

# MAINSTAY

Carrying the message



# The 12 Steps

1. *We admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable.*
2. *Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.*
3. *Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.*
4. *Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.*
5. *Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.*
6. *Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.*
7. *Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.*
8. *Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.*
9. *Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.*
10. *Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.*
11. *Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.*
12. *Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs.*

Mainstay is the magazine of Alcoholics Anonymous in New Zealand. It's our 'meeting in print' reflecting a broad spectrum of current AA experience in recovery, unity, and service.

Mainstay only publishes letters and articles relating to AA and alcoholism and publication does not imply endorsement by Alcoholics Anonymous or Mainstay. Mainstay aims to be self-supporting and is not affiliated to any outside groups or interests and does not accept paid advertising. There is no payment for contributions and they cannot be returned.

Anonymity will be protected, but contributions and correspondents are asked to include their first name, locality and a contact telephone number or email/physical address (not for publication).

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## **AA Preamble**

Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for AA membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions. AA is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organisation or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes. Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

## **Responsibility declaration**

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.

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# Editorial

‘Just say yes’ I was told in my early days. Surprisingly, when I said ‘yes’ I got busy and got better. Seems Bill W did too, by carrying the message to drunks. In AA’s **Legacy of Service**, he says “*Our Twelfth Step - carrying the message - is the basic service that: the AA Fellowship gives; this is our principal aim and the main reason for our existence. Therefore, AA is more than a set of principles; it is a society of alcoholics in action. We must carry the message, else we ourselves can wither and those who haven’t been given the truth may die. Hence, in AA service is anything whatever that helps us reach a fellow sufferer -ranging all the way from the twelfth step itself to a 10-cent phone call and a cup of coffee*”. [See it all P.10, NZ Service Manual.]

Sharing is one of the ‘carrying the message’ services included in our Third Legacy of Service: when you share in Mainstay, it’s one that reaches many people, many more than sharing at a meeting.

Sadly no one wrote about this issue’s special topic “Slogans”. Had I written, it would have been how childish they were, too simple for someone like me in my early days. Later, of course, I saw the wisdom in them and use them on a regular basis. So, in place of that missing letter, we have inserted a piece about them from the frequently asked questions section of the USA Canada website. I’m sure you’ll find it interesting.

The big book itself only has 3 slogans - which Bill called “*little mottoes which are apropos*”:

*First Things First*

*Live and Let Live*

*Easy Does It*” (BB p.135)

Finally, did your group use the internet for meetings while in lockdown – what were your experiences? Did you have newcomers turn up? Mainstay would like to know about your groups experience so we can keep a record for future use – if needed.

*Warm regards in our fellowship,*  
**Heather H. Editor**

PS: NZGSO sends occasional newsletters with items to members who have signed up to their mailing list. To get them, go to our website ([www.aa.org.nz](http://www.aa.org.nz)) scroll to the bottom of the page where it suggests you ‘**Sign up to our mailing list. Stay up to date with the latest news and offerings from A.A’**

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# Reader's feedback

*Want to comment on Mainstay, in Mainstay? Please send your thoughts to [feedbackmainstay@aa.org.nz](mailto:feedbackmainstay@aa.org.nz)*

Congratulations on the June/July edition of mainstay..very professional, plenty of good reading and an all round excellent publication.You are doing great work.

Terry F.

## **A.A. Service Acronyms**

**GSR** = General Service Representative (Note: not group)

**GSO** = General Service Office

**GSC** = General Service Conference

**GSB** = General Service Board

**WSM** = World Service Meeting

**WSD** = World Service Delegate

**AOSM** = Asia Oceania Service Meeting

**SAA/ CAA/ NAA** = Southern (Central, Northern) Area Assembly

### **Other A.A terms**

**Meeting or Group** – a group has a structure and contributes 7th tradition money to GSO/ assemblies AND has a GSR who attends Assemblies. A meeting is just that, a meeting. (Groups have meetings of course)

**Home Group** is the group where you do your AA Service in, and vote on AA issues at the group conscience. You only have ONE home group and one vote in AA

**Intergroup.** Not part of the national structure but: IG = Intergroup or IGR Intergroup Representative

Two often-confused AA terms are **convention / conference.**

Conferences discuss business and conventions are get together/ celebrations of fellowship (NZ's Conventions move around NZ every late January).

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# 12th Step Letters

***Our stories disclose in a general way what we used to be like, what happened, and what we are like now.***

*Mainstay editorial policy is to accept and publish letters from members of AA who wish to share their experience, strength, and hope. The Editor reserves the right to edit submissions. Mainstay does not publish anything unrelated to AA or that violates the principles of AA. Sensitivity and discretion will be used to maintain the integrity of the original correspondence. Please submit your sharing in word-processed or email format, or **legible hand writing**. Digitally submitted sharing should be in Word .doc/.docx format or rich text only please. We accept graphics and photos in most standard formats (please use a high resolution for clarity).*

## **Dear Mainstay...**

### **AA and the Wizard of Oz**

*I recently watched the movie the Wizard of Oz and was suddenly struck by how many parallels there are between the movie and our program of recovery. Our Big Book, Alcoholics Anonymous, and the movie both appeared in 1939.*

*Here are a few of the parallels:*

*Dorothy represents the alcoholic. She came from a broken family and was living with her aunt and uncle. She was having trouble with her family relationships and people in the community.*

*She wants to escape and imagines life would be better for her in some fantasy place "Over the Rainbow". Later she runs away from home and hangs out with a guy in a campervan.*

*The Cyclone represents the damage caused by her drinking (someone is killed) which gets her to Oz (a type of rehab). Suddenly her world goes from shades of grey to full colour – the pink cloud of early sobriety. There she meets her sponsor Glynda (a woman for a woman) who shows her the road to recovery - The Yellow Brick Road. She puts on Ruby Slippers in order to take the steps. Dorothy we all know was honest, open, and willing.*

*On her journey her she always has the Serenity Prayer represented by her friends the Tin Man (a quiet heart or serenity) the Lion (courage) and the Scarecrow (a brain or wisdom).*

*Toto represents unconditional love and is her Higher Power. He's always with her and warns her of danger. At one point she loses contact with him but keeps trying to find him. The Wizard represents*

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her ego which is ultimately shown to be false.

