

# A.A. AND THE ARMED SERVICES

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**recovery**

*ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS*<sup>®</sup> 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 A.A. membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions.
- A.A. is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes.
- Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

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## **A.A. and the Armed Services**



## **Who has a drinking problem?**

Few individuals in the armed services (or any other walk of life, for that matter) like to admit they're having trouble with alcohol. "Not me," they say. Whether they're Air Force pilots, women drill sergeants, Coast Guard radiomen, or Navy wives, they say, "That's not what's the matter with me." It's their job that's gone sour on them, or their family life, or their health, or....

For most people, the word "alcoholic" is a deadly term, conjuring up images of weak-willed skid rowers, panhandlers, or any type they're proud not to be. Their image of the "alcoholic" is so different from how they see themselves, that they have a good excuse to go on drinking.

Every member of Alcoholics Anonymous understands this type of thinking, because almost every member once entertained the very same thoughts. They've learned that denying there's a problem is part of the disease of alcoholism.

From the beginning, A.A. members have regarded alcoholism as an illness — a physical allergy coupled with a mental obsession.

It's important to understand that alcoholism is not determined by where you drink, when you started drinking, how long you've been drinking, with whom you drink, what, or even how much. The true test is in the answer to this question: What has alcohol done to you? If it has affected your relationships with your family, friends, former or present employers; if it has affected your health; if it determines or affects your nondrinking moods or your state of mind; if you are in any

way preoccupied with alcohol; if you have little control over when you take a drink, or once you have a drink, you have little control over how much you drink — then the likelihood is that you have a problem.

This pamphlet will acquaint you with some men and women in the armed services from many backgrounds who want you to know how they came to grips with their common problem — alcoholism — and how fruitful their lives have become since they became sober members of Alcoholics Anonymous.

These stories — in fact, all A.A. stories — illustrate that alcoholism comes in many different forms and in a variety of disguises. There is no such thing as being too young to be an alcoholic, or too old, or too different, or too special.

In the stories that follow, you will learn how men and women in the armed services came to Alcoholics Anonymous and found that it worked as well for them as it has for hundreds of thousands of others who suffered from the same problem — drinking. They learned to change their lives, not by themselves, but through shared experience with other A.A. members.

### **What is A.A.?**

Alcoholics Anonymous is an international fellowship of men and women who have had a drinking problem. It is nonprofessional, self-supporting, multiracial, apolitical, and available almost everywhere. A.A. is not a religious society, since it requires no definite religious belief. The A.A. program of recovery from alcoholism is undeniably based on acceptance of certain spiritual values. The individual member is free to interpret those values as he or she thinks best. There are no age or education requirements. Membership is open to anyone who wants to do something about his or her drinking problem.

## Who is an A.A. member?

Any man or woman — as the typical stories in this pamphlet will show — can be an A.A. member. The illness called alcoholism can strike a person of any rank, any age, any race, any social or educational background. The blackouts and the shakes, the loneliness and the fears are the same for a Private and for a Colonel, a Navy nurse and a Marine Corps jet pilot. To begin with, these shared experiences of active alcoholism make up a bond among all members of Alcoholics Anonymous. “I know what you’re going through,” every one of them can say to a newcomer. “I’ve been there. I remember what it felt like.”

But A.A. members have something much more important in common. They are not merely staying dry together. Through the A.A. program, summed up in the Twelve Steps (at the back of this pamphlet), they are learning a new way to live.

In most cases, they give details about their present lives. But if, after reading their stories, you have additional, specific questions, other A.A. members answer these in the final section, “What’s it like to be in the military — and in A.A.?”

Many A.A. meetings are held at Armed Services bases, in more than 180 countries. For those too far afield to attend meetings, there is support through correspondence, worldwide web-based meetings, and a publication called *Loners-International Meeting*.



## Personal Stories

### U.S. Army

#### **Standing tall at 0600.**

For a variety of drink-inspired offenses, a wise old judge gave me a six-month sentence, then suspended it in exchange for my promise to enlist. I was willing, but the Army was not. It wouldn't let anybody join who, at age 19, had a record like mine: expelled from college three times in 18 months, arrested several times for drunk-and-disorderly, drunken driving, and using false I.D. to get liquor under age.

Although I could not enlist, I was eminently draftable. Less than a month after the sentence, I was in the Army. Stateside, in peacetime, I took to the service like a duck to water. These were my kind of people. No matter how drunk you got or what you did, you were a topflight soldier as long as you were standing tall at 0600 the following day. But I had to develop the habit of working harder and better than anybody else, so that the first sergeant would be in my corner on those inevitable days when I'd be late, shaky, or ducking out for a few midafternoon beers. The arrangement worked; it was a beautiful understanding.

At the end of my two years of obligatory service, I reenlisted for two years, and I got married. (Somehow, both steps took; I've been a married career soldier ever since.) Then I was ordered to Europe, and it would be a year or more before family housing would be available. But I was

ready to accommodate myself to the situation, mostly by nightly trips to the NCO (Non-Commissioned Officers) club or by serious drinking in the barracks. During this time, I was hospitalized twice after being badly beaten in drunken brawls. I broke up a unit party in a private home by going into an obscenity-screaming, rampaging fit. I did a striptease in the NCO club; later the same night, I chased the first sergeant out of the barracks, using a broken whiskey bottle as a weapon. I had slipped from solid citizen to pathetic case to outright menace.

Arranging for my wife and daughter to join me overseas became almost a community project, so sure was the unit that I'd shape up once my family arrived. It didn't work that way. Struggle as I might against it, I preferred life at the club and the local taverns to that at home.

Finally, the time came when I just couldn't be ignored any longer. I couldn't function. I was fat and weak and scared and miserable. I knew that soon I'd be losing stripes and probably be sent home in disgrace. My wife made a last-ditch attempt at salvaging me by consulting a new chaplain, one who knew about A.A. He put me in touch with an A.A. member — the turning point of my life. It took me about five minutes to realize that I was an alcoholic. Fortunately, an A.A. group was just starting in that area. The more I heard about the A.A. program at its meetings, the more certain I was that A.A. was for me.

In the almost nine years since then, things have been getting constantly better. Without the booze, I found that I was every bit as good as the next guy. In fact, with a clear brain and a little self-confidence, I was surprised to learn that I was a pretty scrappy competitor. Also, I discovered that the Army doesn't hold grudges. My record was known, but once I straightened out and enjoyed a reasonable period of good citizenship, the road to advancement opened up, starting with a commission as second lieutenant.

I've learned another thing by going to A.A. meetings over the years. Most A.A. members are pretty competent people. They're not bums or

losers or creeps. Their only problem is that they can't handle booze. Set that aside, and you have some of the most capable, intelligent, and attractive folks in the world. Among the military at A.A. meetings, I've seen every single rank from general officer down to private, members of all branches of the service, individuals with status from drafted basic trainees to the most committed career men, and all racial, ethnic, economic, and social groups. Alcohol is a great leveler. If you have any doubt about the brotherhood (and sisterhood) of man, a few A.A. meetings should remove it.

U.S. Navy

### **A nurse — and patient.**

I am an alcoholic and a professional nurse — a Navy nurse. I am very proud to be a Navy nurse, and I have been back on duty now for over two months. It feels great!

When I was a student nurse, I drank just about anything, including beer in nearby taverns, but drinking wasn't a big part of my life. It did become part of my life pattern about eight years ago, and about two years ago, it started to overcome me. I wasn't sleeping. At work, I couldn't wait to come home to have a few drinks to feel better. But a few led to a few more, and I guess I was lonely, and I would talk on the phone at great length. Often, I would fall asleep on the couch watching TV, without eating. On the job, I kept putting off needed work on future programs in the hospital — "I'll do that tomorrow."

One evening, I got smashed in a hurry at a Navy social. The next day, my chief nurse spoke to me. She suggested A.A. I thanked her and straightened out for about six months, without going to A.A. I thought I could control my drinking by myself. Before long, I slipped back even deeper into drinking. Then the crash came. I got drunk at a social at the chief nurse's home in the presence of top Bureau people. The next day, I

went to work wishing I was dead. I knew I was going out of the Navy. I knew my career was lost. I felt worthless.

The unit chief nurse came to my aid. She spoke to the chief nurse with the Corps, and they offered to help me. I suddenly realized they wanted to help me, just one out of over 2,000 Navy nurses. They wanted to help *me*, a lone individual.

