

THE **alternative**

www.readingberksintergroup.org

MAY 2010

NEWSLETTER OF THE READING-BERKS INTERGROUP OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

NEWS & notes

Twin Valley Group Offers New Beginners Meeting

On Monday, May 3 the Twin Valley Group initiated a Beginners Meeting coupled with their regular 7:30 pm meeting at the Morgantown Community Church, Rt. 23 & Twin Valley Road, Morgantown PA. That's right... same place, same time, two meetings!

As COH Round Up Nears More Volunteers Needed

With 50 reservations already taken for the second annual Circle of Hope Roundup Speakers conference in Reading, committee members are busy and are looking for additional volunteers as the three-day event draws near.

Scheduled for June 4 through 6 at the Perkins Auditorium of Penn State Berks Campus, the conference will feature a number of guest AA and Alanon speakers from across the country.

Registration forms are available online at www.CircleOfHopeRoundup.com.

Teeing Off for Serenity At Annual Golf Outing

The Second Annual Lancaster County Serenity Golf Outing will be held June 5 at 1 pm at the Overbrook Golf Course, Rt. 501 North in Lancaster. This will be a shotgun start. Check-in is at 12 noon. Cost is \$200 per team (4-man scramble). Food, prizes, and fun are included.

Make checks payable to LCSGO, and mail to c/o Don Ulmer, 216 Fieldcrest Ln., Ephrata, PA 17522.

For more info call Don Ulmer at 717-598-5864 or Matt Leisure at 717-781-6991.



From Simple Beginnings Leesport Group to Mark 28 Years

The Leesport Group of AA will be celebrating their 28th Anniversary on Saturday, May 15 at the Trinity Union Church in Leesport. The anniversary is an open meeting, so feel free to bring family and friends.

Festivities begin at 8 pm with food and fellowship featuring guest speaker, Joe R. from Philadelphia.

The group will hold its regular weekly meeting at 9:30 pm following the festivities. Trinity Union Church is located on Rt. 61 next to the car wash.

Here is an excerpt from the group's history:

Why was the group started?

Frank G. needed a meeting everyday and wanted a local meeting on Saturday night. He couldn't get to a meeting because he baby sat. He lived in the apartment house near the church where the Leesport Group eventually met. His wife worked until 9 on a Saturday night. Once the meeting place was secured, the meeting time was set at 9:30 pm so his wife could pick up their



daughter at the church on her way home from work.

Did your group encounter any special problems or growing pains?

As with a lot of groups, (we were) heading nowhere because of having few or no group officers, lack of knowledge of the

Traditions, people holding offices in more than one group, no real home group structure, lack of business meetings etc.

Then, due to the group's GSR persistence and enthusiasm about a group inventory, the Leesport Group held it's first group inventory on November 22, 1992. The group was restructured according to the guidelines suggested in our A.A. literature, in particular, *The A.A. Group*.

Through trial and error a lot of changes came about after the first inventory meeting.

(Ed. Note: The Leesport Group currently offers babysitting at their weekly meetings.)

RBI To Host Day of Softball Fun

On Saturday, May 29 RBI will stand for Runs Batted In, and the only thing loaded will be the bases as the Intergroup hosts a fun-filled day of softball, food and fellowship.

The games are set to take place from 1 to 5 pm at Morningstar Fellowship, 100 Limekiln Rd., Bechtelsville. So grab you bats, mitts, balls, families, sponsors, sponsorees and get ready to play ball! There is no rain date for the event. Call Carrie C. at 610-404-1518.



Archive Committee Seeks Volunteers

The Archive Committee of RBI, having been tasked with compiling and organizing the histories of area groups among other things, is looking for a few volunteers to assist in their mission. The committee meets the second and fourth Sundays of each month and provides an excellent means of service as well as gaining some insight into the founding and development of the fellowship in our area. Persons interested in joining can call Henry, chairperson, at 484-794-6363

June RBI Meeting Rescheduled

Due to a scheduling conflict, the June monthly meeting of the Reading-Berks Intergroup has been rescheduled for Tuesday, June 29. The meeting will still be held at the Calvary Baptist Church, 510 Park Ave. in Reading at beginning 7:30 pm.