*Dorothy is given certain suggestions - kill the Wicked Witch (what an order - I can't go through with it!). If she doesn't kill the witch she'll lose contact with Toto, her Higher Power. But she is not discouraged and is willing to go to any lengths to get sober so she follows the suggestion which she does simply, but not easily, using water. Water (the water wagon = abstinence) symbolizes the end of her drinking and she reconnects with Toto, her Higher Power*

*Having completed the first 3 Steps, she is then allowed to return to Kansas (Welcome Home, a phrase often heard in AA meetings) where her family is happy to see her although they'll never understand what she's been through.*



Randy W.

### **Hope of recovery in AA**

I washed up in AA with a string of failed relationships and a myriad of blackout one-night-stands. I abused men like I abused alcohol. I used them to get what I wanted, and when they wanted to leave, I would threaten suicide.

I took to sobriety like a duck to water! I had a sponsor, a home group, and a sobriety date. I

was taken through the steps and introduced to service. AA filled me with an enthusiasm for living that I never thought possible for someone broken like me. I was sponsored, I sponsored women and I worked this programme to the best of my ability.

My best, it turns out wasn't really that great. I was sleeping with a married man from work, occasionally seeing my friends' brother (my attempt at arousing jealousy in the married man) and swiping my way through Tinder. At three years I was still as sick in this area as when I had walked through the doors.

When God gifted me a shiny new relationship, I did everything in my power to ruin it. I was jealous, insecure, needy, and controlling. Fear drove my actions, mainly fear that I was

going to lose this person. He came from a functional family and had a successful career. I never felt good enough to be with him, expecting him to break up with me every day. When I threw tantrums he didn't react, infuriating me even more. The confusing thing is that I was desperate to stay in this relationship and had no idea why I was acting this way. It baffled me as much as my drinking did.

As with all rock bottoms I had a

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choice. I could carry on going the way I was and drive him away, or I could turn to the programme that had saved my life three years earlier. With the guidance of a sponsor we followed the plan of action outlined in the Big Book. I thoroughly reviewed my conduct over years past. I had to see my old ideas on paper, of how I show up in relationships. Armed with these facts, I was able to make a sane and sound ideal of my conduct going forward. To stay in this relationship, I had to support him, whether I agreed or not. I had to respect his decision to be with me, letting him be kind and generous without questioning why. I had to give him freedom and space, as apparently this is what people in healthy relationships do. All these actions went against my instincts.

Whenever my defects would surface, I would pull out my sane and sound ideal, and pray to God to help me live up to it. Sometimes I would have to call my sponsor or another alcoholic. If I was taking it to the right person, and not taking it out on my partner, things would get better.

Today I let him love me without question. He supports my commitment to AA, and I support every one of his decisions.

Occasionally I'll meet a man who I have the old obsessive chemistry with. Because I take regular inventory, I can see this delusion for what it is. It doesn't mean I don't love my partner, or that I need to sleep with this person to get it out of my system. It's simply another old idea that I ask God to remove. I have a solid tenth step plan for when the old defects arise. To stay well I must do regular inventory, be honest with my sponsor, and share my experience to help others who

are struggling in this area. I don't always do it perfectly but through continuous effort I can see evidence of God working in my life. If you are struggling in this area please know you are not alone, and there is hope of recovery in Alcoholics Anonymous.

Anonymous.

*Anonymous*

*Geyserland Group, Rotorua*



### ***Thankful for my experiences***

My mother had me when she was very young. She was 16, beautiful and completely messed up by the world. Her childhood was hellish, her father was a violent drunk - an insane man who messed around with his children. Her mother, for a long time, was trapped raising



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four kids until the time came when she could finally run. She ran to south Auckland but was followed and tormented by her husband, for years. As time went on, the kids became teenagers and mixed with bad kids on the streets who had also had bad childhoods. They claimed gang patches and physically removed this poisonous man from their lives for good.

At 16 my mother could not raise me. Deeply involved in the gang world, addicted to the drugs and the lifestyle, my grandmother took it upon herself to be my carer. But I always yearned for my mother. I didn't understand. I loved her with all my heart and I just wanted to be with her, but when I was with her, it was like I wasn't there.

I understand it now. She was a sick woman, underneath the heavy cloak she wrapped herself in. And I wanted to take drugs, as a way of getting close to her. Eventually, at 11 years old, we were taking drugs together and for a short time we were best mates. It was exciting, a great escape from my own pain, until I was taken away from her for good. Absolutely devastated and thrust into the world with new eyes I began on a treacherous path of self-destruction for years.

I never blamed my mother; her

story was so sad I could understand even at that young age. But as time went on and years passed, my grief from suddenly leaving turned into anger because I was on my own. My dreams of being a happy family diminished, overshadowed with the cravings to take any substance to take that pain away. I could not maintain my life; I could not settle anywhere. Not long after I had landed somewhere the chaos would follow; the rent wouldn't get paid; I'd get fired from jobs and my life would burn to the ground.