I was sent to another Navy hospital, where they had psychiatric facilities and an alcoholic rehab unit. It is difficult for almost anybody to be a patient in a hospital, but let me tell you, it is *very* difficult for a nurse. At first, I just couldn't realize — much less accept — that I was a *patient*, in a Navy hospital, in a psychiatric ward. I saw nurses and doctors that I had had duty with before, and they knew I was there as a drunk. I was ashamed. But I kept repeating to myself, "I want help." I put this first in my mind, and I kept it there.

I did not become an alcoholic overnight, so I did not recover overnight. Many, many people worked long and hard helping me to get where I am today. I look back, and I think of all the fine people in A.A. and in the rehab unit. I think of a young nonalcoholic hospital worker who listened to me and guided me as I worked through my denial, anxiety, and anger into my awakening, accepting, and rejoicing. Then there was a chief communications technician, a fellow alcoholic, who gave me strength and confidence. He and others helped me to appreciate and understand better the Navy we belong to. They helped me to realize that we all need each other as everyday human beings in a military family, and that we can reach out and receive more help from the civilian family of A.A. These folks helped me to learn the true meaning of love — plain love for another person — and to get back my self-esteem.

During my hospitalization, with the help of my doctor, I gained some insight into myself, the alcoholic. To stay sober, I must want to for myself, the person — not for my profession, not for the Navy, not for my family, not for my church, but for myself. Staying sober, I may be of

some value to society and to God.

In looking over my life, I believe the most important thing that has happened to me is that I was able to get help when I needed it — the Navy gave me the means and the tools to be able to lead a different life. What would my future life have been if I had continued the way I was going? No life at all. Now, I do have a future. I hope to use A.A. both for my own needs and for helping others with drinking problems to realize that they are not alone and need never be alone. There are hundreds of thousands of people like me who have been helped.

## U.S. Army Dependent

### **She said, “I’ve been waiting for you.”**

I was born to German immigrant parents on Long Island. My father was a successful surgeon and I grew up in a privileged household. During the war years my father still had his German accent and so we were discriminated against. I was beaten up and, because of my heritage, I believed that I was guilty. I never felt like I belonged.

It was unusual in the forties for a girl to be tall and I was the tallest in all my classes. I craved friendship and love and would go after it instead of letting things happen. I was always barreling through and trying to get my way.

I met my future husband when he was a West Point cadet. I loved uniforms and my father loved him and then he asked me to marry him. Military life started and it was the beginning of 20 moves in 20 years. I went from being an extension of my father to being an extension of my husband. He was not at all well-liked and I was the personality kid. Later I would sit by myself, martini in hand, watching Dick Van Dyke and saying, “You’re like I am. Laughing on the outside and crying on the inside.”

I couldn’t grow where I was planted. In the 11 months after I was married we made three

moves and traveled 40,000 miles. I had a baby and lost another. My husband was wounded in Korea. That's a lot to have happen to anyone, and I could not bear the loneliness. I loved being a mother, but couldn't stand the confinement. It was in Texas that I discovered the martini. I found that a martini (although I couldn't stand the taste) got me where I wanted to go — a plateau of nothing but warmth. It did something magical for me. All of a sudden I wasn't such an angry person. The world was right and I wasn't lonely and all the things that seemed boring were okay.

We went from Texas to Turkey. I applied for a teaching job at the Turkish Army Language School. I loved teaching and really found my niche. In Turkey the drinking water was very bad and the gin was extremely cheap. Drinking became very important. By now I'd been married for 10 years. Overall, I had eight miscarriages, and had adopted one child. I finally had another full-term pregnancy. From then on the drinking really started progressing. My mother died and I had no home to go to, which I found very difficult.

We came back from Turkey and I became pregnant with my fourth child. My husband went off to Vietnam. I was drinking heavily but there was an element of control. Until the day I surrendered I never drank before 5 p.m. because ladies didn't do that. My drink of choice was 15 ounces of gin with a whiff of vermouth and I deliberated over whether I would add olives, because I had a weight problem. We moved to Virginia and I made a pass at A.A. I'd read an article in *Reader's Digest* and I wrote to this man and told him how I was hurting and he told me to go to A.A. He sent me articles and I called A.A. and got beautiful material which I hid behind my encyclopedias.

I had even gone on Antabuse by the time we went to France and this is where the blackouts started. I tried all the controls and cures, and one day I started to hear voices. That night I asked my husband to take me to A.A. At the meeting a gal by the name of Barbara said, "Oh, I've been waiting for you." I was still playing with Antabuse; drinking off and on. I kept asking,

“Why can’t I make it?” They smiled and said, “Keep coming back.” I played this game for 15 months and then we went back to the U.S., where I had three months alone. With no one to program my drinks, I began buying by the half gallon. I had this huge kitchen with a lot of cabinets, in which I would store maybe 10 empty half-gallons. On Saturday mornings, I took them to the dump. My son would ask why I had so many whiskey bottles.

We moved to Wilmington, Delaware, and I still kept going to A.A. meetings and drinking. The fears had set in and the blackouts were horrendous. I still didn’t know that I was hurting my sons. I was just sick and tired of being sick and tired. I didn’t want to live and I didn’t want to die. If I misjudged my supply, I drank things I couldn’t stand. I remember starting out for a party and I don’t remember anything after that. Later I said, “This has got to be it.” This is where the miracle took place, because for some reason, for one hour at a time, I was able to stop. I called a woman from the meetings and asked her to sponsor me. She told me where to find a meeting that night. I got there late. One day led into another and I started to get sober. It couldn’t have been my willpower — I had used all of that. It has to have been a power greater than that.

Things didn’t get better, but I did. In rapid progression I got cancer, lost my farm and my money and was served with divorce papers. I started to laugh because what else could happen after that? We moved to a trailer and I watched the boys grow up and heard them laugh. All I’ve done is change myself. It’s been a program about learning — about me and about God. As a middle-aged woman I crawled into the working world and it wasn’t fun. I now have a job I love, but it took 10 years.

Today beautiful things are happening and it’s all due to Alcoholics Anonymous. I have remarried and life is good. The ups and downs are very painful but today I can reach out.

**I don't know why God picked me.**

Long before I was drafted into the Army, I'd been getting into trouble — smashing cars, passing out — from drinking cat whiskey. That was just another name they gave to moonshine in the small Mississippi town where, as a poor black kid, I lived with my mother. She was on welfare; I never knew my father. Later we moved to Detroit.

Once drafted, the drinking continued. I thought it was like a party, even though people kept telling me, “Hey, man, you ought to slow down.” I was stationed at a camp near Huntsville, Alabama, where, downtown late at night, things could get ugly and dangerous. I would go there with the guys, but instead of leaving to get back to the camp around midnight, I would stay on until three or four in the morning, sleep an hour or so, and get up and go to work with a bad hang-over. Things continued that way wherever I was stationed, including a stint in Okinawa, until I got out of the Army and went back to Mississippi.

I worked at a couple of factory jobs, but then I couldn't get work and my drinking stepped up. I started bumming around. I'd wanted to go back to school, but when it came time to register I couldn't make it because I was drunk. I realized I was going down the tubes and things were getting worse, not better.

So I reenlisted in the army and went back to Okinawa, where my drinking continued exactly as before. The most devastating memory I carry with me was of a time I drove an old Pontiac off the road, then 50 feet down a ravine. The car stood on its nose, miraculously held in place by a little tree, instead of plunging down the rest of the ravine. I'm sure now I would have been killed had it not been for the safety net that little tree provided. At the end of my tour there, several of my drinking buddies and I decided to celebrate, but the barracks party soon escalated into a rampage when another buddy and I wrecked every car in the parking lot. That parking lot looked as if a

herd of wild animals had gone through it. As a result, I got busted and, for the next 14 years, I carried a resentment against the guy who signed a statement about seeing me in that parking lot.

By this time I realized my life needed some stability. I decided to marry the Mississippi girl I'd been seeing on home leave. When the Army reassigned me to Germany, she stayed behind for three months. When she joined me I discovered she was pregnant by another man. This touched off the worst period in my life. In black-outs I would beat her up repeatedly. Finally I was persuaded to go for help from a marriage counselor and attendance at a drug program. Neither of these helped, so I decided to go back to school. My motives? I thought if I could get the necessary degrees in psychology, I could give myself the fix I needed whenever I wanted. I did get a bachelor's degree, but by this time my drinking had me scared. I tried to control it during the week, but on weekends, I'd drink round the clock. This went on for five more years.

