

EXPERIENCE, STRENGTH AND HOPE

A.A.
for the Black
and African-
American
Alcoholic

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

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

- The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for A.A. membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions.

- A.A. is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes.

- Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

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**A.A. for the Black and
African-American Alcoholic**

Do you have a drinking problem?

It is so difficult for many of us to admit and accept that we have a problem with alcohol. If you, too, are of Black/African-American heritage, it may feel sometimes as if there are other problems more important than just your drinking. If you are having problems on the job, at home, with your family, or with your friends, it may be easier to look at society, at prejudice and racism, at little and big insults, at the attacks on your dignity, at experiences of rejection and exclusion, of feeling different, not good enough, not wanted, or not the right kind. Some of us feel like telling the rest of the world: “If you were like me, if you were in my situation, if you had my problems, you would drink too.”

Sometimes alcohol seems like the solution to our problems, the only thing that makes life bearable. But if, when we look honestly at our life, we see that when we drink problems occur, with our family, at home, or on the job, with our health, or even with our emotions and our social life, we most likely have a problem with alcohol. We learn in A.A. that anyone, of any race, color, creed or sexual orientation, young or old, rich or poor, woman or man, can suffer from the disease of alcoholism. We also learn that anyone who wants to stop drinking can find help and recovery in Alcoholics Anonymous.

Some history — blacks in A.A.

From the time Alcoholics Anonymous was born, in Akron, Ohio, June 10, 1935, the hope of the Fellowship has always been to reach every alcoholic who needs and wants help. A.A. has taken great care to emphasize that no alcoholic can be exclud-

ed from A.A. Our Third Tradition states clearly: “The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.” You are a member if you say you are.

As early as 1940, when A.A. was just five years old, Bill W., our co-founder, “invited two black alcoholics to attend meetings in the New York area. After hearing him speak at an institution, they asked him whether, on their release, they might join A.A. Bill said yes, and a few weeks later, they appeared at a local meeting.... By the mid-1940s, a number of black alcoholics had found sobriety in the program. Jim S., a physician, was called the originator of A.A.’s first black group.” (*Pass It On*, p. 317) [Note: “Jim’s Story” appears in *Alcoholics Anonymous*.]

Since that time, in spite of the difficulties and obstacles sometimes faced by many people of color in the wider society, thousands of black alcoholics have found a welcome and recovery in Alcoholics Anonymous, and so can you.

Experience, Strength and Hope

The following stories relate the experiences of nine women and men, all members of the Black/African-American community, who have found sobriety and a new way of life in Alcoholics Anonymous. These stories represent a wide range of experiences and viewpoints. If you think you have a drinking problem, and if you are of Black/African-American heritage, you may identify with some of the experiences shared in these stories. You, too, can discover, as these women and men did, that you are welcome in Alcoholics Anonymous, that here you are wanted and needed and loved. Here you, too, will find a new freedom and a new happiness in this spiritual way of life.

"I can go into any A.A. meeting, anywhere, and feel at home."

I grew up in a normal family in a black neighborhood. My parents were teetotaling, nonsmoking churchgoers. I was not deprived or abused. For these reasons, my alcoholism came as a shock to my family.

As a shy, serious kid, I didn't fit in with the cool girls in my neighborhood. I was teased mercilessly about my awkward, skinny body. I was terrible at sports, afraid of boys, and couldn't dance. I blamed my straight parents for my corniness, and that began a lifetime of blaming others for my actions.

The first time I thought of color was in the sixties, when I was in high school. When I started, the school was two-thirds black and one-third white. Because of all the fighting and rioting between blacks and whites, by the time I graduated there were only three whites out of a graduating class of four hundred.

By age 15, I'd made some friends. Together, we summoned the courage to escape our shells. We began attending parties, cutting school, smoking, and of course, drinking. I dated older guys who had easy access to liquor. As a result, I lost my virginity in a blackout. It was the first of many losses to liquor. I ran away from home, breaking my parents' hearts. I wanted to live on my own. After a month, I crawled back home, but remained rebellious. I took my parents' love for granted, like all my blessings.

I moved into an apartment with my new boyfriend soon after high school graduation. We married a year later. Once I was out of my parents' home, the cap really came off the bottle. I began drinking daily. In my eyes I was an adult. After all, I had a husband, an apartment and a car. Years later I learned that being an adult meant being responsible for my job, bills, and housework. The marriage

was rocky from start to finish. I blamed my husband for everything, ignoring the part I played.

After the divorce I was finally free to “enjoy life.” No one was around to nag me about my lifestyle. I began to party every night in my new apartment. I dated men who drank just like me. I had mimosas with my breakfast, beer at lunch, and wine after work. I felt I had no problem, since the men drank more than I did. I thought my life was one big party. Only after I came into A.A. and got sober did I see how my life had declined with the first drink.

Over the years I lost numerous jobs and was denied raises and promotions. As usual, I blamed others. “They’re prejudiced against me because I’m black.” I blamed prejudice for a lot of lost opportunities in the workplace. “She’s blocking my advancement.” “He wants my job.” I neglected to consider how often I was out sick because I was hungover, how I must have smelled after liquid lunches, how I embarrassed myself at company functions. I thought that if I sprayed a little perfume on myself or popped a couple of mints, nobody would know what was going on. I neglected to consider the most obvious reason: I simply wasn’t doing a good job.

I cashed my checks and used my money to party. Whether I was hanging out with my friends or isolating with my drink, my money went to alcohol. I ruined my credit. I feared answering the phone or opening mail from creditors. I nearly always drove drunk, but somehow avoided any DWI (driving while intoxicated) arrests. Most mornings I had to search for my car. I even reported it stolen once, only to find it parked a block away.

I had many horrible relationships with men. As usual, I blamed the men. They wouldn’t marry me or even date me. Just take me home. After I came into A.A. I realized what men saw in me. They saw a woman sitting unsteadily on a barstool, stinking of drink. They treated me accordingly.

I remarried, this time to a man as alcoholic as I was. Our marriage lasted 11 years, but something remarkable happened midway. God cleared my vision long enough for me to see that I was harming myself and damaging my relationships. I

was secretly drinking daily. My husband worked evenings. I would drink all evening, hide the bottles, brush my teeth, and be asleep before he got home.