READING-BERKS INTERGROUP

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commitments INTERGROUP TWELFTH STEP

Caron Adolescent Extended Care - Men Sundays 7 pm

May 2 Caron Alumni
May 9 Leesport Group
May 16 Robeson Group
May 23 Happy Hour Group
May 30 Lifeline Group
June 6 Caron Alumni

Wernersville State Hosp. See Guard in Building 34 Mondays 7 pm

May 3 Robeson Group
May 10 CCC
May 17 Gibraltar Group
May 24 New Life Group
May 31 Hilltop Group
June 7 Sober at Six

Reading Detox Unit Every Other Tuesday 8 pm

May 4 Walnut St. Group
May 18 New Life Group
June 1 Wyomissing Group

Reading Detox Unit Thursdays 8 pm

May 6 Shillington Lifeline
May 13 New Millenium Group
May 20 Birdsboro Group
May 27 Congo Group
June 4 Walnut St. Group

*I am responsible, when anyone, anywhere
reaches out for help I want the hand of
AA always to be there, and for that...
I am responsible!!*

Caron Adolescent Extended Care - Women Sundays 7 pm

May 2 Caron Alumni
May 9 Happy Hour Group
May 16 Women's Sat. Morning
May 23 Morgantown Group
May 3 Walnut St. Group
June 6 Caron Alumni

St. Joe's Hospital MH Unit 3rd Floor Reed & Walnut Sts. Mondays 7:30 pm

May 3 Walnut St. Group
May 10 Alpha Group
May 17 Congo Group
May 24 Walnut St. Group
May 31 Robeson Group
June 7 Alpha Group

Caron Foundation Thursdays 8 pm

May 6 Hilltop Group
May 13 611 Washington St. Group
May 20 Robeson Group
May 27 YASNY Group
June 3 New Berlinville Group

Caron Foundation Young Adult Female Fridays 8 pm

May 7 Women's Sat. Morning
May 14 Sober at Six
May 21 New Life Group
May 28 Sober at Six
June 4 Women's Sat. Morning.

If you take a commitment for your group, make sure the person agreeing to go has a substitute if they can't make it. If you would like to go to the St. Joe's meeting, contact the hospital first to see if there are any alcoholics there: 610-378-2092. *When sending group members to commitments, it's great to double up! Send a newer and an older member, and everyone will benefit!! PLEASE make sure that someone honors the commitment that you take for your group.*

These may be the only meetings that the patients may have. Remember, "You Are Responsible", when you commit your time. PLEASE don't let these commitments go unattended. If you cannot make your commitment please notify Steve at 610-750-4019.

On the 5th Step...

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

We have made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves; at least we have tried, and even though our first efforts at this sort of thing are far off the mark, we have come up with an ugly assortment of defects of character and shortcomings. Were we to stop at this point, that is after completing the 4th Step, there would be nothing for us to do but get very drunk in order to forget it all.

Our program, however, provides for carrying on the process to recovery and this 5th Step is an important link between the recognition of our faults and their correction.

The 5th Step encourages us to think of our faults in specific terms and helps us to be honest in our thinking by requiring us to consider our faults from several viewpoints. We consider how God regards a fault, how our neighbor regards it, how we ourselves regard it, and we force ourselves to take a position on how we will act in the future.

Further, by admitting to someone else the exact nature of our wrongs we are doing something about them, not just sitting and bemoaning them. We are practicing humility and recognizing our dependence on others which helps us to overcome the self-obsession that was leading us to destroy ourselves.

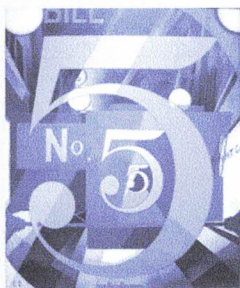
All of this is another way of saying that confession is good for the soul. It is one of the earliest discovered spiritual laws and its observance is just as necessary to our well-being as observances of any of the natural laws we take for granted.