One day, a Monday, I called in sick but had to go in anyway and was confronted by a 25-year-old captain who saw that I'd been drinking and said I had a problem. Again I went for professional help, but this time the counselor was excellent. She leveled with me about alcoholism, how it was progressive and how I would only get into more trouble if I continued drinking. She put me on Antabuse. Eventually I stopped taking it, got drunk one night at a party and had to be hospitalized after my wife hit me on the head. The doctors refused to give me any anesthesia, thinking all the alcohol in me was anesthesia enough.

That was a turning point for me. I went back into counseling and was told to quit trying to do things my way. I joined A.A. and immediately got involved in the program. I continued in the inpatient program until I left Germany to return to the United States. I worked on the planning of a D.W.I. program for about two and a half years, then went back to school, got my master's degree in counseling services, and became certified as an alcohol abuse counselor. My wife and I

are still together. We worked out our differences. We bought a house, and two years ago, I terminated my army career and have opened up my own private practice. I don't know why God included me among those to get sober. I know I would never have been able to do any of the things I have done without sobriety, and for this, I thank Alcoholics Anonymous.

U.S. Coast Guard

**I didn't understand a word  
— but I knew I was in the right place.**

I would never have thought it possible that I could be an alcoholic. I started drinking when I was 14 with a group of people considerably older than I, and felt proud when they complimented me on my ability to “hold my liquor.” That was generally the reputation I had until the end, when I wasn't able to “hold my liquor” so well.

When I went to boot camp, I had the longest period of abstinence since I started drinking. About the third or fourth week of boot camp, someone was reading the alcohol content on a bottle of mouthwash and said, “I bet this stuff could do the trick pretty good,” and so we drank the bottle of mouthwash. We felt sick, but proud that we were the center of attention, and that we actually got drunk on mouthwash. What I remember most about that episode is someone commenting, “Only an alcoholic would drink mouthwash to get drunk.” I quickly disregarded that at the time, but later on, if I was confronted about drinking too much, that statement kept coming back.

I progressed very quickly to daily drinking, and thought that that was normal because I was a “sailor,” and everyone knows sailors drink a lot. I went through most of the Caribbean, but never got much further than the first bar, no matter where I was. Upon reenlisting I was transferred to a cushy shore station, and my drinking kept up. I began to get complaints from my supervisors

because I was smelling of liquor in the morning (I had learned the trick about the hair of the dog), and after I received a D.W.I., the complaints became more frequent. Confident that I was not the problem, but not knowing what to do, I tried a geographic cure, and “mutualed” (traded places with someone) back to the ship. There my style of drinking was more acceptable.

Around this time the enlisted performance marking system was changed and, lo and behold, it included the category of sobriety, in which I was marked quite poorly. I was appalled, and requested to speak with the captain. Upon the conclusion of our discussion, he was certain that I was not a “social drinker,” and needed some help. I spoke with a specialist, and he recommended Alcoholics Anonymous.

My first meeting was in Tampa, Florida. There were people there in work clothes, and some in expensive suits. I was confused, but then found out that everyone was a member. I heard a lot that night, and one of the important things that stuck with me was “no dues or fees.” I wasn’t broke, but I wasn’t on Visa’s mailing list. I also heard someone say that anything you find unattractive about the program, just set it aside and come back to it later.

When I heard people talk about sponsors, I knew I didn’t need one of those since I was in the military, and not a weak person! Ten weeks after coming to A.A., I got drunker than ever, and it didn’t take long for my captain to find out about that and land me in a rehab. This was the true turning point for me. I learned a lot about me, and a lot about life in general that I would never have known had I not gone there.

One of the most important yet simple things I learned was that I’m an alcoholic, and cannot drink safely. After rehab, I went back to the ship, where I immediately requested a transfer. It was denied. I pleaded, “Please transfer me to a shore station where I can go to meetings every night.” Once again it was denied, and the ship set sail. My first meeting away from home port was in Puerto Plata in the Dominican Republic. The

entire meeting was in Spanish and I didn't understand a word, but I knew I was in the right place.

During the next 18 months, I went to every island sober that I had previously been to drunk, and that was a spiritual awakening in itself, because I found A.A. in every one of those places!

As a result of staying sober, I am now stationed in a foreign country, and I stay sober the same way as in the States, "one day at a time," and attend English-speaking meetings as often as possible. It really works, no matter where I am, as long as I work at it.

## U.S. Air Force

### **Too valuable to give up on**

I entered the service in January 1957 and during the first 11 years I enjoyed a better-than-average career progression. I had the best assignments and was promoted well ahead of my group. An incident in 1961 caused me to slow down my drinking for a while. I had a major auto accident, which injured some people, including myself. The same year, I was charged with and found guilty of assault and threatening the life of another individual with a weapon. I was sentenced to serve 90 days, but this was changed to "discretion of commander." I never served a day and this was expunged from my records, so I was back on track.

I spent eight consecutive years in the command section of the Air Force, during which I drank excessively and suffered tremendous hangovers, but continued to function effectively. In 1969, I was in Spain, where liquor is cheap and available 24 hours a day. That's where I discovered a hangover cure, "morning drinking," which led to mid-morning, noon time, mid-afternoon and evening drinking. Even though I was out of control, the military seemed to consider this behavior acceptable.

Back in the States I was selected to go to an advanced school, which meant 12 weeks of academic training in a classroom. I was absolutely terri-

fied; my dependency was so great I could not possibly get through a day without drinking. Again, the God of drunks was looking out for me. When I arrived at the academy, the learning center was closed for remodeling and all our classes were held in the dayroom of the dormitory where we lived. Every night I bought a quart of vodka; during breaks between classes and at noon I sipped vodka and gargled mouthwash. I graduated 115th out of 130.

In December 1971 the wheels started coming off. Sometimes I worked 12 or 15 hours without a break and sometimes I didn't work for several days. I was sent to the South Pacific and in March 1973 my family joined me on the island of Guam. The night my wife and kids arrived in Guam I was drunk and missed their airplane. When I finally got to the airport, they were the only people left in the terminal. Rather than hugs and kisses, my wife cursed me.

For the next two years my life was miserable. By now the Air Force's attitude toward drinking and alcohol abuse had changed, and so had my wife's. Between the social actions officer and her, I couldn't find one minute's peace. I couldn't drink at home, I couldn't go to the club, and we didn't go to parties. I had to go undercover. Everywhere I went someone was watching and telling. I had accidents: broken bones, pulled muscles, cuts and abrasions. I passed out at home, at work, at the club, and in my car. I went to the hospital so many times that they turned me over to the safety officer as officially "accident prone." All these things together brought me a great deal of attention and I eventually became an item of special interest at the wing commander's daily briefing.

My wing commander took exception to a senior officer causing so much trouble. Certain decisions were made in my behalf. First, I was turned over to the Navy for hospitalization and indoctrination on the ill effects of alcohol. I stayed sober for about 30 days. Next I was sent to Texas for 45 days treatment, which included psychoanalysis, sleep therapy, and even shock treat-

ment. I was drunk and arrested by the FBI at Dallas airport the same day I got out of treatment. Then I was sent to Clark AFB, the Philippines, for another rehabilitation treatment. I never even got sober there. Eventually, I was sent back to the Navy and this time introduced to A.A. I stayed sober long enough to get out of trouble, finish my tour in Guam and return to the United States.

I had one more drunk and it was a good one. Instead of pampered medical attention, my case was referred to the Mental Health Clinic. These folks really worked me over. Blood tests, urine tests, liver function tests, aptitude and awareness tests — you name it, I had it. While all this was going on, my commander presented me with a letter stating that “any conduct in the next 12 months which brings discredit on yourself, this organization or the U.S. Air Force will result in administrative elimination.” Clear enough. Where else could I get free medical attention and get paid too? My doctor did what he could for my health and then he called in A.A.

Two A.A. members called on me every day I was hospitalized and afterwards took me to meetings all over the city. I chose one of them for a sponsor; he taught me how to enjoy sobriety. First, through Twelfth Step work and then through A.A. service.

While making amends I contacted the people who I caused the greatest amount of trouble for and, without exception, they said I was too valuable to the service for them to give up on me. My family and I are certainly glad they felt this way.

I retired from the Air Force on July 31, 1979, but more importantly, I have continuous sobriety since August 9, 1975.

## Canadian Armed Forces

### **God was looking after this drunk.**

I grew up in a military environment. Alcohol was not a problem in my home. I joined the Canadian Armed Forces and had completed nine years, 306

days, when I was honorably discharged. Shortly after joining the military, things started to change and I started to drink. I drank on my own accord; no one forced me into taking the first drink, but I thought I had to be accepted.

