

From the swag to sobriety

An aimless, meaningless life free of responsibility becomes a life of honesty and purpose

'Work hard, play hard' – that was the motto that greeted me on arrival at a Queensland backpackers hotel, written in huge letters two stories high alongside a huge painting of an old swaggie, with his walking stick and humping a swag over his shoulder. I saw that portrait and the motto and thought, 'I'm home'. It had always been a dream of mine that, some day, I would *live above a pub for a year* – this was the extent of my dreams and the extent of my ambitions. So I stayed in that hostel above the pub for a year – a year of more or less unbroken drunkenness, blackout drinking. A year-long bender. I thought I had 'made it': no responsibilities, no consequences, no limits, no social restraints. I worked hard (farmwork) and I played hard. I once came out of a blackout clinging to the revolving beer sign on top of the roof of that old four-storey hostel, and thought, 'how the *&@! did I get up here?', and then, 'how the *&@! do I get back down?' (I had a bad experience climbing with my father when I was around 12, and had lost my head for heights – I was terrified of any height. But when I got drunk, I would climb...buildings, a church, trees.)

I managed to get down that time by climbing down the water pipe on the side of the hostel. In doing so I broke the pipe and flooded the pub below. Everyone in the backpackers woke up for work that morning without water for showers or breakfast. Another big night.

That was the year I gave up all pretence at control. I was 27. At the end of the year the proprietor of the hostel called me into his

office and gave me a talk – the first person to confront me about my drinking. He said an old friend of his had recently died after a long illness brought on by alcoholic drinking. He said that I was in the beginning stages of the process he had watched his old friend go through. I thanked him, even though this little talk was a preamble to kicking me out of the hostel. I just moved across the road, and carried on my way. But who knows, maybe a seed was planted. (A bit over a year later I was in my first AA meeting.)

I had been drinking heavily since I was 14 years old. I grew up with an alcoholic father (a bender drinker like me) and was sneaking drinks from an early age. I believe I was born an alcoholic because I would look for opportunities to sneak drinks even when 9 or 10 years old. As soon as I had access to alcohol in large quantities, I drank to excess. I arrived home from school one lunchtime (not long after my 14th birthday) to find my older brother (now also a member of our fine organisation, 16 years sober) and his mates having a BBQ. I joined in. I started drinking schooner glasses of half vodka, half orange juice. There was pot around and I smoked quite a bit of that, and also ate half a box of 'Chicken-in-a-biscuit'. Then, I started to feel sick. For years afterwards, I blamed

the biscuits: 'don't eat Chicken-in-a-biscuit when your drink', or, 'don't mix alcohol and pot', or, 'have a couple of drinks, then have a cone (or joint) or two, and everything will be fine', or, 'drink milk before drinking'. Alcoholic readers won't be surprised to hear that none of this changed the way I drank and what alcohol did to me.

Later that afternoon, when I was 14, I was in the backyard throwing up, when one of my brother's mates [...continued on page 6](#)



Did you know?

Toowoomba weren't going to let a global pandemic get in the way of the 2020 National Convention, which they hosted **virtually** last October. To find out how it went, see page 3.

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Statement of Purpose

The Mixer, for 'people who normally would not mix' (Alcoholics Anonymous, p. 17), is a forum for AA members in Australia to share their experience, strength and hope with each other, that they may stay sober and help others to recover from alcoholism.

Stories are collected by a group of volunteer editors around Australia, who form an editorial group conscience for the magazine, together with the General Editor and technical and design team.

While the editorial team takes reasonable effort in vetting contributions to ensure relevancy to and general adherence with the 12 Steps, 12 Traditions and 12 Concepts of the program of Alcoholics Anonymous, any facts or opinions asserted in a contribution remain that of the contributing individual or group; not the magazine or the AA Fellowship as a whole. Contributions are not intended to be a complete or accurate presentation of the program of Alcoholics Anonymous, but instead how individuals or groups relate to it.

The Mixer can be accessed online at our website: www.aamixer.com

You can subscribe, contribute or offer service to The Mixer by contacting us by email at: editor@aamixer.com



Reflections on the 2020 AA Aus Convention

The pandemic forced host city Toowoomba to get more than a little creative last year...

The theme of the 55th Australian National AA Convention in 2020 was 'A Vision For You'. When the Toowoomba host planning committee began preparing for the event, their original Vision was to a) carry the message of Alcoholics Anonymous; b) be innovative; and c) provide a wonderful opportunity for the local fellowship to be involved in service to the wider Australian fellowship. Little could they have imagined just how fully that Vision would come to be realised – especially when it came to innovation! – delivering a Convention that due to COVID-19 restrictions was staged virtually, entirely online.

The virtual format allowed the committee to begin looking at ways to change how we can participate in AA events and particularly a National Convention. One of the innovations of the 2020 Convention was the pre-recorded content that was available on the Convention website. Registrants had access to this for up to two weeks after the live event was over. This material included a variety of workshops on the Concepts and Steps, a virtual tour of a wonderful set of AA archives, a tour of AA and Al-Anon meeting places in Toowoomba, a moving interview with one of the children of a founding member of AA in Australia (Dr Sylvester M), and stories of recovery from Indigenous members.

All the meetings recorded across the Convention weekend were also available for viewing post-Convention. This really added to the whole experience, allowing registrants to view meetings, workshops and presentations in their own time.

Another innovative approach to this weekend was the use of a Convention phone app that allowed members to send messages to other registrants and view meeting schedules and programs. The app generated a lot of enthusiasm, both before and during the Convention, and provided people with a way of interacting with each other in the absence of the face-to-face experience.

There was a variety of entertainment provided with short Kahoot (trivia) presentations between meetings, as well as guest appearances as part of our Friday and Saturday night entertainment. The Diamond Jubilee celebration of AA's 75th birthday in Australia (and 85 years since it began) was a wonderful event on the Saturday night of the Convention, with many members participating in cake-cutting celebrations in their own homes while watching the big cake being cut in the host studio in Toowoomba.

One of the special highlights of the Convention was the publication of the special edition Convention book, titled 'A

Vision For You', which gives an excellent description of key moments in AA history – both globally and within Australia. The book has since become approved by the General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous Australia for publication as a conference-approved piece of literature.

