.

782. If you're not having problems, you're probably not alive.

785. EASY..... does it. Put the emphasis on easy and it tells you what works.

790. Alcoholism is a disease of extremes and excesses.

792. When I remember to pause, a reasonable spirit enters me and takes away my world of extremes.

799. What we really want is some comfort in our lives. Seems to me the most comfort we can find is by helping other people.

800. How cheaply am I willing to sell my serenity?

801. Anger is like a piece of red hot charcoal you pick up and throw at someone else. You may or may not hurt them, but you are certainly going to burn yourself.

804. Participating in a resentment is like drinking a glass of poison and then waiting for the other person to die.

819. There may only be just 3 prayers... Help...Thank you...and Wow.

825. This program is not rational, it's spiritual.

828. "Figure it out" is not an AA slogan for a good reason.

840. Humility...if you think you've got it, you just lost it.

842. People who strive for humility are happier than those who are arrogant.

850. As happiness is the absence of pain, joy is the absence of suffering.

870. This way of life has nothing to do with us while we are drinking. It has everything to do with us after we stop.

882. Keep your head where your feet are.

883. In this program you start where you are, but you better not stay there.

888. Sobriety is the only thing I've ever gotten in my life that nobody can take from me but me.

892. God pays attention to all the details in my life because He's up all day and all night.

895. Alcoholism is about an imperfect spiritual yearning.

897. It's so much easier to care about people than it is to judge them.

916. God's not going to give you more than you can handle. But He's not going to stop you from grabbing more than you can handle either.

917. Fear cannot stay with me when I insist on telling myself the truth.

925. Mine is not a negotiated serenity. I can't do good things in expectation of a payoff.

926. Today, 3 things are important in my life. Don't drink, have faith, and don't drink. I need that second "don't drink" just in case my faith falters once in a while.

934. God is infinite, but there is only so much of me to go around. If I'll try to fill up the holes in me with my God instead of myself, my life becomes limitless.

935. For me, there's a God-self and a self-self. God uses me for His works, and if I'm in tune with that, my life goes well. My self-self will cause me to implode.

942. Sobriety is its own reward.

944. Real happiness is losing yourself in something bigger than yourself.

946. Self-centered fear will always block us from the sunlight of the spirit. There's self-centered fear, and then there's healthy fear.

947. Drinking is suffering. Sobriety is less suffering.

949. Soul balance is when I'm totally leaning on God and He's taking all the weight.

951. I used to have bad days. Today I have bad moments.

952. There's a big difference between being recovered and being cured. If you came here to get cured, you're in the wrong place.

954. When you finally realize that you're going to the meetings for the newcomers, it's then you know you're sober.

958. Any time you feel like you have to have something right now, it's usually not God's will for you.

959. Don't ever pray for patience. If you do, God will send you every opportunity to practice it.

968. I grew up in the country and was taught not to greet that stray dog that comes to the door. He'll just keep coming around if I do. It's the same with negative thoughts that lead to emotional hangovers. I've got to learn not to feed them.

969. Sobriety is knowing the truth.

978. Tough love is harder for me to do than it is for you to take. But today I'd rather step on your toes than stand on your grave.

979. If you're sober and still screwing up, remember that it really doesn't matter. We've screwed up so much, one more time won't even change our average.

980. Experiencing a psychic change is when you move out of your will and into the perfect will of your Higher Power.

981. We find God in the last place we look... deep down inside us. If we couldn't find Him there, we couldn't find Him anywhere else or in anyone else.

988. Resentment is the #1 offender. There is no #2.

989. Self-esteem is about how you look at yourself.
Self-worth is about how you look at what you do or did.

990. If there's anybody who brings out the worst in you, remember that what they're bringing out is still you.

995. God talks to me through other people. He won't talk to me directly because He knows I'll try to rationalize with Him.

998. My mom says P. U. S. H...Pray Until Something Happens.

1001. An impulsive reaction is rarely a quiet one. An intuitive response usually is.

1019. Potential is not reality.

1020. I need to keep my program grounded in reality. The sobriety medallion I carry is an outward symbol of an inward commitment.

1033. I'd rather walk in the dark with a friend than in the light alone.

1039. I believe that in order to get to any point, you have to start somewhere. In recovery that somewhere is today... now.

1040. The difference between admission and acceptance of our alcoholism has a major impact on the quality of sobriety.

1042. The dictionary says acceptance means to willingly receive, not to gladly receive.

1044. There's a big difference between God working in my life and me not paying attention in my life. Because I wasn't aware, all the good things were passing me by.

1055. Sometimes resentment is unresolved grief. I can do resentment a whole lot easier than I can do grief.

1064. Sobriety is the narrowing of the gap between my values and my actions.

1065. Balance and the maintenance of it is the gate keeper of sobriety.

1068. A mindset of "not currently drinking" is not the same thing as being sober.

1070. If the grade is downhill, apples can roll pretty far from the tree. The only limit to how low I can go is death.

1075. Fear is the darkroom in which negatives develop.

1076. You have faith sufficient to begin. All you need in order to recover is in the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. If you work these steps, more faith will come.