During recruit training I had a loaded weapon in my hand and pointed it at another recruit. This is the first time people started to cover up for me. I was driving drunk one night and attempted to run over a local police officer. I got away with it, and I realize now that “someone” was looking out for me. Later I fell off the side of a ship out at sea. Around this time I started to get in more and more trouble — some that could have been serious and some not so serious. I remember that one night out at sea when I was on duty I dropped five gallons of milk down a hatch and used the excuse that the ship had rolled as I was coming up. Then one night I hit a hydro pole, totally demolished a car and ended up in the hospital. When the blood tests were done, they found .27% alcohol in the blood system (after 7 hours). The medical assistant who got the report when it was returned to the hospital accidentally lost it so no charges were ever laid. Again, I had God on my side.

One Good Friday, I was asked to leave Israel, due to some of my actions. Three days later, on Easter Monday, I was expelled from Syria. That same week I was on a plane out of Egypt and on my way back to Canada. Back in Barrie, Ontario, I was driving back to the base when I ran the city police off the road. Once again God was looking out for me. Yes, I got away with it, as I know how to conduct myself while being talked to by the police. A short time later I was out drinking one night, ended up drinking with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and drove home drunk once again. Soon I was back in Egypt, where I spent the last two weeks in a jail. I had a number of charges hanging over my head, both criminal and noncriminal. Some of them could have meant spending time in a federal prison. The morning I was put on the plane to return to Canada, I was told I was still under open arrest and had to report to the military police in

Germany. This was not important to me, so I went drinking with friends and consequently AWOL. But someone said I had reported to the police as instructed, when actually I hadn't.

When I got back to Canada, I was told to report to my base. Instead, I went AWOL, and then made up an excuse when I returned. I was sent to a psychiatrist, not about my alcoholism, but about the incident in the Middle East. After the police completed their investigation, I was offered help and accepted. I went into a military hospital for two weeks, during which I admitted that I was an alcoholic, and that I was gay. I was discharged from the military. My journey in sobriety started at the age of 27fi.

I was mixed up and confused at my first A.A. meeting but heard something that I liked, and wanted what everyone else had. The compulsion did not leave me right away, but I could feel a change inside myself. I started to get active by picking up ashtrays and moving chairs; then I was allowed to stand at the door and greet. Eventually, I was even allowed to chair a meeting, and then I started to share. Every time I started to do something different, I could feel a change happening. After a time, however, I still couldn't find the happiness and contentment that other people talked about. Then I realized that I had not gone beyond Step One. So I started to work the Twelve Steps and found a little bit of inner peace. This was happening because I was asking for help each morning, then saying thanks at the end of the day. Even today I ask for that help and usually have a pretty good day.

Eventually, I became General Service Representative of my home group. A year later I was elected the Area Institutions chair. I moved to Ottawa, and very quickly got active in service. After many 24 hours of sobriety, I continue to be active, not only in my home group and the district, but also in carrying the message into prisons. I have found working for the same employer — different departments of the federal government — for almost 27 years gets easier, one day at a time, due to the fact that I am sober. I have also been

able to help colleagues who have come to me. Today I am no longer the liar, thief and cheat that I once was. People can depend on me to do what I say I am going to do.

My journey in sobriety has taken me to some beautiful places. No matter where I go around the country I can find a meeting; it might be a little different from what I am used to but that is okay. I have been to meetings where everything has been in French, but the same feeling is there. When I share or try to share in French, the people around the room listen. I have been to meetings where everything was in Spanish, but the handshake, the smile, and the sharing are all the same.

As I continue in sobriety, I continue to learn and grow. Not only am I happy in A.A. but my partner is also in A.A. with over 17 years of continuous sobriety. As I watch the newcomer or the person who is coming back, I realize that it is no better out there today than it was over 22 years ago. Today I can be there to welcome them.

Every day I look for three or four things that I can be thankful for. I have found sobriety, contentment, and happiness one day at a time through the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. God is with me as I write. It is through His guidance and direction that I have been able to share this.

U.S. Air Force

**I have not found it necessary  
to pick up a drink.**

I was born into a Navy family, the oldest of three brothers. My parents were hard-working, middle class people. We had access to a good education; they provided for our needs and our family wanted for nothing. I found alcohol when I was 16. It was a gallon jug of red wine shared with two friends. I can always remember that feeling of silliness and comfort. My drinking soon pro-

gressed to beer and hard liquor. I had my first blackout that year. Even at that young age, I exhibited little control over my drinking once I started. Eventually, my drinking began to cause problems. I had some minor scrapes with the law. My parents did their best but were unable to deal with a teenage alcoholic.

I had just graduated from high school at the height of the Vietnam War. My father “suggested” a military career, after he told me that I was no longer welcome in his house. I will always remember that morning ride to the Oakland Induction Center. It was a decision that almost cost me my life. I enlisted in the United States Air Force. I thought I had found a home at last. I volunteered for a special unit and was soon assigned to Vietnam, where I was stationed at Da Nang Air Base in the Quang Nam Province. I served two tours there. I received several awards and commendations for my actions during this time, and was promoted to a Senior NCO by the time I was 21 years old. On my second tour, a horrific rocket and mortar attack left five of my comrades dead and myself seriously wounded. It was an event that was to be forever branded on my memory. I recovered from my injuries but not from my mental and emotional scars. To this day, the nightmares occasionally return.

I was honorably discharged and came home. My drinking had changed. I was more solitary and reclusive. I sought out other vets and found some drinking partners. I tried to drown my memories and fear. My heavy drinking was still periodic and hadn't caused me the problems that it would eventually.

In my early twenties, I went to college on the G.I. Bill. I did very well. I married, started a career and started a family. I tried to achieve the American dream, but it wasn't to be for this alcoholic.

In my early thirties, my drinking habits began to change. I came out of an extended blackout and called the local A.A. hotline. I never went to the meeting they suggested, and the next 10 years were a nightmare. I progressed from peri-

odic binges to daily drinking and nearly lost everything important to me. My last two years of drinking are a foggy memory.

The end came on a cold December night. I had called in sick to work for three days to try to dry out. I had made many promises to my employer and my family that I would get off the liquor. I went to work that Friday, but left early and stopped at a liquor store. One more time, I was drunk, but a moment of clarity came to me. I knew deep inside that I could no longer control my drinking and that I had a real problem. I found my way home to a terrified family and asked for help. A loved one called the A.A. hotline and got the time and directions to a meeting. This time I went! That was nearly 10 years ago, and one day at a time I have not found it necessary to pick up a drink since.

Today, I am an active member of Alcoholics Anonymous. I regularly attend meetings at my home group. I took the Steps with a sponsor early in my sobriety and have always been active in service. I continue to practice the principles of the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions in my everyday life. This program has given me a higher power of my own understanding. I firmly believe in the three legacies of recovery, unity and service. I have come out of the darkness of chronic alcoholism and into the sunlight of recovery. The Fellowship of A.A. has welcomed this alcoholic. I can count on many sober friends today and have found many veterans in these rooms also; we share a special bond. I continue to be a “work in progress.” Recovery has allowed me to put my life back together. Today, I am a responsible member of society, a good employee, and responsible parent. I have been the beneficiary of the experience, strength and hope of the men and women who came before me in Alcoholics Anonymous. Indeed, there has been a light at the end of the tunnel for this veteran — the hope that I have found in Alcoholics Anonymous.

### **Using the tools of A.A.**

I got sober at the age of 18 and began learning how to live through the Twelve Steps. Gaining from the experience, strength and hope of A.A. members on living skills, like holding a job and paying bills, I began living sober. After five years of sobriety, tired of struggling to get an education and work at the same time, I looked into the Army as a career that might open doors. Using the tools of A.A., I did an inventory and shared it with a friend. Turned out that he had grown up an Army brat. He gave me an honest appraisal of what to expect, sharing only his experiences. To be the first in my community to make such a career decision was a real act of faith. Despite my fears, my home group supported me and gave me encouragement, including after I shipped out to basic training.

Basic training was the first time I was unable to attend A.A. meetings. Long training days kept me so busy I hardly had time to think about a drink. I shared my recovery with the chaplain and, out of necessity, substituted chapel on Sundays for meetings during eight weeks of training. I stayed sober and sane, but was grateful to attend meetings during Advanced Individual Training.

At my first assignment I joined the Fort Bragg Group. Since this group was not my original home group, I had to adjust to changes and regional differences for the first time. After finding that the group would not change, I began to learn the hard way that I needed to change. No matter how fond I was of the group where I found freedom from alcohol, the Twelve Steps are the same everywhere. I only had to pray for the willingness to adjust and take action by trying.