Over and over. I lived like this for a long time, even after my first baby had come, but having a child had given me purpose to live and love again. I vowed to be the mother I needed when I was a child, but I had no mothering skills or life skills.

I was 22 years old, totally in love with my daughter but no clue on what happens next. I knew I had to move away from her drug addicted father and put that all behind us and so we did. And started again. I was drinking alcoholically now, and untreated alcoholism, living in self-will was a recipe for danger. My pain would surface often but we kept going.

14 years after I was removed from my mother, we finally reconnected



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via Facebook. I flew over to Australia to a very emotional reunion. My baby sisters were all grown up, and my mother had aged, but was still very beautiful. On the first night together we celebrated, getting to know each other once again, and getting stuck into my duty-free booze. My mother was wary I remember. Sadly, my mother got violent towards my youngest sister in front of my daughter and that reunion ended in tears and my sisters' confiding in me of the whole truth about their lives in Australia. All the abuse, the drugs, the alcohol and creepy men that had tormented and warped their childhoods. History repeating itself. This news broke me and I felt deeply guilty for leaving them.

The rough life killed my mother at 45, throwing me through a loop and my oldest girl moved in with her grandmother. History repeating itself. But by Gods good grace and determined to break the cycle I was led to the rooms of AA.

By the time my 2nd little girl came along I had taken a few hits in life and still suffered from untreated alcoholism and was living in a bad relationship. All I knew was that I loved this little girl and I did not want this life I had. I knew I had to do whatever it took and once I

again I found the swinging doors of AA beckoning for me to come. My desperation and vulnerability this time allowed me to completely embrace the programme and quickly miracles began to happen in my life.

My relationship with my eldest daughter was mended. And she is now at an age where I can share with her some of my experiences. I am truly thankful that through her own experience she had become a compassionate loving soul.



Life has come full circle now and God has worked his way through my sisters lives who are mothers also and by a miracle are also on their own paths to recovery and healing from the traumas our mother's life caused.

I am truly thankful for all my lived experiences. For they have led me to where I am to today. Once I was a lonely child who felt unloved and let down by the world, but now I know I will never be alone. Through living and breathing this God given programme of recovery I will always feel loved and be able to love back whole heartedly.

Thanks to my loving God.

*Trinity C*

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## ***An on-going practice***

My name is Frances and I am an alcoholic.

I noticed that the June issues topic was sponsorship and I wanted to share with you how amazing a gift sponsorship is. I look back on my life in sobriety and I see how much I have learned from the beautiful people God has introduced me too, as a person being sponsored to a person who is sponsoring.

My first sponsor showed me how to be loved and accepted, how she trusted God and how this faith would carry her through her last days of life here on earth. I knew from her experience of dying that her faith was a faith I wanted for myself. She was selfless, brave and completely spiritually centred in her life once her diagnosis was advised. I thank God for her and the valuable things she showed me.

The first few people I sponsored showed me that God runs the show, although I tried to prove him wrong.

My second sponsor showed me that life was for living, that I could not and should not carry the weight of the world on my own. She showed me how to get involved in life and have fun, how to serve. She introduced me to the volunteer world, doing for others, which was never my idea of a good choice.

She showed me how to give. She was a humble servant and carried a full heart in her love of people.

I am grateful for those sponsors since, and the love and support given, sometimes thanklessly. I was not the most accepting sponsee, full of ego and pride but their patience and understanding carried me through, they loved me until I could love myself.

I am eternally grateful to my current sponsor for taking me through the steps and showing me that this is an

ongoing practice.

May I remain forever willing to learn, to grow in this spiritual life, to listen, to pray. May I always remember the hand that was offered to me in love, in knowing that to keep it, I must give it away.

*Frances*



## ***Mainstay - a vital tool***

I'm writing this testimony for Mainstay to keep myself inspired because as a journalist I've resisted writing for so long due to a biased and proudly arrogant view that Mainstay has had its day and doesn't deserve to survive when it struggles so much.

But after I found an old copy of Mainstay in my bookshelf at 3 o'clock this morning when I couldn't

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sleep, I discovered the stories to be inspiring and encouraging; I realised Mainstay is actually a vital tool in helping some of us stay sober, hence I'm contributing now in the hope that this letter might help other alcoholics to keep going.

I'm coming up two years sober and never thought I'd get this far as I had previously tried several times to control my drinking. I'd achieve one or two days a week without a drink, but it didn't work as I used to smoke pot every day. In a stoned state I always relapsed on Friday nights, getting smashed and telling myself I could manage my addictions, even though I never could.

Things came to a head when I had a stroke after a heavy session. That led to a week in the ICU where I detoxed enough for a young doctor's advice to hit home; she told me that unless I changed my lifestyle and quit the booze and drugs, I'd kill myself and lose my family for good.

From there I went to AA and then to rehab at Capri Sanctuary in South Auckland where I finally came to my senses enough to realise, I had to stop substance abuse permanently. Now I'm sober and following the daily advice of a great sponsor with 31 years of sobriety who has convinced me to regard AA

meetings several times a week as my new medication, and it's working.

In the level 2 phase of Covid19 lockdown I finally accepted that I need AA if I'm to succeed in staying inspired sufficiently to keep sober.

*John W.*

Gisborne. As Bill Sees It Group

### ***A simple programme for complicated people***

Greetings folk my name's Ken and I'm an alcoholic.

I never did drink sensibly. I was brought up in a drinking home and my Dad drank and taught me it was a reward for working hard or to celebrate and you had to have it to have a good time.

So, from a young age I was sneaking Dad's

beer or port and I think I was 10 when I got really drunk for the first time. I loved it and as I moved into my teens, my mates and I would get a few beers in or top shelf, but it was always me that ended up wrecked. This was in the 70's and dope was around but not easy to get. I was working by now and associating with older guys who drugged and drank. I was getting hammered 5 or 6 nights a week and thought it was quite acceptable.