In the words of Bill Wilson: "AA must and will change". These words ring true when we look at the various methods we have used to carry the AA message in recent times, including the way the 2020 Australian National Convention was hosted. Thank you to the Toowoomba Host Planning Committee and to the wider fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous for an inspiring 2020 National Convention. Thanks also to our sister fellowships: of a total of 519 registrations for the Convention, 170 were Al-Anon members with some Alateen registrations also. When you take into account the respective member-bases of these fellowships in Australia, this represents big support from Al-Anon (and Alateen) for the Convention. Thank you!

Anonymous

Heard!
**Around
the Traps**

"Never let a good mistake go to waste."

Carrying the message across every medium

Host of a new AA podcast Derek reflects on the importance of getting the message right

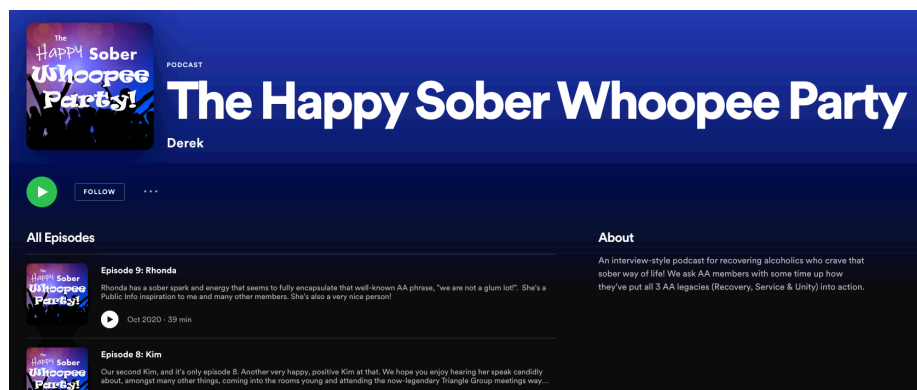
In the 1960's, Canadian philosopher and scholar Marshall McLuhan famously said "The medium is the message". What he was getting at is that different mediums – e.g. TV, radio, newspapers, the internet – require messages to be presented differently, if they are going to be effective. In other words, taking a one-size-fits-all approach to communication across different mediums doesn't work.

Some mediums, like TV, require a visual aspect to the communication, whereas others, like radio, rely solely on sound. Some require short, bite-sized chunks of information; others require lots of detail.

Given the importance of AA's life-saving message, I have a question: how effective are we at carrying our message across all the communication mediums available to us in 2021? (I mean, a lot has changed in the last 85 years, right?)

So, what are those mediums? Well for starters, you and I are communication mediums. We can carry the AA message within our interactions with members, newcomers, and other people interested in our program. Then there's our literature – ever since the Big Book was first published in 1939, we've used the written word to carry the message. Then there are speaker tapes – loads and loads of recordings of AA members talking at meetings, and larger AA conventions and events.

The question is, are we communicating well, maximizing the opportunity to communicate within each medium we use? For example,



is the tone of our written communication contemporary and considerate of modern-day sensibilities? When we speak to non-AA groups, do we try to structure our interactions in a way that promotes representation of AA's perspective, rather than our own? Are we maximizing all the opportunities that audio offers?

It's this last question that popped into my head one day as I listened to an AA speaker in my car. Almost all of our speaker recordings are of members talking at an audience. In other words, they are mainly one-person speeches. This is why I don't much listen to them. I go to meetings to hear multiple members speak, and to be honest, I don't care about the quality of the oration; I care about the quality of the honesty and recovery.

But what about two-way member conversations? How come we have so many speaker tapes, but so little recorded material of members having a chat with each other? I knew that *if they were available*, I'd certainly listen to these! I mean *hey, I listen to podcasts on non-AA subjects all the time!* And then I

discovered AA-related podcasts!

So yes, we do have them – in some numbers actually. Episode after episode of members talking with, rather than just at, other members. What a joy! One thing I did notice however, was that there were very few AA-related podcasts, if any, that had anything to do with our beloved Traditions and Concepts – i.e. our AA way of doing things. So, with the Responsibility Banner very much in my head and heart, I created one. I put it off at first, but the idea 'kept coming back'. This means it was probably my Higher Power wanting me to set the thing up. So often my recovery works that way – God wants me to do something, I resist, God then keeps asking until I give up and choose to 'do it anyway'!

The podcast is called 'The Happy Sober Whoopee Party', and it involves talking to members who've been around long enough to put all 3 AA legacies into their life – Recovery, Service and Unity. I'm only a few episodes in, but so far, so good. It's nothing more than an attempt to provide members (and non-members too of course) with something they might like. It can't hurt, right?

It's fascinating to hear older, sober members speaking about the impacts of Traditions and Concepts on their larger, recovered lives, both inside and outside the rooms. I'm learning heaps, and it's great to hear more than just a member's drinking and recovery story.

I use this podcast, and the structure I've chosen for it, as a simple example of a much larger point: it's impossible to achieve AA's Primary Purpose without using a communication medium of some kind, and whilst we need to ensure our message itself is in line with our Steps, Concepts and Traditions, it's probably a spiritual idea to also ensure we are communicating effectively within the medium we choose. Some questions we might wish to consider include:

- If we produce a public information poster, is it clear, well-designed and free of typos and errors?
- If we are interviewed, or speak

in public to non-AA members are we, as the Just For Today card suggests, 'dressing becomingly, talking low and acting courteously'?

- If we produce a video, is it well-shot, well-cut and something people will want to continue watching?
- If we write something that may become conference-approved, is it well-considered and expressed in a considerate, contemporary, voice?
- If we create a podcast, is it structured enough to be coherent, yet sufficiently respectful of the guest not to be overly leading or controlling?

Bill Wilson and many other AA members worked hard to achieve high quality communication of many types in order to carry our message. Those pioneers also broke down walls to carry the message across every contemporary communication medium they could, be it local or national in scope. The now-famous Liberty Magazine

and Jack Alexander articles and the 'We The People' syndicated radio program are just some examples of how early AA was assisted by the effective, high quality use of mass-media.