I attempted controlled drinking. My methods included drinking only certain hours of the day, only on weekends, only at home, only one bottle, and so on. I know now that when you try to control something, it's already out of control.

One evening, while my husband was at work, I was reaching into a closet where I kept fabrics for sewing and heard a clunk. It turned out to be an empty bottle that I had hidden. I said to myself that this was probably a good opportunity for me to find all my bottles. So I went around to all the rooms and found bottles I had forgotten about. I ended up with two big shopping bags full of bottles. That, for me, was a rude awakening. I couldn't leave them in the garbage in front of my house. I got in the car and dropped them in someone else's garbage.

I had finally had enough unmanageability in my life. I knew I needed help. I had heard of Alcoholics Anonymous and thought it would help me stop drinking "temporarily." I found A.A. in the telephone book. I called the number and the person who answered told me about a neighborhood meeting. I went the next evening and have been coming back ever since.

I parked in front of the church, took a deep breath, and went inside. I was scared and ashamed. Holding my head down, teary-eyed, I grabbed some literature and sat down. I've forgotten what was said that night, but someone reached out to me after the meeting. With tears rolling down my cheeks, I vocalized my alcohol problem for the first time. I was relieved.

I concealed my A.A. membership from my husband and everyone else. I told my husband at the end of that month. He was stunned but supportive of my sobriety. I continued going to meetings. I also started reading and working the Steps with other members. Miracles happened in my life. My job performance improved greatly. My self-confidence soared. I accomplished personal goals with ease. My attitude toward life changed. I started to hold my head up and look people in the eye when

I spoke to them. I started to realize that I was as good as anyone else, that I had been a sick person, not a bad person. The downside was that my husband remained actively addicted. Our marriage ended. I do not blame him. I was the one who changed.

I started out going to all-black meetings because I was living in a black neighborhood. I felt at ease at these meetings. It was like being any place else in my neighborhood. Recently, however, after eight years of sobriety, I moved into an area where there are lots of blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and Indians, but the meetings are all-white and not representative of the neighborhood. When I walked into meetings there, I felt different at first, very ill at ease. I felt like I stood out because there was only me and at most one other black person. I knew, however, that I needed A.A. What I found was that because I am an alcoholic, the members accepted me very warmly. My experience has shown me that I can go into any A.A. meeting, anywhere, and feel at home. In A.A., I finally found a place where I fit in.

Today I live a full life. I was afraid I'd be bored in sobriety. How would I occupy my time when sober? Now I participate in life instead of watching it. Rough situations arise, but I overcome them without drinking. I have friendship, love, respect, fun — all the assets I sought on a barstool. Life is good.

Kirk

“It was what did not happen in A.A. that surprised me most. I was not judged, nor was I made to feel different.”

I was born in Harlem to hardworking, loving parents. My father was a New York City police officer and also a sergeant in the Army National Guard. My childhood was controlled and protected. My brothers and I were instructed to do as we were told and we would be provided for.

From early childhood I was comfortable with my surroundings from a material standpoint. Like

many of their generation, my parents concentrated on improving mainly our physical surroundings. There was little time for what we today would refer to as “quality family time.”

We were constantly striving to improve our lives and, while I was still a child, we moved from Harlem to the land of milk and honey, called the Bronx. I was very happy, but something seemed to be missing. As a black child in what appeared to me to be a white world, I always felt a little bit out of the loop. To make things even worse I was left-handed, which made me feel like a weirdo when playing baseball.

As a young man, I loved sports. That, along with the fear of what my parents would think, kept me away from smoking and drinking while I was underage. All through high school I participated in sports, mostly baseball and basketball. Although not a great player, I soon learned that coaches liked players who appeared to be fearless and would give up their bodies for the team. I adopted an aggressive, fearless style of play, even though I was scared to death most of the time.

When I took my first drink, at 18, the tone was set for my drinking life. The very first time I drank, I drank to excess. I drank until I could no longer physically drink, got sick and passed out, dressed in a tux, on a bus. The girl who was my date, and who later became my wife, cleaned up my mess.

In college, I would go for long periods without using alcohol or drugs because, depending on the season, I was either training for or playing baseball or basketball. In between, I was out there on a tear. Most people say alcohol made them able to feel outgoing. I was already outgoing — I drank to be outrageous! During that time I realized that if I used other substances along with alcohol I could drink longer and harder without getting real sick or being hungover the next day. My drinking became periodic in nature. I would go on a binge for a while, then stop to recover.

After I left college, I became a New York City firefighter. Once again, I was a black face in a white world, and my fear-based, aggressive personality came to the surface. Also, maybe most importantly, my work schedule was perfect for binge drinking.

During my first few years on the job I maintained two lives, one when I was around the fire station and another when I was off duty. I married the girl who had cleaned me up the night of my first drunk and we moved to the suburbs with our young children. My wife continued for some years to try to clean up the mess alcohol was making of our family life.

My drinking soon progressed to new lows. I was introduced to cocaine, and this became the rocket fuel for my alcoholism. After a while, I was unable to maintain any kind of home life with my wife and children, and my marriage of many years ended in divorce.

The stress of a marriage gone bad just drove me deeper and deeper into my alcoholism. At some point, I had realized that the marriage was doomed and, even before the divorce was final, I found someone else. I drove this new relationship to the brink with scores of financial, moral and social irresponsibilities. After about a year with this other woman, I was faced with either getting help or having no place to live.

A friend who had come to A.A. about two years earlier told me to give A.A. a try. My first experience was not good. I walked into the meeting and it was all white and all white-collar workers. The speaker shared that he had been a high-powered executive. Oh boy, was I in the wrong place! My first impression left me wondering how all of these middle-class white people could know anything about hard times. They were all rich and, in my mind, the only thing they had lost was their house on the beach, or maybe they had to fire the maid! What did they know about being different? *I was different*, I thought, so back out the door I went.

My drinking and drug use progressed so much over the next three months that after a five-day binge I came back on my hands and knees, thoroughly beaten physically and emotionally. I decided that there was no place else to go, and if I wanted to live I had better stay here and do as I was told. Always the skeptic, I could not understand how this room full of people I did not know could help me do something that neither I nor the people

I surrounded myself with outside of A.A. were able to do. But I did get the help I needed in A.A.