Eighteen months after I joined, we were notified we were going to Saudi Arabia. Desert Shield turned to Desert Storm, and I tried to create a meeting in a remote desert compound. I placed a notice on a bulletin board that read:

“Friends of Bill W. meet here every night at 1900 hours.” I waited by that board every night, Big Book in hand, for another alcoholic. Each night ended with me in my tent reading and praying. I had written the General Service Office before departing and had photocopied a page of local meetings from the International Directory. The letter eventually resulted in cards and letters from everywhere through the *Loners/Internationalist Meeting*. The Fellowship had done, through general services, what the group couldn’t alone — carried the message overseas. In the midst of my most lonely moment, when I desperately wanted to drink, missing family and friends and living with daily fear of the real threat around me, God sent me the Fellowship through the mail every day. It came in the form of letters, cards from groups, literature, and A.A. speaker tapes. Some of these people I have since met personally and we have become steady friends. The miracles of A.A. were available in the middle of the desert. It occurred to me: It works, it really does!

Since this experience, I have sponsored A.A. members who have stayed sober in Bosnia, Kuwait, and Afghanistan. Today online meetings help bring the message to these remote areas. The *Loners/Internationalist Meeting* and the same loving service I benefitted from have helped other members in the military remain sober and useful to both A.A. and their country.

My career has taken me all over the country and overseas. Since that first experience in North Carolina I have been the “new guy” in several groups in many states and countries. It forces me to reach out my hand and be the newcomer again. This loving action keeps me humble and sober. I appreciate the differences in format and have a deep appreciation for the fact that the Twelve Step program of recovery is identical no matter where you are. What was once a job has become a career. After becoming a successful NCO, I was selected for Warrant Officer. I have worked in some selective and demanding positions, enjoying success by any measurement. A.A. absolutely works!

Because the military attracts people who have often not hit bottom, most groups I have been involved with provide ample opportunity to carry the message. The experience of staying sober and enjoying a successful military career has allowed me to share strength and hope with the hopeless. If you are among the hopeless today, know that the military does not require drinking as a prerequisite; there are many of us who enjoy sobriety and careers who will be grateful for the opportunity to help. You never have to take another drink again, if you don't want to.

## U.S. Marine Corps

### **One grunt's miracle.**

I was a lance corporal, a machine gunner in the Marine Corps infantry, and had just returned to the U.S. from an uneventful West-Pac. My wife and I were ecstatic to be reunited after this trying time, but found out quickly that we were operating on very different agendas. She wanted to relax and spend time together, and all I wanted to do was drink and party. I had drunk myself into oblivion every chance I got over the course of the deployment. I got into fistfights with a good friend and people senior to me, overdrew my checking account by two hundred dollars, and urinated in my rack several times upon returning to ship drunk, along with a host of other unpleasant experiences that used to accompany my blackout drinking. However, I made it home, with my rank, and miraculously still had a spotless military record. I was well taken care of by my fellow marines, who were now beginning to loathe my drinking. I saw no problem with continuing on this path of destruction. Every weekend I wanted my wife and I to go out drinking with other married couples we knew. I habitually embarrassed her, and made an absolute fool out of myself in front of our friends, laughing it off the next day in my semiconscious state. I don't know which Saturday morning it was that I staggered into our apartment after spending the night in the back

seat of our truck, but my wife had finally had enough. I was issued an ultimatum all too familiar to many married alcoholics. It was either her or alcohol.

Thanks to some divine intervention, I chose her, although at the time, this was a very empty commitment. She demanded we go see a marriage counselor and that I make the arrangements. So one day, very reluctantly, I called and made an appointment. Our counselor, upon hearing of our problems as a result of my drinking, suggested I go to an A.A. meeting. I had been once before to 90 meetings in 90 days, but that was seven years prior, and I had little recall of what it was like. The next day I called the A.A. hotline and got an address for a men's group. I circled around that parking lot twice before I gathered the courage to park and enter the meeting. I shook and was short of breath when I read "How It Works."

I was overwhelmed by the fellowship at that meeting. Every man there stuck out his hand and offered hope. Had it not been for that kind of reception, I might never have returned to A.A. I got myself a sponsor, started working the Steps, and began going to three or four meetings a week. The insanity I used to experience between drunks was slow to dissolve this time. I found myself running six to 10 miles a day, just to quiet the "committee" in my head. I replaced my active drinking with workaholism, and began to excel more than ever as a marine. I became a well-regarded and respected corporal in the battalion, and was starting to get a taste of the freedom and peace of mind that sobriety would later grant me. I had a very active relationship with God, and called on Him several times a day for guidance and serenity. And on the toughest days, the weekends, I hit my knees, repeatedly asking for relief from the painful insanity. Eventually, the committee got quieter and quieter and more manageable, until at some indiscernible moment, I was finally able to distinguish, somewhat, reality from my thoughts. God and A.A. and the Steps were working!

I was six months sober on September 11, 2001 and our original deployment date of January 16 was moved up to December 1. The prospect of going on another deployment, sober, and under these circumstances, was terrifying. The days sped by and before I knew it, we were boarding the ship to steam to the Arabian Sea. That day I was promoted to sergeant, a goal I thought seemed pretty unrealistic six months prior. Armed with countless speaker tapes, a Big Book, and e-mail addresses for several A.A. members, we set sail. I discovered, much to my dismay, that there would only be one meeting a week on board that ship, for what was then an indefinite amount of time.

The meeting usually consisted of myself and one or two other members who were really committed to staying sober. There were others who attended after being mandated to begin a treatment program, but they were uninterested for the most part, a fact that I found deeply frustrating. However, I always looked forward to Thursday nights. That meeting was my sanctuary from the insanity of ship life. I kept in close contact with my God, and found my relationship with Him to be the most fulfilling aspect of my sobriety. Extremely vital to my positive mental attitude and sobriety, though, was the contact I received from my fellow A.A. members. About once a week I would send a blanket e-mail to all the guys whose addresses I had. They would respond faithfully, one by one, and I would write them back individually as they responded.

I owe my sobriety mainly to the men in Alcoholics Anonymous. The fellowship I experienced from halfway around the world was unlike anything I had ever seen. They, along with my loving wife, were my biggest supporters. I continued to work the Steps, communicate with other alcoholics, read the Big Book, and stay in close contact with God. Before I knew it, it was over and I was back on U.S. soil. The Marine Corps infantry, especially when on board ship, is an extremely difficult and harsh environment in which to live. The fact that I made it through this

trying time sober is nothing short of a miracle. I have God and the men and women of Alcoholics Anonymous to thank.

U.S. Navy

**Everywhere I went I was still an alcoholic.**

I'm 28 years old and have been in the Navy since I was 19. I got sober in the Navy and would like to share how it happened.

I've liked to drink as far back as I can remember. At a very young age I was introduced to alcohol. I would be at parties or dances and people would let me taste their drinks. I liked it. I liked the warmth that almost immediately followed the first couple of drinks. I really liked the way it made me feel — like I was no longer skinny and ugly. It made me feel like I could dance without caring who was looking. It made me feel like the total opposite of what I normally felt like. It was the solution.

I had my first drink somewhere around six or seven years old, but the opportunity to drink rarely presented itself at that time. I was only able to drink when there was a big enough party where I wouldn't be noticed getting tanked. I could get my mom, dad, or a number of other people to give me a sip here and there until I was lit, but this only happened once or twice a year. When I got into junior high school my drinking picked up a bit, but was still largely in check due to adult supervision. Through some family upheaval that started when I entered high school, I bounced from house to house a bit. I stayed with an aunt and uncle for my first two years, then stayed with my mom again for the last two years. I was still not drinking every day or even every week (at first). I had quite a bit of supervision and positive influences in my life. By the time I was a senior in high school, though, I was drinking every weekend. By then I was also smoking marijuana almost on a daily basis.

I never planned on joining the military, but I eventually realized that with the way my life was progressing I would never be able to make much of myself if I didn't find a way to get an education, get motivated in the right direction, and get away from all of the bad influences that were in my life. When I was in my senior year of high school, I joined the Navy. This was going to be my calling.

I was going to be in the Navy's nuclear power program when I joined, but after being arrested for an alcohol-related petty larceny I was disqualified. My date to leave for boot camp also had to be moved up because I had to spend a second year as a senior. It seemed that I was unable to succeed in school by going two to three days a week and always trying to catch up. I eventually ended up in Great Lakes Recruit Training Command. I was on my way.