The only reason for attempting to analyze how it works is to make clear why it should be a continuing process. Our spiritual development proceeds in a spiral. The first time around the circuit, or through the Steps, we accomplish much, learning more about the preceding Steps as we perform each subsequent one.

Because we learn something that is applicable to an earlier Step after we have passed it we are impelled to make the circuit again to apply our greater knowledge. We move on a slightly more advanced level the second time around, but again we recognize development as we proceed and we know that we're in a position to do a still better job than formerly--and so the spiral continues--onward and upward and ever away from the kind of thinking that leads to the first drink.

Bob D.
Garden City, Long Island, New York

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Exactly What Happened

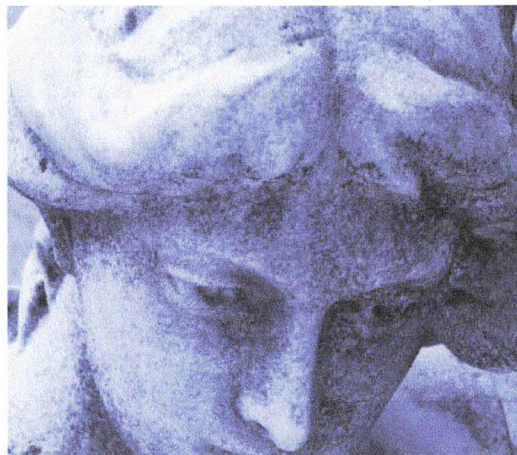
"Having made our personal inventory, what shall we do about it?" So begins the discussion of Step Five in chapter six of the Big Book.

In one of the early issues of the Grapevine, the author of a piece on this Step described it as a link between recognizing our faults (Fourth) and doing something to correct them (Sixth and Seventh).

By the time we come to this Step, it seems to me, we ought to have encountered and begun to deal with the idea of a Power greater than ourselves. When I find myself balking again, because the Step involves further discourse with God, the signal is clear that it's time to backtrack. Let me return to the earlier Steps and do a little more groundwork. With time, I began to find it comparatively easy to make admissions to God. My God is eager to understand and to forgive, so eager that it becomes easy for me to misinterpret his love, and to overlook his request for rigorous honesty (the basic requirement, incidentally, for sobriety itself).

I sometimes take God for granted. I tell myself that he knows all and it is not necessary to make any admission to him. But that isn't so. It is entirely necessary to take God into my confidence. I ought, also, to take good, reasonable care in my choice of the human being I'll be sharing my Fifth Step with. One aspect of the Step that still delights and reassures me is the use of the words "another human being." By implication, the Step is telling me that I, too, am a human being. I believe it today, but it was news when I first came in. I had long ceased to regard myself as a human being. I had lost my claim to humanity. I had next to no moral values left.

Ideals, ethics, and virtue had fallen by the wayside. In the end it was the most difficult action imaginable to reach out for anyone's help. Finally, I reached out to AA, and made my first



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admission of powerlessness. It was also my first attempt to admit the exact nature of my most fundamental defect: that I drank too much for too long, and by my drinking had ruined my life.

But the part of the Step that gave me the most trouble, and still does, occasionally, is the last part, "the exact nature of our wrongs." Even after reading the "Twelve and Twelve" and listening to lots of Step talk, I could not grasp the significance of the phrase "exact nature." It took a crisis situation in the life of a friend to bring it home to me. In my

attempt to console my friend, I heard myself say, "Tell me exactly what happened."

So it is with this Step. For example, it is not enough to admit that I was a home-wrecker. If I am to be released from the burden of guilt, if I am to be strengthened against further indulgence in my old weakness, I must admit to God, to myself, and to another human being exactly what happened in each case of home-wrecking. I ought also be willing to admit to situations where I might not have caused a split but did actually damage the foundations of a home.

In order to derive full benefit from the Fifth Step, I like to think about the exact nature of my recovery. I was not able to quit drinking and begin recovery all by myself. I needed lots of help. Along with so many others I can say that I got the message of AA through the grace of God, just as through the healing grace of AA I got the message of God.