It was what did *not* happen in A.A. that surprised me most. I was not judged, nor was I made to feel different. Instead, people from all walks of life came to me and offered me help to recover from the disease of alcoholism one day at a time. They did not ask me to do anything special for them; rather, they claimed they were helped by simply helping me.

I think the most important A.A. concept that was passed on to me was that recovery is just one day at a time. That seemed to make my problem a lot more manageable. I was no longer concerned about not drinking at my next party or wedding. All I had to do was not drink and make an A.A. meeting that day. The people in A.A. taught me that the “first drink” is the drink that will get me drunk. I had been under the impression that cocaine was my problem, because when I used cocaine my life got problematic, but I came to realize that alcohol was the root of my problem.

I found it amazing that everyone said, “Don’t pick up the first drink and your life will get better.” When I heard that I said, “Don’t these people know what kind of mess my life is?” I found out they were right. By not drinking a day at a time, I was able to learn to show up for myself and the people around me. Little by little I became able to see that without alcohol and drugs, my life, although not perfect, was a lot more manageable a day at a time.

Today it is many 24 hours later. My life is still not perfect, and I have a lot of issues that I still work on daily, but if I don’t drink I have a chance to make progress. Staying sober has given me the ability to do many things, but most of all it has given me the ability to show up for my children, my family, and my relationship today. I realize today that I owe everything I am to the program and the people of A.A. They, along with my Higher Power, which I choose to call God, keep me coming back and sober, one day at a time.

“I feel like I am simply a member of Alcoholics Anonymous — nothing more, nothing less.”

My name is Paula, and I am an alcoholic. I am the youngest of four children born into chaos and confusion. I was told later in life that while my mother was in the process of giving birth, and I was on the way to taking my first breath, I almost killed us both. My mother had to stay in the hospital throughout my early months.

I felt as if my mom never loved me, or if she did, she never showed it, at least not to me. I found out later that my mother never wanted another girl, she wanted another boy. I can remember feeling different, never being quite good enough. I just never could make my mother happy, and for me, any attention that I could get from her was never enough. So I began to act out, seeking attention — negative or positive, it did not matter.

The neighborhood I grew up in seemed to be predominantly white and male. Somehow I felt that being female and being black was never going to be good enough. I was always afraid that I would never measure up. Later, when we moved to a white, upper middle-class neighborhood, I lived in the shadows. It was important that I be seen and not heard. I was the little black kid whom everybody picked on. My hair was different, my lips were bigger. I was always getting into a fight.

I can remember the first time I was introduced to life’s “relievers.” It started out with a concoction I created at about age nine. The grown-ups in my life would get together and play cards on Friday nights and get drunk, and I got to be the all-time refiller. I would take all the leftovers and pour them into a pickle jar, and when my parents finally went to bed I would drink from that pickle jar. I can remember it stunk and tasted awful, but I drank it anyway. I also remember waking up the next morning on the kitchen floor.

School was a nightmare for me. You see, I was not brainy enough to hang out with the smart kids, and I was not pretty enough to hang out with the

popular kids. I did not play sports, so I could not hang out with the athletes, and of course I was not witty or clever, so I could not hang out with the cool kids. Where does that leave someone like me? Alone and lonely, that's where.

I never had any friends growing up. I just could never fit in, no matter how hard I tried. I was a loner except for the friendship and love I received from my older brother. But that was short-lived. He began to get into trouble with the law, and was taken from our home and placed in juvenile detention.

This started my rebellion against authority of any kind, including my parents. I began to run away from home. My brother, the only person who ever truly loved me, was gone, and I felt that no one would be there to protect me from my mother's wrath, so I left home at the tender age of 11, swearing never to return. I met some people and they were just like me — rejects — but they were happy, or at least appeared to be. And when I hooked up with these rejects the adventure was on. I was introduced to and used everything I could find to not be me.

Some years and a lot of drinks later, this kid turned into a woman — or at least my body did. I was 27 years old with no lasting ties in life. No one cared whether I was alive or dead. I came to one day with the knowledge that life had passed me by, and I was in a lot of pain and confusion. I was living in a two-bedroom rat's nest with the newest addition to my world — “what's-his-name” number six or seven — hooked on crack, reeking of alcohol, and chasing my beer with whatever. I wanted to die. Life was unbearable, and it hurt too much to continue living the way I had been living for the past 16 years. I wanted off this merry-go-round for good.

I think for the first time in my life I called on God sincerely. I mean, I had called on God my whole life, every time I was in trouble and needed a way out, but never meaning a word I said — kind of like bartering, “God, if you do this for me, I will do this for you.” God would come through once again and I would renege. This time it was real for the first time. It was like my soul was crying out after being

buried alive. I asked God to help me die, and then I took a hundred-plus 'scripted pills, chased them down with some gin, and lay down to take my last breath. I woke up choking and gagging and ran to the restroom. Here I was again, at a place that I had been before. I was never able to get it right, so I escaped into another world and that world had turned on me. I couldn't even die right!

Well, I began to make some phone calls, and through some people I had never met, I found A.A. Having nowhere else to go, I found myself running to meetings. I was at a point in my life where everything I had tried had failed me miserably. After a few meetings, however, misery began to set in. I wasn't drinking or using anything to change the way I felt, and those feelings of failure seemed overwhelming. I felt that I did not belong in A.A. Every meeting I went to I would be the only African American there. Naturally I felt I was different, and that these people could not possibly know where I came from or what I had been through. Maybe this A.A. could work for them, but it would never work for me.

I discovered that not a single person treated me as if I was the group's special project. What they did was show and give me the kind of love and support I had never known. They would say, "Keep coming back, Paula." For me, people had always said, "It is time for you to leave now, Paula." I was not used to being treated like a human being because all my life people had treated me like dirt. These A.A. people loved me. Wow, they loved me.

All my fears of being black in A.A. were just that — my fears. Not one of them has come true, and I have been here for more than three years now. I had been afraid that I wouldn't be accepted. But it didn't seem as if the color of my skin even mattered. Up to this very moment, I would never be able to tell that I am black in A.A. You see, I feel like I am simply a member of Alcoholics Anonymous — nothing more, nothing less.