1077. To get a 30 day sobriety chip....."it takes 30 days and a thousand nights"

1083. People that judge don't matter. People that matter don't judge.

1088. The concept of one day at a time will keep you sober just as long as you understand the concept of one day at a time.

1095. My dad always told me to "let the rough edge drag." I try to stay away from controversy and let God smooth it out.

1114. My arms are too short to box with God.

1115. Two things that all of us here have in common are that we are all alcoholics and we are all human beings.

1116. We're climbing a mountain that has no summit, which is better than sliding down a valley that has no bottom.

1118. Our natal birthday is the day God gives life to us. Our AA birthday is the day we give our lives back to God.

1125. Today I'm a newcomer. I've never been here today before.

1126. My sponsor suggested that in any situation the first thing I ought to try is surrender. I asked him if I was to surrender to my disease or to my Higher Power. He said I should surrender my disease to my Higher Power.

1134. This program is about living life instead of being afraid of it.

1142. We are not saints, but we are servants. Through our relationships with others, we get a chance to serve, which is as close as we'll get to sainthood.

1143. Somebody told me, "If you could drink a day at a time, then you can not drink a day at a time."

1144. The only difference between a winner and a whiner is the sound of the "I".

1149. There is really nothing new in AA. You can't teach an old dog new tricks, but you can teach an old dog old tricks.

1152. I hope I have enough life left to give me enough time to grow up.

1154. People talk about heaven and hell. To me, heaven is here and hell is when I turn my back on my Higher Power.

1157. My alcoholism is like a dropped stitch. God gets in through the wounds.

1163. It's not so much the days that count as the changes.

1174. Expectations are premeditated resentments.

1175. Wisdom is knowing what to do with knowledge.

1176. Our literature teaches me the knowledge, and our fellowship shows me how to put it into action.

1188. You're either going to the liquor store or you're getting farther away from it. That's the growth and the relapse in this program.

1189. AA is the only place where they give you a medal for running out of a burning building.

1194. Lots of people accumulate time in this program and then drink again. Often, they've kept counting years but stopped counting days.

1195. This program really does work...and with God's help it works even better.

1199. Expectations are the pavement on the highway to resentment. And those little yellow clickers embedded in the road...they're the "yea buts." (yea but yea but yea but yea but)

Appendix I

Step Reference

Step One

54. Step 1 Part B.....(our lives had become unmanageable)...There's a difference between management and control.

56. It is the first step that determines if I am a real alcoholic or not.

92. Step 1 is the only non-spiritual step. Rather, it is just the plain truth...reality. To take it, one merely has to state the truth.

139. The vehicle that brings me to the place of willingness is the first part of the first step.

268. In the first step, it's one thing to admit our powerlessness, it's another to accept it.

560. Someone asked me how I knew I had taken the first step. I said I could tell because I'd stopped struggling.

740. The neat thing for me about the 1st step is that it comes right after the 12th step.

983. Step 1 is the only one that can and must be done perfectly. The rest of the steps are guidelines to measure our ongoing progress.

1089. The first step deals with my identity...with who I am. Before my recovery, I never knew who I was.

Step Two

131. Believing "that" rather than believing "in" (step 2) indicates a commitment, which makes all the difference.

584. Step 1 is a statement of despair. Step 2 is a statement of hope. Step 2 is not about God, it is about hope.

Step Three

172. In step 3, to turn my will and my life over actually means to turn my thoughts and my actions over.

201. Imagine reversing the direction of the 3rd step prayer.....God prays to me..."Child, I offer myself to you... I will relieve you of the bondage of self that you may better do my will....I will take away your difficulties.....

215. If you don't want to see things change...if you don't want your life to change...don't start saying the 3rd step prayer.

236. Where step 1 was giving up, step three was giving in.

264. With Step 3 I make a contract with God, and it's no longer an "I" effort...now it's "we." From this point onward, I am no longer alone.

301. The shortest declarative sentence I can think of is also the easiest way to do the 3rd step, and that's to simply say "OK."

385. Step 3 is an action step. It's about the action of picking up a pen to do step 4.

386. Saying the 3rd step twice is like telling the bartender "give me a double."

387. When I finished saying the 3rd step prayer, I added, "and I really mean it."

388. Taking the 3rd step is probably the best decision I ever made...and I make it again several times every day.

691. When I took step 3 I made a decision to stay here in Alcoholics Anonymous.

743. The 3rd step doesn't say we won't have difficulties. It says "take away my difficulties."

845. The step said, "God as we understood Him." I finally realized that the way I understand God is that I don't understand Him.

1139. For me, the 3rd step is like the clutch on a standard transmission. When I engage it, I'm able to shift gears and see things differently as I proceed through the action of taking the next steps.

