

A.A. for
the Older
Alcoholic

—Never too late

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A LARGE PRINT EDITION

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS® is a fellowship of people 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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Mail address:

Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163

www.aa.org

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A.A. for the Older Alcoholic

This booklet will acquaint you with some A.A. members from a wide variety of backgrounds who have had diverse experiences with alcohol. What they have in common is that each of them came to grips with their alcoholism in their 60s and 70s. They began drinking at different periods in their lives and drank for various lengths of time. Their backgrounds and circumstances were different. One woman did not start drinking in earnest until her 60s, while others drank for more than 50 years. Several found their drinking escalated dramatically after retirement, one describes a ten-year relapse that started with a drink she took on vacation. Some of the stories describe long and happy marriages, others struggled with abusive relationships or long periods of loneliness. Many of the members describe their experiences as parents and grandparents. Some

of these are joyful, loving relationships, others were marked by tragedy or struggle. A few of these writers describe difficulties with depression, finding that the medication they were prescribed didn't help much when they were drinking. A couple of them describe suicide attempts they made before finding A.A. Many describe medical crises that came in the form of alcohol induced falls, accidents, and hospitalizations.

These stories illustrate that alcoholism comes in many different forms and a variety of disguises. Whether or not you are an alcoholic is not determined by where you drink, when you started drinking, how long you've been drinking, with whom you drink, what you drink, or even how much you drink. The true test is in the answer to this question: What has alcohol done to you? If it has affected your relationships with your family, friends, or employers, past or present; if it has influenced the way you schedule your days; if it has affected your health; if it determines or affects your moods or your state of mind when not drinking; if you are in any way preoccupied with alcohol — then in all likelihood you may have a problem. Many crises accompany the process of growing older, and almost all of them entail loss of some sort. The

children grow up and leave home. You move to a smaller place. Friends are fewer and farther apart. You are obliged to retire from work. Physical health is less robust and faculties diminish. Your partner of many years dies. Sometimes these changes in circumstances make a long-standing habit worse. Whereas a drink before dinner may have been a companionable pastime earlier, it now becomes the relief looked forward to all day — and the single drink grows to two or three, and then more.

For others, the onset of alcoholism may follow a major crisis, a devastating loss. Suddenly, the bottle fills the emotional gap left by the loss of a job or the death of a loved one. Still others suffer a long history of barely contained alcoholism, and somehow squeak by until the body, after years of abuse, can no longer cope with the onslaught of alcohol.

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

out. These people of all ages have accepted their alcoholism as the disease that it is, and, in doing so, have made themselves accessible to help, recovery, and the restoration of their lives.

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

Plucked Out of a Virtual Meeting

Karen

It was my 68th birthday. My daughters, sons-in-law and 5 grandchildren had come over to celebrate. It was a lovely evening. When they all left, I walked into the kitchen to turn out the light. That's when I noticed they had left a partial bottle of vodka on the counter. The next thing I remember is waking up to see one of my daughters looking down at me. I knew something was wrong, I just didn't know what. I was about to be informed that I had been in a three-day blackout. Apparently, I said horrible things to my daughter. I have no memory of any of it. Little did I know my ten-year alcoholic relapse was about to come to an end.

There once was a time when I thought relapse was for other people. Not for me. I had it all figured out. I had ten years of sobriety. Until it all came crashing down on a cruise ship. A couple of drinks on a well-deserved vacation turned into a nightmare almost immediately. It didn't take long before I was hiding liquor behind pots and pans in the kitchen. Or drinking in the car on my way home from work. The medication I took for my depression was of little help despite my doctor increasing the dosage. As my drinking escalated, I reached a point where I wanted to stop but couldn't. What had happened? It seemed so easy the first time around. I was in deep trouble. I started going to A.A. meetings after work. It didn't help. I was wandering around in what felt like a nuclear winter. This went on for ten years. No matter how hard I tried it was of no use. I couldn't stay sober more than a few days or a few weeks or a few months.

A short time before my birthday, I had gotten an early morning phone call as I was getting ready for work. It said "Coroner's Office" on my phone. I knew who he was calling about. I had been expecting it for the last four years of my sister's life. She had been drinking

nonstop for forty years. I was the only person left in the family who would talk to her anymore. The coroner said she died of acute alcohol intoxication combined with an opioid and other prescription drugs overdose. I got so drunk my daughter had to go down to the funeral home and make her final arrangements. The gates of hell had closed around me, and I was trudging down the road of death. Following silently behind my sister.

Shame was keeping me sober during the period after my three-day blackout. I knew enough by that point that I was going to drink again. I just didn't know when or where or how much or what was going to happen when the insane idea won out. My doctor called and wanted to put me in a rehab. I said no. Why waste the money. Two months went by. I came home from working out at the gym to find my house feeling like I had just walked into a mausoleum. Loneliness and despair rose in me, and I felt like I couldn't go on whatever that meant. I grabbed my phone and found an online A.A. meeting that didn't require a password, so they let me in right away. It was a Big Book Study, and the topic was: The allergy and the malady. What was this all about?

The speaker broke down how my body would react to create an allergic reaction if I drank alcohol. That it would set in motion the phenomenon of craving which explained why I couldn't stop once I started. Then he explained the MALADY! He asked if anyone was drinking against their will? I raised my hand. He put into words what I had never been able to name. Drinking against my will!!!

He went to page 24 of the Big Book (**Alcoholics Anonymous**), where it says, "At a certain point in the drinking of every alcoholic, he passes into a state where the most powerful desire to stop drinking is of absolutely no avail." Page 39 said I had lost the power of choice. I was unable to assert my own will anymore. The speaker started pointing out all the pages where it said I was a REAL alcoholic, that I was beyond human aid. Dr. Silkworth on page XXV described a type of alcoholic that he had come to regard as hopeless. Dr. Carl Jung said this type of alcoholic is utterly hopeless (page 23). "Once this malady has a real hold, they are a baffled lot. There is the obsession that someday, somehow, they will beat the game. But they often suspect they are down for the count. The tragic truth is that if the man be a real

alcoholic, the happy day may not arrive. He has lost all control.”

So, there it was. All laid out for me in the stark cold diagnosis of my condition. Nobody could help me now. I was an alcoholic of the hopeless variety. I began to cry. Tears were running down my face as the reality of my situation meant I was going to die, and it would probably be soon. The speaker announced the meeting was over. He asked if anyone had a question? I didn't raise my hand, I didn't say a word. What was the point?

That's when I heard my name being called. I jerked my head up. What? Was he talking to me? Yes, he was. He told me to unmute myself. I had never spoken in an online meeting before. He asked if I had any questions? I blubbered out that I had never heard of the malady before. He told me to grab a pen and paper. I didn't have any paper close by, so I grabbed my Kleenex box. He told me to write down a phone number. I did. Then he asked me to repeat it back. I did. He told me this was the phone number of my new sponsor, and he told me to call her in the morning.

The meeting was over. I just sat there, and I cried, and I cried, and I cried. Why would he give me that phone number if there was no hope for me? Was I in a hospice situation?