*“ . . . it dawned on me, ‘I don’t have to drink.’
It was a powerful feeling!”*

My name is Sam and I’m a black alcoholic. I was born in the deep South when segregation was alive and well. I learned how to live separate, but not always equal. Back in those early days I hated the South, where Jim Crow was the law and where I didn’t feel I had any rights. I hated the laws, I hated the way I was treated, the way I was looked at — you name it, I hated it.

I started drinking in my late teens. From that first drink, my body told me I shouldn’t be drinking. I had to keep putting it in until I could hold it down. Then I would get numb and float away in a mystical world where I couldn’t separate the real from the unreal. When I drank I forgot about all the mistreatments I had endured in the South and how much I wanted to get away from there. When I drank, all was forgiven.

I joined the Air Force, after almost flunking the exam because of whiskey. In the Air Force and the workplaces that followed my time in the service, I was drinking at every opportunity. Alcohol was getting me ready for A.A., but I didn’t know it

During my late thirties, I made the rounds of the doctors and hospitals, and trips to the psycho ward, where I was told I had better check out Alcoholics Anonymous. A friend introduced me to the man who took me to my first meeting, where I really got a culture shock. I saw that everyone was white, and they all seemed to be Irish Catholics. They would say all was wonderful, but then I couldn’t remember when things weren’t okay for them. *White people*, I thought, *always got the best breaks, the best jobs, and they had all the money, so why should it be any different here in A.A.?* None of my friends were here. I worked with white folks and talked to them, but they were not my running mates. My attitude was pretty cynical. However, that first morning that I went to an A.A. meeting, I saw a man whose cheeks were rosy and who looked like he really

enjoyed what he was doing. I wanted to feel as good as that man looked. After talking to him, I had the feeling that for the first time in my life I had someone in my corner.

At the same time, I could hardly wait until the meetings were over so I could get back out there with my people. I got drunk again and got really ill. When I asked my lady friend to call the A.A. guy for me I believed I was in total surrender, but in only 30 minutes I was back in charge. I asked her to get me half of a half-pint so this guy and I could have a little talk. When he showed up, he told me: "If you want to talk to me, put the plug in the jug." And that's where it has remained.

That same guy became my A.A. sponsor. One night he and I were going to a meeting when it dawned on me, "I don't have to drink." It was a powerful feeling! This had never occurred to me before. Prior to that, after getting out of psych wards or jail, I would hear a voice that would say, "It's time" and I would always drink. It was a spiritual experience to discover that I was allergic to alcohol and did not have to drink! That was 32 years ago. I haven't had to drink since, one day at a time.

Over the years, I had developed an attitude of mistrust, a feeling of helplessness, and a sense of humiliation and vulnerability as a direct result of racially motivated confrontations. These ugly encounters had had a profound impact on me. My untrusting attitude began to dissipate slowly as my sponsor took me to different prison camps to carry the A.A. message. The whole time I listened to these inmates' stories I realized how frequently I had dodged a bullet. I could easily have been in there with them. I started doing the Steps there with the inmates. It was there I got relief from my heavy burdens — I could lock them up there and they would stay there. I really got the idea of what this A.A. thing was all about. It knocked down that barrier of me versus you. I began to see that, although I was black, A.A. would work for me, regardless of all the hurt feelings, mistreatments, and resentments I felt.

My big breakthrough came after I took the Fourth Step ("Made a searching and fearless moral

inventory of ourselves”). I discovered that defects that I saw so readily in others were very prominent in my life. I found out that I’m no different than anyone else in the Fellowship. When I realized that, it gave me a new freedom.

It was the honesty in A.A. that allowed me to learn that the same disease that afflicts me and my running mates afflicts all alcoholics. I had preconceived ideas of how white people felt or lived, but when I got right down to the nitty-gritty, they were just like me. I realized that everyone in A.A., regardless of color, was there to do something about their underlying problem.

I can’t say enough about Alcoholics Anonymous. A.A. members told me I could stay sober one day at a time. My life was changing for the better and I wanted the change to continue. It was exciting. I continue to be excited today. I’ve been given a new lease on life through A.A. and my Higher Power. I have never been happier or more in tune with my God as I understand Him. I’m accepted and I’m loved in the community and I feel love for others.

I was told in A.A. that someone would always be there for me. I didn’t know that I would become someone who would be there for someone else. Although I had difficult times with my father and could not care for him, I have now found myself for the past four years helping someone who is in a nursing home. A.A. has helped me to feel love and responsibility. Service to this friend has taken away a lot of fear and I know that someone will be there for me, too.

So life began for me at 40. I have had the opportunity to enjoy most of my forties, all of my fifties, all of my sixties, and now I’m working on my seventies. Now if that is not something to really make you think and give you hope, I don’t know what will.

Most of my days are peaceful, and for that I will be eternally grateful to A.A. and what it allows me to do — to continue to carry the message to the man or woman, any man or woman, who is still sick.

It’s a good day to be sober!

“I fell in love with the ‘we’ of the program. I listened to people sharing and was amazed at how alike we all are.”

I am an African-American female. I grew up in a physically abusive household, with anger being the emotion most frequently displayed. I was taught to stuff my feelings and never reveal any vulnerabilities to anyone. The neighborhood I grew up in was predominantly black and I attended a predominantly black school. My first daily interactions with people who were other than African-American was when I entered the workforce. I had assumed that we were different, but my fears were unfounded. I had no negative experiences.

I started drinking at a very young age and instantly fell in love with the way alcohol made me feel. I wanted to be happy and I thought alcohol could make me happy. When I drank, I forgot about being unhappy. As my drinking progressed, it began to interfere with my life. It became increasingly difficult for me to work and attend to my husband and daughter. My days all began to look the same. I would start the day by drinking whatever was left on my nightstand from the night before. I would have drinks for lunch. I would drink while preparing dinner, during dinner, and after dinner until I blacked out. I became afraid of driving because of blurred vision and blackouts.