At my first command I found out that there were a lot of people who liked to drink in the Navy. My roommates and I would party every weekend. All weekend. During the week we would only have a forty-ounce or two a night. Things were pretty wild. I somehow managed to stay out of trouble. I was always a hard worker and that kept my head off the chopping block.

Toward the end of my first enlistment I met a girl and eventually moved in with her. That is when I started to really think about my drinking. I wanted to drink all night on the weekends and she didn't drink, so the logical thing for me to do was to stay up all night by myself and drink myself into oblivion.

One night, while watching the television sign off and wishing it wouldn't because I wasn't done drinking, I saw a commercial just before the picture turned to snow. It was an Alcoholics Anonymous public service announcement. I don't remember exactly what it said, but it was enough to spark an interest in me to call. They directed me to a meeting the next day. I wish I could say that that was my last drink, but I wasn't done yet. I went to that meeting with the intent of getting some information. I still wasn't quite sure

that I was an alcoholic, but knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that I had a drinking problem. What I found at the meeting is that I could relate with the people who were there.

I came in and out of A.A. several times over the next six years. I changed commands. I got married. I moved to another apartment in the same town. I moved from Virginia to California. Everywhere I went I was still an alcoholic. I was never able to stay sober, until I had reached a point where I was willing to do anything that was suggested. My bottom came while on recruiting duty. I had been fighting with my wife almost constantly. She was very sick of my drinking and alcoholic behavior. I was too, but wasn't ready to stop yet. Then one morning I woke up after a long weekend of drinking and decided that I would give A.A. one last honest attempt. If that didn't work I'd blot out my existence the most painless way I could think of.

My first meeting back was at a group called There Is a Solution. It is a Big Book study with a lot of structure and sobriety. I told them that I didn't have a sponsor and one was given to me. I didn't know, but I wasn't done with my pain yet. It took a long time and a lot of work to get some sanity and manageability back into my life. The Navy sent me through rehab at the Great Lakes Naval Hospital. This was a great opportunity for me to do a lot of soul searching and get away from the stresses of home and work for a little while. My sobriety date is the day after I checked into rehab.

The Navy has been very supportive of my staying sober. While stationed at my second command I was able to attend A.A. meetings aboard ship. In recruiting, the chain of command has been very supportive of my attending after-care meetings at the Great Lakes Naval Hospital every week, just an hour and a half from where I work. For a long time I attended meetings almost every night. Once a week I would meet with my sponsor to discuss homework he had given me and to work on the Steps.

The saying is that "when the student is ready

the teacher will appear.” I really feel blessed to have come to this place where I got sober. Everything seems to be in my favor. The quantity and quality of sobriety here are incredible. The people are the friendliest I’ve ever met in A.A.

After getting sober, my life continued to get worse for a while. I had made a wreck of things at home and at work. It took a while for things to get better. In God’s time, though, they did. I’ve become one of the top recruiters in the recruiting district while still attending aftercare once a week. My recruiting station is on track to receiving a Navy Commendation medal for production. My personal life has improved dramatically. My wife and I still fight now and then, but we work things out. I owe all of this to my higher power, whom I call God, and to Alcoholics Anonymous.

## U.S. Marine Corps

### **I climbed inside a bottle.**

Shortly before my 18th birthday, I received a letter from Uncle Sam which began, “Greetings!” A friend who had received the same letter and I decided to celebrate by tying one on. Somewhere in this period of insanity we called the Marine Corps recruiter, who was only too happy to hear from us. I was at this time a rather naive Texas country boy. Shortly before my 19th birthday, I arrived in Vietnam. I served with the 3rd Marine Division in the Quang Tri Province.

After I left Vietnam, I returned home to Texas. After finishing my enlistment, I went to work in the oil fields “roughnecking.” I had a taste for drinking and excitement. During this period my dad took me to a VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars) dance. While there one of his cronies informed me that I “had lost my war!” I have never seen fit to enter another VFW since. I met the then love of my life, and for a while we had the American dream, the three-bedroom home, two children, cars, motorcycles, bills, etc.... Then one day I began having problems. I

began to sleepwalk, and my poor wife found me outside our home several times. Thank God she had talked me into wearing underwear. I began to have night terrors; I became wary of sleeping. Then one night I awoke to find my wife pounding me on the chest and my hands around her neck. Shortly after I wound up in my first VA hospital. When I tried to tell anyone about Vietnam I was informed that this was not my problem. There was an influx of Vietnam veterans almost overpowering the VA, and they came up with the diagnosis post-traumatic delayed stress syndrome (PTSD).

On my second trip to a VA hospital the following year, my wife divorced me. I rocked along for a while, managing to stay employed, although drinking had become a way of life. I averaged only two to four hours of sleep a night, no matter how much I drank. I had met another lady and was fixing to marry again; my ex had remarried. I paid child support and did my best to be a good dad. One weekend I called to get my children and she informed me that her husband didn't want me to see my children. I told her I was going to put him in one of two places, "the hospital or the morgue!" By the time I got to their house, they were gone. I would have no contact with my children for 14 years.

I climbed inside a bottle and lived there for the next nine years; in and out of jail and VA hospitals, committed to a state hospital four times. I was given every diagnosis in the book — manic depressive, schizophrenic, paranoid schizophrenic, antisocial personality disorder — and finally the correct one of PTSD and garden variety drunk!

In 1985 and 1986 I spent an entire year in three VA hospitals, the last a VA domiciliary where a doctor told me I would never leave that hospital alive.

Slightly over a year later I wound up at my first A.A. meeting, more dead than alive. By the grace of God and with the help of A.A. I have been sober more than 15 years now. At two years sober, I went to a PTSD clinic, exorcised some

ghosts, and began to average six or seven hours of sleep. At five years sober, my children came back into my life; I am a granddad twice now. I am employed and have been for years. I am a member of my hometown honor guard and color guard and am finally getting some healing there. Today I am proud to be a sober veteran!

## Canadian Armed Forces

### **I was miserable and failing badly.**

Hi, my name is Carolyn, and I'm an alcoholic. I grew up in a home and my own drinking began early and escalated quickly. Among my peers, I was considered a "natural leader" when I was not seeking attention by getting drunk and doing crazy things. When I was 13 I attended a New Year's Eve party where there was a bunch of army cadets. There was a lot of drinking at this party and I wasn't the only one doing crazy things. I had found where I belonged and I joined the cadet corps the following week. The next four years were full of slipping grades in school, youth detention centers, and outstanding achievements as a cadet. Drinking was the bright spot in my life.

When I was 17, I joined the Canadian Armed Forces. My original enrollment was for the military police, but in the bar, the night before I took my oath, some of my new friends said that it would be a disaster if I joined the MPS and encouraged me to change my trade to Mobile Support Equipment Operator.

I was a truck driver and I had never had a driver's license. The first time we went on an exercise someone told me to drive a two-and-a-half-ton truck. I was too embarrassed to say I didn't know how, so I just pretended I knew what I was doing. I was to repeat this response whenever I didn't know what to do, in all areas of my life, for many years to come. Drinking seemed to be central to military life. We had regimental drinks, drinking contests and drinking games. When

someone was promoted they bought a round of drinks, and when someone “rang the bell” another round was coming. The junior ranks mess was the first place I reported for duty on every posting. I won praise for my hard work and I received many awards as well as an advanced promotion to master corporal. My drinking escapades were considered “antics” and won me as much status as any of my hard work did. In fact, I was elected president of the junior ranks mess, which meant I was in charge of the bar. I felt immune to serious consequences for my drinking because I hadn’t suffered any yet.

My drinking continued to escalate, and over the next two years the Canadian Armed Forces sent me to treatment for alcoholism three times. I called it a “spin dry” and didn’t take it seriously. It didn’t occur to me that I needed to do anything different, except not get caught. Then came “the big one”: in a blackout I stole one of our battalion’s trucks and had an accident; well actually, I flattened a light standard. I was in a lot of trouble; my blood alcohol was 0.32 and I went to jail. Finally I was put on counseling and probation for “misuse of alcohol,” which, according to the Canadian Forces Administration orders, is the final attempt to save a member’s career; I was 20 years old. For the next five years I served only part time in the reserves. I tried desperately to control my drinking while on military property; I was miserable and failing badly. Many well-meaning people covered up for me to prevent the dishonorable discharge that was looming. I left the Canadian Armed Forces for one reason and one reason only — I couldn’t control my drinking.

