

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are asked to include their first name, locality and a contact telephone number or email/physical address (not for publication).

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CONTENTS

Editorial	2
Sharing	3
Mainstay - will it stay or will it go?	13
Conference chair report	15
Special feature - Travel/holidays	19
Service in the fellowship	22
Book review	24
Items of interest	26
Subscriptions	28

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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.

Editorial

Kia ora te whanau,

It's funny how my character defects can come back to bite me.

At my home group on Sunday, we were talking about perfectionism, and how true the old saying is about pointing the finger at someone and 3 coming straight back at me.

This past month I've been pointing the finger at members who haven't carried the message, by writing to Mainstay, and now I realise the task I have of writing an editorial every issue has been totally forgotten and I'm now having to do it at the last minute.

Many years ago, when I was on conference in the early 90s, Garth from Auckland was the editor and served on conference at the same time as me. Those were the days of monthly mainstays and I suggested to Garth that it was a bit egotistical to be writing the editorial every month, giving us a little homily to digest, and now I'm having to do the same!

I've also received a few letters over the last days, perhaps from those very people. I have been pointing my finger at in my mind. My apologies. Despite having taken the 7th Step, it seems God still has need for my character defects as they haven't gone - yet! I wonder what happened to my magnet that stated "please be patient with me, God isn't finished with me yet."

It's obvious that I need to talk to the Mainstay team and get ideas for our editorial each issue or I will have some smart member, as I was, complaining that its egotistical for me to be writing the editorial every month.

So now you know, I'm a failed perfectionist, and always have been and still sometimes point the finger at others. I'm sure you don't, but please forgive me for my defects.

Now to get this to Toni to put in the gap she left in the draft copy.

Warm regards in our fellowship,
Heather H. Editor

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 ...

Kia ora my name is Pip and I'm an alcoholic

I'm really grateful for be sober today and grateful for the programme of Alcoholics Anonymous which allows me to live a life on life's terms.

Toward the end of my drinking I was finding it hard to leave the house. I needed to go to work and school but when I left the house in the morning, I had no idea when or if I would be coming home. Drink had me baffled. Life had me baffled. I didn't realise at the time, but I had no mental defense against the first drink. I could leave the house with every intention of coming home straight after work and having a quiet night – often I was suffering terrible regret from the night before and knew that I needed to come home and have

a quiet night. But all resolve, every good reason for not drinking would disappear – completely swamped by the idea that I could drink safely. That this time would be different. And it never was. Every time I picked up a drink thinking, 'This will be the one I can control and enjoy,' it would set off a phenomenon of craving which would find me unable to stop drinking.

So, I was really scared to leave the house. I was finding myself in more and more dangerous situations. I relate so strongly to the jumping off place the big book Alcoholics Anonymous talks about – I knew that if I kept drinking the way I was, I would die, but I just could not imagine being able to carry on living without alcohol. I really thought alcohol was the only thing holding my life together. It had worked once for me back when I was child, and I was sure that if I just kept trying it

would eventually work again. Life was so hard and confusing, and I was sure that there was no way I could live it without alcohol.

At first, when I came to AA, I felt sad at how low my life had had to go. But I think now it took what it took. I really relate to the idea that my first GOD was the Gift Of Desperation. I sat in my first meeting with not a single other option and I'm grateful for that.

I'm not sure if travel was something I wanted to do before I came to AA – I was restless and I moved around a lot to try and stay out of trouble. I was always acting in reaction to things, the idea I could move toward something rather than away from it didn't occur to me until I came into AA.

The first time I went anywhere for a break, it was to Wellington (I was living in Christchurch). I was kind of looking forward to it and in the back of my mind I was thinking, maybe I won't need to go to AA in Wellington. Maybe I am different in Wellington. Maybe it is okay to take a break from AA occasionally. On the Interisland ferry this thought took hold a bit more, maybe I wasn't even alcoholic on the sea. Like, this limbo place between the South and North Island maybe I had some magical power where I could drink like other people. There was a bar.

Other people were drinking. Maybe that's just what people did when they travelled on a boat. Luckily, I had been immersed in AA and the next thought was something someone had said at a meeting and I thought, 'Woah,' and started to pray and got to Wellington safe and sober.

I think that trip changed how I saw travelling. Now, one of the things I most look forward to when I travel is going to AA meetings in other places. I have a group of friends at

the Tamaki meeting in Auckland which is just round the corner from my parents' house. I think of it as my home group away from home. I've been to Spanish speaking meetings in Durban, South Africa (it's a long story) and Korean-speaking meetings

in Seoul. I've been to AA meetings in Salt Lake City where alcohol is heavily regulated and hard to get and I've been to meetings in Las Vegas where you can drink on the streets. In London I have a couple of friends I met in New Zealand and they have taken me to meetings and dinner, and it has been great. I seem to listen better when the voices are different, and the faces are new. And my travel always goes better – if I'm working, the work



goes smoother. If I'm on holiday I have a better time. I love seeing this programme work for people from all different places and cultures and communities. It always seems to boost my faith in God. One of my favourite lines in the big book is, 'God is either everything, or he is nothing,' and when I travel, I see God's work reflected in all sorts of new ways.

And really, all of this is gravy, because if I stay close to the programme (meetings, service, working the steps with a sponsor) what I get to do, is not kill myself with alcohol – and really, for an alcoholic like me that just astounds me. That I can live usefully and happily and soberly, is amazing.