One day my husband left, stating that he could no longer stand watching what my life had become. Our daughter went to live with him. My job with the federal government was in jeopardy because of embezzlement, poor job performance, and long, unscheduled leaves of absence. I had acute pancreatitis. I was in a lot of debt and totally out of touch with reality about the mess that my life had become. I had all these problems but remained unaware that alcohol was my real problem. There was no longer any enjoyment associated with my drinking. I was drinking to prevent myself from becoming ill, and I was in constant fear of not having enough alcohol. My life became totally unmanageable and miserable. I spent all my

money, time, and energy on drinking and I was left hopeless, helpless, lonely, angry, afraid, confused and frustrated. I had reached my bottom physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. After a failed suicide attempt, I honestly surrendered and prayed for help. I believe that prayer led me to a treatment facility, which led me to Alcoholics Anonymous.

When I came to Alcoholics Anonymous, I had nowhere else to go in search of help. I thought I had taken every suggestion to stop drinking and nothing had worked. Because I was not working, I was able to attend a 7:00 a.m. sunrise A.A. meeting that had only African-American participants. I could not believe there were so many friendly, happy, peaceful faces in a place where no alcoholic beverages were being served. I assumed that I could relate to the experiences being shared because I was also an African American. It was my first glimpse of life without alcohol, and I realized that this is what I had been looking for my whole life: happiness, comfortableness with self, and peace. I asked after the meeting what I had to do to stay sober. I was told to get a sponsor, attend a meeting daily, get active in A.A., pray, and work the Steps.

When I returned to work, however, I was forced to find another daily meeting. The meetings I found that fit most conveniently into my work schedule were a lunchtime and an evening meeting, but both groups were predominantly white. At both meetings I felt out of place. Although I continued to attend these meetings, I was afraid to speak because I didn't think the members would understand. At night I would call a couple of the members from my old group and cry about how much I hated attending these new groups. I was repeatedly asked the same question: "How are they different?" This forced me to admit my own prejudice. Soon I had no choice but to share with the white members what was going on with me. I felt emotionally wrecked and was afraid of jeopardizing my two-and-a-half months of sobriety. At that point I wanted a drink more than ever before. My fear motivated me to open my mouth. I was amazed to learn that so many others had

experienced the exact same fears. That was when I began to understand the saying “We are more alike than different.” The A.A. members didn’t care about whether I was different, but they did genuinely care about my sobriety. I became hopeful that I, too, could be helped by A.A. I was glad that the only requirement for membership was a desire to stop drinking, because that was all I had at the time.

I fell in love with the “we” of the program. Although I didn’t understand a lot of what was being said, I understood “Keep coming back.” In fact, I couldn’t remember anyone saying that to me before. I listened to people sharing and was amazed at how alike we all are. I immediately identified and felt right at home with people just like me. The white, black, gay, straight, old, and young members of A.A. were telling bits and pieces of my story. I heard them share about how they were no longer drinking one day at a time.

I have made many friends in A.A. They have loved, supported, and guided me through many ups and downs. The Twelve Steps of A.A. have helped me work on me, and the Twelve Traditions have helped me work with others.

Today I love my life and I love Alcoholics Anonymous. A.A. has saved my life by helping me to not drink one day at a time. A.A. has become my family. I am truly grateful to A.A. for the quality of my life. A.A. has taught me the importance of prayer and has renewed my faith in myself and others. In A.A. I have learned how to love my Higher Power and myself and how to accept love from others. I know that I am blessed. I am sober, healthy, happy, productive, positive, and willing to live life on life’s terms. A.A. has enabled me to be forgiving of myself and others. I am reunited with my family. I have wonderful relationships with my daughter, my husband, other family members, my sponsor, and my friends. A.A. has given me lots of love, support, encouragement, courage, and direction. My life is better than it ever was before. A.A. has helped me to appreciate every moment of every day and shown me how to maintain balance in my life physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. A.A. has taught me to place principles before

personalities and help other alcoholics. Alcoholics Anonymous has enabled me to become the person I always wanted to be.

Palmer

“I am an unflinching advocate of a healing faith and of Alcoholics Anonymous.”

I grew up in a black environment and attended all-black schools. My first experience with alcohol came to me as a very young boy. Both my parents, who I now know were alcoholics, were popular figures in the New England community of my birth, and hosted regular Saturday night gatherings. The morning after these parties, before they awoke, I would slip into the living room and sample the drinks left unfinished by my parents' guests. Despite the bitter taste of the alcohol, I became quite fond of the warm glow in my stomach and the soothing feelings that came over me.

The 1960s, with its turmoil, sexual promiscuity, rock music, drug culture and unpopular war, was the backdrop of my puberty and my ascension to young adulthood. I remember wondering at that time why I never saw any black people on TV. There was also an incident in my early childhood that affected my attitude toward white society. One day, my mother took me into a furniture store, where one of the white salespeople started arguing with her, apparently because she couldn't make a payment on a bunk bed. My mother started crying. I never forgot that, when I was a young child, a white man made my mother cry. From that time on I thought I had to be careful around white people.

I maintained my religious beliefs and activism in the church, earned fairly good grades, and played on high school sports teams. But I was also drawn to late-night street-corner gatherings with my neighborhood friends for wine drinking and soul singing.

After high school I was offered, and accepted, a four-year academic scholarship to a prestigious

area university, and agreed to live on campus for the first year. Before, I had had to drink within limits because I was living in my mother's home. But in college I could drink the way I wanted to. My college career not only ushered in my alcoholic drinking but also introduced me to a variety of drugs and to my first taste of failure in that I left school at the end of my first year.

During the next few years, I kept dropping out and reapplying to college. At this time I married a black woman. I also started using heroin. This marriage failed after two years because of my drinking. I was unable to hold down a job for more than eight months. Drinking went from weekends to every day of the week.

Finally, 13 years later, I graduated. Armed with my newly acquired degree in English literature, I returned home to formulate a plan of attack on the world. I learned that my mother had been diagnosed with a lethal form of cancer. She had been taking care of my grandmother and great-uncle. Suddenly I was thrust into the position of caring for all three of them, while holding a teaching position in a public special-needs middle school. An even bigger responsibility came with the birth of my son. However, I was never able to be a father to him. I never married his mother. After my mom got sick, my son's mother stayed on to take care of him. In spite of all the cooking, cleaning, shopping, and bill paying I had to do, my drinking and heroin addiction moved to a new level.

After the death of my mother, I found myself in an empty home, cold and dark, with no utilities. I had sold everything of value and was facing homelessness. I soon became a faceless transient in filthy rags, caught in the hopeless grip of alcoholism, drug addiction and despair.