The next several years were a torturous cycle of building my life up in new city after new city, always followed by the horror of watching it all fall down around me. I eventually hit my bottom. I couldn’t face another day of my life, and through the grace of God I called Alcoholics Anonymous rather than end it all. I had no hope, no faith, and I was incapable of trusting anyone. My first three months in A.A. I was full of fear and unable or

unwilling to tell anyone what was really going on. I drank again and God saw fit (in spite of me) to bring me back to A.A. This time around I still didn't have much hope or faith, but I learned to "act as if." I learned not to pretend that I knew what to do when I didn't, as I always had, but to follow suggestions and take action even if I couldn't believe it would make a difference.

I attended meetings every day. I found a home group and a sponsor, and I began my journey through the Twelve Steps. I started to feel excited about life. I hadn't picked up any hobbies while I was drinking so I had a lot of time on my hands, and I started doing service work. I began to form real relationships with people in A.A. and that seed of hope that was planted around Step Three began to grow. Through Steps Four through Nine I discovered a new world; I formed a new relationship with the God of my understanding, and I gained a new relationship with myself. Steps Ten, Eleven and Twelve are the gifts that allow me to build on what I have been given and to give some away to the next suffering alcoholic. I've only been sober for 18 months, but even the worst moments have been much better than my life was before; and in the best moments, I have experienced a joy of living I had never known was possible.

## U.S. Air Force Dependant

### **How God worked through my husband.**

From the day I was born at a Brooklyn Air Force base 32 years ago, I spent my life around booze. I sometimes think I drank before I was born, as my mother, carrying me, drank brandy Alexanders. My parents drank any time trouble came, any time good times came. It was always the same; they would fix drinks, sit down and talk until they got drunk and fought.

I started heavy drinking on weekends, when I was 12 years old. As I got older, I cut school to go drinking. Once, at a school dance, when I saw my

boyfriend dancing with another girl, I began to cut up and ended up being shoved into a police car. Another time I woke up, locked in a windowless room of a juvenile detention center. I quit school altogether and went to work as a waitress.

I met Rich. He was in the Air Force. By the time I was 19, we were married, I'd had a baby and soon after that Rich got orders to go to Vietnam. Wow! I was scared. All during my pregnancy I'd drunk beer, but now that Rich was leaving I knew what I was going to do: drink to oblivion. Often I would wake up in a bar and not know what had happened. I just brushed it off, thinking that this is what went with drinking. Besides, I wasn't hurt and my kid was with the babysitter.

When my husband returned from Vietnam, we got reassigned to North Dakota. That year was the best year of my drinking life — I only got drunk about six times. But when we were transferred to Indiana I got into bowling. I bowled every night and drank every night. We were there for six years. At the end of our stay there I was on six different bowling leagues, played five days a week, every night and on weekends. I drank all the time. Frequently I would get drunk and cuss everybody out, from first sergeants to commanders, and then pass out. Why my husband kept me around I do not know.

When we got orders to go to Alaska, I was scared to death. All I could think of was Eskimos and igloos and I was shocked when we drove into Anchorage and I saw how big the city was. I had two children by then, two boys (8 and 11 years old), but I got a job right away, having been warned about cabin fever. Soon enough I found the bowling alley, got on some teams, and I was off and running again, drinking every night. Another jolt came when Rich got orders to go to the Senior NCO (Non-Commissioned Officers) Academy. He was supposed to be gone for 61 days. I prayed to God to get him out of it, but he went anyway. I drank for 59 days straight. I left my boys alone because sitters were costing too much and I preferred spending money on drinking. I quit my job because it interfered with

my drinking. With me away, my kids tore our house apart.

Two days before Rich was to return, I panicked and delivered an ultimatum: "Dad will be home in two days. Clean this house up." Instead of cleaning the house, they began to fight. They fought so hard the older one jumped on his younger brother, and was choking him until he turned blue. I ended up knocking the older one clear across the room. "My God, I'm a child abuser," I said to myself, terrified. I wanted to run away and stay with my parents in Charleston, S.C., but my father refused to let me come, warning me not to leave the children and to face the music.

So I met Rich at the airport, told him my fears about abusing my children and he said: "All the help you'll ever need is right here, so please don't leave." I still had the airplane ticket in my pocket, but we went home and Rich calmly, kindly, took us all by the hand and said: "Today is the first day of the rest of our lives. Let's forget the past and go on from here." We all hugged, kissed and cried, went out to supper and started our new life the next day.

Soon after, though, I used that plane ticket and flew home to Charleston without warning. The first thing I did was get drunk. After four days I called Rich and asked him if I could come home. All he said was "Yes." I wish I could say I stayed sober after returning to Anchorage, but I didn't. I went bowling all the time, drank, and one day in April, 1983, I walked out again without saying a word. I woke up not knowing where I was. I called Rich and, for the second time, asked him if I could come home. Again all he said was: "Yes." This time, when he picked me up and I got in the car, I looked at him with tears in my eyes and said, "Rich, I have a drinking problem." He said nothing, just drove us home.

I immediately called a mental health clinic in the base hospital. It took me about 10 minutes to get that lump out of my throat and tell them I needed help. They made an appointment for me to see a psychiatrist. I asked the doctor if he could tell me how to quit drinking after one or two

drinks. He said he could not do that, but that he knew someone who might be able to help me. I was sent to a social action counselor who also told me he could not tell me how to stop after one or two drinks. He said there was a 10-day program that might help me, which I could attend on condition that I attend some A.A. and N.A. meetings. I said: “No way! I’m not going to stand up and talk about all the bad things I’ve done.”

The counselor said he couldn’t help me then, so I relented and said I would give the program a try. That program led me to A.A. and soon I will have been sober for two and a half years.

Months after getting sober I found out something remarkable about my husband. While he was attending the Senior NCO Academy, Rich had not only met a recovering alcoholic, but he had attended a substance abuse class where he was given a fine course on alcoholism. Do you think that was a coincidence? I think it was God’s work. How else could Rich have come home that time, to that awful mess, and not blow a fuse? See how God works?

The very night I went to my first A.A. meeting, I got a sponsor who, a few days later, got me a Big Book. I started reading and we did the Steps right away. Within three weeks I had been through the Twelve Steps for the first time. Since then I’ve been through them again and again. Each day of reading the Big Book has taught me more things which help me to live sober. A.A. has taught me that I never have to be alone again, that I can become happy, joyous and free — as God wants me to be.



## **What's it like to be in the military — and in A.A.?**

### **How is advancement affected?**

“I have reached the top of the enlisted ladder, which is a great deal better than being on a greased slide ready to go to the bottom.”



“Since joining A.A., I've been commissioned and have gone in five years from first lieutenant to captain to selection for major. I've had the usual succession of overseas and stateside duty tours, each one a little better than the last. I've been awarded at least one medal for meritorious achievement or service at every assignment. I never got any in the seven preceding years as a practicing military drunk.”



“The sober alcoholic has a great chance of being advanced with or ahead of their peers. I have been extremely fortunate to be promoted quickly. Active drinking sometimes causes problems that lead to reduction or elimination. Often these folks earn the respect and rank back after joining A.A. in either the civilian community or the military.”

### **How do we cope with the social aspects of military life?**

“When we're drinking heavily, we tend to think that everyone else must be doing the same. But we're not in A.A. long before we find out that this just isn't so. At first, I avoided social events

where there would be heavy drinking, but this didn't last long. Today, now that the physical craving for booze is gone and my self-confidence is up, I can go to a party and have one hell of a time — entirely sober. In my seven years as an officer and an A.A. member, I've never been cited for bad behavior.”



“Military life requires attendance at social functions where alcohol is present. As the A.A. Big Book suggests, I ask myself if I have a good reason to be there. Whether I need to attend briefly or for most of the evening, it is always amazing to me that there are others who choose not to drink and that the peer pressure I suffered from was imaginary. Usually the event goes great, but if I am uncomfortable or tempted I always reserve the right to leave. Sobriety is the most important thing.”



“I'm a sailor — a chief petty officer — who doesn't drink. Preposterous, yet true. Just what is there for a career military man who doesn't partake at the club now and then? Plenty. No matter where I go, I have a lot of friends I haven't met yet — A.A. friends. From Gitmo Bay around the world in both directions, I have met men and women just like me. Folks who understand and are always willing to help. These are friends — not the kind you'll find in Mary's Bar or the Texas, and not the kind after a sailor's buck. They are friends who open their homes and hearts to welcome the traveling person and perhaps continue the sharing of experience, strength, and hope.”

### **Is difference in rank a problem?**

“When we go to A.A. meetings, we leave our rank outside. Each member is addressed by his first name, and just as much respect is shown a member of low enlisted grade as is shown the higher-ranking officers.”



“Over the entrance to our meeting place is a sign:

‘Abandon rank, all ye who enter here.’”