Pip. Wellington

My name is Catherine, and I am an alcoholic

As a child, I moved too fast and talked too much. I was bossy and demanding, I sulked, stomped, and slammed doors, I whinged and whined. My moods and behaviour dominated the family. As I transitioned into puberty, the hyperactivity slowed down but was replaced by something worse: depression. While my friends were out socialising on Saturday nights,

I was at home, isolating. I'd spend a lot of time in my bedroom making an inventory of everything that was wrong with me and why I wasn't worthy of social interaction. I'd start at the top of my body and go all the way down, listing the faults and flaws: too short, big nose, ugly teeth etc. etc. When I was done with that, I'd start on my personality, intelligence, and talents or lack thereof. As far as I was concerned, I was unlovable and unlovely. I hated myself and hated the world.



My self-loathing was both emotionally and physically painful, with no way out. It was, therefore, no surprise that one Saturday night, at home I discovered alcohol. My parents were hosting a dinner party and when they left the room to eat, I was left alone with the

liquor cabinet. And so, my 36-year drinking career began, and it started as it continued: alone and to excess. The effect was literally intoxicating and for the first time I felt liberated from the burden of being me. I had found the solution.

Alcoholism is a progressive disease, and I didn't always drink daily or into blackout, but that was how it ended. I did, however, always drink too much. Once I started, I found it difficult to stop. I wasn't interested

in one or two glasses of wine; I was interested in one or two bottles. Neither was I very interested in drinking with people – my date was with the bottle and if someone else happened to be there, that was fine but not necessary. I had no idea that my drinking was abnormal, that my relationship with alcohol was unhealthy and that it had total power over me. And so, my active alcoholism continued for decades until in 2013, I spiritually flat lined. I was morally, and physically bankrupt and knew I had come to the end of the road. The solution had become the problem.

You see alcohol does that to an alcoholic; it takes everything and leaves a dried-out husk where the spirit should reside. On top of that it feeds self-centredness, intolerance, false pride, self-righteousness, and ingratitude. As the big book says, it is a disease of restlessness, irritability, and discontentment. It also stunts any emotional growth so if you began drinking at 14 as I did, you remain that emotional age until you sober up and take action. Because I drank to escape emotional pain, I never really learned to handle my emotions. Anytime I felt anger, jealousy, hurt or fear I would self sooth with a drink but for me, because I am an alcoholic, it would

be a drunk. When I drank, I always got drunk. I thought that was normal.

My drinking also enabled me to create a fantasyland into which I retreated when things got uncomfortable. I wasn't equipped for reality; it scared me because it was unpredictable, and I couldn't control it. In my alcohol addled brain, I could create my own world where I was the centre of the universe and everyone else was just bit a player. I actually believed



I held the definitive world view and that if others could just be more like me, just do as I said, everything would be fine. It's no wonder in the real world, I butted up against people, places and things on a daily basis and that life felt like a relentless battle of wills. It's

also no wonder I'd console myself with booze at the end of each day. As a result, I never reflected on my behaviour or the part I played in any negative interactions and unsurprisingly, I never learned from my mistakes. My big ego protected my low self-esteem. The shouty, sarcastic, cynical, argumentative, intolerant, Catherine shielded the frightened, inadequate, anxious Catherine.

That's what my alcoholism looked and sounded like.

In 2013, I found AA and having done the 12 steps I now have a better understanding of my disease and of myself. The journey has been difficult and painful but hugely rewarding and life changing. I couldn't have done this on my own and I owe the fellowship a huge debt of gratitude that I am repaying by staying sober, working my programme, and helping other alcoholics to get sober. AA gently took me by the hand both literally and metaphorically and lead me from the centre of the universe to the outskirts where I belong as person among people. I have learned humility, tolerance, gratitude, and compassion. I understand the importance of spiritual wellness and the need to maintain it on a daily basis. I've learned to look up, look around and look away from myself. AA has taught me the skills to let go of the past, to not fret about the future and to have faith that all will be well.

Just for today I will not drink.

Catherine

Akron Big Book, Auckland

A second chance

I went to an AA meeting in Christchurch this morning. Not an unusual event as I have been going regularly for quite a few years now, but at this meeting, I realised yet again how very fortunate I am. A newcomer shared his story of how he can stay sober for weeks at a time, but not 'stay off the grog' if temptations are put his way.

Looking back, I know I had a robust introduction to AA. First through the rehab.

I attended for 3 months, and where I was introduced to the steps and the fellowship; and 2nd, when I left treatment, I was encircled by a group of AA members who attended meetings almost every night of the week.



Maybe, being the sort of drunk I was, having to drink every day, all day, made it easier for me to accept I really am an alcoholic. I came out of the treatment on pink cloud wanting to tell everyone how wonderful AA is. Of course, I was grateful I'd had my life restored - the life I had wanted to end but haven't been able to take the action necessary to achieve.

But the gratitude wore off, and the actions, which were strongly

advocated, were not followed. I didn't find a sponsor, and I didn't continue to put effort into working the steps which I had been introduced to in the rehab.

After 4 years I stopped attending meetings, I thought I didn't need AA, my life was good. I had a new husband, who I'd met in AA, we had busy lives, working full-time, family members to look out for and to socialise with, so we didn't need AA.