Some years later, at a homeless shelter, I was asked to consider going to the detoxification unit of a local hospital. The prospect of three meals a day, a clean bed, a shower, and medication to ease my drug sickness was appealing. I agreed to go. It was there that I was first exposed to Alcoholics Anonymous, and I realize now that a seed was planted. Although my initial perception suggested "middle-aged white males only need apply," I was

struck by an unbridled joy and sense of purpose shared by many of those A.A.s who came to speak to us. At that first meeting there was a very disruptive drunk making a lot of noise. I wanted to throw him out. I couldn't understand why everyone was so nice to him and why he was allowed to stay in the meeting. It was much later that I learned that the only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking.

I continued to struggle for many years, in and out of detoxes and halfway houses. Once I stayed sober for six months before relapsing, another time eighteen months. Still, I explored new meetings and introduced myself to diverse groups in spite of my drinking. Most members urged me to "keep coming back." I now know that I was unconsciously seeking two ingredients I so desperately needed to make my recovery possible: self-honesty and faith.

I was teaching, as a reading specialist, while drinking and using heroin. After a while I couldn't bear to look in the eyes of the children anymore. I walked away from the job, walked out of my apartment, and rented a chair in the living room of a drug dealer. I lived there for four months, plying myself with vast amounts of alcohol and drugs, with the intention of killing myself. Then, one day, I knew the alcohol and drugs had stopped working. I walked out of there, walked into a detox, and I haven't turned back since.

I am now reintegrating myself into a society I once feared and hated, working with troubled youths and their families. Participating in my A.A. group's commitments to those same detoxes and halfway houses that took me in is indispensable to my recovery. I got sober in a mixed group of A.A. I was always welcomed by any group, but you get a special feeling when you know you're really accepted, that people want you around. I learned that recovery from alcoholism is an inside job. Those of us who want to recover do so through the grace of God and the Twelve Steps, and we recover because we need to and want to. I am an unflinching advocate of a healing faith and of Alcoholics Anonymous.

“ . . . without my sobriety I have nothing. This is the kind of life I always dreamed about.”

I was born into a large, chaotic black family in which everyone drank heavily. I can remember watching my aged grandmother drinking beer until she passed out after a long day of cleaning white people’s homes. One of my uncles had an alcohol problem and was found dead in the back seat of his car.

As a young girl growing up, I was taught that life was hard. I knew I would have to struggle and work twice as hard as white people to get off welfare and to get an education.

As I grew up, discipline played a very important role in my life. I learned early to establish goals and to work diligently toward achieving them. Often I became frustrated and overwhelmed. Before long I learned that a few drinks could ease any discomfort.

At first my drinking was lots of fun. I was no longer shy or self-conscious; alcohol seemed to bolster my self-confidence. I quickly became the life of the party. Soon the more I drank, the more obnoxious and overbearing I became. Sometimes I drank until I passed out. Friends began to whisper and laugh. As my drinking increased, discipline became less important.

When I went to college, my drinking continued, mostly on weekends and during semester breaks. Somehow I was able to graduate and find work in a field I enjoy. Unfortunately, in nursing school, my drinking escalated and eventually I found myself drinking almost every day, usually after work.

I’d always had low self-esteem and I thought a few drinks would help bolster my self-confidence. When I was under the influence, I did not care about other people and my low self-esteem no longer was a problem. Before long, a few drinks were not enough. I had to have several drinks before going to parties or social functions, where I would drink myself drunk.

I got married for the first time when I was 21. That marriage lasted only two years. Ten years

later, I married my second husband. That lasted only about 90 days. He wanted to slap me around, so I had to leave. I drank myself through both these marriages.

Between these two marriages, while driving my new car drunk, I ran off the road and crashed into a tree two blocks from my apartment. Ashamed and humiliated, I found myself arrested and handcuffed, with blood covering my fur coat and high-heeled shoes. Fortunately, I didn't kill anyone. Despite this incident, my drinking continued. I tried to cut down and to drink only at home, but that didn't last long.

For years I denied that my alcoholism was a problem. I convinced myself that my problems were caused by the rest of the world, not me. Everybody I associated with drank or used drugs like me. If they didn't use as much as I did, I would not continue to associate with them. I thought I could stop drinking as soon as things in my life got better. Unfortunately, the more I drank, the worse my life became.

I was drinking daily and alone. I would start drinking vodka when I awoke in the morning, and would continue until I passed out before dinner. I had no friends and was arguing and fighting regularly with my alcoholic husband. The police were called numerous times.

I became very depressed and angry. My third marriage was falling apart. One day, during a heated argument, my husband abruptly placed a loaded gun to my head and cocked the hammer, threatening to kill me and bury my body in the desert. He had also threatened suicide several times. I was terrified, but I continued to drink. I attempted to resolve the situation by hiding the three loaded guns in our home in a different place every day. But I was now a blackout drinker and began forgetting where I had put the guns. I was afraid to sleep because my mind told me my husband might actually know where the guns were and was waiting until I fell asleep to kill me. My life was an out-of-control nightmare. I felt like I was going crazy.

Finally I decided to leave my husband. I loaded our car with as many of my belongings as I could and withdrew half our savings account in cash. I

took the three loaded guns, an open container of alcohol, and a half-pound of marijuana and headed across the country. Fortunately, I stopped at an old friend's house and she encouraged me to get help. I did not realize that I was an alcoholic until I found myself in a locked psychiatric unit, having been hospitalized for major depression and alcohol dependence. Fortunately for me, A.A. was part of the hospital recovery program. While hospitalized I realized that I had hit my bottom. I was 44 years old. I was afraid to live and afraid to die. I felt ashamed, hopeless, humiliated, and alone. I found myself on my knees beside my hospital bed in that psychiatric unit. I asked God for help. I asked Him to clear my thinking and to guide my life. God sent me to Alcoholics Anonymous.

When I attended my first A.A. meeting, I had no idea what to expect. I was shocked to find so few black people. I was afraid I would not be accepted by such a large white population. I was afraid it was going to be like it was when I was in nursing school, where I had gotten a lot of flack from non-blacks and had not been accepted. I was surprised to find that the only requirement for membership was a desire to stop drinking.