And I like to think about those messages. The one tells me of a way out of the drinking problem; the other, of a way out of the bondage of despair.

W. H., New York, New York

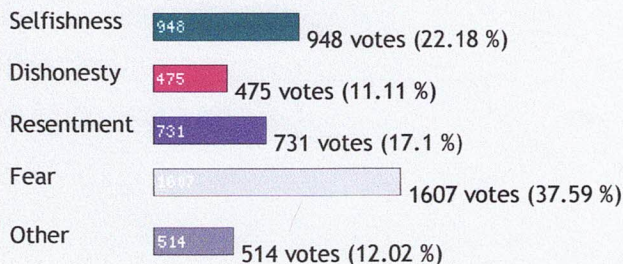
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GRAPEVINE POLL

Results from recent
Grapevine Magazine reader polls

Question: *What do you consider your number one character defect?*

Total Responded: 4275





The Welcoming Spring

No Matter How Long Our Winter, Spring Is Sure To Follow

New spiritual roots



But some of me is praying a little, asking that these tiny plants be blessed with strong roots and hardy growth.

THE WHITE dogwood flowers look like snow against the new green of the sweet gums and pin oaks. Azaleas splash bright red, orange, and hot pink among the softer cherry and crabapple blossoms. It is my second sober spring, and I am still surprised at the generous color and the newness of it all. I am grateful to see it, and wonder aloud with friends whether it's always been here, each spring as beautiful as this. "Welcome back to the world," they say.

Yet while I am awed and inspired by the season, deep in my heart I hold a secret. It is painful and I am ashamed of it. Yet it is a simple, common, alcoholic secret. One day during a quiet afternoon AA meeting, among those who know me well, I tearfully share my secret. Yes, I say, I love the beauty of spring, and the beauty of the program, and sobriety, and my wonderful support system. But I still don't feel a part of, or connected to, the power that created all of this. You tell me it is so, and I believe you! But I don't feel it inside me, and I am afraid I never will.

They nod, those AA miracles, and give me their love, their experience, strength, and hope. First, dwelling on negativity will not help. The better way might be to continue to believe, and the feelings will come as we continue to work the Steps. The Steps give us the feelings of worthiness, and help us feel the conscious contact.

Someone points to Appendix II of the Big Book, saying that for him, this feeling was a spiritual experience and has been of "the educational variety." He laughs, too, and says he was grateful his spiritual experiences have been "mercifully subtle."

They say that we are striving for progress, and so we do not always feel in perfect accord with our Creator. And mostly, they remind me to be patient, to keep coming back, and to trust that it works. I feel comforted and clearer somehow.

I think of these things on Saturday while I am planting new seedlings in the garden. Some of me is complaining about the hard work, and how bad my back feels. Some of me is in the future, thinking about how the garden will look in summer, and how I can show off my hard work. But some of me is praying a little, asking that these tiny plants be blessed with strong roots and hardy growth.

A phrase from the Big Book comes to mind as I pat another seedling into place, "his roots grasped new soil." It was Bill W. talking about Ebby T. I laugh and think of all these little plants, like a bunch of AAs, all in new soil, all growing.

I feel silly, laughing like that alone in the gar-



den, but still smiling, I dig another hole and notice, to my surprise, how warm and rich the soil feels. Holding the dirt in my hands, somehow my heart fills up with that warm, rich feeling. And even though I am smiling, I feel tears, too. Another phrase comes into my head, this one from a poem by Edna St. Vincent Millay: "God, I can push the grass apart, and lay my finger on Thy Heart." And I feel, finally, that what you told me is the real truth, and I am not alone in the garden.

June 1987, Vol. 44 No. 1

Springtime Regained

MANY OF us in AA remember all too well the lost Spring times of our drinking years. We recall the sadness we felt when belated awareness dawned on us that Spring's gorgeous curtain-raiser had come and gone and, again, we were not there to see it. Sometimes it seemed in our alcoholic thinking that the whole world was passing us by.

But no longer. Now we enjoy Spring's annual show from start to finish. For this pageant of renewing life, which has always been a miracle to humble men, has become a part and a symbol of the miracle that touched us in AA.