For the first few years, everything seemed rosy but somewhere along the way, I started getting resentments, and they got bigger and more numerous. Resentments against my husband, other family members and colleagues at work. My life was a mess. I was a mess, but I didn't think of going back to AA to sort it out.

Fortunately for me before I picked up a drink - which I'm sure was on the cards - my Higher Power gave me a 2nd chance at this program. One night I found myself at an old-timer's meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous. There I listened to some members who I had been attending meetings with all those years before. I had an overwhelming feeling of relief. I was home!

Looking back, I know that alcohol

was not my problem. I used alcohol as a solution to my problems. I used it to shut up my head and to deal with that rage inside, which was always there, spoiling even the loveliest of occasions and events. So, for 8 years I had been trying to live life on life's terms without booze and without AA. In my case, a recipe for disaster.

So, you see I have every reason to be grateful as I've been given 2 chances of obtaining sobriety.

The 2nd time I didn't mess around.

I asked a woman to help me do the 4th and 5th steps, dealing with all the resentments that would destroy my peace of mind and my relationships with others. It took a while but with help from her and other AA members and of course my Higher

Power, I was able to start living again instead of just existing.

I have no doubt that I would have picked up a drink eventually if my Higher Power hadn't guided me to that old timers meeting. I try now to show how grateful I am for that 2nd chance, by doing service which finally includes getting around to writing to Mainstay again.

Janet S. Christchurch



I didn't think I was an alkie

– but I was sure my ex-gang-member, de-facto-husband was. After all he'd once had 'treatment' for alcoholism so he must be one: and I wasn't like him. I'd never been to jail and had no drink-driving charges. I'd also been a PTA chair; member of the tennis club and I knew people like that were not alxies. Nor was I.

However, my life was messy so I went to a counsellor and then a hypnotherapist who I thought would fix the mess my life was in – but they didn't. In fact, the counsellor suggested I might be alcoholic, and I needed to go to the treatment centre some 100 miles from home. Desperate to change, I eventually did, but I knew when I got there, they would apologise for her mistaken belief.

They didn't apologise, in fact they confirmed her diagnosis and after 7 weeks in therapy I sort of believed them too. They also said treatment was for discovery and that AA was for recovery, and I only had to go to AA for as long as I wanted to stay sober. Well, actually I didn't want to stay sober, I just wanted my life to be better so decided to give AA a go even though I didn't like the 'god' part of their programme.

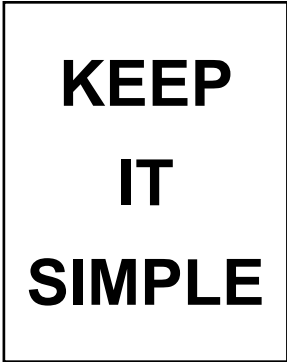
Once there I decided that A.A. would be my higher power, the 'God of my understanding', and I'd do what they suggested – after all if I was to have a God, I should follow its guidelines.

Anyway, over the next few weeks, months and years, I did come to believe in a higher power, and like most in A.A., it was one that has nothing to do with religions. There was no man in the sky keeping score.

One of my awakenings was on a beach. The waves were crashing on the rocks, big bull kelp was washing in and out, I was lying in the sand, the sun was shining, and only a few metres from me were some sea lions – very smelly sea-lions.

As I lay there watching the wispy clouds float by, being seduced by the sound of the waves I suddenly realised that all the pieces of the picture were complete. That each element, me, the rocks, the sea, sand, sun, and sea-lions were all as important as each other, not one of us more important than the next.

And somehow that all translated into my mind that there was a higher power, manifested in the form of nature before me. That AA was a huge part of my higher power and restoring me to sanity, but nature



**KEEP
IT
SIMPLE**

too was part of the whole, smelly sea-lions included.

Most importantly I learnt, just as those A.A. members told me I would, I had a spiritual awakening as the RESULT of the twelve steps – all of which I knew I did not need to do and even if I did ‘do them’ they would not work for me.

Now I am many years sober and still attend meetings. not because I am scared, I’ll drink, but because I can help others and I like the way of life I have when I practice the A.A. programme - I am happy joyous and free. I’ve attended A.A. meetings around the world and in them have met atheists, agnostics, Buddhists, Protestants, Hindu, Muslims, Catholics and Jews; all united under the banner of a “god – as we understand him”.

For me the word God is just shorthand for whatever I (or you) believe, A.A. didn’t make me believe anything and when I’m in a room of 20 or 100 other sober alkie, I know there are 20 or 100 Gods as we all understand the word.

HH Wellington



My name is Chris, and I am an Alcoholic.

I have just taken on the Mainstay Rep job at my Home Group of Mahu in Christchurch. I am keen to have more members of our group write to Mainstay and as I have an AA Birthday coming up in the near future, I thought I would write and set an example.

First though I would like to sing the praises of Mahu which is a Meeting which originated at Sunnyside Mental Hospital (Now Hillmorton) many decades ago. It is an awesome Meeting with what I believe is a Heart and a Soul. There is a true feeling of Fellowship. The Meeting is located in Collins Street in Addington next to the Salvation Army Bridge Programme and Meets at 9.00am on a Sunday.

Back to my journey of Recovery. I had my last drink on 4.10.1992 and will celebrate my 28th AA Birthday on 5.10.2020. Life is an amazing journey and I have a very active contented life. Everything I was promised in the early days has come true.