I'm doing everything I can to make my podcast both in line with AA principles, as well as entertaining and engaging. Am I there yet? No. Am I trying? Yes. I have a friend who hosts his own radio show on the ABC. I've sent him the Spotify link to the podcast so he can listen and give me pointers. I have to, otherwise listeners will turn off, and if that happens, I'm hurting instead of helping AA's chances of carrying the message.

The medium is the message, including for AA.

The Happy Sober Whoopee Party is available on Spotify. **Click here** or search for "The Happy Sober Whoopee Party"

Derek R, Southern Region

7th Tradition Contributions

We at The Mixer hope not only to continue this magazine, but to see it continuously improve, including its website and online presence.

To date, The Mixer has been funded by a small group of members. In order for it to become sustainable - and in the spirit of it being fully self-supporting - we are seeking 7th Tradition contributions from individuals or groups.

The main costs we incur relate to the running of the website, email system and web-design software. We also hope to print more copies, as meetings return to in-person.

Any contributions would be gratefully received.

The Mixer
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From the swag to sobriety (cont'd)

came and put his face close to my face and said, "Brad, we all drink and we all get drunk, but *there are some people who just shouldn't drink, and you are one of them.*" The truth! It was there right from the start, right there in my face. They had to keep a watch on me all afternoon after I passed out so that I didn't choke on my own vomit. That's how it started for me. I drank just like my Dad.

That was a Tuesday. My father, in his alcoholic wisdom, had built a garage in the backyard with a large snooker room and adjoining bedroom for my brother and I when I was about 13. The Friday night after that first drunk, as soon as my parents had gone to bed and the last light was off inside, I slipped out over the side fence into our neighbour's yard and was off to find the party that my brother's friends were having that night. Only this time, I told myself, it would be different: no vodka; no mixing alcohol and pot; no 'Chicken-in-a-biscuit'...I believed that, if I just avoided those traps, I would be alright. Of course, I went out and got very drunk and sick again – that's pretty much how I usually drank.

That was the beginning of the early, 'social' phase of my drinking. For the next four years, our back garage/snooker room would become a local hangout after the pub for all my brother's mates and anyone else who happened to come back. I would do my school work, fall asleep and be woken by a large group of teenage surfer dudes back from the pub, with someone pouring cheap flagon wine into my mouth and yelling, "come on Brad, party's here!" I loved it. I loved being the young kid amongst older guys, some of whom were several years older than me. I loved getting blind drunk and stoned,

playing snooker and pool until late at night; sneaking out to their parties, where I would play songs for everyone and get free grog and pot. I felt invincible, it was exhilarating, and you couldn't have gotten through to me then that I couldn't drink like others and shouldn't drink. I boasted that I never had hangovers – boy, would that change! But the fact was, I couldn't drink like others: I would almost always get disgustingly, anti-socially drunk – my drinking always stood out, even amongst that crowd. Often, I would pass out in a pool of vomit in someone's bathroom, if I was lucky enough to get there. Or I would pass out in the garden and then, once I had regained consciousness and had the capacity to walk, haul myself back into the house for more grog! I worked out, with the cheap flagon and cask wine of the early 1980s, that if you swilled the stuff around your mouth and spat out the first mouthful, then it didn't make you gag after that and you could drink as quickly as you liked; and that, once you threw up, you could pretty much drink with impunity after that. I thought that this was a brilliant discovery for a teenager, and recommended it to others as though I had found a magic cure, which allowed you to drink cheap wine without being sick. My whole world was alcohol and other drugs. I got to know the local drunks and addicts, who would drop over regularly during weekdays as well as the weekends, so drinking became a more frequent thing. We would talk grand philosophy: *52 dimensions of thought!*

Throughout my late teens and twenties I was more or less chronically unemployed or an itinerant worker, and increasingly lived as a bum. I lived out of a backpack from my late teens till several years into Recovery in my

early thirties. I was participant and spectator in the slow, suicidal decadence of my father's painful descent into an early alcoholic death at the age of 44. I was drunk for a week before and a week after he died. It was the ultimate excuse to drink: a sense of justifiable self-pity, and feeling that the usual social constraints and judgements didn't apply.

And if you had asked me during these years of purposeless wandering, I would have said that I was living out my dreams, doing what I wanted, living 'on the edge' without a care in the world. *Except...*the getting sick; the blackouts and the horrors the next morning, along with the hangovers; the growing sense of unease; the nerves; the fear of talking with other people; the horrific sense of purposelessness, of a complete lack of identity. I had achieved my one avowed ambition through my twenties: to live like one of Henry Lawson's swaggies. And like all people who achieve their goals early in life, I felt a terrible emptiness – here I was, camped by the river 7 km outside of a country town in western NSW in my late 20s, working a few hours a day on farms for a few dollars for rice and a bottle of port, sleeping under a 2x2m plastic tarpaulin which kept me dry in all weathers, even violent thunderstorms. I thought I had made it – I was free! Free of society and all its constraints, its judgement. But I was miserable, lonely, suicidal, ridden with guilt – although I could never quite work out for what – without any sense of direction or meaning in my life. A life free of responsibility to anyone, even to myself...

A friend of my brother's sent me some music for my 28th birthday, and sitting there in front of my fire by the river, miles from anyone, I suddenly felt it: that loneliness, and also that connection – music had always been my escape from the trauma of growing up with

the madness of my father's alcoholism, and music and literature had been the sustaining force during my teens and twenties, which I believe kept me alive in the way that other AA members say their spouse or career did. So, listening to this tape, I felt the pull of the city once again, and came back. I went on a bender with an old schoolfriend and drinking buddy that lasted for the whole Summer. I was a complete mess. And then, my brother came to visit me in my boarding house and suggested that, seeing as I was by myself without anyone to talk with, I might like to check out these meetings he had been going to, where people told stories, amazing, real stories of their lives – he really spun it as being an interesting sort of campfire yarn type of thing, a tribal place of elders telling stories. So, inspired by my brother's suggestion but knowing nothing of AA at all, I went to my first meeting – a large meeting at North Sydney on a Monday night. I was moved, powerfully moved, by the stories. I felt strong resonance (what I now know is identification). And when a whole lot of people stood up in the middle of the meeting and, one by one, stated their name, admitted they were alcoholic and said how many days sober they were, I did stand up, trembling, but could only say, "my name is Brad and I have had a lot of problems with alcohol." An understatement, and an evasion. Despite members outside trying to get me to come to a café after the meeting, I made a beeline for the gate and didn't come back for two years.