The next day I called my new sponsor. We talked about the gravity of my situation, and she asked me some questions about my drinking history. She later told me I was one of the worst alcoholics she had ever come across. She began to talk about God. Did I believe in God? Yes! I believed in God. I was in religious school clear through college, and I belonged to a church. We continued to talk and after a while she very gently explained to me that it looked like my faith had been put in people, places, and things. Not God. Bam. That hit me hard. I could see it now. My ex-husbands, the house to raise my kids in and the money to pay for it all. Those were the things that I could point at, to prove I was not broken, that I was a good mother and provider for my children who meant everything to me. But more importantly I saw these things were my worships. She talked about how I had blocked myself off from God and the only way out of my hopeless situation was to accept a spiritual course of action. I had no idea what she was talking

about. We made an appointment to meet on the phone, every morning from six thirty to seven. I was to bring my Big Book, a pen and paper.

I had read the Big Book about 20 years earlier. Honestly, it went right over my head. I found it in my bookshelf with all the other self-help books gathering dust. My new sponsor told me she was going to take me thru a course of action which meant we were going to work the Steps. This was the way out she said. Would I, have it? Yes, yes, I would!

So, it began. Every morning we met. We started out on page XI with the Preface. Then the Forewords of the First, Second, Third and Fourth Editions. I learned about the first one hundred. Then we got to the "Doctor's Opinion." I learned about my condition. I learned about Bill W. and his story. On page XXVII it said that I was restless, irritable, and discontented unless I could again experience the ease and comfort that comes at once by taking a few drinks, emerging remorseful with a firm resolution not to drink again. This is repeated and unless this person can experience a psychic change, there is very little hope of recovery.

I know that an alcoholic of my type has only a daily reprieve and that it is based on the maintenance of my spiritual condition. I must carry the vision of God's will into all my activities. Step Eleven suggests prayer and meditation. Toward the end of the Fifth Step, my sponsor took me to page 86. She suggested I read pages 86-88 upon awakening each day and before going to sleep at night. This is when I ask God to show me all through the day what my next step is to be and to show me what I need to take care of my problems. I must not pray for my own selfish ends, but to pray only if others will be helped. I am now to go through my day asking for the next right thought or action. There is much danger if my mind drifts toward excitement, fear, anger, worry or self-pity. These thoughts lead to poor decisions (page 88). I had to figure out a way to be of service to others. How could a broken-down alcoholic like me help others? Well, first, I go to meetings regularly and if called upon to share I talk about alcoholism, my 10-year relapse, the allergy, and the malady. I talk about how my sponsor took me through the Steps. I stay after the meeting to be there for newcomers, the people coming back and the people still drinking.

I answer my phone if someone calls asking for help. I listen with my whole heart. I am usually a very shy person, but I know how important the work is for us both. I also take after-hours phone shifts from my local A.A. Central Office. This experience has been amazing. I get all kinds of calls from simply helping someone find a meeting to people in full-blown crises. People just like me who have lost their way and are looking for a ray of hope and a way out.

Am I a grateful alcoholic today? Yes, yes, I am. It's never too late.

I Knew Deep Down That My Drinking Was Getting Worse

Robert

I am 68 years old, and my sobriety date is 2/11/22. I had been a lifelong binge drinker since approximately the age of 15. I joined the Navy at 18 and entered a life where **work hard/play hard** was the common mantra. I almost never drank without getting drunk. Mostly the goal was not to get too drunk.

I married my high school sweetheart at 20 and we've been married almost 48 years. She has hung in with

me through some rough times. She also partied with me a lot through the years. I managed to have a successful career but certainly not without a few alcohol-related blemishes. Disorderly conduct, public intoxication, DUI and a couple of minor brawls sums up my Navy drunk log. I also had a successful civilian career as a maintenance manager. I retired at 63.

Throughout my life, my drinking was almost always to excess, and my family and friends accepted and expected it. After three years in retirement, I found that I was drinking differently and acting differently when I drank. I would drink bourbon and get mean with my wife and be raging around the house, slamming and breaking stuff. I wasn't physically violent with my wife, but I know she feared me. I would blame her for making me mad because I knew she didn't like it when I drank bourbon. Things would be broken around the house the next morning and she would ask me if I remembered breaking this or that and I couldn't.

I had the fix. I couldn't drink bourbon any longer because it made me crazy and angry, so I changed to rum and vodka. I knew I could handle these. By this time beer was around but I almost never drank it

because it wasn't fast enough. I would drink heavily three or four nights a week to the point where the next morning I didn't remember what my wife and I had talked about the night before. I knew I was on a slippery slope from witnessing friends through the years, but I thought I could hang on and manage.

I hung on for less than a year when my first major eruption happened at a family function on June 26, 2021. There was only beer there, so I had positioned myself near the cooler and guzzled about 15 beers throughout the course of the day. Talk turned political late in the evening, and I became enraged and combative toward my ailing brother-in-law and nephew. Everyone was stunned. They had all seen me drunk plenty of times but never acting out. I was stunned at myself for acting that way with people I truly love.

My wife had to drag me out of there. She was disgusted with me and told me the drinking had to stop. The next day I was allowed back in the family house to make apologies, which I knew were insufficient for the magnitude of my misconduct, but everyone wanted to carry on with the family get-together pleasantly and were mostly gracious.

Approximately one month later, while vacationing with a group of friends I spent the day at the beach drinking beer, wine with dinner followed by large amounts of rum. Late in the evening I became insulting to a female friend about her weight. I thought I was being funny but really, I was insulting. My wife dragged me back to the room. She was disgusted with my drinking yet again and told me it had to stop. I apologized to our friend, and she said she accepted it, but I knew she was hurt. I didn't drink for the rest of the week at the beach.

Once home I went back to my controlled rum regimen — three or four nights a week drinking to the point of mental oblivion but still able to get to bed under my own power and get up and function the next morning. This went on for months and my wife was OK with this because I wasn't mean, and I almost always drank at home, or she would drive if we needed to go out.

February 10, 2022, we went to dinner with friends. Three bottles of wine were consumed mostly between three of us because my wife was recovering from hip surgery. We went back to our friend's house for cocktails where I consumed a large amount

of rum in a short period. I knew I could handle it because we had only been drinking wine all night. I was unstable on my feet when leaving. My wife drove us home in my truck. I was coherent and talking for the 15-minute drive to our house. I remember pulling in the driveway and the next thing I recall is being on my hands and knees beside the truck. The left side of my face was smashed and dripping blood onto the driveway. I fell forward from my knees and hit my face again. I was legless. Next, I recall my wife standing beside me and I was telling her I needed help. She thought I meant I need help getting up, but I meant I need help to stop drinking like a madman. She helped me into the house and kept me awake for a few hours because I had a head injury.

The next day February 11, 2022, we spent most of the day at the ER getting x-rays and CT scans. Thankfully I did not have any internal head injury, but my face was severely bruised. My left eye was nearly swollen shut. I also had broken my left thumb and badly bruised my right knee.

After returning from the ER, I looked at the meeting schedule for the nearest A.A. club. I didn't need the address because I had already looked it up after the

incident in June. I knew deep down that my drinking was getting worse. I called the club and inquired about how to join. The man who answered the phone asked if I wanted to stop drinking. When I said yes, he told me to come in and sit down and listen. No fees, no dues, no registration.

I was a mess when I arrived for the 7 p.m. meeting and there were a lot of people left over from the prior meeting. The left side of my face was totally bruised, my left eye was swollen shut and I had an immobilizer on my left thumb. Tony, the man who had answered the phone, greeted me in the kitchen area and introduced me to a few other A.A.s who were gathered there. I was welcomed by all in a manner I had never experienced anywhere before. Immediate acceptance, empathy and understanding.