I have never stopped attending meetings, have always had a Sponsor (the first two have sadly passed away) and my present Sponsor is great support for me. I also Sponsor a number of Members of the Fellowship.

I hand my life and my will over to my Higher Power every morning and read my AA books - Daily

Reflections, As Bill Sees it, and Twenty-four Hours a day to start my day. I have shared many times that my recovery is the most important thing in the world to me. I do not ever want to forget that I am an Alcoholic. Without Sobriety I have nothing.

To those that are early in Recovery I suggest that you keep up your Meetings and get involved in Service. Recovery will not happen by Osmosis. You have to roll your sleeves up and be part of the Heart of your Group and don't hang on the fringes.

Some good advice I was given by my first Sponsor was to sit in the Front Row if you want Rolls Royce Sobriety. If you are happy to settle for Austin 7 Sobriety sit in the back Row.

Keep coming Back. The Miracles can and do happen.

God Bless

Chris R

Living Sober

Kia ora, my name is Linda and I'm an alcoholic. In Auckland we are living in Level 3 again.

I have found it difficult and my anxiety levels have risen each time we have had to adapt to living with COVID19 nearby where we can't see it. Like before I having been doing some work from home and adapting to using the computer for work meetings and for organising

online stuff for work.

Fear has been one of my defects which I found when I did step 4 and 5 with my sponsor. I didn't want to do the steps or go to meetings or talk to these happy strange people when I came to AA a while ago. But I kept coming to meetings because I didn't want to drink again and lose: friends, jobs, accommodation and self-respect again. So, I keep turning up and leaving quickly to get away from you. I picked it up slowly that I needed to change how I did things, and that my head did not have my best interests at heart, and these people were kind and caring, and like me.

So with this surge of anxiety rising up again I have had to go back to my basics, which include attending at least 3 meetings a week (it is online meetings at the moment), praying in the morning for sobriety and to follow Gods will not mine, doing my inventory each night to keep on top of my defects.

I got in touch with my sponsee's, and got back into step work with them. I contacted my sponsor and told her how I felt and I could see the programme of AA working for me. But I have to keep at it and I decided to look at the Traditions and how I can use them more in my life.

When I'm doing what I need to do and not always what I want to do, I have a different outlook on my life. I see all the things I am grateful for, including: being sober, being

alive, good health, good job, lovely grandchildren and lots more. I've realised I'm living in the solution, which is the AA programme, and not the problem - which is a sad alcoholic who feels sorry for herself. Thank you AA for giving me a good and useful life trying to stay sober and help other alcoholics achieve sobriety.

Linda G

You grow, or you Go

Years ago, when I was new to the fellowship, I heard someone say that if you got a horse thief sober, all you had was a sober horse thief. I couldn't for the life of me understand what that meant. At the time, I thought that if someone got sober, then everything else would change, too. All the problems would go away, situations would get better, and life would improve in general. How wrong I was.

When I got sober, I still had a lot of old ideas that I acted on. I still felt like I deserved more than most people, and now that I wasn't drinking anymore, I felt that the world owed me even more. Getting a normal job still seemed beneath me, so I used that as a rationalization to continue my illegal activities. My sense of entitlement led me to keep cheating in other ways as well, and soon I was even more miserable than I had been while

drinking.

When I confronted my sponsor and asked why I wasn't feeling better now that I was sober, he said it was because I was refusing to recover. He said just putting the plug in the jug but not changing anything else meant I was just another sober horse thief. He explained that recovery meant working the Twelve Steps and growing past my old self. Only by discarding the old and having a spiritual experience would I change and feel better. As I watched others refuse to do this and go back out, I realised the wisdom in the saying: You grow, or you go.

Anonymous



Mainstay

Will It Stay Or Will It Go?

Mainstay printed its first edition in June 1955 with it being held in trust by its two editors until handed over to the membership in 1964.

For many years it has been our meeting in print and the voice of A.A. in NZ. There were periods in the 70s and 80s where over 1,000 copies per edition were printed. By the late 90s early 2000s that subscriber base had dropped to 650. By 2010 the subscriber base was down to 345 and as I write this it sits at 246 subscribers.

At the October Conference as Chair of the Mainstay Committee I reported with pleasure the improvements we have made in modernising the look and improving the content of Mainstay along with adding the option of a digital subscription. The feedback from Conference and from our readers has been very positive about the magazine with a motion passed from Conference to thank Heather and Toni who put the magazine together. Alas the quality has not made a difference to the support for the magazine which we measure in the number of subscribers so we can pay the bills and the number of letters, so we have local content to publish. Lack of letters is like a meeting with no members showing up!

My reluctant recommendation to Conference was that without an increase in subscriber numbers we should consider that Mainstay has run its course and is no longer required by the membership. Like a meeting which can not attract enough members to support itself it might be time to cease publication of Mainstay.

The current decision passed by motion at Conference is that if the subscription base does not grow to 500 Mainstay will cease to be printed from April issue 2021. Delegates will be taking this back to Area Assemblies.

I preach to the converted as those of you reading this support Mainstay but you are less the 5% of our membership. Added to this over the last year meeting subscriptions have dropped from 95 to 87 and we have over 480 registered meetings in NZ. It is not just about being self - supporting. I have the privilege of working with a dedicated group of A.A. members producing each issue of Mainstay but it is hard to stay enthused when you see the subscriber base drop and you struggle to get content from members to put an issue together.