Honesty, surrender, being a part of: what I couldn't do at that first meeting. The next two years were mostly dry drunk madness – restless, irritable and discontent – with occasional bender madness. But it wasn't so much the drinking as the not-drinking that got me in the end: I just couldn't live in my head

any more. I ended up at my brother's place and after an argument I resentfully declared I was going to head out to the bush again. He came into my room a few minutes later, threw the AA Big Book on the bed and suggested I might read it. He said he washed his hands of me. He was the last person in the world with whom I had any real social contact. I picked up the book and started to read. And again, I identified. Again, it hit me, that powerful feeling when you hear someone else tell your story, when you hear your truth spoken out aloud by another human being. But this time, I admitted to myself, 'yes, this is me, *I am an alcoholic*.' I heard my truth from the stories of others, and I accepted that I am the same as they are. I surrendered. I got honest. I couldn't wait to get to my first meeting.

The next day, I stood up at what was to become my home group for the first seven years, and when asked to share in front of over a hundred people at that lunchtime meeting, I said, "My name is Brad, and I am an alcoholic". For me, those words have had some sort of magic: I haven't had a drink since. But several months later I got a bag of dope and was getting stoned every night, even while going to daily AA meetings and doing service! Then I had to surrender again, and I realised the lesson for the first time that honesty in all my affairs was needed. This was not just about not drinking. I was honest with another human being – I admitted my pot smoking and my addiction – I surrendered, and I haven't had a drink or drug since then, October 1998. My sobriety date.

Honesty is the foundation of my sobriety. I have had to be honest with myself and with others. And early on, I wasn't really capable

of much honesty at all – I couldn't even share about my drinking. It was too traumatic. I had sought oblivion in alcohol. Now, safely sober in meetings all day, and back present in my body and my mind (instead of being 'out of it'), I just couldn't go there; for a long time, I couldn't tell my story. I did share once, "my story is.... I don't know what my story is". I really had no idea. I used to think, 'where have I been all my life?'

I just went to shitloads of meetings, and I stayed sober on the first three steps, and on service work. And as my sponsor puts it, I got sober on the honesty of other members, until eventually I was able to start talking openly about my own drinking, my alcoholism, my defects of character. I ran into my best friend from Primary School when I was a few months sober. He asked me what I had been up to the previous 15 years since he saw me last. I replied, "I have been running away from myself." He said, "mate, that's an incredibly courageous thing to say" – which meant a lot to me to hear from him. I learnt to face myself, the truth about myself. AA has taught me that, by admitting my powerlessness over alcohol/drugs and unmanageability, I am given freedom from drinking; so I know that honesty is the key to sobriety, to dealing with all the wreckage of my past, and to finding out what and who I am. In return for this work, I have been given a sense of my identity through being a part of the fellowship of AA and of life. As a result, I have been given a life I could never have imagined – a life of responsibility, of purpose, of meaning.

Brad S, Melbourne Rise and Shine

AA is a Spirit

A poem that proves the AA message can be found anywhere

The following is a poem submitted by Laurie P, a member from Melbourne, who copied it from a piece of masonite he found lying behind a piano at the Brighton group's former venue (some 55 years ago!). The original author is unknown.

Its evidence can be seen, but cannot be touched
Nor can it ever be completely understood
It is as wide as the world, yet small enough to fit
snugly into the minds and hearts of man

It has brought light to where only Darkness dwelt
It has given hope to the hopeless
and help to those who yearned in despair

It has nourished forgiveness in those who knew no pity
It has given strength to the weak and humility to the strong

It has given greatness to the common
It has spurred to higher goals those who strive for nothing

It has transformed Sorrow into a weapon of happiness
It has given purpose to the trackless and shelter to the lost

It has taught patience to the hurried and action to the slothful

To the youth it has given "Vision"
To the aged it has given promise
To the lonely it has given companionship
To the restless it has given rest

To the sick it has been a doctor
To the dying it has given a desire to live
To those who have fallen it has been a helping hand

It has no judgement against the unteachable
Yet it has praise for those who learn

To the outcast it has been a home
To the childless it has given children
To the unwise it has given tolerance

Better still to the alcoholic it has given that most precious gift
That which is most precious, "Sobriety"

It has given them a gift of love
It has given them a gift to search for truth

With enough left over to share with each other.

41 years of sobriety, one day at a time

Jack G from Maroochydore reflects on AA's ability to be the long haul for sobriety

I started drinking around age 16 in the Wollongong Master Builders' Club at a friend's Christmas work party.

Not long after that I started work where we went over the road to the railway station dining room and bar to drink as many as we could between workers' trains; catching the last one to Fairy Meadow station and walking a mile and a half home – so when I arrived home I appeared to be sober.

Then my job changed in the same company, and I moved to Sydney to live. I did relief work in country towns. What a God-send for an alkie. No motels, only pubs, so all went on the bill: grog, food, bed, etc. This life was good as I did not know I was an alcoholic.

I then joined an international company to see the world. This job had a full expense account so I was paid to drink.

I had a massive health scare caused by my drinking and was told to ease up, so I did for about two months.

Then we moved to Ballina where a visit to doctor for blood tests told me based on the results to 'drink a glass of stout a night to increase my blood numbers'. This did last a while but then my alcoholic brain kicked in: 'if a glass is good then a bottle must be better?!' My job was not in jeopardy as I was a reliable and good worker.

Then my slide was rapid. I had decided I would give the grog away when the price of a schooner became 50 cents; it was 75 cents the day I had my last drink.

It ended up in a visit to Richmond Clinic at

Lismore Base Hospital after threats from my wife.