As we look forward to enjoyment of the new drama soon to begin outside the window let us remind ourselves of an insight we have found.

And this we know, too: that the life-renewing processes of nature, which happen in Springtime to burst in cascades of color all around us, also flow unceasingly in hidden ways all year round. The tender, unfolding leaf of Spring was made and tucked into its bud during the sere and yellow season of Autumn. Each season and each day contributes to the continuing miracle of life outdoors. That is God's twenty-four-hour plan for things that grow.

As we look forward to enjoyment of the new drama soon to begin outside the window let us remind ourselves of an insight we have found. We know now, in AA, that energizing, life-giving sources also now unceasingly for the human spirit, and can be made to work for us twenty-four hours a day all around the year.

March 1959, Vol. 15 No.

Birth month of AA

WITH THIS month of May, there is across the northern half of a troubled world the full bloom of mid-Spring. The long testing of undecided March has been weathered; the confused tears of April have been profusely shed; and the steadfast skies of the fifth month look down, upon all who will see, with a promise of serenity.

The unmanageable Winter has proven powerless over the returning warmth and the clear light of the sun. The goodness of the life impulse stirs, no matter how acid the soil; and the weakest root grows new strength to break through in the eternal miracle of growth and reaching upward.

This is the birth month of AA.

It was in May that two men who had suffered long years of the barren winterhood of alcoholism met and enjoined themselves into this fellowship that has become another miracle of growth and reaching upward for tens of thousands of us. That May, 1935 was the beginning of the end of the swirling storms, for in June Dr. Bob found his sobriety.

Let us all, young or old in AA, rededicate this birth month. . . in the admission of the First Step those two founders took. . . in the belief and the decision that came next in that Springtime. . . in the weeding out and the cleansing and the regeneration of the next steps. . . in the diligence and selflessness of the Eleventh Step. . . and finally in the action of the Twelfth Step.

Let us so mark AA's birth month of May. Let us be strong in this flowering time that we have found. . . that those still in Winter's darkness may through us glimpse a time of light again.

May 1953, Vol. 9 No. 12

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Volunteers Still Needed

The Archive Committee of RBI, having been tasked with compiling and organizing the histories of area groups among other things, is looking for a few volunteers to assist in their mission. The committee meets the second and fourth Sundays of each month. Call Henry, chairperson, at 484-794-6363.

Volunteers are also needed for our Bridging the Gap efforts. Individuals are needed to serve as 'Contacts', writing to soon-to-be released prisoners via a P.O. Box and following up with them post release meeting assistance etc. Contact Terry at Bridging-Gap@ReadingBerksIntergroup.Org.

Oley Group Plans Anniversary Night

The Oley Group will be commemorating their anniversary on Tuesday, June 15 at Friedens Lutheran Church, Rt. 72 in Oley.

The evening will begin with coffee and cake at 7pm with guest speaker Lucy to follow at 8 pm.

Intergroup Meeting Rescheduled in June

Due to a scheduling conflict, the June monthly meeting of the Reading-Berks Intergroup has been rescheduled for Tuesday, June 29. The meeting will still be held at the Calvary Baptist Church, 510 Park Ave. in Reading at 7:30 pm.

Dist. 67 Annual Picnic

District 67 will be holding their 13th Annual Picnic on Sunday, Aug., 29 from noon to 5 pm at Gibraltar Park, in Gibraltar, PA.

Hot dogs and hamburgers will be provided, and picnic goers asked to bring a covered dish. Donations are requested. Speakers begin at 2 pm, with 50/50 and other raffles going on during the day. Sorry, no pets.

Jumping Off That Noisy Bus

by Kris
Congo Big Book Group

Practicing these principles. We hear this phrase so often and like everything else in this program, it sounds so simple but it is not so easy. By the time we get to step five we have identified most of those fatal flaws we call defects of character. Knowing what drives our particular bus, we now have the freedom, but more importantly the responsibility, to make the choice of whether we go down the same dead end roads that lead us to futility, bitterness, resentment and alcohol.