1206. In the 3rd step prayer, I am asking for something... and I'm offering something...a good balance.

Steps Six & Seven

219. Working steps 6 and 7 is like trying to keep leaves out of your yard during the Fall season.

Step Ten

1062. This program has a short shelf life. That's why I need a good 10th step every day.

Step Eleven

83. Practice of the 11th step forces me to align my actions with my convictions.

524. The first word of the 11th step..."sought..." implies work.

654. Step 11 tells me to seek to improve my conscious contact, which implies that I already have one.

Step Twelve

462. Twelve stepping is about carrying the message...not about the alcoholic. So you plant a seed. The alcoholic will water it if he's not ready yet.

1146. The steps work like a cycle in my life. When I use the 12th step to find someone to sponsor, I get taken right back to step 1 with that new sponsee.

Acceptance

"Why doesn't the first step say we accepted we were powerless over alcohol instead of we admitted it?"

An astute newcomer asked this question in his first few months of sobriety. There are probably several valid answers. The most applicable is that acceptance is just too much to ask of a new person. Many of us would not have survived early recovery were acceptance of powerlessness a requirement. The first step only asks us to admit it and begin from there. That becomes our "admittance" to this astounding way of life. Later we begin to realize that we must accept our defects in order to set them aside each day. It is at this precise vantage point that recovery reaches solid ground and lays its foundation.

A "We" Program

"We're more normal than anybody else...because we know what's wrong with us."

These expressions refer to "we" and "us" rather than "I" or "me." The similarities of our common urges and feelings bind us to each other. If you are currently in recovery, or if you are considering it, you are already one of us...you are already one of "we."

From the very beginning, it has always been a "we" journey. One cannot take it alone. It is when we recognize this that the healing begins, and the miracles unfold.

Wisdom

There are many definitions of wisdom. Years ago, one was read aloud at an Eleventh Step meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous, and it has endured as the most concise companion for the spiritual journey of recovery. Regrettably, the source of these words has been lost.

"Wisdom is priceless. This faculty is unquestionably high on the list of personal values. The Bible commends it; the philosophers praise it; the poets extol it; and the wise seek it.

Sir W. Temple said, ""A man's wisdom is his best friend; folly, his worst enemy.""

Defined, wisdom is the use of knowledge and experience in meeting successfully the circumstances of life. It puts ready hinges on the door of success and a soft glove on the fist of fate. Some call it common sense. Whatever it is, the wise get more of it; but fools, never."

Appendix II

The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous:

What they mean
and how they work.

An experienced sponsor
shares his perspective.

“I’m for anything that works!”

There may be as many individual perspectives of The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous and how they work as there are people who have successfully employed them.

That’s a whole lot of people, and every one of them is right...because it worked.

What the Twelve Steps “mean” is like so many other things...they’re about what they mean to you. For that reason, and several others, the process of The Steps are presented as suggestions, subject to a wide and varying interpretation, depending on the individuals involved, teachers and students.

Over time, however, there seems to have developed a wide general agreement of understanding of each of The Steps and how they ought to be approached. Or, at least, how they *ought not* to be approached. Countless failed attempts have created a conventional wisdom of what *does not work*, as well as leaving a wide open field of various ways that do.

The following opinions of each Step are mine, based on my own personal experience with each one, countless others I have watched, and the things I have heard from “real winners” in countless meetings.

Everyone I have ever met, discussed with, and listened to on this subject agrees on at least one steadfast principle...

Step One must be taken 100%...without reservation. It is the only Step that must be done perfectly, and there is only one way to do it. The step is self-explanatory, and leaves nothing to interpretation or imagination. Anything less than what Step One clearly states is a half measure, the results of which will avail us nothing.

Beyond that there's room for countless theories, perspectives, understandings and approaches, and I never tire of hearing about all of them.

From what follows, as with all of our wonderful program, take what you can use and disregard the rest. And, if there's ever a conflict between what is said here and what is in The Big Book, go with The Book. It *always* works.

Don G.
Temple, Texas

Step One: Surrender

“We admitted we were powerless over alcohol, that our lives had become unmanageable.”

In American culture, all our lives we are taught, “don’t give up.” The general opinion is that once you begin this process, it will carry over into everything, ultimately making you “a quitter” who never accomplishes anything.

For centuries, the sailor’s adage “The Captain goes down with his ship” accomplished only the needless loss of a lot of good Captains. Even THEY don’t do that anymore.

Obviously, surrender is something that requires BALANCE, that most difficult of properties for “all or nothing thinkers” to handle.

“Surrender and win” is a relatively new concept to Western culture. In certain circumstances, it is not only preferable to resistance...it is the only thing that in fact works. This would appear to be the case with alcoholism, although some would argue, in which case you are invited to try out all other potential remedies, and if you find one that works, go for it.

Unmanageability of our lives is the convincer. Serene manageability of our lives is the goal. So we have to make a beginning, and that beginning is admitting.

Surrender, followed by acceptance, is what we first learn to manage...setting our lives aside for the moment...and as the success starts to come, we begin to shift the process into our daily living, constantly trying to achieve a balance of life.