This was the first time I had been honest about how much I drank to myself and a health professional. When the Doctor asked how much I drank I gave them the best estimate I could. I was 24-stone, needing 2 scales to weigh me. The doctor gave me some options: inpatient, outpatient, inpatient with AA, AA alone, etc.

I took the inpatient with AA.

So my journey began.

Some wonderful Members sat at my bedside and helped me through

In the Northern Rivers area of NSW there were about five meetings a week, so travel distances were long by today's 'around the corner' standard...get in and get out with no chance to talk to the older sober members or put a hand up for service. (In my opinion there are too many meetings diluting the message and resources of Alcoholic Anonymous.)

In 1981 we moved to Emerald in Central Queensland for work. What a surprise...one meeting a week or a long drive to Alpha or Dysart if you missed the meeting because of work. Then we moved around a bit, ending up on the Sunshine Coast.

This is where things got tricky. My job involved a lot of driving in a four-wheel drive, hot and dusty just the right recipe to bust, covering the bottom half of Queensland and about 150 kms into NSW.

So my meetings dropped off to three a year. I kept in touch with my sponsor and other

members of the Fellowship on a very regular basis. I talked to a lot of Members and their families on the road.

Some local Members on the Sunshine Coast kept saying to me 'you could have a drink way out there in the West and nobody would know',...yeah *but I would* and those close and dear to me would feel the brunt of my changed attitude and behaviour'. You do not know who is watching. My Higher Power and AA members are only around the corner.

I travelled with 3 things: My Higher Power, the Big Book and my Twenty-Four Hours a Day book that I still use today.

I retired 10 years ago and this was a testing time so I filled this time with AA Service and woodworking. I do not need pats on the back as I can see the glint in the eyes of newcomers, and the regular attendance at meetings has kept me going.

It has been a very long journey with highs and lows so today I try to keep my days between the Tropics and as close as I can to the Equator and away from the Poles. The most important thing today is not picking up a drink and to put my head on my pillow, friends with myself so as I can be friends with others.

I had a lot of difficulty doing Zoom meetings. I like to see the whole body share as this tells the full story. Nowhere to hide. There were too many distractions for me.

To the Members in the Bush and nearby who keep the doors open regardless of who rolls up: Thank you.

To the Members who do service without you the Fellowship would not carry on: Thank you.

To my home Group: Thank you.

I still have the same sponsor Long John now living in Warren NSW, so times are tough for him with no Alcoholics in town?! Thank you for being a friend and mentor.

I am still married to the person who could have left at any time during our 48 years. We have a pigeon pair and four grand kids.

Today marks 41 years of Sobriety a day at a time, and sometimes hours and even minutes have had to do to get me to twenty-four hours.

If you are struggling to obtain the gift of

sobriety get in touch with a Member NOW, not sometime in the future as you could miss the boat and die, if you are lucky, or end up in an institution for ____ ???

Your in Fellowship

Jack G, Maroochydore

AA Service: From little things big things grow

David M reflects on what started as very humble beginnings doing service in AA

People said, "It gets better if you keep coming back." So I did.

People said, "Get phone numbers." So I did.

They said, "A problem shared is a problem halved."

And people said that they did service work and that made their recovery easier. So that is what I tried to do.

I washed up the coffee cups after the Meeting. That is where I had my first chat/share in AA.

I was making monthly financial contributions to the Local Court House and saw they had a few empty brochure stands and that they didn't have any information on AA. I asked the clerk if they would like some brochures, to which I heard an almighty roar of a reply: "Alcoholics Anonymous...yes, as much information you can get, YES!!" When I

came back into the office they asked if I had any contact numbers of AAs to call and I did. The clerk then lifted the glass on top of the counter to put the AA contact details permanently under the glass.

I became the Candy Stripper (Supper Person) for my home group and me, being the Alcoholic I am and loving to cook, made toasted sandwiches, party pies, sausage rolls, little boy cocktail frankfurts with sauce and mustard, and prawns on biscuits. This led to more people coming to my home group for the meeting.

I was asked if I would like to go to an area meeting. I was happy to learn more about what I was involved in. I became the GSR (General Service Representative) for the Group. (12 months.)

I became the Area PI & CPC (Public Information & Cooperating with the

Professional Community Coordinator). (Two years.)

I heard people saying, 'Corrections Service... carrying the message behind the Bars is the *cream of service*', and I wanted to have more. So I became the Coordinator of Parramatta Prison AA Service Roster. (Two years.)

During this period I was nominated to be the SGST (Sydney Gaols Service Team) Coordinator. (Two years.)

I was then nominated to be the Eastern Region Corrections Coordinator (NSW). (Two years.)

I have found that I have learned more about the Traditions and Concepts through Service and Good Sponsorship.

David M, Riverstone Australia

Alcoholics Anonymous National Helpline
ph. 1300 222 222

How the Big Book comes to life (continued)

A member reflects on how the passages in the Big Book have come to life

'The broker had gone to Akron on a business venture which had collapsed, leaving him greatly in fear that he might start drinking again.'

*Alcoholics Anonymous,
'Foreword to Second Edition', p. XVI*

Each one of us have things that can send us over the edge. I do everything I can to protect my recovery. I know the book says we can go anywhere, but common sense tells me to not get too cocky and self-reliant.

During a trial and low spot the obsession fleetingly hit me....I was reminded that "the main problem" centres in my mind. From Bill I learned that in order to save himself he must carry his message to another alcoholic. I saw that, God was already doing for me what I could not do for myself, I recoiled as if "burned" and that took me back to deeper inventory for the answer. I realized that I was on the edge of the "subtle insanity" that preceded the first drink. I had been sponsoring others, in service and intuitively knew God had me covered.

Sanity had returned and I thanked God.

The second thought was: 'what would it look like if I drank again?' Death by an alcoholic seizure; a wet brain; suicide; or the least damage possible, that I would lose all my relationships with people I love...I might feel so much guilt and remorse that I might try the "Supreme Sacrifice" and not make it back. I imagined the pain I would cause.