Unless we see an increase in subscriptions for Feb and April Mainstay our future has been set. You can help by letting your meetings and friends know we need letters and we need subscribers if we are to remain254 new subscribers to bring us to 500 is the measure set in the motion passed at Conference.

Yours in service

Russell B, Chair of Mainstay Sub Committee

Our Thanks To The Meetings Who Have Supported Mainstay in 2020:

- | | | |
|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| Wellington Saturday Early Birds | Oxford Group | Christchurch Big Book Study Tuesday |
| Wellington Came to Believe | Kaipoi Monday | Christchurch City Steps |
| Wellington Wednesday Night Steps and Traditions | Ashburton Monday Night Steps Group | Dunedin AA on Cumberland |
| Wellington Living Sober | Ashburton Friday Lunchtime Group | Mosgiel Tuesday AA |
| Wellington Beginners Group | Ashburton Friday Night Group | Balclutha Group |
| Wellington Kilbirnie Group | Runanga AA Monday Night | Cromwell Thursday Group |
| Wellington Sunday Spiritual Concepts | Hokitika Sunday Morning | Wanaka Monday Group |
| Nelson Wednesday Night Big Book | Came to Believe | Alexandra Tuesday Night |
| Richmond Monday | Hokitika Thursday Night | Oamaru Tuesday Recovery Group |
| Richmond Sunday Morning As Bill Sees It | Waikiki South | Gore Sunday Group |
| Nelson Thursday Night | Christchurch Saturday | Edendale Group |
| Serenity Group | Fendalton Just for Today | Invercargill Sunday Night |
| Havelock Thursday 12 Steps & 12 Traditions | Christchurch Service Centre | Invercargill Monday Jenkin St Group |
| Blenheim Sunday Renwick | Christchurch Mahu Sunday | Bluff Sunday Night |
| Picton Marina Group | Christchurch Wednesday | Ashburton Saturday Night |
| Wednesday | Came to Believe | Methven |
| Christchurch Fendalton | Christchurch Sunday Steps St | Rangiora Serenity Lunch Meeting |
| Wednesday Night | Barnabus | Gisborne Monday Night Country |
| | Christchurch Redwood | |
| | Thursday Group | |
| | Christchurch Womens Steps and Traditions | |

Conference Chair report

Hello,

My name is David and I'm an alcoholic.

I am currently Chair of Conference for AA NZ, and I have been asked to write about my experience in this Service position.

Firstly, a little about me; my sobriety date is 04/05/1994 and I live near Christchurch. I have served as a Southern Area Assembly Delegate to Conference 2009-2011 and as a Class B member of the Board 2015 – 2018. This is my first year as Chair of Conference and I was asked to put my name forward last year. I half-jokingly say that I couldn't think of a valid reason to say 'no' so that's why my nomination proceeded.

It is a privilege and responsibility to do this; our Fellowship has been well served by others in this role and I feel I have big shoes to fill. My term is for three years.

Conference is comprised of the nine Area Delegates representing Northern, Central, and Southern Areas along with the two World Service Delegates, the Executive Officer of GSO, and Board members. The Board comprises Class A Board members (non-alcoholic) and Class B Board members (alcoholic). Voting rights are all Area Delegates, Class A Board members, and one vote to the Class B Board members which is held by the Chair of the Board. This voting arrangement is designed to preserve the Conscience of our AA NZ Fellowship as it is expressed by the Delegates representing each Area. For a more complete understanding of how Conference is structured, and its role, check out the Guidelines for Conference and Conference Charter; both are available on our website.

According to our Conference Charter our purpose is:

1. Purpose: The New Zealand General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous is a guardian of the World Services and of the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous. The Conference shall be a service body only; never a government for Alcoholics Anonymous.

It has been explained to me that Conference is the body of AA, and the Board is the arms and legs; this seems a good analogy. Also, Conference is how we in New Zealand connect to the worldwide Fellowship through our World Service Delegates. In general terms The Board is the holder of the material – matters of compliance, contract, finance and policy, things which enable our Fellowship to exist and function. Conference is the holder of the spiritual – our purpose.

I believe my role is to ensure that there is a proper platform for the voice of our Area Assemblies to be heard through their Delegates so that sound decision making can occur, and our New Zealand Fellowship can carry our message locally and contribute internationally through our World Service Delegates. To this end our members are Trusted Servants and in accordance with Concepts 3 and 10 have a 'right of decision', and an 'authority commensurate with their responsibility'. They are expected to practise this at the Conference table, and it is a significant responsibility which requires them to come fully prepared. Part of my role is to enable this by ensuring they have access to all relevant information.

My role also requires me to be an 'Ex Officio' member of the Board so I attend all Board meetings and participate in discussions, although I do not have voting rights. So, I get to have a say but I'm not responsible for any outcomes – pretty sweet aye! (FYI, Board meetings between Conference meetings are conducted by Zoom so there is minimal cost involved.) The intention is that I carry the Conscience of Conference to the Board and I can bring back an insight into Board decisions to Delegates at Conference.

Conference meets twice a year in April and October for two and a half days, from Friday evening through to mid afternoon Sunday. It is a busy and intense timetable with a lot of business to get through. Attendees often feel pretty exhausted by the end of it; me included.