In A.A., I discovered that I had to learn to let go of my pride and become willing to try a new, sober way of living. I did what I was told and found a sponsor who took the time to take me through each of the Twelve Steps, which led me back to God and my recovery.

Since I've been sober, God has changed my life and rebuilt my marriage. At first I was afraid to go back with my husband. Gradually, he and I dated and got back together. Now he also is sober. Each morning my husband and I pray on our knees. We thank God for keeping us sober another day and ask how we can best serve Him today.

I don't know what it would be like to be in an A.A. meeting with many black faces. I would welcome that. It's sad that I hardly see any black faces in A.A. rooms here where I live. I would like to reach out to other suffering black alcoholics and let them know it doesn't have to be that way. In A.A., I've never been rejected because I was different. I've always been surrounded by people just

like me. Color makes no difference because we all have the same disease in common.

I've learned that without my sobriety I have nothing. Regular attendance in A.A. keeps me grounded and I'm forever grateful. This is the kind of life I always dreamed about.

Charlotte

"A.A. has made me a sober woman, a woman of integrity. . . a woman of values. . . ."

I grew up in a housing project, the youngest girl of six children. We were poor, but we were pretty happy. There was just one thing lacking. My father wasn't there. When I was nine months old, my mother asked him to leave because of his drinking. Whenever my father did come to visit us, he would be drunk and he would bring confusion and trouble with him, and my mother would always end up crying. I was very embarrassed about his drinking and I resented the way he abused my mother emotionally (though not physically). I said to myself that when I grew up I was definitely not going to be like him.

My father died when I was 16. He had an operation and was not supposed to drink, but he drank some wine, went into convulsions, and choked on his own tongue.

I met my first husband at dancing school when I was 16. He was five years older than me and very worldly. He was a percussionist. He told me that if I wanted to be in his company and travel with him when he went to his nightclub jobs, I would have to learn how to drink socially. That's when I had my first drink. I didn't really like the taste of alcohol, and I didn't like the way it made me feel. I didn't even like the drinking atmosphere. At the age of 18, however, I got married to him. We stayed together for about two years and we had two children.

When I found out he was drinking and smoking marijuana I asked him to leave, because I didn't want that around my children.

After our separation, I picked up a drink and found it covered up the pain of loneliness and betrayal. Drinking seemed to be a panacea. No matter what was going on, I felt I was more effective when I drank.

Then I ran into my second husband. That was like jumping out of the frying pan into the fire. We would drink together, but I noticed that once he started to drink, he would become very violent. I was very afraid of him when he drank, so when I saw him take one drink, I would take two. Before the night was over, there was some kind of physical abuse. After nine months, we broke up, but he really didn't leave me alone. He kept calling me, harassing me, telling me that if he ever saw me out in the street he was going to kill me.

My drinking escalated. I was still in fear, even though he was not in the house. Because he lived in the neighborhood I didn't know when I was going to run into him. One New Year's Eve I really wanted to go out. A few drinks gave me courage to get up and go out. As I walked out of my apartment, he grabbed me, threw me back, and said: "I told you I would kill you." I was knocked to the floor, and when I got up I saw a straight razor in a pool of blood on the floor. I ran for help. I didn't realize I had been cut until I called my neighbor. "Oh my God," she said, "Your face. It's wide open."

In my neighborhood if you wore a scar you were really considered a roughneck. And here I was, a female, and I had a scar. I started to drink more. By this time I had had a third child. I was having severe anxiety attacks and went to the doctor. He asked me if I drank, and of course I said no. He decided to give me some medication, provide me with a social worker and relocate me. On relocating, I made friends with a woman named B. who drank very heavily, too. We drank together for about three or four years. During that period, I met my third and last husband.

Once, my brother left a lot of liquor in the house, so I invited B. to come over. I hadn't seen her for about three or four weeks and I wanted to share my whiskey with her. When she came over I knew immediately something was different. She had some A.A. pamphlets with her and she said,

“I just came over here to tell you I’m in Alcoholics Anonymous.” I told her, “You’re not white. How could you be in Alcoholics Anonymous?” I thought only white people went to A.A. She said, “You really don’t have to be white.” She left. I was very puzzled. I watched her.

B. stayed in my life while I continued to drink. I was drinking on the job and was about to lose it. I wanted to stop, but I couldn’t. I started drinking on a daily basis. I was drinking because I couldn’t get rid of the jitters. I was urinating on myself. My teenage daughters were putting me to bed in my clothes. I was also becoming very belligerent. Once, I stabbed my husband in the arm with a screwdriver.

The day after one New Year’s, I was due back to work, but I was in such bad shape I couldn’t go. My mother called me and said, “What are you doing home today?” I said, “I have plenty of sick days.” She said, “Everyone knows that you are a drunkard.” I hung up on her, yanked the phone off the wall and ran upstairs. I didn’t know where I was going, but before I knew it, I hit my knees and said, “Oh God, please help me.”

Within a short period of time, my friend B. came into my mind, and the thought came, *Why don’t you call A.A.?* I called A.A. that day.

When I heard a white person answer the phone, I said to myself, “Oh no. This is not going to work.” He said, “Just give me your telephone number and hang up, and someone will get back to you in ten minutes.” Thank God, it was within five minutes, and it was a black woman. She asked if I would like to go to a meeting that night and I said yes. She said she wouldn’t be there herself, but she gave me the location of the meeting, which was about two blocks away from me, and the name of a woman I should ask for.

That night, I met the lady and was very impressed by her. But I was looking for all white people, thinking that A.A. is a place for white, upper-class people. I thought you really had to have money to belong to this organization. Little did I know that I had walked into the only black A.A. group in Philadelphia. This is my home group today. I looked around and another black woman

came over to me and said: “Do you have a drinking problem?” I was glad she didn’t say “alcoholic,” and I said “yes.”

I stopped drinking immediately when I came to A.A. I have not picked up a drink in 27 years, nor do I wish to. After five years in recovery, I went back to school, got my G.E.D., and went on to take some college courses. I had a temporary A.A. sponsor right from the start and then got a regular sponsor after nine months. Later I started working the Steps. My life got better. I became responsible and found a Higher Power. I have been on my job for 29 years, the same job I thought I was going to lose.