I wrecked my first truck at 18. I

**KEEP  
IT  
SIMPLE**

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was working pressing wool and living on the premises and decided to take the truck into town for a feed. Luckily, I didn't kill anyone but totalled the truck, a lunch bar, a lamppost, and the wall of a pub.

At 16 I'd taken my brother's car when I was meant to be babysitting his kids. I drank a bottle of whiskey, left them asleep, and went off in his new car smashing into another one and causing much havoc. Yeah, I was building a nice little dossier with the police and after the truck incident I had no licence for 2 years - but learnt nothing.

Later I'd moved cities and started married life but continued to drink. I've worked most of my life as a truck driver and had to change employers often on account of my mood swings and the resulting damage and bad behaviour. I chose nightshift linehaul work so I could be alone with my habit, sometimes waking up on the side of the road not knowing where I was.

Truly the God of my understanding was looking out for me because by now I didn't care. I worked extra hours to cover my drinking costs, stealing where I could and always making sure life was about me and my wants.

I could go on with some more of the really dumb stuff I've done in my life - the damage to vehicles and relationships - but 10 years ago at the age of 46 I woke up, yet again in a police cell. For the first time ever, I questioned myself. I knew what

I'd done to get there - my memory of the day and night before was as clear as clear, and all I could think was 'what did I do that for?'

Without knowing it, I did step 1 that day and I went and sought help from the local Salvation Army where my children went to Sunday school and my wife and I were known. From there, I found my first AA meeting and knew I was in the right place. These people knew what I was like and told stories like mine.

I had no dream of drinking normally, I was ok with not having any, not picking up the first drink. I acknowledged my total lack of control over alcohol - what a relief.

My biggest fear was that I wouldn't be able to sleep after drinking myself to blackout for 30+ years but my higher power took care of that. I thank the God of my understanding for this gift all the time. So, one day at a time I've been rebuilding relationships, renewing friendships, and being grateful for a second chance at life. There is no doubt in my mind that this programme works when I work it.

I've just celebrated 10 years sobriety and there's no way I want to go back to the old life. It's truly a simple programme for complicated people.

Thanks AA.

*Ken*

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## ***My Last Flute***

I was in early sobriety and I had just made a visit to my family in the UK. On the long and arduous journey, I was delighted to hear that I had been upgraded to first class for my Melbourne-Auckland leg. Having already been cramped up in cattle class for 24 hours the promise of huge seats and acres of leg-room was a dream come true.

Shown to my enormous leather chair I took up conversation with the equally delighted and overawed lady sitting next to me. We were both first class virgins. A beautiful hostess whispered up to us and proffered us a glass champagne flute full of bubbles. We accepted these, toasted, and took a mouthful. Just like that. Not a genteel, first-class lady's sip – a gob-full – an alcoholic slug.

My mouth was full of it. It tasted foul - it smelled revolting. Why did I do that? I had no intention of having a drink, no craving. I had no sponsor to call, no friend to ring. Swallowing it became a necessity as I began to choke. This was first class, spitting your champagne over cabin crew was probably a regular occurrence but I was still trying to be polite! The choking got worse, and then - I swallowed and threw the remaining champagne up in the air and all over myself.

There was a moment of time suspension as I realized what I had done.

The beautiful lady approached again with the still very full, very large bottle of bubbly. My head had already calculated how much was still in there. I could fill the next few hours downing excellent free champagne in comfort – what a result! Or, you've done it now - you may as well enjoy it! The committee had started discussions.

I just couldn't get off the plane in Auckland drunk and disappoint my family again. I had been working my AA program for nearly a year and I couldn't let down my friends in my home group and the fellowship. I just couldn't take myself to the place of shame again with the probable consequence of being removed from the plane in a wheel chair - I knew I would be far from sober.

I asked God for help. Please give me the strength not to take another mouthful.

I gave back my champagne flute to the lovely crew member and asked her for some water. I went straight back to day one. And I've not drunk since.

I did a "deal with God" while I was up there and that was over ten years ago now. Now I know that wherever I am, whenever I ask for my higher power's help, I will find the strength I need. This was how I came to trust the program. This was how I found the faith I needed in my higher power.

*Chrissy*

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## ***A new way of life***

Hi there, I am a newcomer to AA and my sponsor suggested I might like to write a letter so here goes:

It was 3 ½ months ago that I walked into my first AA meeting. I had tried for years to give up my maintenance drinking. I'm a 61-year-old woman and it was a desire to be honest about this private struggle that caused me to walk through the doors. This was coupled with the fact that my father had been a severe alcoholic and I wondered if there was something genetic in my struggle.

The level of honesty and sense of God's presence that pervaded the room was palpable. I'd come home to a fellowship that felt real. I knew the similarities in so many of the stories and felt a cleansing I'd been desiring without realising. I'm yet to admit fully that I'm an alcoholic, but I'm getting close, recognising heaps and I'm so grateful to have a sponsor to go through the Big Book and share deeply with.

I can honestly say that the desire to drink left me from that first meeting. It is an incredible gift and therefore I'll continue to come back. I'm so amazed at the timing of this happening because 6-7 weeks later we were in lockdown with Covid 19. Instead of drinking I'm learning a new way of life One Day at a Time. I'm indebted to the existence of this group. Thank you

*Jill*

## ***Made a decision***

I made a decision to be well, and working the steps got me sober. The meetings gave me the strength to work them, but it was the steps that gave me recovery.