The surrender we are asked to make is to reality, perhaps for the first time ever. There can be no reservations...we truly have to *do it*...100%. All the other 11 steps allow for degrees of doubt, and ask for a willingness to be shown...to wait for demonstration. But that door will not open for us unless this first step is taken with “complete abandon.”

Step Two: Willingness

“Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.”

For us, the suggestion of any kind of belief immediately conjures up our experiences with religion, which is nothing like the point of taking Step 2. It's aim is to introduce us to The Spirit, which has little or nothing to do with religion. Our overwhelmingly prevalent religion (Christianity) often demands, or so we often deduce, that it's "our way or the highway" (to Hell)... something the classic alcoholic simply cannot or will not accept. We have railed against this and so many other tenets of our society for years, which has brought us painful consequences. But then, there may have been times when we really tried to adhere to such, and still the consequences prevailed. One way or the other, we've not known anything else to try, so we've insisted continuing what we've been doing over and over again. Finally, in frustration, we sought relief and escape in alcohol, and even that has finally stopped working.

At this place of true dilemma, it's suggested to us that "doing the same thing again and again and expecting different results is a form of insanity." Being restored to sanity could be the way out. But how do we do that? How do we "come to believe?" Since we don't know how, we'll have to be shown or taught. In order to become teachable, we'll have to adopt a measure of willingness. Even if we don't presently believe anything, all we need is a willingness to believe in order to make a start. So we are challenged, "If you can't believe this, would you be willing to believe it on the chance it might work?"

Here's where the true genius of the ensuing 11 steps begins. We can take this with all kinds of doubt and/or speculation. "OK, show me!" But before you can say that, you have to be willing to give it a shot. Usually, if we have truly "bottomed," there's no other recourse, so we (often reluctantly) agree to give it a try. We have stepped back across the line into sanity. The very moment we do this, The Spirit has begun to enter us. Call it Hope...call it Faith...call it Fear or Desperation...it doesn't matter. Regardless the reason, it is sufficient to make a start.

The amazing result of beginning this process is the longer we stick with it the stronger it becomes, and before we even realize what's happened to us, we have started to come to believe.

Step Three: Decision

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

In the past, this is where many of us have tried to begin. “OK, I’m gonna quit now.” And it didn’t work. Clearly, this place is one of progression. First, we had to admit the reality of our problem and surrender to our inability to manage it. Next, we became amenable to turning to a power other than our own self-will for a solution. Having laid this foundation, there’s a far better chance that deciding to do something about the problem is going to work. This decision is our first action, although it is a mental one rather than a physical one, which comes later.

It is a dangerous pitfall for us to assume we are giving up all control, as that is just not the case. In truth, we have the capacity to quit and return to our old way at any time. But all that has happened before, over and over again, and is not where we want to go this time. Yet we still maintain that powerful and frightening capacity which is the freedom of our own self-will, so what are we to do with it?

Here is where the “act” of decision becomes powerful. We cannot give up our self-will, which has taken over control of this problem, but we can give up the CARE of that will. Our attempts to CARE for our own thoughts (will) and actions (lives) have been a dismal failure, and that is what we are going to turn over to this newfound power, whoever or whatever it may

prove to be. In a way, we are deciding to become a child again returning to a parent for direction, or a student to a teacher, or an employee to a foreman.

“...Our will and our lives” are in fact our thoughts and our actions. They have been perpetuating this problem, and we have been unable to manage or control them, yet we cannot merely “throw away” our physical and mental capacity to do that. Instead, we decide to release the care of those capacities over to someone or something else for proper direction. That power, that entity, for the lack of a better name, we will call “God.” Here again, this is “the God” of our own individual, particular understanding...not one that has been defined by someone else and enforced upon us. This is our own very personal God...one that we respect and revere rather than fear. This HIGHER POWER is of our own choice.

Finally, we have quit playing god ourselves, and for the most logical of reasons...it didn't work. We are going to move ourselves out of the driver's seat and allow something else to direct our thoughts and actions regarding this problem we have. This is the railhead of a spiritual path, and from here our only goal will be to keep our train on the tracks each day. Where the train goes in taking us away from our ongoing problem is now up to the engineer. We are passengers in his care.

On this journey, there will be many more opportunities for us to make decisions, and we don't want to repeat the same mistakes we've made in the past. Since we are now being cared for in our other problem area, we turn our attentions to understanding why we have chosen poorly in the past. If we can be shown those realities, we won't have to repeat those mistakes again.

Step Four: Reality

“Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves”

Here the action of physical work begins. Until now, we have been thinking. It’s time to actually *do something*.

Our memories and perceptions of what has caused our resentment, fear, and guilt over the course of our lives has been flying around in our minds for years. Just like a rumor, with each mental revisit, the stories have grown and embellished. Now we will write them down, and force them to stand still, so they can be analyzed...so we can uncover and discover their true nature. First, we name and list them. Next, we explain what we believe caused them. Then, we carefully examine how they hurt us. Finally, and most important, we write down exactly what we did at the onset of each one that caused them to occur and unfold in the first place.