Brought face to face with our defects we realize we are not capable of releasing ourselves from their strangling hold. They are overwhelming — a lifetime of knee-jerk reactions we must reckon with, or die trying.

For me personally, I know I'm in trouble when my noise level goes up.

If my lips are moving, I am not listening.

If I am angry, I can't see the situation clearly.

If I am despairing, I rob myself of the energy to see the situation clearly and deal with it effectively.

If I am self-righteous, I am forgetting how well I can screw things up.

If I am needy, then I am empty, and there is only One who can fill my cup.

Sharing

OUR READERS WRITE

I have to take that responsibility to turn to my HP who knows my needs and is in the process of meeting them, whether I can see it or not.

Instead of jumping on that noisy bus on the road to nowhere with all of my character defects, I can choose to just stand there and wait for the answers, and so I have. Sometimes I take a short spin around the block, but more and more often I choose to wait.

It takes some getting used to, mostly due to my fear of what others will think, since we live in a world that values self-direction, and waiting for direction from "out there" qualifies for a mental health commitment! But I can listen now, and follow direction, so I stand there, pray and I wait.

While I am waiting I begin to see more clearly the things behind the patterns, the real drivers of the situation.

While I am waiting, I can more clearly see that the things that are

happening in my life are not random, NOT at all.

While I am waiting, I can Dispassionately (not uncaringly) take a real look at the behaviors of others and See the truth of the matter.

Sometimes it's great to see the truth about a Defect and be suddenly relieved of it - poof - gone.

Other times seeing the truth means that making things right will be arduous and life changing.

To thine own self be true. Anything less and it's game over, John Barleycorn collects another soul.



Sharing

OUR READERS WRITE

We at the Alternative strongly encourage our readers to share their stories of experience, strength and hope. Submissions can be

mailed to P.O. Box 12157, Reading, PA 19612, or emailed to Alternative@ReadingBerksIntergroup.Org.

Please include your name and a contact number, phone or email so we can verify the submission. Also please include the group to which you may be affiliated. Names will be withheld from publication upon request.

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Every Other Tuesday 8 pm**

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Thursdays 8 pm**

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*I am responsible, when anyone,
anywhere reaches out for help I
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**Caron Adolescent
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**St. Joe's Hospital MH Unit
3rd Floor Reed & Walnut Sts.
Mondays 7:30 pm***

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June 14 Congo Big Book Group
June 21 Alpha Group
June 28 611 Washington St. Group
July 5 Alpha Group

**Caron Foundation
Thursdays 8 pm**

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June 17 Advent Men's Group
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**Caron Foundation
Young Adult Female
Fridays 8 pm**

June 4 Women's Sat. Morning
June 11 Walnut St. Group
June 18 Boyertown Group
June 25 Women's Sat. Morning
July 2 Hilltop Group

*Note New Time for St. Joe's Monday Meetings.
Call 610-378-2000 and ask for Berkshire Pavilion before going.

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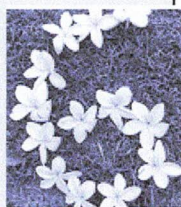
The Alternative is published monthly by the Reading-Berks Intergroup of Alcoholics Anonymous. Serving Districts 33, 66, and 67 of Delegate Area 59—Eastern Pennsylvania. Reach us by mail at P.O. Box 12157, Reading, PA 19612, or you can email us at

Alternative@ReadingBerksIntergroup.org

On the 6th Step...

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

This step is most important because here we are ready for God (as we understand Him) to walk along with us and guide us as we seek to improve our character and eliminate the defects which contributed to our alcoholic problem.



With God's help we'll now apologize quickly when we are curt to others. We'll overcome our resentments. We'll become humble and remember it's our own character we want to improve, not the character of others. We'll remember that as we aren't perfect we haven't any particular right to be critical toward others.

We'll ask quickly for help each time we are aware of wrong thinking and whenever we begin to feel sorry for ourselves. When we wish to judge others, we'll remember that not so long ago we were in no position to judge anyone.

Resentments, our biggest stumbling block, can be dropped right here. Resentments against those who loved us and tried to help us; resentments against the boss, against our fellow-worker, and all the million other little and big resentments must be turned over to a higher power.