The Third Step in particular put the stride back in my life. Step One and Two picked me up out of the gutter and put me tentatively on my feet (an admission I was broken and the promise of repair). But it was with Step 3 that I received the gentle push-start that, scary as it seemed, showed me that I could indeed walk again. What's more, I could run again. I could laugh again. I could be a free man once more. It is the paradox of Step 3, as it says in the 12x12, that the more dependent we become on our Higher Power, the more independent and free we become.

I couldn't make sense of this when I was a newcomer but I know it to be true today. I was so resistant to this idea, and with the first two steps, it was only desperation and defeat that made it possible for me to try it. I grew up being dragged to a Presbyterian church every Sunday and went to a Catholic college. When I shuffled into AA, I was a firm atheist, so, Step Two was daunting. I thought everything was up to me. I thought that if I said the right things at the right times, and mustered up my willpower, everything could be great, my life would be amazing. If all of that was really in my power,



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then why was I so powerless over myself? Why couldn't I get myself to achieve those dreams? It was this defeat—by alcohol and my life—that made it possible for me to accept that I wasn't all-powerful, that the universe was much more powerful than me.

But when it came to Step Three, where I am asked to begin a relationship with this Higher Power, I didn't know if I could do it. I didn't believe that there was a man in the clouds or a consciousness like mine that was listening to me and was guiding my life, like a narrator writing their protagonist's story. The scientific side of me couldn't believe that. And so, I resisted. I held on to my ego and my need to 'understand first', too afraid to take a leap of faith. What if this really was a cult? What if I get temporary sobriety, only to find out it's all a lie and fall harder than ever before? What if...? In the end it didn't matter. There was no 'what if' that could be worse than continuing to live my life the way I was. I knew, after a handful of meetings, that I had this disease.

After a few more weeks of meetings—with a sponsor guiding me through—I continued to resist the 3rd Step. I came to do the Third Step, on my knees, on a cold autumn day, in my bedroom. I'd not gone to work for a few days and was miserable and was going crazy. My head was talking at a million miles an hour and it felt like there was more than one voice in

there. I thought I was going crazy (or always had been). I said to myself "I knew it. I knew all that drinking and drugging had to have done permanent damage. I'm going schizophrenic." I decided to make an appointment with my GP. "This is going to need medical help" I told myself. But I couldn't wait. I knew what I had to do; the steps would help me with this too. I picked up my Big Book, opened it to the page with the prayer that I'd refused to say with my sponsor, and on my knees, I said the Third Step prayer out loud. From that moment, I was getting well again.

A member at one of my meetings always points out that Bill W.'s desire to drink on the night that he met Dr. Bob went away as soon as he made the decision to call another alcoholic. Not when he made the call, nor when he met the fellow, but from the moment he made up his mind to reach out instead of to pick up. In other words when he 'made a decision'. And so, it was for me.

When I 'made the decision to turn my will and my life over to the care of God' I started to get well. A bit of grace interceded in my life. In my wire-crossed mind, the thought came to me: "It's a Thursday. I have my steps meeting tonight which has good sobriety. This is probably just a manifestation of my alcoholism, not schizophrenia. Before I make an appointment, I'll go to my meeting and share what I've been feeling.



Maybe someone else has felt this way.” I went to my meeting that night. I shared what had happened. Another member shared her story of feeling a very similar way and actually going through with the doctor’s appointment! I went home and have said the 3rd Step prayer almost every day since. Even if there isn’t some man-like God listening to my every word and answering my prayers, I know that me taking the action of kneeling and saying the words out-loud makes changes in my mind. Physical changes. It aligns my thinking back to a way of living that works. At other times, those sad times when I don’t feel like working the AA program—when I want a break from the readings, prayers, meditations, work with other alcoholics—I remember that I’d made a decision. On that cold day in my threadbare flat, I had made a decision. The other party has continued to keep up their end of the bargain, and I will too.

*James R.*

City Steps, Christchurch

**Q:** When someone quits drinking, why are they said to be “on the wagon”?

**A:** Before pavement was a regular feature of cities and towns, a water wagon made the rounds and sprayed the dirt streets lightly to keep down the dust. Someone had the image of climbing “on the water wagon” (like climbing “on board” to join something) and the image took hold in the popular imagination.

Implicit in the idea of being on the wagon is the idea that you can always jump off! Perhaps, because of this, being on the wagon has always had a rather temporary sound to many of us.

*Image: Water wagon  
~no room for me~  
Alcoholic abstintion  
comic postcard 1906*



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# Special feature - Our slogans

## *What's the history of typical AA slogans like "First Things First" and "One Day at a Time"?*

We don't have a great deal of information about the origins of AA's slogans and acronyms, but we can provide some sharing and preliminary information. Many of these slogans, as with other practices in AA, were simply passed along verbally to other members, so it is impossible to know who started using them first. It is possible that some of the slogans may have originally stemmed from a part of the Oxford Group Movement language, but it could also be that they were original with Bill and Dr. Bob and the early members.

Members have always inquired as to the origins of various slogans, and it has always been difficult to narrow down; in our research, we discovered a letter written by former GSO Archivist, Frank M., dated 1989, who responded to a similar question that was posed to him. This was Frank's response, "Your interest in the origins of 'One Day at a Time' is shared by many of us. Like hand-holding, however, it's difficult to pin-point the exact 'moment.'" That is the problem we find with most of our AA slogans, unfortunately!

We do know, however, that many

slogans commonly heard have been around since the early days of the Fellowship.