Then the third thought: 'what am I going to

do about it?' Immediately I told a member, and my sponsees, contacting my sponsor and doing a deeper inventory, all of which were crucial....the blank spot had included Step 10 and Review. Because I immediately shared with others what was going on with me, I ended up helping someone else who had been too full of fear to admit they had been on that same "spot".

Bill was right, nothing ensures immunity from drinking than intensive work with other alcoholics.

'Driven by a hundred forms of fear, self-delusion, self-seeking, and self-pity, we step on the toes of our fellows and they retaliate.'

*Alcoholics Anonymous,
'How It Works', p. 62*

And then I get upset because they retaliate! Fear is a motivator for me, just like pain is a motivator.

I cannot afford to have it absolutely paralyse me so deeply that I can't go forward. Can't do the task at hand. Can't help others. I was shocked when I learned procrastination is a fear. I can become deep in that! What it boiled down to was that I was more afraid of succeeding, or doing it and it not being perfect. This caused me to procrastinate, which can lead to the return of my defects and create conflicts with people. That "evil corrosive thread" runs throughout my defects.

Fear can be a merry-go-round for me, and

today it makes me too dizzy to get on it. When I first got sober the fears that faced me in my 4th Step were obvious. They were easy to see and track. After a period of sobriety, they got harder to see and are not so obvious. That's why I continue to use the 10th Steps, Nightly Review, recovered AA friends who walk shoulder to shoulder with me, and also the Traditions.

I need to catch the ones that are so subtle I might just miss them. Sometimes I have to really look for them. What I discovered through working with my sponsor was that I was angry, out of fear.

Anger is one of the first ways my fears express themselves. Once I realize the fear, then I am able to inventory it, pray to have it removed by a spiritual reprieve, then share it with someone. Only then am I able to transmit the full extent of the AA program. Now, I increase my prayer life and know that fear is lack of Faith.

The "Fear prayer" (ask God, 'what would God have me be?') is answered on p. 133 the Big Book. IF there is calamity, I can bear witness to the Power I accessed in Step 3.

*'Sometimes we think fear ought
to be classed with stealing.'*

*Alcoholics Anonymous,
'How It Works', p. 67-68*

Fear is a thief. It robs me of time. As I sit there squandering my spiritual energy worrying about whatever the problem is, I could be out there helping one of God's kids instead of procrastinating over something I can't do anything about. Fear can be associated with Step 1 and my own powerlessness.

It robs me of joy. Sitting in the middle of all that spiritual malady leaves little room for any Light, joy or freedom to enter from the Spiritual realm. The more I squander the hours in that fear, the harder it is to come out of it. It robs me of life.

When I am in the middle of fear, the more I can isolate from everything. But the longer I isolate, the bigger the fear gets until my life is unmanageable all over again.

It robs me of peace.

When I am in a place of fear, all of my

character defects begin to rear their ugly heads. I am alternatively riddled with selfish, self-centred and dishonest behaviours. Anger returns. This is a luxury I simply cannot afford.

In small or big ways, these defects of character all appear in some form or fashion. I edge closer to the bitter morass of self-pity. So then I am faced with a choice; once I realise what has happened – when I recognize the fear and the behaviour – then I have a choice as to how I want to take action:

Am I ready to let it go? Am I sick and tired of the current behaviour? Am I ready to turn whatever it is over to God and do something different? Is the payoff for fear stronger than the pain and unmanageability this is causing me? Am I ready to join the living?

Once I have made my decision, I act on it. If I have decided I no longer want to volunteer for this misery, I take action, and the first action I take is to pray.

We have been given a "fear" prayer on page 68, and I pray that prayer. "God, please remove my fear and direct my attention to what You would have me be."

At once, I commence, begin to, outgrow the fear – my daily reprieve is restored. I call my sponsor and talk about it with another human being. I share with others what has happened to me so they can learn from my experience. I share with others that they, too, can get through times like this without the return of the obsession.

And once again, this "thief" has been put behind bars. But mind you, if I begin to go down the dark alleys and side streets of my mind, back down those dangerous paths that are not lit by God's Grace and Power, fear will be there. Waiting, watching. And if I am not paying attention, It will try to steal from me once more.

Anonie-Mouse



Consider printing me off!

If you're enjoying this edition of The Mixer, you might like to print off a few copies for your home group!

If your home group hasn't returned to face-to-face, you could always send a copy to another member by email, or encourage them to contact editor@aamixer.com to get added to the email list for future editions.

Why Bill W visited Dr Bob...

Not much has changed for us AAs since Bill W made 'that' call from the Mayflower

"You recall the story about Bill having had a spiritual experience and having been sold on the idea of attempting to be helpful to other drunks. Time went by, and he had not created a single convert, not one. As we express it, no one had jelled. He worked tirelessly, with no thought of saving his own strength or time, but nothing seemed to register.

"When he came out to Akron on a business mission, which (perhaps for the good of all of us) turned out to be quite a flop, he was tempted to drink. He paced up and down the lobby of the Mayflower Hotel, wondering whether he had better buy two fifths of gin and be "king for a night," as he expressed it, or whether he had better not. His teachings led him to believe that he possibly might avoid difficulties if he found another alcoholic on whom to work."

(From Dr Bob's last major talk, Copyright © by A.A. Grapevine, Inc. reprinted in the AA Pamphlet, 'Co-Founders of Alcoholics Anonymous')

My sponsor would often ask me a question through my early years, 'why did Bill W. visit Dr Bob?' The answer of course was, not to get Dr Bob sober, but to keep Bill W. sober. As Dr Bob reveals in his last major talk, despite Bill W.'s 'hot flash spiritual experience', five months later Bill was pacing up and down the lobby of the Mayflower Hotel in Akron, his business deal having fallen through, hearing the chink of glasses and sounds of conviviality coming from the bar and thinking he might "buy two fifths of gin and be king for a night" – an expression that has an authentic, familiar ring to it and is likely to be

something Bill told Dr Bob the next day when they met for the first time.