We discover that in almost no case did anyone come looking for us to cause trouble. Tracing back to the very beginning, we find that we either did something or placed ourselves in a position to be hurt. Plainly, if we had not done that, or going forward, if we can learn not to do that anymore, our problems will either greatly diminish or disappear. Beyond that lies reasonable peace and serenity, which is our true goal.

It is vital that this be written down. Without the writing to force these perceptions to stand still in our minds and sight, we are not analyzing anything... we are merely looking around and watching them bounce from place to place in our imagination. In this process, we have opened the door to reality, and abandoned fantasy.

Although the real truth can be painful, it is absolutely necessary for this process to work. If we cannot be true to ourselves...our innermost selves...right here and right now, we can never get ourselves “unstuck” from our past, which is what has brought us down to our current state of being. In each and every occurrence we record, we quickly get past what “they” did to us, and place all our focus on what we did. This is a completely new perspective of our very old problems. Now, we can clearly see the truth...the exact nature of each of these occurrences. Until now, we’d believed we were victims of the actions of others. The reality is that we have been victims of our own actions, and those are the ones we have the ability to do something about. We can change them going forward.

“To thine own self be true.” This is the outer edge of the Sunlight of the Spirit, a process of constant self-examination in the presence of our own individual and personal Higher Power. This is the threshold we have been looking for, the opening of a pathway that leads to an entirely different way of living...”the way out.”

Step Five: Humanity

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

To make the recovery process work, we will have to rejoin the human race. The substances we receded into have isolated us from people in any honest and meaningful way. Now, there will have to be someone, somewhere who knows everything about us...the whole truth..warts and all. The secrets we have been keeping from everyone are sick, and they have made us sick...we have become as sick as our secrets. This is how the “ism” of alcoholism has gotten the upper hand with us...it has isolated us into the thinking of I, Self, and Me (ISM).

And so we admit, out loud and in person, the entire truths we’ve uncovered and written down about ourselves. The time has come to vocalize them...to say them out loud, and to someone who is listening. At first, we admit it to ourselves. It can no longer be denied...it is looking back at us from the pages where we have written it. And, we admit it all to our Higher Power, either in thought or voice. We realize that He already knows all of it as well as we do, so we are going to need yet another “god”...a human being...a temporary “god with skin on him” to hear our entire truth.

This is the “price” of our admission back into humanity and our participation in it. We have to do this for one simple reason. It has been clearly proven that we cannot survive with this malady, this disease, alone. We’ve tried very hard to do that...to go it alone...and we have failed.

As this step instructs, we are admitting, out loud, the exact nature of our experiences. That means we admit not only what we did, but our newfound truthful understanding of “why” we did it. We uncovered that in Step 4. We saw how we were hurt or threatened, causing us to react with resentment or fear, often leaving us with guilt. The problem is not as much what we did as why we did it. Only by disclosing this can we get at the roots of these obsessive, often compulsive actions, and “root them out.” If we don’t accomplish this, and right now, we are destined to repeat them over and over again, until they finally consume us.

We carefully choose the person who will listen to us. It must be someone who will not judge. We’ve had, or are having, enough judgments from society and the law. If we are going to move forward out into life, we’re going to have to divest ourselves of our baggage ...our wreckage of the past. That process begins here, and continues through the next several steps.

When we have finished our thorough confession, it’s very important that we take an hour to silently contemplate what we have done, making sure to the best of our current ability that we have left nothing out. For if we have purposely omitted anything, it will remain a secret, and such secrets are what will surely derail this recovery effort in the future. If the memory of something we’ve honestly forgotten returns later, we will have a step to deal with that promptly. But for now, we must be absolutely certain that we’ve omitted nothing of which we are aware. If we have, we must return and correct that immediately.

Step Six: Courage to Change

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

With our truth laid bare and confessed, we are now standing at a threshold beyond which is an entire new life. There are many who believe this is the most important step of all. The reality of who we’ve been, the what and why of all we’ve done, is exposed. We want to “recover” from that, but not in the traditional sense. We want all of that behind us, but not so we can return to that way of thinking and acting, only to do it all again. We need a clean slate, but not to clear the way to repeat it. “Get me out of this one and I’ll never do that again” is something we’ve often said or felt in the past, but this time we’re actually going to have to “do it.”

“Entirely ready” are the key words in this step. Are we ready to change our way of thinking, acting, and believing? That will require a major realization and a commitment.

The realization is that life with its people, institutions, and situations, is not going to change. It is the way it is, and is going to remain so. “They” have not been the real problem, “we” have been the stumbling block...“we” and our reactions to “them.” If we want different results from now on, it’s “we” who are going to have to change...a very tall order, and one that is going to require courage and a strong commitment to it.

Having come this far, we are not going to “live happily ever after.” That only happens in fairy tales, and what we are dealing with here is real life.