There were two much younger men in the meeting room when I went in and sat down. Right away they introduced themselves and asked what happened to me. I explained and they listened. One asked if I had a Big Book. I didn't know what that was. He got up and brought me a Big Book out of the new bookcase. The conversation went on and the second man recommended starting with Chapter 4. I had been "in

the rooms” for 15 minutes and already been accepted and someone I had never seen before bought me my Big Book. Although I was still stunned from the events of the last twenty-four hours, I sensed something very special. A true no judgement zone.

The meeting commenced and I introduced myself and shared briefly why I was there. Of course, it was readily apparent that I was injured. Again, an outpouring of acceptance, support and understanding. I heard the shares of other A.A.s along with laughter and mention of a Higher Power. I picked up my white chip at the end. Everyone told me to keep coming back and the chair made sure I had a phone list.

I started reading Chapter 4 immediately when I got home. The first paragraph described my situation. I couldn't quit entirely and when I drank, I had little control over the amount I drank. Many times, over the last few years I would refuse to start drinking because I didn't want to “light the fuse too early.” I remember in the first couple of weeks reading the Big Book the feeling that it had been written about me. “The Doctor's Opinion” convinced me that I was lacking a spiritual force in my life.

My wife was questioning whether I was really an alcoholic. I kept giving her examples from the Big Book and finally she said that she thought of me as a functioning alcoholic. She has been extremely supportive of me. Within my first three months and 96 meetings I had come to believe that there is a higher power. I accepted the fact that I was powerless over alcohol and that only God could restore me to sanity. People of faith outside of A.A. were suddenly being put in my path and reaching out to me. I've joined a local church and attend regularly. I had known for years that spirituality was missing in my life, but I never acted. The Step prayers were instrumental in getting my prayer life started. I thought I didn't know how to pray. Father Martin taught me if I was trying to pray that I was praying.

Today with seven months of sobriety my life is wonderful. I start each morning with prayer, meditation and reading. This sets the tone for the day. Now I think before I speak and try to remember to be teachable each day. I pray that my God draws me closer to him and that I practice the principles of A.A. and my faith in all my affairs.

Two months after entering A.A. my wife received a terrible cancer diagnosis. Now that I have a prayer life, I was able to remain calm and pray only that God's will would be positive and that I would have strength to accept it. I believe God did for me what I could not do for myself by getting me sober in time to handle a life-changing event.

Currently I chair one meeting per week, which is a privilege. It's a pleasure to see a newcomer get connected with another A.A. and get the guidance of a sponsor. I just connected with a newcomer in his first week to be his temporary sponsor. The fellowship in the rooms is truly amazing beyond anything I could have imagined. I have never experienced the immediate acceptance, understanding and love anywhere else in my life. I'm proud to say I'm a friend of Bill W. and I get to go to meetings.

Finally Wising Up at 66 Years Old

Gloria

I grew up the fifth of seven children in an African-American family. My parents were dedicated and hard working. My father was a maintenance engineer and mom stayed home with us children. My parents were not heavy drinkers, but they had a Friday night routine of cards and drinks with friends. They always seemed happy and never out of control. But things changed when my mother started working outside of the home. Now, the Friday night routine included mom, dad, alcohol and arguments.

It was about this time I began suffering from low self-esteem and became a target for bullies in the neighborhood and at school. I started skipping school and drinking mom and dad's booze.

Somehow, I managed to graduate high school and started community college. I worked a series of part-time jobs while attending school but was still drinking and unable to complete anything.

I dropped out, moved in with my older sister and babysat while she worked. I met and married my husband, and we became alcoholic partners.

At first it was just a bottle or two of wine on the weekends. We reasoned that we owed it to ourselves after a hard work week. Then gradually it became a bottle every evening and all weekend long. I couldn't wait to get home from work and have a drink. Soon, the marital bliss wore off and hubby preferred to drink with his buddies instead of me. He didn't come home after work, so I drank alone every evening all evening, until I passed out.

I really enjoyed my job and was good at it, but I struggled. I used every vacation and sick day allowed. I was a chaotic mess. Three years into our marriage, our son was born then three years later, a daughter. I really tried to be a good mother, but I was sad and depressed, so I drank. I tried to hide things from my children because I really didn't want to hurt them. Little did I know the damage that I was doing. Their clear minds could see right through me. Of course, they could not pinpoint it, but they knew something was wrong.

Then, I was diagnosed with stage three breast cancer and promised God that I would stop drinking if he got me out of the cancer. Well, after two years of treatment, I was in remission and stopped drinking.

I did not drink any alcohol for five years! Even though I was very grateful to be cancer free, I was not content. I still wanted to drink and gradually I did. First socially, then right back to my full-blown drunken self. We are raising two grandchildren and I am fearful of repeating the cycle of damage that I caused my children. I must stop this insanity.

Two months ago, at the age of 66, I walked into an A.A. meeting and found a new way of life. I'm nearing day 60 of my commitment to 90 meetings in 90 days that my sponsor suggested to me. I can hardly begin to describe what I have found! When I walked through those doors, I was greeted with so much love, kindness, and acceptance that it makes me want to cry as I write this.

Finally, I have found those who relate and understand what I have been going through. I am under the care of a wonderful sponsor, and I am a part of a unified Fellowship that is beyond what I could ever have imagined. Don't get me wrong, I still have life's problems, but through this program and the support of my new friends, I am learning to manage without the use and abuse of alcohol.

I recently suffered a personal tragedy, the loss of a young beloved family member to the disease of addiction. I did not miss a meeting because of it, and I did not drink to drown my sorrow. It is through this program that I was able to stand with grace and dignity to support my sister during this painful time.

These days, when I go to bed at night, I pass out from the day's activities and not blacked out from alcohol. In the morning, I wake up instead of "coming to" and for this I am grateful!

I Walked into the Rooms of A.A. at 75 Years of Age

Barb

My sobriety date is September 12, 2016! The A.A. program has given my life back to me. I now have a husband who trusts me again, I have a loving and supporting family. I have received a "new" family from the fellowship of A.A. I have self-respect, I know I am ENOUGH. I have self-worth, I have been given the privilege in Step Twelve of carrying the message, which is my passion. I know I will be living this

program for the rest of my life — that’s exactly what I want to do. I have no desire to drink, I remember my last hangover which lasted about four days — could not get out of bed! Mostly, I have regained my relationship with my Higher Power who I call God! He’s amazing and I know if I trust in Him and ask for His will, He will keep me in His hands!

My story begins as the third child of an Irish mother and a German father. All my young and adult life I watched my mother suffer from this terrible disease. When I was young my father would come into the house carrying my mother over his shoulder. I would cry and scream because I thought she was dead! Eventually, my mother did die of alcoholic dementia. This was not easy to watch, and I told myself so many times, “I’ll never be like her!” I so wish I had known about the A.A. program then!

My desire as a teenager was to get married, have five children. My older sister and brother both had five children and I love each one of them as my own. My high school sweetheart and I were married on August 8, 1959. I was eighteen. Boy, was I immature and green.

My husband worked very long hours and I was alone a lot. I became defensive, angry, so lonely and unhappy that I decided to reach out to people I thought would love me and pay attention to me! I was working and started having invitations to after-work parties. I went because I would get attention and I didn't want to go home to an empty apartment. This started around the age of 21 as I could then go into bars with my co-workers. Well, to make a couple years a short story, I was meeting all the wrong people at all the wrong places.