This year has been exceptional with COVID-19 provisions being in place. We were unable to meet in April due to lockdown, so we hastily organised a Zoom platform which served our purposes in the situation we found ourselves in. However, I'm sure all Conference members would agree this was not an ideal situation, and we were all grateful for the opportunity to meet in a physical sense in October. There is a huge value in face to face meetings and the associated side conversations and connections that occur over a cup of tea and a meal.

We are fortunate in having an ideal location at the Friary in Auckland – it provides us with a comfortable level of accommodation with good facilities and a peaceful and spiritual environment; all within an easy distance of Auckland airport so travel arrangements can be organised in an efficient and economical way. I am grateful our Fellowship can access the St Francis Retreat Centre for our meetings. Of course, there is no obligation in this arrangement; we are self-supporting and meet their expectations in all regards. However, I always feel grateful when our friends support us in ways beyond the material.

I hope this snapshot gives you an insight into my role as Conference Chair and the functions of Conference. I humbly suggest that for a more complete view you have a chat to your Area Delegate. She or he is your representative at Conference and they can give you a first-hand viewpoint on what their role is and how Conference exists to serve our Fellowship and enable us all to support our Primary Purpose – to carry our message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

Yours in service,

David G

Chair of Conference



Cheques to be phased Out

Is your group prepared?

The major banks have announced plans to phase out cheques with the following;

Bank	Cheque processing stops
Kiwi Bank	Feb 2020
BNZ	July 2021
ANZ	May 2021
Westpac	2021

For all groups still using cheque books this will require some forward planning as to how they will handle a transition to internet banking. As Tradition 4 notes

Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole. So, it is up to the groups to sort their finances out and both the Board or GSO are rightfully avoiding giving advice as this could appear to be interference in group autonomy. I would note that waiting until the last minute is not advisable.

As far as GSO is concerned internet banking is more convenient as we do not have to physically go to the bank as we currently do with cheques. This is not a reason for groups to change as GSO serves the groups in any way we need to but knowing a change to internet banking will benefit GSO is hopefully another reason to bring a change forward?

Yours in service,

Russell B.

Board Acting Treasurer

Special feature - Travel/holidays

Recovery and travel

Oh - when I heard this topic – the global pandemic has put paid to that. Then I realised I have a story where travel has played a huge part. What are we told in “How It Works”, chapter 5 of the Big Book – in AA we share our experience, strength, and hope? This is my experience, and I have travelled as a sober person inland as well as overseas.

When I got sober in London, March 2004, I already had a trip planned to my elder brother’s family home in Chicago, USA. I had visited many times before and always loved it.

I was indulged like one of the kids there, but a kid with adult privileges. Drinking and smoking used to be encouraged as my presence gave my sister in law licence to act out. She had the chance to stop being wife and mum and behave badly, knowing my brother was unlikely to criticise with me around.

This time was going to be different though. I didn’t tell many family members about my new-found sobriety, but I did tell the USA-based ones. I felt a need to speak about it outside of AA to someone, and they were miles away! As many AAs had suggested, they showed nothing but

love and assured me not only would all booze be hidden away in their house, but also, they could chauffer me to as many AA meetings as I wanted. (They were quite aware of where to find them as I had a nephew with similar issues.)

Three months sober, I had heard stories from other AAs about triggering places to relapse. The inside of a plane during a long journey was one, as was visiting old drinking haunts. I was losing my constant craving for alcohol at that point and feeling physically improved but was still paralysed by fear. Just before departure I got news from Chicago – a treasured friend had been tragically killed in UK, so the plan had changed. Luckily for my brother and his wife, they could fly to UK, whilst I crossed them in the air, and cared for their kids for a week or so, until their mum could get back. Perfect timing!



I went into a tailspin of fear. How could I face all that responsibility when I needed AA meetings to get me out of bed and facing every day with some stab at normality?

Rigorous honesty was a phrase I had heard over and again in meetings. It had washed over me really, now I went for it, and shared in a meeting how worried I was. This resulted in many practical suggestions, and one fellow instantly bought me the AA-approved text *Living Sober*. “Just read it cover to cover on the plane”, he said, which is precisely what I did. For the 6 or so hours that alcohol was on offer free during that flight, I read and re-read, unknowingly being comforted, and gaining serenity from the book.

My brother and his wife had pulled out all the stops for me in Chicago. A close friend happily volunteered to take me to meetings and home again. A meetings directory was waiting for me on my bedside table.

I have a fear of entering ‘new’ meetings and being the stranger in the room. I don’t want to be inspected and possibly found wanting. I soon realised, that this was in my head, and other people in the room are likely more interested in their own business. At the same time, my new American fellows showed me the same compassion and help as those I had learned to count on in London. I was offered lifts and didn’t have to

inconvenience our family friend all the time. When I shared that I was sad to have misplaced my 3-month sobriety chip, someone left the room and got me a replacement.

This all happened because I had learned to share my fears in AA meetings. I entered the rooms of AA ashamed of my anxiety and fear of the world. I was offered a listening ear, understanding and trust. If I had not made my fears known, I would not have been taken care of.

8 years ago, my husband and I moved to New Zealand. I had attended meetings in Wellington on previous visits, so had no fear of missing out on Recovery. However, it certainly took me a while to adjust to a different format and that old feeling of not being wanted, as an intruder.