Change of this kind is uncomfortable...an absence of ease, a “dis-ease.” This is the fundamental bedrock of our problem. Speaking of such a change is one thing, doing it is another. Most of us are going to need lots of help for a long time to do it, and that means a committment. To proceed any further, we must be entirely ready to commit to this new process we’ve learned up to now, as well as anything that comes with the remaining steps.

Being “entirely ready” means we now know there can be no going back to the old ways for us. We’ve been shown how and why that doesn’t work for us, so now we know, and once we know, we can’t “not-know.” In that sense, we have in fact already been changed forever. The question is, are we now “entirely ready” to fully accept that fact? Any fantasy hope that we can ever go back to how we were has to be given up...entirely. When we can honestly say that, to ourselves, our Higher Power, and to those who are trying to help us...then we are “ready.”

It’s important to understand that life is still going to hand us all the difficulties, annoyances, and worries it always has in the past. The committment now required of us is that we are going to approach and handle them a new way...a different way than we have been doing. This will be hard work, and we will need help from our fellows. Our old ways, our “old tapes,” are ingrained in us as habits. At least at first, the thoughts and actions...the advice of our helpers, will have to take precedence over ours until we become accustomed to this new way.

That is a very large realization, and an even larger committment.

Step Seven: Humility

“Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.”

Humility is not humiliation. We’ve had plenty of that in the past, and it never did us any good. For the purpose of recovery, humility is about balance. For people like us who are “stuck,” addicted to and/or diseased by what began as habit, the way out is going to be through balance. But before we can make use of it, we have to get there. To do that, we’ve got to go to the opposite extreme.

AA’s founders used the Prayer of St. Francis to demonstrate how to achieve balance, resulting in humility. The prayer contains eight stanzas that each suggests “if the problem is *here*, then let me go *there*...” with “there” being the complete opposite extreme. Hence,

*“that where there is hatred, I may bring love;
that where there is wrong, I may bring the spirit of
forgiveness;
that where there is discord, I may bring harmony;
that where there is error, I may bring truth;
that where there is doubt, I may bring faith;”*

and so on. The goal is to find a way to get yourself to the middle, the center, which is where we find balance. And balance is the essence of humility...it is neither all one way or all the other. It is balanced...in the middle. Temptations pull at us all the time from one side or the other, but if we can stay balanced in the center,

we remain safe. It is the daily abstinence from going one way or the other that is the spirit of humility, and more importantly, serenity.

With each of our defects of character, our shortcomings, we strive daily to place ourselves at its opposite extreme. For that, we'll need help, so we ask our Higher Power to remove from us our former position, allowing us to go to the opposite one. This is difficult, sometimes strenuous, and eventually we'll have to find a relief that is manageable. Ultimately, that relief is balance, a middle ground between our shortcoming on one side and their opposites on the other. We can remain there indefinitely, as long as we take the daily actions to remain "balanced." For example, the lure of alcohol will always beckon to us, but after enough practice of the opposite, not drinking, we settle serenely in the middle..."I am not going to drink *today*. I will face tomorrow when it gets here."

This is the most dependable "cure" we will ever attain. It is the true meaning of "One Day at a Time." Our defects will never go away permanently, but they can be removed daily, and once we become satisfied with that, we step into the Sunlight of the Spirit which is serenity, safety, and comfort. Life, with all it brings each day, continues to soar and rage around us, as it always has and always will, but we have now stepped onto a different plane...a new dimension of existence. Balance is the key that opens the door to that plane.

Step Eight: Wreckage

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

The Big Book tells us that in Step 4 we’ve already made a list of all persons we’ve harmed. We need to consider carefully which of those people we actually harmed by our actions. Perhaps with many of our resentments and fears we’ve harbored bad thoughts or feelings but never taken actions that caused actual harm. We’ll need to make an amend to those people also, but not a *direct* amend, as we’ll be asked to do in the next step. The list we compile now is of people we actually *harmed*. They are easy to identify. They are the ones who still make us want to cross to the other side of the street rather than encounter them...to look away rather than face them. For some of us, we may still get a “rush” from confronting such people with cold or angry demeanor, and we will have to rid ourselves of that now.

Our searching and fearless inventory has revealed the true nature of these harms. In most cases, if not all of them, the situation of conflict that emerged began with something we ourselves did initially, either wittingly or not. “We stepped on the toes of others and they retaliated, seemingly without provocation.” Those conflicts cannot be erased...they are facts. We want to rid ourselves of the guilt they created, as well as any lingering resentment or fear.

It is vital that we first become completely willing to make each of these amends. To face these people while still holding feelings of resentment or fear will produce only insincere words that will do us, and perhaps them, even further harm. Most likely we are still feeling guilt, which is what we want to clear away. If resentment or fear still remains, we need to wait until they have been resolved within ourselves. Hopefully, we accomplished that in Step 5, but if not, then we must go back and complete that work. For that, we may need help, from our Higher Power through prayer and meditation, and perhaps from our sponsor and others. When that work is done, then we have become willing to make the amend.