My husband and I were trying to begin a family and we decided we would move to be closer to our families. Five years passed and we still were not successful in conceiving. We decided to talk with our doctor about it and he sent us for some testing. It turned out neither of us were able to have babies. This was a huge slap in my face. My husband seemed to handle it much better than I. This is when I started having no self-worth or self-respect. Of course, I know now that I was having nothing but a big PITY PARTY! As time passed, our life moved forward, we bought a home and it seemed all I did

was cook, clean, be a wife and I felt I wasn't getting anything from our marriage.

We talked and decided we would check into adoption. We did. What a process that was; however, after about a year we were blessed with a beautiful four-and-a-half-month-old baby boy! I was so very happy and enjoyed every day caring for our son! I kept telling my husband that I had my son, now he needed a daughter! He wasn't as excited about going through the adoption process again as I was. We moved forward and within three years the adoption agency called and said they had a little girl for us! OH MY, our daughter was seven days old, red hair, red body, and was so tiny I was afraid I would break her! Our second blessing! Our life moved forward, our son and daughter began to grow into teenagers, and we only had one bathroom in our beautiful home, so my husband sought out a new home for us! We needed to take this step as soon as possible because our children were of the age that we needed to get them into a new school with new friends.

I began working since the children were in school and felt I needed to put myself in a social

atmosphere. Well, I was fortunate enough to be an executive assistant in two large corporations. Alcohol was everywhere and flowed at all parties and events. I tried not to get drunk out of my mind at conferences; however, one time I let myself go and the next morning, which I had overslept, everyone was talking about what the CEO's assistant (me!) had done the night before! So embarrassed! People thought it was funny since I had never shown that side of myself before! Hard to live that down. My family and friends all drank. I wanted nothing more than to be a part of the group.

At the age of 34, our daughter began having some weird medical issues. She and her husband were going through *in vitro* at this time, so we thought with the injections she was receiving that her moods and personality were affected! Well, after about four years the doctors discovered that our daughter had cancer and it had already metastasized! I believe my husband and I stuck our heads in the sand and felt sure the doctors would cure this horrible disease. We watched our daughter suffer terribly with this cancer and we did everything we could to help both her and her husband. At the age of 39, on August 4, 2016,

our daughter suffered a massive stroke and passed away two days later. Needless to say, THIS WAS MY BOTTOM! I was angry at God, and I felt he was punishing me by taking our daughter! I cursed God, walked away from Him, and drank every day and every night! While working, I would think, do I have enough wine at home to drink while I'm fixing dinner and then take a bottle (or two) outside to "relax"? My drink of choice was wine! Never thought I could be an alcoholic on a "fruit"!

One night after I fixed dinner, I took my bottle of wine to my backyard and sat by myself, thinking all that "stinking thinking" stuff and told God I would fix everything. I would go be with our daughter. I put the bottle down, walked into the house, into our garage, got in my car, turned the car on and I don't remember anything until I heard my son and grandson pounding on the car window to try to wake me up. I did wake up, thank God, opened the car door and they took me into the house! My husband was horrified as well as my son and grandson!

I, of course, said I was sorry, that will never happen again. I didn't attempt suicide again; however, I continued to drink to block out the loss of our

beautiful daughter. My grandson had been in the A.A. program for about six years and my husband had asked him to help me. My grandson told my husband that he could not help me until I was READY! So true!!!! I know this now of our disease!

My grandson had been to a men's retreat and called me on a Sunday asking if he could stop by! I had been in bed since Friday night of that week after drinking myself into oblivion! I immediately thought, oh no, I don't think I can listen to his experience at his retreat; however, I can never tell my grandson NO!

Little did I know our grandson was coming over to give his amends to us! As I was listening, having a tough time to even sit up, something clicked. I began to sob, and I asked my grandson for help! He turned, looked at me, said, "Grandma, stay right here, I'll be back in an hour!" And he was back in an hour with a Big Book, and a "Twelve and Twelve." Inside both books he wrote, "Let Go and Let God!" I couldn't believe it.

He then said, "Grandma, I'll be here tomorrow night at 7:00 p.m. and we are going to an A.A. meeting!" I thought, "Oh no, what have I gotten myself into!" But

I wasn't going to let our grandson down, so I was ready at 7:00 o'clock and scared to death! We went to the meeting, the room was full of people, both young and old; however, no one as old as I was! As the people in the room began to share, I listened, "WOW," I thought, "maybe I am an alcoholic!" When it was time for me to share, I was so afraid to admit to all these people that I was an alcoholic at the age of 75, but this was just what I needed! I shared, "My name is Barb, and I am an alcoholic!" They applauded!

After the meeting many people came up to me, handed me A.A. literature, told me they were so happy that I was there and to please come back! Something told me I was HOME! After a couple of weeks my grandson introduced me to my sponsor. It was crazy because we knew each other. We had worked at two corporations together and neither one knew the other had a problem! God works in mysterious ways, right?

Today, I am six years sober; my grandson is nine years sober today. I have the same sponsor and I also sponsor five beautiful ladies; I am an intergroup rep for one of my meetings, I am secretary for

my home group, I am also chair of the Intergroup Telephone Answering Service.

It is my plan to work the A.A. program for the rest of my life, do as much service work as I can and maintain my sobriety. I CANNOT DO THIS WITHOUT THE A.A. PROGRAM AND MY FELLOW ALCOHOLICS!!!

Never Too Late

Sandra

I was the most unlikely candidate for a future alcoholic one could imagine. At least that is what I thought. I know now that I began to drink alcoholically in my early 60s, and thankfully was able to stop in my 70th year.

Nothing in my background indicated alcohol would become a problem. I grew up extremely poor in a material sense but had an idyllic childhood in almost every other way. I grew up in a rural area on a small tobacco farm where my father was a tenant farmer. He worked two or three other jobs as well. My mother stayed home and worked very hard with no modern appliances or running water. I got my work

ethic from them. We kids played in the creek in the summertime, the woods, the barn loft, made our own fun without toys. All my grandparents and aunts and uncles on both sides of the family lived within a five-mile radius and always spoiled me with their time. I had a brother and sister to play with and cousins. We were taken to church every Sunday. My family sang church and gospel music. Our lives revolved around church, family, and music. These years were far from perfect, but very good. I knew I was cared for and loved.

I made the highest grades all throughout school, was involved in everything, and graduated as valedictorian. I was the top English graduate at my university, graduating with a 4.0. I got a job teaching English at a very fine high school. I left that to marry a handsome Army officer just out of Vietnam and we moved to the nearest big city so he could go to law school. I worked full-time to pay the bills, typed, and edited for his classes. And then I stayed home and had three babies. It was an abusive marriage from the start and got worse. When he left, I was a young single mother with three young children to support. I had no money, no job, and no earning power. I had

supported him and his career — the classic story. The next 25 years, I worked 70 hours a week to make the house payment and to feed my children. Then one day I looked up and my children were grown and gone, well-educated, successful, happy. I eventually paid for two beautiful homes that I loved. I was fully self-supporting.

So why would I turn to something that had never been a part of my life? I never remember seeing liquor until I got to college, and I didn't drink it then. In my 50s I dated a man I would now describe as a heavy drinker. I learned to like wine, but never more than two glasses. After we broke up, my drinking continued. I remember going home at lunch break and having a drink, but that was rare. I could stop for long periods of time. I moved back to a rural area near where I'd grown up. It was a 50-mile round-trip to a liquor store and I remember driving it quite often. I played piano and organ at church, and I remember drinking wine in the morning before I left for church. This horrible insidious disease was progressing, and I had no clue. My first two grandchildren would come to visit and there were times when I drove with them in the car after I had had wine. I feel so guilty about that.