In December of 1958 Ruth Hock (non-alcoholic), who was AA's first secretary, wrote a response to a similar question concerning different slogans. In her reply Ruth wrote:

"...Bill [W.] and I first worked together in January 1936 when he had been sober just a little over one year and at that time 'Easy Does It,' 'Live and Let Live,' and 'First Things First,' were part of the daily conversation. They were also used in the very first drafts of the book, but probably only Bill himself could tell you where he picked them up...

"As far as I'm concerned all of the above were introduced into A.A. by Bill W. himself although not original with him.

"Some of these could have been used in Oxford Group meetings but there is no way for sure."

In addition to Ruth's response, page 220 of Bill W.'s biography, *Pass It On*, also addresses this topic:

"Some 'A.A. saws' were also used as long ago as the late 1930s: 'First Things First,' 'Easy Does It,'

'Live and Let Live.' Because these appear in the first edition of the Big Book (at the end of the chapter on 'The Family Afterward'), it's probable that the use of the slogans originated with Bill and that he brought them with him from Vermont – old saws with new teeth."

**from Frequently asked Question. AA USA/CANADA Website**



*Have something to say on this or other key topics we often discuss in AA, at meetings and with each other? Please send in your story, with the topic in the heading as; 'Special feature - \*topic\*'*

*Topics for the special feature in future editions are listed below.*



October/ November	<b>Traditions</b>
December/ January	<b>Sober Travel/ Holidays</b>
February/ March	<b>Concepts</b>
April/May	<b>Steps</b>
June/July	<b>Sponsorship</b>
August/ September	<b>Service and Me</b>
October/ November	<b>Traditions</b>
December/ January	<b>Trudging the Road</b>



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# Service in the Fellowship

## General Service Representative (G.S.R.)

### *Our most important role in AA – are you up to it?*

**“The strength of our whole A.A. service structure starts with the group and with the general service representative (G.S.R.) the group elects. We cannot emphasize too strongly the G.S.R.’s importance” Bill W.**

As our pamphlet (p.19) says, this may be the most important service role in the fellowship. A group’s GSR connects our home group to the worldwide fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous.

A group’s GSR attends the area assembly (from where all GSRs choose our Delegates to Conference) and carries the group’s experience strength and hope to the area. They are the trusted servant or active guardian as Bill W called them and brings back to the group a written report of the meeting as they understood it.

When choosing a GSR, we must

heed Bill W. - ‘the good is the enemy of the best.’ And choose the person who is best paced to carry out the role responsibly.

AA Great Britain have a pamphlet called The Rewards of being a GSR. It talks about the GSR role being a unique opportunity:

‘In many respects, the unity of the fellowship lies in the GSRs hands.’

‘It’s a position of complete trust, something most of us lost while drinking and something that is most precious when regained in sobriety.’

‘This service position calls for a willingness to put others before oneself, an attitude essential to our recovery program and one which rarely fails to bring its own reward.’

It also discusses concept one and how “if the views, thoughts, and conscience of a group are left unvoiced or unknown, how can the full democratic spirit of Alcoholics Anonymous be truly or effectively expressed?”

It talks of the ‘promises’ and how in early sobriety they sound remote and unobtainable, but as time goes by, they begin to become a reality.

‘As a GSR, the promises take on an even deeper meaning and they will strengthen your sobriety immeasurably’.

It acknowledges that some people are put off becoming a general service representative because of hearsay and talk of politics or arguments. It reminds a potential

GSR that it is a business meeting they will attend, not a normal group recovery meeting, and 'tolerance is a must - it is here that the phrase 'principles before personalities' becomes a working ethic; it is at these business meetings that unity, service and recovery (our 3 legacies) are forged through discussion and compromise. By finding the common purpose, despite any disagreements, a unified action can be taken.'

(Adapted from The Rewards of Being a GSR. Great Britain)



**G.S.R.**  
General Service  
Representative

May be the most  
important job in A.A.

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



# Gratitude Month

**August 2020**

***Reaching the still suffering alcoholic in a digital age.***

COVID 19 has shown us how valuable our online presence is, especially to those who are seeking help.

For Gratitude month this year we want to make the most of our new website by adding videos about AA and introducing a live chat function for the newcomer to reach out to us.

You can contribute online this year. Simply use the 'Gratitude' button on the A.A website (under members tab) or use internet banking with the details below.

New Zealand General Service  
Office, 06-0501-0236572-07

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# Book review

## ***Twelve Concepts for World Service by Bill W.***

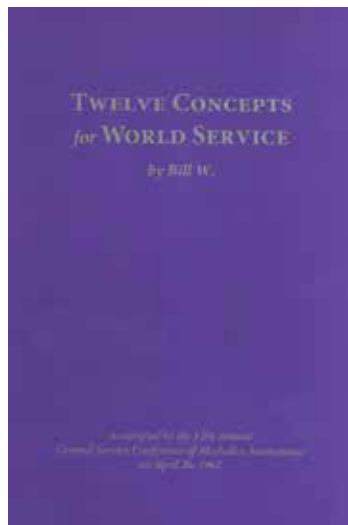
As A.A. grew up, it began with the groups — first only a few, then hundreds and then thousands. Very early an Alcoholic Foundation, later renamed The General Service Board, was formed to be responsible for our affairs. And with Dr. Bob's death and Bill's facing up to his own mortality, a General Service Conference assumed the leadership which had fallen to the co-founders. Meanwhile, a tiny publishing operation and service office had grown in size and importance to the Fellowship, and a monthly journal, the AA Grapevine, was being published.

Which of these entities was supposed to do what?

Little wonder there was confusion! What was their relationship? Who was in charge? What were their responsibilities — and what were their rights?

Bill W. himself was sometimes part of the pulling and hauling that took place, and so he saw the need to “reduce to writing” his concepts of the “why” of the whole structure, the lessons to be drawn from experience, the relationships and, above all, the spiritual principles.