The real work in this step is not so much identifying those we've harmed as becoming willing to amend those wrongs. The thoughts and feelings that initially caused us to take these actions have been with us for a long time. Nurtured by misguided resentment or fear, they may have become a very part of our being, or seemingly so, but they have been wrong, and they must be cast out. More than anything else, this step is an exercise in learning how to let go.

Any harm we have done to others in the past has left wreckage...to them, to ourselves, or both. That is the wreckage, the baggage, we will clear away in this step and the next one.

Step Nine: Amends

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

“Direct” means face-to-face, wherever possible. Most of the harm we caused was not done indirectly, such as in letters or on the phone. There may be some instances where a letter or a phone call are all that’s possible, in which case such is better than no amend at all. There are others, however, where we merely need to wait until the “direct” opportunity appears. As long as we keep ourselves completely willing to make that amend as soon as possible, waiting for the proper opportunity to do it face-to-face is preferable. If the person we harmed is now deceased, we can use a written letter. Although they are departed, this is a very important expression of amend to put down on paper for ourselves, as well as their memory in spirit.

There may be instances where to bring up such past events may do the other person more harm than it does good for either them or us. If we were to reappear and this were to cause them trouble, pain, or discomfort in their current lives, then it is better that we do not open the old wound in them. In such cases, there is another way to make a proper amend. To do that, we must first understand what it is that constitutes an amend.

Stated simply, an amend is the correction of a wrong. The key words here are “correction” and “wrong.” Although some amends will require an apology, saying “I’m sorry” is not at all the point of an amend. Making an amend implies that we now

understand where we were wrong, and we intend to not take those same thoughts and actions going forward. Sometimes, we can mend a past harm by making physical restitution, such as repayment of money borrowed or stolen, or for repair or replacement of something we destroyed. Where this is possible, such restitution is absolutely mandatory for us, no matter how long it takes.

Many amends cannot be made through physical restitution. The harm caused was verbal and emotional. For these, an apology may be appropriate for what occurred in the past. But an apology is not an amend...it is a statement of regret. Again, an amend is the correction of a wrong, and if this is our intention, then we must go further than an apology. We must advise this person that we have, through the application of these steps, become a different person, or are presently trying to become such. Therefore, we not only apologize for our past thoughts and actions that caused harm, but more importantly, it is our intention going forward to not commit these wrongs again. This is the true nature of an amend. Stopping at an apology leaves an opening for us to repeat the same behavior again in the future. It is vital that we commit to ourselves, our Higher Power, and the people we have harmed in the past that from here forward we are on a new path. Without such a committment, a simple apology if virtually useless. It may be nice to hear, but it actually does no good for them or for us.

For all amends that cannot be made directly, our only recourse is to live that correction one day at a time going forward. We are constantly mindful that “I may have done that in the past, but I don’t do that anymore.”

Step Ten: Purpose

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

We have followed the blueprint plan of a new way of thinking and acting, leading to an entirely new way of living. We did this for one reason...to solve our problem. That problem does not “stay solved” all by itself. We have learned a way to remove ourselves from the consequences of this condition of ours, but it remains within us and always will. If we can learn to peacefully coexist daily with this condition, we can set it aside and keep it there indefinitely one day at a time. This becomes our purpose, which can certainly be accomplished, but it will have to be renewed every day in order to keep it. Steps Ten, Eleven, and Twelve are designed to do exactly that, and Ten begins the daily process.

We learned how to inventory our resentments, fears, and guilt to understand their true nature, and we learned how to amend and discard them. Because life is the way it is, and our condition remains with us always, we will constantly be confronted with new situations daily that, unchecked, will lead us back to the same traps from which we have escaped. To stay alert and continue to employ the process in our daily life, we must constantly question and analyze every problem, discomfort, annoyance, hurt, wound, slight or shame that crosses our path each day. What part did we play in causing this to occur in the first place? How did we feel threatened, and how did we react? And, what have we done to correct that?

Over a period of days, months, and years, our constant application of this process will become somewhat second nature to us, and we'll find ourselves using it almost automatically, reaping the rewards of acceptance and serenity. These desired results will become the new norm for us, and as the intensity of pain disappears, we will naturally tend to take everything easier. Do that long enough, and our "edge" begins to erode.

Therefore, analyzing and amending our daily missteps, as wonderful a process as it is, will not be enough to keep us from slowly being drawn back into the clutches of our original problem. To keep that from happening, we'll have to reach further, and we'll have to do it every day.

The daily test is a simple set of two questions:

1. Did I hurt anyone or anything today? If the answer is "yes," we employ the process we've learned for understanding and future avoidance, and we apply the proper amend immediately. Eventually, the time will come when the most common answer to this question will be "no," at which point we must go further.

2. Did I help anyone or anything today? To maintain the freshness and sharpness of this design for living, we have to daily seek out and act on people, places, and/or institutions to help in some way (anonymously is best) through tolerance, love, and service.

Each day, what we are looking for is a "no" answer to the first question and a "yes" answer to the second one. If those are the honest answers to ourselves and our own Higher Power about the day just lived, then we are "on the beam" and have been a success for that day.