At first, however, I didn’t think I was going to be able to make it, because I was probably not in the right economic bracket. But I saw these drunks, and many of them had been sober for many years. So there was some hope. But where the real hope came from, and when I really wanted to belong to A.A., was when I saw the cross-section of people, a diverse group of people. That’s when I was sold on A.A. The oldtimers in my group would bring in people from all backgrounds, of different colors, as speakers and as chairpersons for our meetings. It made a great difference to know that there were a lot of blacks in A.A. It was also a seller to me that A.A. wasn’t just a black person’s thing, but that it was upper-class as well as lower-class, citywide, and statewide, and in fact universal.

As far as my recovery is concerned, the greatest thing that happened to me was that I got into A.A. activity very early. It kept me very busy and did a lot for my self-esteem. My recovery was the most beautiful recovery because I participated in everything — service to my group, conventions, anniversaries, other A.A. affairs. I was engulfed in the program. It was beautiful to be a part of Alcoholics Anonymous.

I now know that alcoholism is just not a white or black man’s disease. It affects all social backgrounds. A.A. is not a fellowship of the elite, of the upper class. You don’t have to have X number of dollars to belong.

A.A. has made me a sober woman, a woman of integrity, more respectable, more responsible, a woman of values, more open-minded, more spiritu-

al, more serene, all the things the Twelve Steps are trying to point us toward. I feel that, with the support of A.A., I can accomplish anything that I aspire to do or to be. To me, A.A. is the greatest thing that could ever have happened to me.

Larry

“Today my life is unbelievable.”

I was born and grew up in a black neighborhood in a large northeastern city. We were a working-class family who valued education. So after I attended the local elementary school, my parents sent me to a junior high school outside the area — a better school, in a mixed neighborhood. Later, I attended a high school that was almost entirely white.

My first experience with alcohol was when I was 15, with the guys on the corner, and it was magical. I was the only kid in the neighborhood going to this high school, and I didn't feel connected to my fellow students because most of them were white. So I tried to be accepted by the guys who were on the corner. I looked up to them. They stood outside these taverns and looked as if they were having fun. I drank some of the beer and it transformed me into who I thought I wanted to be.

When I graduated from high school, I immediately enlisted in the Air Force. My drinking increased during the nearly four years I spent overseas. During this time, I had a couple of experiences with racism (including being overlooked for promotion) that left me so disheartened I decided not to re-enlist.

I came back into my old neighborhood and decided I wanted to go to college. But I didn't have any money. As a veteran the only thing I had was the G.I. Bill. I got accepted into a Catholic, all-white, all-male school, and then wondered how I got there and why I didn't fit in.

We were the largest black class that had ever been recruited to that college — maybe one percent of the student body. We got very activist and we also did a lot of drinking. I was of age, so I

appointed myself the designated State (liquor) Store runner for the other students.

When I graduated, I got a job as an administrator in the same college. I was the youngest person and the only black among the administrators and I felt less than. My drinking really took off then, to the point that I felt it was in the best interest of the program I was directing for me to leave. So I resigned.

I decided to go back to grad school. My drinking kept me from getting an advanced degree. Everybody else in the class got their master's degree. My drinking just took over. I did everything, passed the exams. All I had to do was four papers, but I couldn't get them done.

I got other positions, but I was drinking more and more. I tried to control it, but I wasn't in control any more. I thought that if I got some more responsibility it would help me control my drinking life, so I got married. It didn't work. All I did was ruin that woman's life. I would pick fights with her so I could go back out and drink with my buddies.

One time, I had left my keys in the bedroom, which had a door that locked from the inside. I asked my wife to let me in to get my keys. She refused. I just broke the door down and found myself with her neck in my hands slamming her head on the bed. The next morning, I realized what I had done and it frightened me. That's when I decided to move out, because I knew that if I stayed there, somebody would get hurt.

I thought I was going crazy. While I was drinking, I was hearing the voices of my grandparents, saying "We didn't raise you like this." "You know better than this." "Why are you doing this?" And those voices tormented me. My behavior was bizarre. I would think I was on fire, so I'd get into the shower with my mattress and box spring and soak everything. And I would think stuff would be crawling on me, and I would scratch my arms until they bled. I would see people outside windows and they wouldn't be there. At the time I didn't know what that was; I didn't know that was the D.T.s.

I kept changing the people I was drinking with, to find people that I could feel "better than." In the end, the drink wasn't working anymore. Even the

people I thought I was better than didn't want me around anymore.

My drinking took me to another career, a career in travel sales, and that's when it really got bad. As a result of drinking and stealing money to drink, I got fired. That was the beginning of my introduction into Alcoholics Anonymous.

I called one of my old (white) college buddies who happened to be a counselor and he helped me get into a detox and to a rehab. Up to that point I had never heard of A.A., but A.A. members brought meetings into the rehab and that's where my connection began.

One of the suggestions that was always given was to go to a meeting right away, as soon as you got out. I got out at 10 o'clock and at 12:30 I was waiting for a meeting. It was there that I got greeted. I was scared to death. I used to drink directly across the street from where this meeting was held, and never knew what this church was.

I was told to get a sponsor. I saw this guy who used to say that he was a success and a winner because he didn't drink for that day, and that impressed me because I did not feel like a success. He became my sponsor and he took me to meetings and introduced me to a lot of people. I got into the Steps very early, and I've never had a drink since I came in.

Before I came to A.A., I didn't think there were black alcoholics. I thought only winos, old white men, had the disease. I didn't think black people had it. Most of the people in the rehab were not black. When I met other people like myself in A.A., I began to feel comfortable. My home group is a predominantly black group and I've always felt comfortable there.

Today my life is unbelievable. The same person who fired me from my job rehired me. I went into partnership with him. We merged with another company and I bought him out. About four years into sobriety I got a divorce. My ex-wife and I are good friends now. I found and married another beautiful woman in A.A. It's just fantastic. We're in the process of buying a new home. I can do pretty much anything I want as a result of being free from alcohol. A.A. has worked tremendously fine for me.

How do I find A.A.?

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

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

There are several kinds of A.A. meetings:

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

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

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

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

THE TWELVE STEPS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

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

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

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

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

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

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

7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

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

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

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

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

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

THE TWELVE TRADITIONS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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A DECLARATION OF UNITY

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

I am responsible...

When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there.

And for that: **I am responsible.**

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