As Bill set them down, the Twelve Concepts are a potpourri: Concepts III through V, IX and XII deal with spiritual principles; the remainder, though they have spiritual overtones, are devoted to describing the relationship of the various service entities and how they work together.





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# Items of interest

## **A.A. is a spirit**

It cannot be touched, nor can it be completely understood.

It is as wide as the world, yet small enough to fit snugly into the mind and heart of man.

It has brought light where only darkness dwelt. It has given hope to the helpless and help to those who yearned in despair.

It has nourished forgiveness in those who know 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 strove for nothing.

It has brought to the destitute a home.

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 youth it has given - vision.

To the aged - promise.

To the lonely - companions.

To the restless - rest.

To the sick it has been a doctor.

To the dying it has revived the desire to live.

To those who have fallen it has been a helping hand.

It has no judgment against the unteachable nor has it praise for those who learn.

To the outcast it has been a family.

To the childless it has given children.

To the ignorant - wisdom.

To the wise - tolerance.

It has given to all men that which is most precious - it has given love for truth with enough left over to share with each other.

**Anon**

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## 1941- The first specialised interest group

The first known all-women group is founded in Cleveland in 1941, making it A.A.'s inaugural specialized interest group. Women in New York, Minneapolis, Salt Lake City, and San Diego soon follow suit, and by the mid-1940s the ratio of women to men in the A.A. population is roughly one in six. Women's groups light the way for other specialized groups, which will eventually include those for young people, the elderly, gays and lesbians, and doctors, lawyers, and other professionals.

## Did you know?

The first 164 pages of the big book uses the term "recovered" 16 times. It uses 'recovering' once.

## FAQ from G.S.O. Archives

*Q. What is the origin of introducing oneself with the statement "I am an alcoholic" at A.A. meetings?*

**A.** As with the origins of other customs in A.A., this is something of a mystery. However, we came across a Box 4-5-9 article on the subject in the April-May 1987 issue:

"Who was the first to start a meeting or a qualification with the statement, 'I am an alcoholic'? How did the worldwide custom begin? As late co-founder Bill W. used to observe, "Nobody invented A.A., it just grew." And so probably did its classic introduction at meetings.

'Many members ask us these questions,' says G.S.O. archivist Frank M. 'Unfortunately, only a few of the early-timers are left, and not many of them are able to provide plausible theories. So we can only speculate.'

According to an early friend of A.A., the late Henrietta Seiberling, the expression dates back to meetings of A.A.'s forerunner, the Oxford Group Movement, which had its heyday in the early 1930s. Mrs. Seiberling, a nonalcoholic who had



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sought spiritual help in the Oxford Group meetings, introduced Bill to A.A.'s other founder, Dr. Bob, then struggling to get sober in the Oxford Group.

At small meetings, the members knew one another and didn't need to identify themselves. But in the large, public meetings, where there was 'witnessing' along the lines of an A.A. talk today, personal identification became necessary. Chances are that someone at some time said, 'I am an alcoholic,' but Mrs. Seiberling wasn't sure. Nor did she remember that the phrase was used at early A.A. meetings in Akron before publication of the Big Book. In fact, she said, the word 'alcoholic' was rarely uttered, at least in Akron. People referred to themselves as 'drunks' or 'rum hounds' or 'boozers' or other choice epithets reminiscent of the Temperance Movement that gained adherents during Prohibition.

An early New York A.A. first heard the expression as 'I am an alcoholic and my name is...' According to his recollection, that was after World War II, in 1945 or 1946. And it is a matter of record that, in 1947, a documentary film entitled, "I Am an Alcoholic," was produced by RKO Pathé.

From then on, as Bill would say, the custom just grew.

*Q. Who wrote AA's Preamble? And when was the word "honest" dropped from it (i.e. "honest desire to stop drinking"), and why?*

A. The Preamble first appeared in the Grapevine in June 1947, and was written by Tom Y., the Grapevine Editor serving at that time. Its intent was to inform the public as to what A.A. is and what it is not. Shortly thereafter, the Preamble began appearing in each monthly issue of the Grapevine, and later on in much of our A.A. Conference-approved literature. In 1992 the Grapevine published a short history of the Preamble.

In the 1947 version of the Preamble, it contained the wording, "...an honest desire to stop drinking..." as printed in the foreword to the first edition of the Big Book. However, since the adoption of the short form of the Traditions in 1950, the Third Tradition has always read, "The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking" and this form was used by Bill in writing the book, Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions.

In 1958 the expression "honest desire" was discussed at great length at the General Service Conference. It was felt that it was impossible to determine what

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constitutes an “honest” desire to stop drinking, thus the word was dropped. The “new” version of the Preamble, without the word “honest,” first appeared in the September 1958 issue of the Grapevine.

There have been other versions of the Preamble, written by AA members for their local groups’ use, which were then circulated around AA; for example: the “Texas Preamble,” the “Wilmington Preamble,” etc. Many AA members find these interesting, but they have never been adopted by the Fellowship as a whole.

### ***Q. What is the history behind AA’s Responsibility Statement?***

A. The Responsibility Statement reads:

I am Responsible. When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there. And for that: I am responsible.

It was written for the 1965 A.A. International Convention in Toronto. In an article titled, ‘How I am Responsible became a part of A.A.’, from the GSO newsletter, Box 4-5-9. The article identifies former AA trustee, Al S. as the author of the Responsibility Statement.