Step Eleven: The Spirit

“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.”

Steps Four, Five, Eight and Nine have shown us how to “uncover, discover, and discard” the causes and consequences of our problem’s origination, and Steps Six and Seven have shown us how to stay out of its way. To remain safely out of its way will require daily action, both mental and physical. For that, Step Ten opens a way to this path, and Step Eleven shows us how to follow it.

Step Eleven implies that God could and would if He were *sought*. It does not infer that God could and would if He were *found*. In theory, *finding* God would bring an end to the quest. Never do we want to bring this process to an end. Our Big Book states, in the final words of it’s text, that *“surely you will meet some of us as you trudge the road of happy destiny.”* May people misread that phrase as “the road TO happy destiny. That is a serious misconception. The road of happy destiny does not lead *to* anywhere. It is the traveling *of* that road that makes this miracle unfold. To cease the traveling, the *seeking*, is to bring it all to an end.

The goal here is to improve our conscious contact with our own individual God as we understand Him (Her, or It). The mental action of pursuing this automatically removes us from the center of our universe and places our God there in our stead. It effectively

moves us out of the way. “We,” with all our personal concerns for self, have blocked our entry into the Sunlight of the Spirit. To replace ourselves with a power greater opens the way. The way to do that is through conscious contact...through God-consciousness.

An excellent example of a fictional character who has largely accomplished this is Tevya, the papa from *Fiddler on the Roof*. Here is a man who walks around all day talking out loud to his God. Tevya questions Him, argues with Him, implores Him, makes deals with Him, and over and over again, surrenders to Him. Seemingly, his God is rarely out of his consciousness. This may be an impossible goal, but the act of *seeking* it is all that really matters. Here again, to accomplish this would bring it all to an end. Our goal is to try...to seek.

“Praying only for knowledge of His will for us” means before we take action on any of our thoughts we ask ourselves...

Would I do this if God was watching me?

The God of our own individual understanding does not want to punish us, nor is He a score keeper or a “vending machine in the sky.” He wants only the best for us, and He has made that available, but we are the ones who will have to seek it out. For that, we will need His direction, and the way to tap into that is through conscious contact.

We will never be able to perfect this trait. The best we can ever do is to constantly improve it through seeking. Seeking means trying, and by one very wise definition, a “winner” in our program is “someone who is here, today, trying.” Some days are better than others. It all unfolds as it should, one day at a time.

Step Twelve: Our Mission

“ 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.”

We have come a very long way. And, if we've done it essentially right, we've had a spiritual awakening, which means we have become aware. Now we know, and once we know, we cannot “not-know.” Certainly, we can forget, which can be dangerous or even fatal for us. To specifically avoid that is the meaning and purpose of The Twelfth Step.

You may ask, “Ok, what am I supposed to do now?” The answer is very simple. *Carry the message.* From this point forward, like it or not, we are an example of someone who has completed (worked) these steps. As with everything else we've discovered, their gift is given to us only for today. We can have it again tomorrow, and the days after, but only if we “show up” and seek it one day at a time. “Showing up” is the single most important thing we can do in every day of the rest of our lives.

“Showing up” means plugging ourselves into the awareness we've learned each and every day...even each and every moment. “Repetition confirms and strengthens habit, and faith becomes natural.” The more we do this, the more a part of us it becomes. Will we ever be finished? Hopefully not.

The most direct method of “getting out of ourselves” and replacing that with our Higher Power is to reach out to others. Other suffering alcoholics are the best we can try to help because we have suffered the same path they are currently on. But our world is overwhelmingly full of others who are not alcoholic. We can reach out to them also by merely being there, carrying our message with us, showing an example of who and what we have become. To do this is “to practice these principles in all our affairs.”

Appropriately, this final step is where everything comes together. Every day that we decide to remain sober through this process, we have “worked” the first three steps. As the problems of daily life confront us and we analyze them to uncover their true nature, we repeat steps four and ten. Openly sharing our experiences, especially with those who would learn from us, repeats steps five and twelve. In doing so, we are constantly reminded of our ongoing character defects, steps six and seven, and promptly amend our errors, steps eight and nine.

But most important of all, we are not alone anymore. We have learned how to make contact with our own Higher Power, and He (She, It) is always available to us, step eleven. To keep this “fresh,” we constantly “show up,” reach out to others, share what we’ve learned, serve as an example of its goodness, which is step twelve.

All we have to do is try every day. Do that, and you have become a real winner.

About the Chronicler

Don G. is a 20+ year sober member of Alcoholics Anonymous, Alanon, and other Twelve Step recovery programs. An experienced writer and speaker, he has traveled the United States and the world carrying a message of recovery. His numerous articles have appeared in THE GRAPEVINE, AA's international "meeting in print" magazine, and various recovery publications. He was a seminar presenter on the topic, "Humility: A Power Greater" at the worldwide AA International Convention in Minneapolis, MN in June, 2000. He currently resides and writes with his wife, Cynthia, in Temple, Texas.