I have heard that it was actually his wife Lois's voice that came to him in that moment: Bill had been complaining to Lois back in New York before going to Akron that he had not sobered up one single drunk amongst the many he had tried to help over the previous five months since his legendary hot flash spiritual experience. Lois had pointed out, that one person who had stayed sober all that time was Bill himself! So, in that lobby of the Mayflower, Bill realised that he needed another drunk to tell his story to – not to get that drunk sober, but to keep himself sober. To me, this is the crucial moment in Bill's sobriety, and in the conception of AA: the moment Bill shifted from being an evangelist, who had been 'saved' and was trying to save others, to being a drunk who had found a way to stay sober, a day at a time, that involved intensive ongoing work with other alcoholics.

Dr Bob, meanwhile, had had all manner of well-meaning people offering advice and trying to help him get sober, also without any success. But when he went to meet Bill, in spite of a terrific hangover and a solemn promise from his wife Anne "that 15 minutes of this stuff would be tops", Dr Bob ended up sitting there for several hours engrossed in conversation with this stranger from New York who understood. We who have sobered up in AA all know this experience well – the magic of honesty and identification, one alcoholic sharing with another. Dr Bob goes on to say, in his last major talk:

"You wouldn't have listened to anybody unless he really had something to tell you.

I recognized the fact that Bill did have something, so I listened those many hours, and I stopped drinking immediately....

"Now the interesting part of all this is not the sordid details, but the situation that we two fellows were in. We had both been associated with the Oxford Group, Bill in New York, for five months, and I in Akron, for two and a half years. Bill had acquired their idea of service. I had not, but I had done an immense amount of reading they had recommended. I had refreshed my memory of the Good Book, and I had had excellent training in that as a youngster. They told me I should go to their meetings regularly, and I did, every week. They said that I should affiliate myself with some church, and we did that. They also said I should cultivate the habit of prayer, and I did that – at least, to a considerable extent for me. But I got tight every night, and I mean that. It wasn't once in a while – it was practically every night.

"I couldn't understand what was wrong. I had done all the things that those good people told me to do. I had done them, I thought, very faithfully and sincerely. And I still continued to overindulge. But the one thing that they hadn't told me was the one thing that Bill did that Sunday – attempt to be helpful to somebody else.

"We immediately started to look around for prospects..."

If one substitutes 'AA' practices in place of Dr Bob's references to the Oxford Group, the 'Good Book', meetings and prayer etc., an interesting suggestion arises from Dr Bob's reflections here: that it was service – trying to

carry the message to other alcoholics – that worked, where all else failed. In our Big Book, the same point is suggested (p. 89):

'Practical experience shows that nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics. It works when other activities fail. This is our twelfth suggestion: Carry this message to other alcoholics! You can help when no one else can. You can secure their confidence when others fail. Remember they are very ill.'

This is what happened when Bill W. first visited Dr Bob: he kept himself sober by trying to carry the message to another alcoholic; and the reason Dr Bob stayed much longer than 15 minutes was because in telling his story Bill was telling Dr Bob's story, and securing his confidence. Bill was able to help where others failed because he talked the language of the heart, as Dr Bob related in his story in the Big Book (p. 179):

"...he was the first living human with whom I had ever talked, who knew what he was talking about in regard to alcoholism from actual experience. In other words, he talked my language."

This type of 12th step work can be done by anyone who has surrendered, who has admitted and accepted that they are an alcoholic, and who has become open-minded to change and then committed themselves to the programme of Alcoholics Anonymous: the spiritual awakening mentioned in Step 12 begins the moment we start practicing the Steps. And it is often the newcomer, a few months sober like Bill W was in 1935 when he first visited Dr Bob, who is most able to connect with someone who is totally new to AA. This was pointed out to me in my early sobriety, and I have noticed it many times since over twenty years of AA service. Long-time sober members of AA

bring a wealth of experience of practising all the 12 Steps and living sober; but for that initial connection that brings new members into AA, you can't beat someone in early sobriety who has accepted their alcoholism – sharing their experience, strength and hope – and who can vividly express what it is like in early days and how to stay sober today, and for 90 days.

For me, the lesson of Bill's and Dr Bob's story is that we need to get to work from the very beginning, looking for opportunities to try to carry the message of experience, strength and hope, if we are going to stay sober. Bill himself, in his story in Chapter One of the Big Book, writes that in early days there were "waves of self-pity and resentment. This sometimes nearly drove me back to drink, but I soon found that when all other measures failed, work with another alcoholic would save the day." I have had the same experience, many times. For example, I was once very ill in early sobriety from medical treatment (Interferon and Ribavirin, for Hepatitis C), and had barely been able to leave my bed for two weeks (a flat mate had been bringing me food), when I got a phone call from the local central service office (CSO) asking if I could do a 12th step visit to an AA member in hospital in intensive care who had just come back from a bust. No one else the CSO had rung could do the call that day. I had a rule in those days never to knock back a 12th step call, so I showered and dressed and set off to the city on the bus. I came away from that 30 minute chat with the returned AA member feeling completely, miraculously rejuvenated, full of energy; and never again during the remainder of that year-long medical treatment did I need to rest in bed – in fact, I went back to doing shifts in the CSO that day, and kept doing shifts for the several months left of the medical

treatment. The day before my final dose of the treatment, I was given the opportunity to go for a day's sailing on a tall ship on Sydney Harbour, helping to sail the ship. We ended up going out through the Heads for a while, and on the way back through the Heads and up the Harbour, I was sent up to the right of the topgallant of the foremast to furl the sails: a real gift, an exhausting but truly exhilarating experience (especially as I have an absolute terror of heights because of a climbing incident when I was 11 years old). That I was able to do this at the end of a year of that treatment is testament to the power of 12th step work, "the wonderful energy it releases" (*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, Step 12*). I found a stanza from a poem by W H Auden (from 'The Age of Anxiety'*) that I thought summed up my alcoholism and what I faced during that experience of the medical treatment and facing my fears during that period:

*We would rather be ruined than changed;
We would rather die in our dread
Than climb the cross of the moment
And let our illusions die.*

The service work I have done over the years has changed; but the principle stays the same: I need to keep trying to carry the message to others, because by doing so I stay sober myself - a day at a time - I pass on what was given to me, and I find out what I can do. Some members say, 'if you really want to get into the Steps, get into a relationship'. I prefer, 'if you want to get into the Steps, do service in AA' – you will have plenty of opportunities to work your programme!