I got over that by looking up the meetings and getting out to them. When the opportunity came, I shared, so my fellows could get to know me. Service was offered, and I took it. After some years of continuous sobriety, travelling somewhere different became an unavoidable way of reflecting on my Recovery, and noticing where I had become complacent and lazy.

8 years later the time has come for us to move again, this time to Spain.

By the way, this moving around the world would never have happened if I was a drinking alcoholic. In my

early 20's and studying French at University, I talked myself out of a year in France as an integral part of my course – the fear was too much, even at that age.

So, I'm facing leaving my familiar fellowship again, and joining a new one, one that doesn't speak my own language.

This worries me – fear hasn't completely gone, but I am aware of it and use my AA Recovery on a daily basis to either conquer it or work through it. Where we're going, there are English-speaking meetings too, so as usual in my experience, AA has provided, and I am never the first person to have this problem. What I tell myself now is that it will all be fine. I have faced worse trials sober and come through.

This time I have Recovery friends in both London and New Zealand – how lucky is that!

Tony H, Wellington

Special Section topics in Mainstay - 2021

Note: if you write on any of these topics you don't need to wait until the middle of next year, for example to send it, but can send them straight away.

Please put - in the topic line - the actual topic so I can file them under the appropriate months/issue. Of course, for every issue I need at least 10 letters on other topics too.

- February/March: **Concepts** - needed by 10th January
- April/May: **Steps** - needed by 10th March
- June/July: **Sponsorship** - needed by 10th May
- August/September: **Service and me** - needed by 10th July
- October/November: **Traditions** - needed by 10th September
- December/January: **Trudging the road** - needed by 10th November



Service in the Fellowship

Service - our third legacy

My name is Wendy and I am an alcoholic.

My first A.A. sponsor was a gentleman living 14,000 Km away whom I found through the Loners-Internationalists Meeting (LIM) whilst working overseas in 1986. LIM is the international A.A. meeting in print for Loners, Internationalists and other A.A. members who cannot attend regular A.A. meetings. It still takes place today in a confidential bulletin: fellow Loners write to each other around the world.

In New Zealand, I learned about responsibility when serving my Home Group, getting the milk and biscuits, opening the door, and setting up the room for the meeting. Members elected me to serve as their General Service Representative (G.S.R.) A.A. calls this service “possibly the most important service position in the Fellowship” and it certainly taught me about the Home Group, the Traditions, sponsorship, Area Assemblies, our literature, chairing, and practising the A.A. principles in Group Conscience meetings.

I became grateful that, by the grace of God, I had never lost my driving licence due to alcoholism and could use this either to pick up a newcomer for their first meeting, or drive 450Km to an area assembly.

G.S.R. service was the foundation of future service in the Fellowship such as organising and facilitating workshops of all kinds, and rostering or being rostered on the 0800 AA works number. Service in meetings at local treatment centres showed the practical meaning of the Toronto Declaration: the responsibility for turning up as expected. Real-life 12th Step calls have become less frequent, but are still powerful service carrying the message to the still suffering alcoholic. G.S.R. attendance at Area Assemblies points towards the Concepts, and practicing placing principles before personalities.

G.S.R. service then enabled members to elect me to the District Committee, first as Secretary and then Chair, and to serve in Public Information service, carrying literature to doctors' surgeries, treatment facilities, and local police stations.

Service on an Area Assembly Hosting Committee and the attached Public Information meeting cemented the importance of our code of love and tolerance. When the time came for the area to host a National Convention, serving on the organising committee and the Registration Desk was a good time to rely upon the experience, strength and hope of a service sponsor.

There was service on the “A.A. on Air” meetings – what a great way to carry the message of A.A. to the still suffering, or homebound alcoholic.

Three years serving on the roster for the Auckland Women’s Corrections Facility meetings taught me gratitude and humility. Writing to and sponsoring women inmates was service which brought great rewards when a woman would arrive at her first “outside” A.A. meeting upon release.

Service on the editorial Mainstay committee steered me yet again to the wealth and wisdom of the A.A. literature. A.A. Conference Approved literature has been through a lengthy and careful “Group Conscience” process and it can be used with trust and confidence that it carries the message of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Supporting A.A. conventions, both national and international, is another way of serving our Fellowship. Joining with 54,000 other alcoholics in the Serenity Prayer Standing at the 75th International Conference in San Antonio, was a spiritual experience for me.

A.A. guidelines for continuous sobriety in service positions, and the Principle of Rotation have been cornerstones of service. A.A. experience shows how these principles protect me, and the Fellowship, from my alcoholic personality. And gives someone else a chance to serve.

A.A. is an action program. Service helps keep me sober and there is something for everyone to do in A.A.

Wendy B.

Hamilton Tuesday Night Big Book

Book review

Beginners' Book: Getting and staying sober in AA

GV20 \$25.00

A Note to readers - the forward outlines the following well founded ideas and actions.

In this book, AA members shared what helped them in early recovery - a journey sometimes full of bumps and detours but also new ideas and surprising insights. This is an ongoing process, the results of which appear, as the big book suggests 'sometimes slowly sometimes quickly'.

"I wish for a slow recovery" an old timer sometimes says to a newcomer in AA. This may make some of us bristle. When we first got sober, we wanted to move forward quickly. We wasted a lot of our time in our drinking days, we think, and now, we're impatient to get on with our lives. We don't want to wait to get our families and our jobs back, or maybe fall in love, travel, or pursue long lost dreams.