“One of my closest A.A. friends,” says an Air Force enlisted man, “was a Marine Corps major. We spent much of our off-duty time together at A.A. meetings and on Twelfth Step calls — to help alcoholics who wanted to stop drinking. On these occasions, we called each other by our first names, of course, and we were in civilian clothes at the meetings. But when we met in uniform, neither of us had any difficulty showing the proper respect to the other’s grade. We felt that, because of our fellowship in A.A., we respected each other more as individuals in our profession.”



“Because I’m an officer, A.A. newcomers who are enlisted men are always hesitant about our relationship. I make a point of discussing this problem and reiterating that my rank remains outside the meeting, even when we are forced by circumstances to wear uniforms there. And I find that the problem rapidly dissolves and is soon forgotten.”

### **What kind of A.A. meetings do we attend?**

“I joined in Arizona, where there were civilian A.A. groups,” says an Air Force man. “I’d been sober for a year when I was sent to Okinawa. I thought I could stay away from a drink on my own there, but after a month I got drunk. The next day, I headed right for the armed forces A.A. group. I stayed sober the rest of my 18 months on Okinawa, thanks to that group. It was composed of military members, dependents, and civilians connected with the military. Two of the civilians had been in various armed forces groups for many years, and had worked with military leaders, hospitals, or chaplains to establish new A.A. groups in different places.” Overseas, armed forces A.A. groups often include other civilians (in addition to the types just mentioned), such as Foreign Service personnel and employees of large Western business organizations.



“The captain of my squadron explained a little bit about A.A. to me and then said, ‘You are going to call them and you are going to a meeting if there is one in this area tonight.’ I called the A.A. central office in San Diego, and was told that an A.A. man would meet me and see that I got to a meeting that night. He was right on time, and we had a good talk over coffee, and then went to the meeting. I was uneasy, of course, but I did accept everything that was said there. Above all, I was happy to hear that A.A. was not controlled by some religion or other. That night, I met many people I could put my trust in, and it was unusual for me, as it is for every alcoholic, to put any faith in anyone or anything. That was 10 years ago, and I haven’t had a drink of alcohol since.”



“I have always attended any kind of meeting I could. In the U.S. meetings are plentiful in my native language of English. I make a point of contacting A.A. as soon as I arrive, or before, if possible. Overseas there are many English speaking groups and I have also attempted to learn the local language and attend those meetings also. The language of the heart is always welcoming and local groups appreciate the effort and reach out to the visitor and newcomer.”



“In Europe, the United States, and Southeast Asia, I have been able to maintain continuous contact with A.A. For two years at one location, A.A. meetings were held in our home. For my first six months in Vietnam, I was able to attend A.A. meetings twice weekly.”

**How do we stay in touch with A.A. when there are no meetings nearby?**

“For military personnel, A.A. has some very special projects to participate in. There are the seagoing A.A. Internationalists, travelers to meet and share with and correspond with. There is the A.A.

newsletter *Loners-Internationalists Meeting* to write to and receive mail from.” What sailor or soldier wouldn’t be happy to get mail from all over the world.



“I have to go it alone occasionally because of my life as a career soldier,” an officer writes in an article in the Grapevine, A.A.’s monthly magazine. “On both my tours in Vietnam, I was an A.A. Loner [listed with the A.A. General Service Office]. Each letter I received seemed to be a meeting in itself. I think of all the encouragement given me by others who were alone like me, and I find I am looking forward to the next year of A.A. experience.”



“At a remote country location in Vietnam, the chaplain was in tape-recorder contact with an A.A. group in Korea, and through him I could stay close to the program. Also, there were the welcome Loners letters from the A.A. General Service Office. When I’ve needed it, when I’ve wanted it, in one form or another the A.A. Fellowship has always been there.”



“Much like when A.A. was new, I share my story with chaplains, medical officers, or anyone who might have trouble with alcohol. I always take plenty of A.A. literature and copies of the A.A. Grapevine if I can. I keep in touch with A.A. friends through letters or e-mail, if it is available. Using on-line meetings and contacts has been very useful also.”

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### **How can you reach A.A.?**

Almost anywhere in the United States or Canada, you will find a listing for A.A. or Alcoholics Anonymous in local phone books. A.A. is also established in more than 180 countries, and there are often English-speaking groups in the large cities.

Your chaplain or your medical officer may be able to tell you whether there are civilian A.A. groups nearby and will certainly be familiar with any armed forces group at or near your base.

You can also get information by writing to the A.A. General Service Office at:

Box 459  
Grand Central Station  
New York, NY 10163

[www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org)



THE TWELVE STEPS  
OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable.

2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.

4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

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

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

7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

## THE TWELVE TRADITIONS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.

2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority — a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.

3. The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.

4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.

5. Each group has but one primary purpose — to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

6. An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.

7. Every A.A. group ought to be self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers.

9. A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.

10. Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.

11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films.

12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

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

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**BOOKS**

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS (*regular, portable, large-print and abridged pocket editions*)  
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS COMES OF AGE  
TWELVE STEPS AND TWELVE TRADITIONS  
(*regular, soft-cover, large-print, pocket and gift editions*)  
EXPERIENCE, STRENGTH AND HOPE  
AS BILL SEES IT (*regular & soft cover editions*)  
DR. BOB AND THE GOOD OLDTIMERS  
"PASS IT ON"  
DAILY REFLECTIONS

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**BOOKLETS**

CAME TO BELIEVE  
LIVING SOBER  
A.A. IN PRISON: INMATE TO INMATE

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**PAMPHLETS**

44 QUESTIONS  
A.A. TRADITION—HOW IT DEVELOPED  
MEMBERS OF THE CLERGY ASK ABOUT A.A.  
THREE TALKS TO MEDICAL SOCIETIES BY BILL W.  
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS AS A RESOURCE FOR  
THE HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL  
A.A. IN YOUR COMMUNITY  
IS A.A. FOR YOU?  
IS A.A. FOR ME?  
THIS IS A.A.  
IS THERE AN ALCOHOLIC IN THE WORKPLACE?  
DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DIFFERENT?  
A.A. FOR THE BLACK AND AFRICAN AMERICAN ALCOHOLIC  
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON SPONSORSHIP  
A.A. FOR THE WOMAN  
A.A. FOR THE NATIVE NORTH AMERICAN  
A.A. AND THE GAY/LESBIAN ALCOHOLIC  
A.A. FOR THE OLDER ALCOHOLIC—NEVER TOO LATE  
THE JACK ALEXANDER ARTICLE  
YOUNG PEOPLE AND A.A.  
A.A. AND THE ARMED SERVICES  
THE A.A. MEMBER—MEDICATIONS AND OTHER DRUGS  
IS THERE AN ALCOHOLIC IN YOUR LIFE?  
INSIDE A.A.  
THE A.A. GROUP  
G.S.R.  
MEMO TO AN INMATE  
THE TWELVE CONCEPTS ILLUSTRATED  
THE TWELVE TRADITIONS ILLUSTRATED  
LET'S BE FRIENDLY WITH OUR FRIENDS  
HOW A.A. MEMBERS COOPERATE  
A.A. IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES  
A MESSAGE TO CORRECTIONS PROFESSIONALS  
A.A. IN TREATMENT FACILITIES  
BRIDGING THE GAP  
IF YOU ARE A PROFESSIONAL  
A.A. MEMBERSHIP SURVEY  
A MEMBER'S-EYE VIEW OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS  
PROBLEMS OTHER THAN ALCOHOL  
UNDERSTANDING ANONYMITY  
THE CO-FOUNDERS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS  
SPEAKING AT NON-A.A. MEETINGS  
A BRIEF GUIDE TO A.A.  
A NEWCOMER ASKS  
WHAT HAPPENED TO JOE; IT HAPPENED TO ALICE  
(*Two full-color, comic-book style pamphlets*)  
TOO YOUNG? (*A cartoon pamphlet for teenagers*)  
IT SURE BEATS SITTING IN A CELL  
(*An illustrated pamphlet for inmates*)

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**VIDEOS**

A.A.—AN INSIDE VIEW  
A.A. VIDEOS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE  
HOPE: ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS  
IT SURE BEATS SITTING IN A CELL  
CARRYING THE MESSAGE BEHIND THESE WALLS  
YOUR A.A. GENERAL SERVICE OFFICE,  
THE GRAPEVINE AND THE GENERAL SERVICE STRUCTURE

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**PERIODICALS**

THE A.A. GRAPEVINE (monthly)  
LA VIÑA (bimonthly)

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.