*(3) W.H. Auden, *Collected Poems* (New York: Random House, 2007), 530.

Brad S, Melbourne Rise and Shine

AA in Australia - the early days

An excerpt from the book Castle of Shadows by AA Australia Pioneer, Archie McKinnon

(We continue from last edition, as we heard how sober member Rex's apartment in Bligh House was being used as the makeshift offices and meeting place of AAs, but not without its challenges: Rex would often come home to an apartment full of drunks, and his money and clothes had a habit of disappearing...)

Besides, the landlord of Bligh House was becoming troublesome. He could not understand the peculiar set-up in the ground-floor apartment. The tenant did not drink, yet his friends never seemed to be sober. The latter drank all day while Rex was at work and the noise and boisterous behaviour disturbed the tenants in the other apartments. The landlord made no secret of the fact that he wanted to rid himself of the whole A.A. outfit.

So on August 28th, 1945, we moved from Bligh House, leaving it to the hard-case drunks, psychotics and convict ghosts. Rex went with us. This move was really a flight from our alcoholic hangers-on, for they had milked us dry both financially and emotionally, and no good had come out of our association with them. We moved into rooms at the Toc H building in Walker Street North Sydney.

Some months later, however, Rex was accepted back at his old apartment, on the condition that his visitors would be non-alcoholics. We were now joined by a new member named Vince, who had for some years been a regular patient at the Reception House, and occasionally an inmate of the Lidcombe State Home.

The Group now consisted of Rex, Ben, Norman, Wally, Jack, Vince, Doc Minogue, Jack's wife Mary, my wife Dulcie, Father Dunlea and myself, though in a short time we had again attracted to ourselves a number of hard-case transient alcoholics.

At our first meeting at Toc H we tried to bring some order into our affairs by electing a committee. Father Tom was made patron, Jack was elected secretary and Mary treasurer, although our funds were so minute that they hardly needed anyone to look after them.

Things soon began to change for the better, for we commenced getting new and obviously sincere members. These included Dave, a dentist; Ron, a wharf labourer; and Victor, a labourer who was also a Rechabite.

Dave was a quiet, reserved type of man who remained sober for long periods, but when drinking, his work became neglected. During these periods, his wife sold insurance to support the family. The periods of sobriety increased until at last he attained permanent sobriety.

Ron the wharf labourer was an active and intelligent man who got on the programme and became an asset to the Group. Victor had been a secret drinker and had fooled his Rechabite associates for years, but had eventually decided to do something practical about his problem.

As we settled down to regular meetings, we began getting more members who stayed with us. The first of the newcomers was Russ, who called to see me at the House

on September 11th, 1945. He appeared to be quite sincere in his enquiries, but his appearance and general health were so bad that we referred him to a physician for treatment. It was quite a long time before he was well enough to take part in group activities.

Later, he developed a talent for rehabilitation work and was always on call to assist new prospects. All through, he was helped and encouraged by his wife Dorothy, and together they developed into a husband and wife team that in the following years travelled all over Australia helping new groups.

With Russ and Dorothy came Eileen, a non-alcoholic with an alcoholic husband. Eileen came to a number of meetings before she could induce the reluctant Fred to come too. After a few preliminary benders Fred, who was a chemist, got on the programme and has remained with A.A. ever since.

Here at Toc H Dr. Minogue inaugurated a rather clinical approach to new members by interviewing them in the formal psychiatric manner, in an attempt to gauge their suitability for the A.A. programme

After a lengthy trial of this approach, he abandoned it, as it yielded no positive results of any kind – in fact, all it appeared to demonstrate was the inconsistency of alcoholic behaviour.

The slow growth of the group had worried Dr. Minogue and myself for some time, and I suffered much anxiety over it. We had A.A. off the ground, but keeping it aloft was the problem. An oppressive feeling of urgency

was always with me, and I would not miss a meeting in case of some development that might break up the group.

We were all depressed by the untimely death of Vince, whom we had all liked. He had started to drink again and no one could find him. Eventually his body was discovered at Cowan, then a remote bush area to the north of Sydney.

My worries about the slow growth of the group were needless, however, for it was following a similar pattern to that of the first A.A. group at Akron, Ohio, twelve years earlier, and our subsequent growth over the next few years quite duplicated that of the mother group in the U.S.A. But just then I felt that we could do with assistance from someone who could bring us new contacts, since so many of our prospects from the Reception House seemed beyond help.

Finally, I decided to approach Frank Sturge

Harty, a well-known radio personality of that time whose voice was familiar to me over the air, although I had never met him. He conducted a session on 2GB, Sydney, called "Let's Talk It Over", in which those with family, social, personal or even personality problems – in fact, people with any problem at all – wrote to him, and he advised them, over the air and by post, on how to deal with their troubles. Many of the problems presented to him concerned alcoholism.

Jack was with me the day I first called upon Sturge Harty, and we suggested that he might be able to help us. To our surprise, we found that he was quite familiar with Alcoholics Anonymous, having put the American A.A. story over radio in 1944, but had been unaware that there was an A.A. group functioning in Australia. He was delighted to help us and came to his first meeting at the Toc H building on November 26th, 1945, and very soon became a regular

speaker.

It was at that meeting of 26th November that we were joined by another non-alcoholic who was to influence profoundly the course and behaviour of our group, and indeed of all Australian A.A. as long as he lived. This was Father Richard Murphy, a Jesuit priest from St. Mary's, North Sydney. He was an intellectual, a great gentleman, a noted theologian, and he brought to that tiny struggling group of alcoholics all the benefits of his highly-trained mind.

He encouraged us when things looked dark, and smoothed over the differences of opinion which inevitably arose, for there was a lot of conflict of opinion in the first Australian group of A.A.

See more from Archie McKinnon's book, *Castle of Shadows*, in future editions of The Mixer

Until next time!

Like they say, 'remember, you can put down this edition of The Mixer and never have to drink again - one day at a time.'

Well, something like that anyway!

We'll be back with a new edition soon. Until then, discover previous editions online at aamixer.com, and feel free to get in touch at editor@aamixer.com