I was finally able to retire and to go on a French river cruise with some girlfriends and their husbands. I went with a local travel group but knew no one except my girlfriends because I had lived an hour away in a big city for 35 years. Nice wine was included, and I drank way more than my share. Little did I know I would not only meet the love of my life, but also the absolute best and kindest man I've ever known. And he was handsome too. He knew my friends, but we didn't know each other. I held off for a day or two, but finally had to admit that my heart was in this just as much as his. We dated for two years, then got married on my birthday. We'd spent a year transforming his house into one that we both loved.

Don had so many friends and knew everyone in town. I put pressure on myself to measure up to his friends. I could go on picking out this and that as reasons I drank heavily. But the bottom line is that the most unlikely of victims, at any age and any station in life, can succumb to this powerful affliction and I did. I would sleep three or four hours, then lie in bed waiting to get up and pour that first glass of wine. It was pure hell.

My husband began to worry for my health. He did not want to lose me. I was fussing at servers in front of my grands, making hurtful comments to dear friends, staggering. I never lost anything, or so I thought. But what I was losing was myself, my soul. I was growing my relationship with my husband, enjoying my wine, but still had not crossed that line. Then five months after my sister died, my beloved younger brother died of a rare disease. We were in Spain, and I couldn't get back for his service, to play piano for him, to grieve with my family. It was one of the hardest times in my life. It still is. A few weeks after he passed away, my husband said, "Your drinking has gone to a different level." I had crossed that line. I drank for another year and a half.

I have searched my mind over and over as to why I would become an alcoholic, when I had gotten through all the difficult years hardly touching alcohol. I'd never been happier than I was in this new marriage. I had been single 31 years when I met Don, had kissed a lot of frogs, but had never settled. He was worth the wait. He had been in a 45-year marriage, no children. He loved all of mine beyond belief. We were retired, didn't have to worry

about paying the bills, were traveling the world. Life was about as good as it could get, and I was sinking deeper and deeper into my self-made pit, all the while in denial, knowing nothing of alcoholism.

I still catch myself occasionally wondering if I'm truly an alcoholic. After all, I didn't lose anything: not my job, my house, no DUIs mainly because I drank alone at home. However, there were times when I should not have been driving. Then in the middle of wondering if I'm really an alcoholic, I remember hiding my glass, the empty bottles, the full bottles; going to different places to buy wine; disposing of all the empty bottles at different places.

I loved my husband so much that I went to my first few A.A. meetings just for him. The group I went to had a lot of sobriety, but very few women; however, I stayed. I read through the Big Book twice. I had been to several meetings when one day at noon I drank the last glass of wine in the house and, for some reason, I sat down, put my head in my lap, and prayed harder than I have ever prayed. I felt a presence, a calmness, and I knew I had been relieved of this craving. I found a sponsor and worked the Steps as thoroughly as I could.

Covid hit and because of underlying conditions and our age, my husband and I only left the house for groceries and medical appointments. My sponsor mentioned a Big Book study by a couple of guys named Joe and Charlie and I embraced those recordings and online meetings. I attended my own group Zoom meetings and others. I listened to hundreds of tapes — I still do — and began to truly grow spiritually, to learn our A.A. history, and to learn an appreciation for this program and all that's gone before me. What a joy and a journey! I've not been able to sponsor (I'm the only woman in my group and because of Covid) but I feel ready and I'm truly willing. However, I am our alternate GSR, have attended district meetings, online area meetings, and just chaired my first home group meeting; and I do my best to share from my heart.

I have a love for this beautiful program that only continues to grow. My beloved husband drives me to every meeting as his way to support me. Life couldn't be sweeter at the age of 75. It is the best and I owe it to God, A.A., and the trusted servants who love me. I have joy, serenity and my program to guide me. The first time I heard a speaker say "I wish I'd become

an alcoholic sooner” I wondered why anyone would ever say that. Now I understand. My A.A. program has made me a better person and has made my way of living ever so much better. And the glorious fact is that it can do so at any age! It’s never too late.

I Was 67 When I Attended My First A.A. Meeting

Ann

My disease had lain in wait for me until I learned how effectively alcohol relieved the pain of fear, loss and guilt that caught up with me in my early 40s. I had been married for 15 years. I loved my husband, who supported me all during my studies resulting in my Ph.D., who learned to fly with me, and who fathered and truly co-parented our two children.

After fifteen wonderful years this picture started unraveling. I was unable to face it despite years of psychotherapy which had shepherded me through the grueling but enormously satisfying process of shaking hands with the ghosts from my past. As the wheels came off, I found stability in alcohol. I could

do my job, manage my responsibilities well enough, and when I came home, I could have a drink. Then two. Then more, until bedtime.

Despite having grown up with a mother who suffered from this disease, I did not acknowledge — did not even see — the path I was on. I got through my divorce and the transition into being a single parent and sole supporter of the family. My career progressed remarkably well, which I used as a pillar of my temple of denial. Looking back, it is still stunning to realize the grip of alcohol and how long it took me, how many mistakes I had to make, how desperate I had to become, before I accepted that I am an alcoholic.

I had married again in 1983. I was drunk when I accepted his proposal, drunk at the wedding ceremony, and probably had fewer than three sober days out of every seven during our marriage. My husband would let me know he was worried by my excessive drinking but did not insist that I do something about it. I did not characterize this as enabling. I felt his love and support as rebukes. Maintenance drinking covered, but did not reduce, my guilt.

My total demoralization began in earnest when I retired. By this time the structure of employment was not working as well as it had, but it was just enough to allow me to think that if I could manage the job, I didn't have to deal with my drinking. Once I had no professional responsibilities, I had no measure that propped me up. I was free to start drinking early in the day and keep on going until I took a nap to avoid passing out, then drank again until the end of the day.

What finally brought me to my knees was alcohol-induced illness. I had two trips to the local ER following falls. After the second episode, and not having been evaluated at all for the possibility of excessive drinking, I gave up. I asked my husband to accompany me to our physician's office where I asked for help. She referred me on the spot to a hospital-based detox program where I spent the next three days in a drug-induced fog.

Upon discharge I entered an intensive outpatient treatment program. Still not convinced anything could really work for me, I followed the regimen to the letter. During those three weeks I completed the first three Steps of the A.A. program, attended

a meeting every day, and found a sponsor before being discharged from the treatment program. I did not realize it then, but I was beginning my recovery. Nor did I know that recovery would be a life-long commitment to practicing the principles of the A.A. program in all my affairs, however many times I fall short in this endeavor.

One of the barriers to my acceptance of the program, to trusting that it was (and remains) the solution for me, was noticing that in the meetings I attended nearly every newcomer was at least one generation, if not two, younger than I. My own ageism combined with my lingering but powerful belief that nothing was really going to help me achieve a good life, led me to challenge how this program could help this old lady. I was not having to cope with family issues, job issues, life challenges facing other alcoholics in meetings. This temptation to dwell on the differences between us was dispelled over time by the work I was doing with my sponsor as we went through the Steps.

The first miracle I acknowledged was the work of the spirit in leading me to this sponsor. There was nothing I brought to our work that she did not help me reframe as grist for the mill of the Step work. And

as we went along, she helped me see the similarities between me and all other alcoholics. This bolstered my dawning awareness that as I experienced the courage, the struggles, the successes of others in A.A. meetings, I was enough like all of them that maybe, just maybe, this program would work for me if I put in the work.