At a later date, as our character becomes sound, we'll find that these resentments disappear.

We must ask God to help us understand others.

It takes a continued program of doing and thinking our best each day to lead us ahead, out into the open, where we can join the company of our fellow men.

The same help we seek in dealing with our alcoholic problem must be used to overcome our other defects. Knowing our problem is in God's hands will give us serenity and peace of mind.

In other words, we will turn our will over to God, asking that His will be done, and we'll work on our defects one by one as they make themselves known to us.

***We'll become humble and
remember it's our own
character we want to improve,
not the character of others.***

Mark H., Buffalo, New York

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That Simple Sixth Step

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without them.*

I have talked to many people in AA who have had, or are having, great difficulties with Step Six, myself included. Step Six suggests: "Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character."

"Too simple," I said, "much too simple! Can't possibly work that way." And once again I was immediately in trouble, for this is what I did:

"I'll just put Steps Six and Seven together and get this over with," I said. "Bill W. was just trying to stretch these principles out to twelve because he was superstitious or something."

Here I made my first mistake. I was "asking" before I was "ready." It didn't work that way for me and still doesn't. I had to become ready first, and this Step provides the proving ground for that to happen.

Sometimes my decision to let go of a defect is quick because of the intense pain it causes me. But other defects are more subtle and I actually enjoy the sick kind of excitement and color they add to my life. I hate the "defect" but I love the "effect."

These, I found, will take me a long time to let go of. A lot of pain and praying for willingness will be required. I try to accept this part of myself, share it with others, seek progress in these areas of my life, and move on in the Steps. To sit and wait always hurts me.

Continuing with my analysis I said to myself, "There's nothing to do here! There's no challenge, nothing for me to fight with and overcome."

Here I made my second mistake. This Step, like One, Two, Three and Eight, requires a submissive type action of me that my bulldozer ego finds intolerable. In this Step I do not go out and fix something but instead allow myself to "become entirely ready."

For me this is an act of letting go, not of grasping or controlling. For me this is an action I find harder to perform, have cried over, have rebelled against more than any other in my entire life. In this Step I literally have to try to let myself go and trust my Higher Power. I cannot beat myself into readiness with my own willpower. And I let myself go by accepting all my defects, not by analyzing or fixing them.

To me this simply means repeating the process of the first Five Steps again on a new level: Admitting my defects (and assets) are truly who I am at this moment and then admitting further that I am powerless to change any of them by my own willpower alone. So simple to understand but so very hard to want to do!

It is inside this Step that I began to really experience the true nature of my powerlessness, and the extent of it. I found that I stubbornly clung to many of my defects of character because of the comfort and security I believed they gave me. Just as with alcohol, I couldn't imagine life without them.

Analyzing this Step further I said, "Finally!

Here is the Step I was looking for! Here at last is my chance to be perfect!"

Give me words like "entirely" and "all," and look out! I'm off and running in an attempt to be canonized by the end of the week. Needless to say, I haven't made it yet. I forgot this Step, like the others, was written by humans

for humans. I now am beginning to see this Step as a process of letting go by acceptance, a little at a time.

As each defect brings me to my knees, I let it go by accepting it as mine and by admitting my powerlessness over it just as I did with alcohol. One day at a time I am becoming "entirely ready." Because of my perfectionism, I must continually remember that Step Six is a guide, something to shoot for, not something I must accomplish perfectly before I move on, because I'd never do any more than five Steps the rest of my life, and five are not enough.

With further probing, into this Step with my brilliant mind I said to myself, "Good deal! Here is a Step I finally get to work by myself. Now I can do it the way I want to!"

I had just made my biggest mistake of all, and not for the first time either. I tried to work this Step alone. I read it as saying "remove all my defects of character." It doesn't say "my." None of the Steps use pronouns like "I," "me" or "my." The Steps, as I see them, are a shared way of life. They are the common experience of many people working together to solve a common problem. I cannot work Step Six all by myself.