This is not to say that eagerness for the fruits of the programme isn't wonderful. Hopes and dreams of the future - even tomorrow - help us stay sober. But we could short-change ourselves if we hurry through these early days. We need time for healing-emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Freedom, happiness, peace of mind, a sense of usefulness and a connection with our higher power are the solid rewards of taking it one day at a time.

This is where "progress not perfection" comes to our aid, a reminder that we are all "works in progress" How fortunate that is: as members of Alcoholics Anonymous, we continue to learn, change and grow, as long as we stay sober.

So, we have found it can pay to take a moment and listen, when someone with long term sobriety says to us "Give time, time" or "I wish for you a slow recovery".

Afterall, sobriety is an adventure of a lifetime. And it begins the moment we ask AA for help.

What follows are a series of 7 sections, each with a heading. These

are the basis of themes which AA members who have contributed to The US Grapevine which comprise contributions to this volume - sharing as one might encounter in a meeting. "You don't have to drink today", "Out of isolation", "Tools for recovery", "Experience strength and hope", "Design for living", "A daily reprieve", through to "Letting go of old ideas", all of which follow a natural and obvious sequence for the reader.

By **Randal P.**



BEGINNERS' BOOK

Getting and Staying Sober in AA

The "God" Word

A.A. is not a religious organization. Alcoholics Anonymous has only one requirement for membership, and that is the desire to stop drinking. There is room in A.A. for people of all shades of belief and non-belief.

"We have atheists and agnostics. We have people of nearly every race, culture and religion. In A.A. we are supposed to be bound together in the kinship of a common suffering. Consequently, the full individual liberty to practice any creed or principle or therapy whatever should be a first consideration for us all. Let us not, therefore, pressure anyone with our individual or even our collective views. Let us instead accord each other the respect and love that is due to every human being as he tries to make his way toward the light. Let us always try to be inclusive rather than exclusive; let us remember that each alcoholic among us is a member of A.A., so long as he or she declares".

A.A. co-founder Bill W. wrote in 1965

Whatever you do, please don't let someone else's religious beliefs prevent you from finding the solution that is available to you through Alcoholics Anonymous.

Items of interest

Stalking the serenity prayer - from a non-AA book

Grateful to Have Been There
by Nell Wing (2nd edition 1998)
Hazelden Publishing 1992.

For 20 years, Nell Wing worked as assistant and executive secretary to Bill W. Throughout those years in the decades that followed, she was a friend and companion Bill's wife, Lois W, the co-founder of Al-Anon Family Groups (AFG). Working in the World Service's office of AA, from 1947 until her retirement in 1982, Nell knew Bill, Lois, and AA in a way no one else could. In this book she shares her memories and impressions of more than 40 years on the inside. Her reflections offer a remarkable insight into the makings and workings of AA by a non-alcoholic.

Appendix B: stalking wild Serenity Prayer page 167

The actual origin of the Serenity Prayer has over the years been tantalising, elusive, and some still feel, unsolved mystery. It's intriguing to those of us GSO who have at one time or another, attempted to trace the prayer to an authoritative, unimpeachable source.

The prayer entered unobtrusively into AAs history in 1941. It was

discovered in the: "In Memoriam" obituary column of an early June addition of the New York Herald Tribune.

The exact wording was:

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference. Goodbye.

Some 15 years later, reminiscing about this event. Ruth Hock Crecelius, our first non-alcoholic secretary, said, "*it is a fact that Jack C appeared at the office one morning for a chat, during the course of which he showed me the obituary notice with the 'Serenity Prayer.'* I was as much impressed with it as he was and asked to leave it with me so I could copy it and use it in our leases to the groups and loners"

At this time, Bobby B who became secretary when Ruth married, was also terrifically impressed with it, undoubtedly used to work with the many she contacted daily at the 24th Street clubhouse. Horace C had the idea of printing it on cards and paid for the first printing.

All the local members including Bill W felt its relevance immediately. As Bill said in *AA comes of age*, "*never had we seen so much AA in so few words*".

For most of the 1940s it was called the 'AA prayer' by members of the fellowship and by the late 40s became better known as the Serenity Prayer. This prayer has, as the Grapevine once noted, been credited to almost every theologian, philosopher, and saint known to humanity. The Grapevine also noted that popular opinion of AAs in the 1950s favoured St Francis of Assisi as the author.

But there were numerous other candidates for the honour also. In *AA Comes of Age* Bill said, *"No one can tell for sure who first broke the Serenity Prayer. Some say it came from the early Greeks; others think it was the of an anonymous English; still others claim it was written by an American city naval officer; and Jack Alexander, who once researched the matter, attributes it to the reverent Reinhold Niebuhr."*

Nell Wing continues to write twenty interesting pages about the various searches for the authorship of our prayer – from Aristotle, to Sanskrit, and an Egyptian obelisk and numerous others. However, no matter who originally wrote it, our AA version is the one we aquired from the obituary notice - our only change has been to remove the word, 'goodbye'.

I'm glad to have been able to look over her shoulder as she records not only the appendix about stalking the 'wild serenity prayer' but a complete (non-alcoholic's) view of what was happening over those early years.



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 & PP)</i>
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	Digital	February/March	8.00
	Digital	April/May	4.00
	<p>Note: Annual renewal notices will go out with April/May issues if Mainstay continues.</p>		

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.

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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.