My husband died when I was just three months into the program. His death was completely unexpected. I was still in the fog of the A.A. newcomer. I don't remember the specifics of how this happened, but A.A. wrapped around me. The meetings and my sponsor helped me with the loss, the fear, the grief. And they made it possible for me to be open to the love in my family in a way that was new, vital and affirming. And I did not want to drink.

As time went on, miracle upon miracle continued to happen. Each of the Steps in the program opened vistas that beckoned me to continue. It was not smooth. It was not easy. Given how long I had lived before coming into the program, I had much to write about the effects of my shortcomings, the damage I had done, the amends I had to make. My sponsor gave me the support to face as much as I could.

She let me rest when I needed to, letting me know that there is always more to be revealed when the time is right.

A.A. is as relevant and essential to me today as it was in the beginning. It is no picnic to realize the runway left to me in life is getting noticeably shorter with every day. The increasing physical challenges, losing dear ones, appreciating the incredible work in front of the next generations — all could transpire to have me focus on what will remain undone when I die. A.A. gives me tools for living and for preparing to die. Self-pity, remorse, regret are absent when I immerse myself in gratitude, in the sunshine of the spirit, in the strength, faith and courage of the A.A. community. And in my surrender to my higher power.

This story contains the key elements of nearly every story of recovery I have heard and read. The age I was when I entered the program, my age now and all the years in between demonstrate the relevance of this program at any age, at all ages. I just turned 85 last month. I joyfully celebrated the occasion with my two children and their families. I met my first great-grandchild who was just a month old. I stay in touch with my sponsor. Some of the women

I am with almost weekly have been with me on this journey since I first came into the program eighteen years ago. Online meetings have made it possible to continue with a small group of women who have the same sponsor (and grand sponsor). I benefit every day from the alcoholics who share their experience, strength and hope, whatever their age and circumstances. Indeed, it is never too late, nor too soon.

Each Morning

Alfred

Each morning I wake up is a good start to the day! At my active age of 85 I exceed the national average of life expectancy by some years. Understandably it gives me some cause for concern, but I digress.

I have the dubious pleasure of living a long life and have experienced several “life-times.” I was an engineer, a family man, a farmer, a store owner, an entrepreneur, and finally a retired gentleman. In all those lifetimes I came to believe in a whole bunch of things. I came to believe in the “American Dream”

and lost it. I came to believe in a Christian God and lost it. I came to believe that when you married it was for life, but it wasn't true for me. I came to believe in alcohol, and it tried to kill me. I don't remember when "it" started. It just seemed to have always been there. I never noticed that it had increased over the years. It never occurred to me that I was an alcoholic. I drank like most people around me - or so I thought. Sure, I got tipsy on occasion. I guess I got drunk occasionally. But hey, I was a "happy drunk." I say that as if it qualified my drinking. If the drinks were free, this cheapskate would have his elbow welded to the bar. I thought I was "normal"; however, I did have the lingering feeling that I was not quite right. My daughter would take the bottle of Sambuca off the dinner table when I had supper at her house. I kept refilling the espresso cup long after the coffee was gone. It tasted good and I was getting a nice buzz.

At the ripe young age of 68 my second wife succumbed to heart failure. I, at the ripe old age of 77, concluded that my life would become one of solitude and loneliness. Thus, having declared how brilliant my deduction was, I very quickly became a pint-a-day drunk. "What? Only a pint?" you might

ask. In self-defense it was 100 proof whiskey and I usually blacked out before the bottle was finished. Well, sometimes it was a two-pint-day. On a special weekend I might step up to a big bottle.

I had the most marvelous pity parties. If I kept score it would be Revelers zero, Bottle one. Hey, no one is keeping score anyway. After the fact I realized my life had become centered around the opening hours of the various local liquor stores. Oh, I had my routine: never the same store in the same week. I wouldn't want anyone to think I drank too much. My self-driving-car would shuttle me between the local liquor stores and my house.

In my more lucid moments, I decided that I should go on a senior's dating website. Maybe I could find some companionship. I was all of 78 but I was told I looked 65. I gave it a try and eventually encountered a young lady with only 69 years on her 55-year-old looking chassis. A match made in heaven, wherever that is. At this point in the story, you might expect that I would stop drinking and we would live happily ever after, whatever that is. This is the real world. I hid my drinking habit as we drunks can do so well. Yes, she knew I drank, but not how much ... until I was

found on my bedroom floor, half naked. I remember falling. Not a real fall-down-hurt-yourself kind of fall. It was more of a crumpling of the whole body. I remember having my cell phone in my hand for a reason I can't recall. As I lay there, I felt the carpet on my cheek. The little bristles poking at my skin. It smelled stale and musty. I heard footsteps coming into the room. Then ... nothing.

Noises. Soft and muted. Muffled conversations. I opened my eyes and perceived people hovering over me. Through an alcohol induced fog I recognized my daughter, my sister and my girlfriend. "Uh oh," I thought. "I am in the ER." "How much did you drink?" someone in a white coat asked me. Huh? It seemed not to be the first time the question was asked of me. "I don't know" I think I replied. Soon afterward I faded from the scene. I was there, but not there. I felt no pain. The white coat spoke again "Can I tell your family your alcohol level?" "No," I remembered saying. Why no? I was embarrassed. That's all I remember, oblivion, my old friend, visited me.

I opened my eyelids. The lighting around me was subdued. The walls were an off-white, or some light color. I thought this must be a hospital. I was

in a bed. IV bags with tubes. Tubes attached to needles. Needles stuck in my arm. “Uh oh, not good.” I remember the anxiousness in their eyes. I remember seeing my daughter and girlfriend looking in my direction. “Do you remember what happened?” someone had asked. Yeah, I remember. I was drinking in bed. I would sometimes do that, so when I blacked out, I was someplace comfortable. And thus, my life had become: Drink to forget. Drink to reminisce. Drink to celebrate. Drink to make life tolerable. I had no excuse, but I made lots of them anyway. I was lonely. I felt abandoned. I had nothing to do that afternoon. The day was too long. Yep, you got it. After that charming episode my daughter set me up with an Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP). The program was great. Three days a week, three hours a night. I was getting it! **(Yeah right)**. I was too embarrassed to even think about “that A.A. stuff.” I can do it myself! **(Yeah right)**. And you know what? I didn’t drink for several months after the IOP program. Until one day I said, “Okay Al, you deserve a drink!” Down the “rabbit hole” I went. As a last resort I attended my first A.A. meeting. I had advanced another year in age.

I was to visit the ER one more time. Just before my open-heart surgery was scheduled I believe I attempted suicide. I can't believe I did, but I was in an alcoholic black-out. All the evidence points to the fact that I swallowed the bottle of sleeping pills with the intent to end my life. I think I had concluded that I was an old and useless drunk. My life was worthless and thus, why go on living. I had just started going to A.A. meetings and so my girlfriend called my sponsor. He later told me that when he saw me stretched out on the bed with some contents of my stomach clustered on my lips and chin, he was almost in tears. Well, off again to the ER. Oh, if only my drinking had stopped there. More scrapes on the car. More unkind arguments with my girlfriend. I would go to meetings and drink afterwards. Sometimes drank before meetings. I thought the phrase: "Keep coming until the miracle happens" was nice but meaningless. I kept coming to meetings. Hmm, no miracle that week. What? You want me to pray? To whom?