In the book Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, it says that this is the Step that separates the men from the boys. This has certainly been my experience for it has brought out and is still bringing out my defects of character in a very revealing way through daily experience. In this Step, for the first time, I am beginning to understand just a little bit the need for true humility to live a happy and serene life. Part of true humility I believe is self-acceptance, which as it replaces the self-hatred of failing to fix myself, adds that dimension of serenity I need so badly in my life. Bill W. expressed this idea so beautifully when he wrote: "To those who have made progress in AA, humility amounts to a clear recognition of what and who we really are, followed by a sincere attempt to become what we could be."

So when it comes to living Step Six, I can say to you and to myself, "Boy, I sure have a long way to go, and some days I don't feel like going at all, but I thank God that I know that much today about myself, because for me, that's progress."

See how it works?

E. C., Bowling Green, Kentucky
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Secret of Serenity

IN attending meetings in various groups in our region, I am continually surprised at the number of members who are resentful because they have not acquired "serenity". They can't get peace of mind "no matter how they try."

It is my opinion and it has certainly been my experience that we don't "get" serenity by fighting for it or even by looking for it. In fact, we may even lose it by wanting it!

Why? Again, in my opinion, serenity or peace of mind is not a goal in itself. It is the result of a revolution in our thinking; a revolution, in our case, brought about by our efforts to apply the Twelve Steps of the AA program to our daily life.

I heard a real old timer the other night say that the Twelve Steps are really one step, divided into twelve pieces. Of course the First Step is essential to sobriety and without it the whole program collapses. But the core of the program is the Third Step. And the heart of the difficulty we have in applying it is our increasing desire to run the show in our own way.

We lose our serenity in the hardship and anguish we suffer every day from the burden of our own selfishness and clumsiness and incompetence and pride.

Discouraged by our own failures, we are hungry to be led and advised and directed by someone else. Who? The Third Step answers the question. "Made a decision to turn our lives and will to the care of God, as we understand him."

Our own will has become the source of so much misery and darkness, that we renounce our own will, our own ego and pride and desire and seek God's will for us. When we do this we find peace and serenity even in the midst of labor and conflict and trial.

Serenity is impossible for the man who is dominated by all the confused and changing desires of his own will. And even if those desires reach out for the good things of life, for peace and recollection, or the pleasures of prayer, if



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they are no more than natural desires, they will make serenity difficult or even impossible.

It is unlikely then that we will have perfect serenity or peace of mind unless we are detached from even the desire for serenity. We may never be able to pray perfectly unless we detach ourselves from the desire for the pleasures of prayer.

The secret of serenity then is detachment from our own will. That is worth repeating: The secret of serenity is detachment from our own will. If we attach importance to our own desires, we run the risk of losing what is essential to serenity--the acceptance of God's will, no matter what our feelings happen to be.

Detachment. If we think that the most important thing in life is serenity, we become all the more disturbed when we notice we do not have

it. And because we cannot directly produce serenity in ourselves when we want it, our disturbance increases with the failure of our efforts.

Finally, losing patience by refusing to accept this situation which we cannot control, we climb into the driver's seat and lose the one important reality--union with God's will, without which serenity is

nearly impossible.

It is important then to revolutionize our thinking about the importance of the human will--our own human will in particular. I heard it expressed once as the laying down of our will alongside God's will so that the two become as one.

Just how we accomplish this is what makes the individual aspect of the AA program. For each of us comes into AA with a different temperament, a different background and various reactions to our past experiences.

One thing I think is important in setting goals for yourself. Do not become too disturbed at failure. We all have a lot of the old Nick in us and we are all far from perfect. If we expect to achieve perfection we shall certainly be disappointed. But peace of mind and serenity do come to us in proportion as we turn our lives and wills over to the care of God, as we understand him.

But don't look for it and crave it. If you think serenity is a great and wonderful thing and that it makes you superior to other men, then you cannot desire it as it ought to be desired. It is necessary to be abased, not to be exalted. It is not helpful to be great in your own eyes but to be little.

For it is in humility that you find the answer to all the great problems of life and the soul.

Anonymous

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VICTOR E.