In the souvenir book for the 1965

Convention, Dr. Jack Norris writes:

“...We must remember that AA will continue strong only so long as each of us freely and happily gives it away to another person, only as each of us takes our fair share of responsibility for sponsorship of those who still suffer, for the growth and integrity of our Group, for our Intergroup activities, and for AA as a whole. It is in taking responsibility that real freedom and the enduring satisfactions of life are found. AA has given us the power to choose – to drink or not to drink – and in doing so has given us the freedom to be responsible for ourselves. As we become responsible for ourselves, we are free to be responsible for our share in AA, and unless we happily accept this responsibility we lose AA. Strange, isn’t it?”

In a Grapevine article in October 1965, the Responsibility Statement is discussed, and Bill W. expresses his views:

Two major thoughts stood out in the remarks of the many speakers, alcoholic and nonalcoholic, at AA’s July Toronto Convention. The first was admiration and gratitude for AA’s startling success in sobering up hundreds of thousands of lost-cause drunks. The other was concern that the success which has come to AA over the thirty years since its start in Akron, Ohio in 1935 would not lead us to any

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complacency about the size of the job still to be done.

The theme of the Convention was: Responsibility. "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."

AA's co-founder, Bill, in his talk to over 10,000 attending the major sessions of the Convention, stressed the need for cooperation with all who work on the problem of alcoholism, the more than 100 agencies in the United States and Canada alone now engaged in research, alcohol education and rehabilitation.

"Too often, we have deprecated and even derided these projects of our friends just because we do not always see eye to eye with them," Bill said. "We should very seriously ask ourselves how many alcoholics have gone on drinking simply because we have failed to cooperate in good spirit with these many agencies. No alcoholic should go mad or die merely because he did not come straight to AA in the beginning."

"The first concern of AA members should be with problem drinkers the movement is still unable to reach," Bill said. He estimated that there are 20 million alcoholics in the world today, five million in the U.S. alone. "Some cannot be reached because they are not hurt

enough, others because they are hurt too much," he declared. "Many sufferers have mental and emotional complications that seem to foreclose their chances. Yet it would be conservative to estimate that at any particular time there are four million alcoholics in the world who are able, ready and willing to get well if only they knew how. When we remember that in the 30 years of AA's existence we have reached less than ten per cent of those who might have been willing to approach us, we begin to get an idea of the immensity of our task and of the responsibilities with which we will always be confronted."

There have been two Advisory Actions from the General Service Conference regarding the Declaration of Responsibility since it was introduced. In 1971, the Conference recommended that:

The Literature Committee, following the general feeling of the Conference, reaffirm both the spirit and the wording of the "I am Responsible" Declaration from the International Convention held in Toronto in 1965.

And in 1977, the Conference recommended that:

*The Responsibility Declaration not be changed, as it was made at the 1965 International Convention in Toronto.*

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# Service Positions

There are currently **four** positions available.

## **Chat Function Admin: 2 year term**

New service position/ immediate start.

This service role is being created in response to the AA fellowship wanting to add another service channel to reach the newcomer.

*Full training will be given.*

## **Class A Board Member: 3 year term**

A Class A board member is a non-alcoholic and is typically a friend to AA and one who supports the principles of the AA program.

Class A board members will ideally have experience in one of the following fields, although they are not limited to these fields: alcoholism treatment in the community, legal and justice fields including police, media, publicity and spiritual.

## **Class B Conference Experienced Board Member: 3 year term**

Class B Board Members are recovering alcoholics who have achieved at least 10 years continuous sobriety and are living so far as possible within the concepts of the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. A full Conference term should have been served as a Delegate, Chair or Secretary.

## **Treasurer Board Member: 3 year term**

The role is primarily to ensure the finances of the Board are appropriately managed including the setting of and monitoring of annual budgets.

*For role descriptions and nomination forms, please go to the AA website: <https://aa.org.nz/members/service/>.*

***Please have applications in by 31 August 2020***

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# Events

*Events for promotion in Mainstay must be received by GSO (nzgso@aa.org.nz) by 30th September to ensure inclusion in the next issue of Mainstay.*

## **28th -30th August 2020**

Lake Karapiro Camp – Waikato

Finlay Park Adventure Park

## **11th - 13th September 2020**

Friary Women's Retreat – Auckland

50 Hillsborough Road, Mt Roskill, Auckland 1042, New Zealand

**Find out more in the members section <https://aa.org.nz/members/whats-new/>**



# An opportunity for Twelfth Step work

**Share your experience, strength & hope  
with people who can't get to meetings**

Topics can include spirituality – steps – traditions  
– concepts – service – sponsorship – carrying the  
message.

Send to GSO with *Mainstay*  
in the subject line.

[mainstay@aa.org.nz](mailto:mainstay@aa.org.nz)

# Subscriptions

Mainstay subscriptions fall on a fixed date of 1st April for a 12 month period (six issues) to 31st March the following year. New subscribers will pay a pro rata amount from when they join in the year. In February's issue each year renewal notices will go out with Mainstay for the following year.

# Ordered	Type of Subscription	Start period	Price \$ <i>(inc GST &amp; PP)</i>
	Printed	April/May	36.00
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	Digital	October/November	12.00
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*In all cases, subscription will not start until payment is received by GSO. Renewal notices for the new subscription year will go out with the February/March issue of Mainstay each year.*

## Subscriber and renewal details

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 Post completed order and/or cheques to: Mainstay, 2/30 Downer Street, Hutt Central, Lower Hutt 5010  
 or complete the registration form at <https://aa.org.nz/members/mainstay/mainstay-registration-form/>

# The 12 Traditions

1. *Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.*
2. *For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.*
3. *The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.*
4. *Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.*
5. *Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.*
6. *An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.*
7. *Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.*
8. *Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.*
9. *A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.*
10. *Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.*
11. *Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films.*
12. *Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.*

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.