My experience with a god has wandered from Catholicism through a Pentecostal movement, then a slide across Wiccan concepts with a brief stop

with Druids and a bounce to a belief in a god of the universe. Something created me and the things around me. I can't begin to conceptualize what a god is or does. However, I do believe in a power greater than myself because I have experienced that power. There was no bolt of lightning, no profound announcement from on high. It all started when I could not make it past the Third Step. Give my life over to the care of God? As a disciplined and educated engineer, I was in control of my life. I can slow down my drinking using my intellect and willpower. I was not giving up control and that was that. Or so I thought.

In desperation, after many failures, I told God that I was **willing to be made willing** to turn my will and life over to the care of God **as I understood Him**. What a coward I was. I don't want to do it, but if you make me want to do it, then that's okay. Sheesh, the logic of some people.

The miracle happened so quietly that I didn't notice it. One day I didn't think to pick up a drink. Then another day went by. Then another week went by. I suddenly realized that I had not had a drink during that time. Nor did I want one! "HEY, what

just happened”? And so ... that was that. The God of my understanding, my Higher Power, did for me that which I was not only afraid to do, but was also unwilling to do for myself. My desire for a drink was lifted from me, NOT by my will or intellect, but by the grace of my Higher Power. Wow!

In my journey of sobriety, I circled Steps One and Two for quite some time. Step Three was a bit of a hill. I leveled off at Steps Four and Five. At which time I knew I was making progress. I could see the positive impact it was having on my life. I was beginning to pay attention: “Progress not perfection” ... I can buy into that. I acknowledge that I am an imperfect human trying to function in a very imperfect world. I can turn anything into a reason to drink. Or I can turn to my Higher Power for strength and direction. To be sober or not be sober, it is not a question (**Shakespeare I think**).

At this juncture of my life, I endeavor to live the Twelve Steps in my daily life. My life in A.A. has exceeded all my expectations. (**That is not hard to do when you arrive at A.A.’s door a broken person**). My girlfriend is still with me. I asked her one day why she ever stayed with me. She said she saw

something good in me and waited around to see what it might be. I now have everything I need in my life: my family, another family, a loving girlfriend (living as my wife), money enough for food and the occasional vacation, a roof over my head, vehicles that work, and a belief in the A.A. program.

With the remaining days and years of my life, I will make a choice to spread the message of recovery found in the program A.A. has set forth. I have devoted time being a group's GSR (general service representative), a group's treasurer, a speaker and a chair at meetings. I currently participate in committee work and am a newly minted DCM (district committee member). I look forward to further spiritual and personal growth inside and outside of the A.A. program.

I have just one regret ... that I lost all those vibrant years to a muddled alcoholic existence. I lived not knowing the real joy of a life well lived. Each morning I wake up is always a good start to my day. Then onward with my magical life in sobriety. Oh, and how should that be done?

YOU ARE DONE

Mia

It was not my idea to quit drinking. After 50 plus years of drinking, and every kind of wreckage imaginable, oddly enough I still had a bunch of “yets.” Not a single DUI, arrest, or car accident; I was still, in my opinion, a high functioning alcoholic.

I had plenty of drama: a drunkalogue that would not fit in a **Reader’s Digest** short story: getting lost in San Francisco after being dropped off in front of a B and B and wandering the streets, picking up a rental car after flying in and going over the exit spikes and blowing out all four tires, sleeping thru movies in theaters, making an idiot of myself, while thinking I was being funny or cute, falling asleep at many a dinner party during dinner and sleeping through the musical “Hamilton”! Just a few examples to give you a taste.

But several days before that fateful, New Year’s Eve, the cumulative effects of my drinking, especially on my relationship with my adult son, had hit the lowest bottom imaginable. We had several conversations, rageful, furious, soul crushing, using terminology

that even I (a tough, swearing New Yorker, found shocking)! And then it happened (it really did). I heard a voice the morning after, and it said to me “MIA YOU ARE DONE!” Was it me? I don’t think so. This was December 31, 2017. I did what I had kind of done before; I looked up A.A., and being a traveling kind, American Airlines kept popping up in my search. So, I typed in the full familiar terminology. You see, my mother got sober in A.A. when I was in my early teens and I grew up with the knowledge and the experience that when things got tough, as they often did, off she would go to a “meeting” — and come back a changed person! And so I went, on the morning of New Year’s Eve 2017 to my first meeting.

There I was greeted by an older gentleman, who introduced himself, asked me for my phone number, and like an innocent, I gave it to him. He promised he would call me every hour to help me deal with my “cravings.” And so he did, and of course I did not answer, as I had no intention of starting this journey on New Year’s Eve! My husband and I killed a bottle of Dom Perignon, and that was the last liquor of any kind that I have put in my body since January 1, 2018.

I'll start at the beginning:

I was born in 1949, in New York City, where I was placed for adoption at birth, and adopted by an alcoholic, and a pedophile. I'll spare you the details: they are not pleasant, but they did not make me an alcoholic. Given the times of my adoption I was not privy to the details, although I was able just this year, to learn the name of my biological mother, and the name I was given at birth. I'll get back to that. My mother (for purpose of clarification, this is my "real mother," i.e., the one who raised me, and when I talk about my family, it is the family in which I was raised) was an alcoholic. She joined A.A. when I was 13 years old. I had no interest in Alateen (a program for the children of alcoholics which is part of the Al-Anon Family Groups), although she suggested it.

My earliest experience with alcohol was at family gatherings, like Passover, where I, along with some of my cousins, drank Manischewitz under the table and when cleaning up. It was sweet, it was fun! My family was made of up atheists and agnostics, culturally Jewish, but rarely was there talk about a Higher Power. Coming from a family of agnostics it was not that I did not have a belief in a Higher Power, I just

had no vision or understanding of what that meant. But my life experience had provided me with enough information, that I knew that it was not me. From my earliest experiences in the rooms, I quickly saw the face of my Higher Power on the faces of the people in the rooms, and that was enough!

In my mother's last months on earth, she connected with a Rabbi, through hospice, and when she died, I inherited the Rabbi. The Rabbi was very familiar with A.A. and when I told her that I was now a member and wondered as to whether I needed treatment, her sage advice was to try A.A. for a month and if I could not maintain sobriety, to consider inpatient treatment. That was enough for me!

Back to what happened and what it was like:

My teenage years were not particularly notable; I obtained fake proof at the age of 16, and could get into bars, along with my friends. This was the '60s, weed was new, and very interesting, and I learned all about driving while intoxicated during that time. Fortunately, no accidents, or DWIs. Plenty of driving drunk however, and plenty of paranoia (pot was illegal)! To this day I get a bit anxious when a police

car is behind me! Except for a few times when I overshot the mark and drank too much, for the most part, I considered myself a normal teenager who drank to avoid my feelings, which included divorced parents, a younger sister who had significant mental health problems and an addiction to pain medication which eventually killed her, a younger brother who died of a drug overdose and the usual teenage angst. It kind of worked. I'd say I was an AIT (alcoholic in training). In hindsight, I now understood that my mother practiced the principles in all her affairs. She was a devoted sponsor, an active member of A.A., and once sober, never drank again. My mother was preoccupied with the significant needs of my brother and sister and saw me as perfect in spite of my alcoholism. She did the best she could, and I did the best I could to maintain that image.

I was dating a guy, and we were in the process of breaking up, shortly after my first sexual experience, when I discovered I was pregnant, and so we got married. Not my best decision, but this WAS the '60s! We went to an anti-war demonstration in Washington, DC, when my son was one month old, and he (the ex) pressured me to take a tab of acid, and I did, and

the next 36 hours were a nightmare, which saved me from pursuing that particular outside issue!

Eventually we divorced, and my outside issues were generally related to the men I dated; if amphetamines were his drug of choice, they were mine as well. Alcohol was always my constant companion. Despite this, I went back to college and earned a degree in social work, and after an internship working on the wards of psychiatric hospitals, my “Master’s Thesis” (a scathing criticism on the state of the psychiatric system), was published while written under the influence of drugs. I suspect it reads like the rantings of a madwoman! Likely not a punctuation mark anywhere!

I decided to work with the community of people who are Deaf, learned American Sign Language, and had a meaningful and robust career for many years. I did not drink on the job, and seemed to be able to tolerate daily drinking, with rare hangovers (I guess I was in a kind of perpetual fog). I started to suspect that perhaps I had a problem with alcohol. Daily drinking, and often, overshooting the mark, was my norm. While working at a school for the Deaf, I attended a “wine tasting party.” I tasted a lot! We

had been invited to stay overnight at the home of the school principal. During the night, while in a blackout, I stumbled to the bathroom, and forgetting that I was not at home, walked off a flight of stairs, hit a wall like a human pinball, and landed at the bottom of two flights of stairs. The paramedics were working on me, and I remember coming to at the hospital and telling my husband “I think I may have a drinking problem”! And while I suffered a severe concussion, I still was not ready!

Along the way I met and married my current husband, and of course, former drinking partner. He has watched me navigate this journey, and he is a loving and decent man, and I often wonder what I did to deserve him!? I’ll get back to that in a bit. After a few decades of working with folks who were Deaf and their families, I jumped over to working at a national rehab center for people who were Deaf-Blind. Yes, Deaf and Blind. I was the therapist, and helped folks negotiate their new lives. It was great work, I loved it, but I was unable to separate their pain from my own. The solution was always alcohol. Every single day. And yet, I thought I was managing.

There were other jobs, other experiences; drinking in the shower while working for the Red Cross after Hurricane Katrina, working with a co-therapist, Deaf himself, to help addicts, and alcoholics, who were Deaf. Ironic, I know! The attacks of September 11 happened. I was in my office, meeting with a client, himself Deaf-Blind, when the news started to come in. We all went to a building where staff could interpret everything we saw on the television, interpreting tactually for 20 or so Deaf-Blind clients. That was it for me. It was game on after that. I drank to oblivion from that point on. Driving home, I could see the smoke. My neighborhood (Long Island) had a commuter parking lot that remained about 25% full, for the folks who did not come home. It was just too much. Buying alcohol with a handle became my new normal. That December and thru New Year's, I traveled with a mission to an orphanage in Russia where all of the children were Deaf-Blind. I learned about Russian vodka and Russian champagne, a deadly combination. Worst hangover ever!

There were lots more stories, as you can imagine, endless close calls, destroyed relationships. Very few people in my life have not seen me drunk. We moved

to California after our third grandchild was born. I was astonished and overjoyed to see that liquor was sold everywhere. In New York I could buy liquor only at liquor stores, which were closed on Sundays. Wineries had begun to spring up, so in certain places wine could be purchased on Sundays. Oh, the joy of the supermarket wine sixpack!

We changed careers to be close to the family and moved my mother out here when her dementia made clear that she was unsafe living alone. She never drank again; she was sober for over 50 years. I regret that she never got to see me sober. She would be proud of who I am and what I do today. I'd like to think she knows! Every year when I celebrate another year of sobriety, I put a chip on her headstone. It makes me feel better. I apologize for such a long story, 50-plus years of drinking is a fair amount of data but let me move on to what it's like today, because that is what is important!

After that New Year's Eve in 2017, I entered the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous, and I knew immediately that I was exactly where I needed to be. It did not matter that I was in downtown Oakland, at a meeting

with folks who were in a Salvation Army treatment center; and no one looked like me! I knew that I was home. Certainly, there were barriers; my belief in a higher power is new, and it is not a traditional one. And I am just fine with that. I know it is NOT ME! The times that he/she/they have shown themselves to me, are just too numerous to list or ignore!

When the pandemic hit, I was astonished at how quickly A.A. meetings moved online. For me this was an easy adjustment! My familiarity as a video ASL interpreter allowed for a smooth and seamless transition to Zoom. I was glad to be of service where I could in helping the groups I attended make the transition. I still love online meetings, and attend them often, here in California as well as in other states and countries! I am slowly getting back to some in-person meetings, but I have no complaints about virtual A.A.

I have been given a huge gift! Shortly after I finished working the Twelve Steps, I began to be asked to sponsor women; they wanted what I have! This was and is miraculous to me! Today I sponsor a bunch of women! I have sponsored women who I have never

met in person. Each of them teaches me something that helps me become the person I was meant to be! We work the Steps and the Traditions, and I get to work them over and over! What a blessing!!!!

I stay sober by going to meetings, being in service, practicing the principles, being in the book, praying and meditating! I am open to suggestions, and although my defects of character are always in the wings, waiting to get out, I have a tool kit to manage them! It started small: a fanny pack, graduating to a backpack, there at the ready when I need it. I just must remember to work for it. Getting sober at the age of 68 isn't the same as getting sober at 20, 30, 40, 50 or even 60! I'm forgetful and facing the inevitable changes that happen at this age. I know that if I focus on the past I may focus on regrets, and if I focus on the future, fear is there waiting. So, I do my best to focus on today, and I know with certainty that I do not have to do it alone!

My fractured relationships have been repaired, not altogether, but they, like I, are a work in progress! While I can never say that my children and grandchildren have never seen me drunk (which used

to make me cringe when I heard it in meetings), I can say that they **have** been able to see me SOBER!

My husband, who is not an alcoholic, and I just celebrated 39 years! Together we have negotiated this mixed marriage and I'm happy today; it works! I go to meetings, generally five a week, sometimes more, rarely less! I have a sponsor, I have a life, and I am blessed.

One more note: I mentioned that I struggled with finding and connecting and being open to a higher power. Working with sponsees it was important for me to be able to give some type of guidance and support with this spiritual program. And so, a few years ago I decided that a way to connect with each other is to start a thread and call it the "St. Francis Prayer." We could read the prayer any time of the day, and type in prayer hand emoji and a heart and be connected. Some of us do it every day, some days we all do it, some days not; but it is always there to connect us, and I believe that connection is the opposite of addiction.

Several months ago, I was able to get a copy of my original birth certificate. Much to my astonishment,

the name I was given at birth was Francis. And if that's not a "God Shot" I don't know what is!

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my story!

My name is Mia, and I am a grateful alcoholic.

How do I find A.A.?

You can find a local A.A. phone number almost anywhere in the United States or Canada. Just look online for Alcoholics Anonymous. 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. Alcoholics Anonymous also has a meeting guide app which can be found at www.aa.org.

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 booklet.

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

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

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

More information can also be found at www.aa.org.

THE TWELVE STEPS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

THE TWELVE TRADITIONS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority — a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose — to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.
6. An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.

7. Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

A.A. PUBLICATIONS

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

PLEASE CHECK WEBSITE

www.aa.org

FOR COMPLETE PUBLICATION LIST

ALSO AVAILABLE IN LARGE PRINT:

**This Is A.A.
Frequently Asked Questions**

A DECLARATION OF UNITY

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

I am responsible...

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

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

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

