

A CONCEPTS

Northern Illinois Area, Ltd. Area 20 Service Letter

Winter 2016

Asking for Help

Many if not all of us have asked for help, either from our sponsor or from another A.A. member, for example for rides to and from meetings, from God, or as I did, indirectly from the court system. One of my favorite sayings the one I heard from an A.A. speaker: "I got a nudge from the Judge." When I first came into A.A. it was hard to ask any one for help concerning anything, let alone for help to stop drinking. I convinced myself that I didn't want to stop so why would I need help. Deep down inside I knew I couldn't stop by myself. You would have thought if I could have stopped drinking it would have been better than all the DUIs, detoxes, weekends in jail, all the money it cost me, not to mention my health and my life. Even though I came into A.A. though the courts I still wouldn't ask for help from members or even God. Many times I will hear that the Big Book only mentions suggestions. But if we want what the first 100 or so members had, we must do what they did and recommend in the Big Book. There are 54 "musts" in the Doctors Opinion and the following 164

pages. In chapters five and six we ask God for his protection, to help us show them the same tolerance, pity, and patience, to remove our fear, to mold our ideas, to be given strength, to help us be willing, and to remove selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear. That is a lot of asking.

I asked a lady to be my sponsor when I was in a 30 day in patient program because we were told we had to get a sponsor to leave. I really didn't want her help I just wanted out of that place. My next stop was a half-way house. But when she was giving me her phone number she said that she knew I wouldn't call her. At that moment I took that as a dare or a challenge. Then I just put her number in my Big Book and forgot about it. Once I got into the half-way house things got a little too much for me to handle. At that moment in time I needed someone's help to get me through those times so I remembered I had that ladies phone number and called her to ask for help on what I should be doing. I had no problem calling her every day for guidance. She was my sponsor for five and half years and

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Concepts is published quarterly by the Northern Illinois Area of Alcoholics Anonymous. It is intended as a service letter to keep Northern IL Area, districts, and GSRs informed of service opportunities, events, and experience relevant to carrying the AA message. Subscription is free but generally limited to A.A. members within the NIA geographical area.

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Comments, suggestions and subscription requests plus shares of experience, strength and hope, should be directed to the editor:

Concepts@aa-nia.org

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Concepts on-line at:
<http://www.aa-nia.org>

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From the editor

Hello Ladies and Gentlemen.

When I started this issue I was going to follow Kelly's lead and make the theme 'asking for help'. I found a few articles in the Grapevine. I knew I wanted to put 'Rent a Sponsor' in, and sponsorship is a great place to practice asking for and giving help. I took a few articles from the Grapevine but the more I got into developing the issue to more I wanted to add humor. So there is humor on most pages. I am feeling a bit beat up and I wanted to laugh. Some may not find the humor funny. But I put so much in this issue I am sure there is some funny bit for everyone.

I was stumped because I had so few contributions for this issue. Formerly I had some regular contributors. But they have stopped contributing. So I could really use some contributions. I always need content and I may base the issue on the subject of your submission. I save submissions so if it doesn't make the current issue it will likely be in the next.

**Submissions for the next issue
will be due Feb. 25, 2017.**

Thank you for your submissions.

Heather S. Concepts Editor

she helped me with more than just working the steps. Some things happened towards the end of our relationship and I was kind of almost without a sponsor and I needed help. I remember quite well when I called another lady I knew through service events and asked her if she would be my sponsor. My exact words were, "I need help, could you please sponsor me?" That only lasted nine months. The next sponsor I asked for help is still my sponsor today. It took me some time to actually ask for help, especially in working another fourth step. I had felt that I had some time in the program and my "issues" were petty. She had listened to me share at meetings and my check-in calls and felt that I might want to do another fourth step.

At the time that was probably the best help I could have gotten. I was getting help when I didn't even know I needed it.

I find that with each step I must ask for guidance and help from my sponsor, and or another A.A. member, and especially my higher power, which I choose to, call God. I like to say I went through many growing pains because whenever I was in enough pain I would ask for help.

After being sober 16 months I went back to college to try and get a career. There was one class in

particular Math, that I was having a hard time understanding. I was always asking the instructor to explain it again. One day when we went outside on break, I had asked a few of the other students if they understood everything and they said, "no." I asked them why they didn't ask for help, but they had no response. Being able to ask for help during those few years helped me to get a few associate degrees with honors.

At my present place of employment, I had no knowledge of insurance or health plans. I told the person I had asked about the position that if she was willing to help I was willing to learn. When I was told that they wanted to hire me permanently the supervisor said one of the big factors was that when I did not know something I asked for help. That's not to say that I didn't made any errors, I did, but I also learned from them.

I got heavily involved in general service and I would frequently ask for help from other members who have been there before me. As a delegate I am probably asking for help more often. As we work our way down the service structure, we become more of a trusted servant to more members. I am doing my best to report everything I get from A.A.W.S., GSO Board, GV Board and any upcoming

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events. Because so much of this is new to me and I do not always understand, I ask questions of members in our area and from around our region. I figure since I don't understand it, there has to be at least one other member who doesn't as well. There are times that a question comes up that I will have to say, "I don't know, but I will try to find the answer." One of the gifts we should receive in Alcoholics Anonymous is humility. The Big Book describes humility as the absence of self-pride, self-will or self-assertion – being humble. Then one of the definitions of "humble" is yielding to the opinion, wishes, or judgment of another. Finally, I feel that the person we ask for help also reaps the benefits of giving it away.

Kelly L.

Delegate/Area 20/Panel 66



"Simply asking for help seems to be a help in itself." Copyright © AA Grapevine, Inc. Reprinted with permission

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Rule 62

Rent-A-Sponsor

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You'll have to learn how to climb down trees sometime... I can't keep asking for Bob's help...

"There is no lack of **KNOWLEDGE** out there... Just a shortage of asking for **HELP**"

"The other day I nearly succumbed to a bout of narcissism. I just don't know what's come over me, me, me, me." —Terrance B



I'M ACTUALLY FINE. I JUST NEEDED TO PROVE TO MY GIRLFRIEND THAT I'M CAPABLE OF ASKING FOR HELP.



A little boy and his recovering father were talking one day. "When I grow up I'm going to be an alcoholic," the small boy proudly declared. "You can't do both," said the father. —Mary C.

The Heartbeat of AA

Asking for help and helping others was her lifeline in the program

By the time I was five years old, I had developed a lot of survival skills that worked at the time, but over the years, one by one, they failed. My survival kit included: self-sufficiency, people pleasing, stuffing my feelings, dishonesty, adrenaline, fight, flight, and of course, alcohol and drugs. I attended my first AA meeting at the age of 17. Twenty-six years later I checked myself into treatment. In the end, I did one thing right—I asked for help, by the grace of God.

When I was finally flattened by my choices, I tried something new—I reached out to the hands of AA that I had bitten in so many ways before. Those hands caught me and carried me with prayer, kindness, truth and a large dose of unconditional love.

As I write this, I am 88 days sober. Most days, I still feel as though I am hanging on by a thread and I definitely feel like a newcomer—but I keep asking for help.

Asking for help brings me a lot of benefits today. First, it teaches me to trust. The more I open up and share my fears, the more others reveal the same fears and trust me enough to tell me about it. I also learn what it means to be loved unconditionally. Second, I am beginning to recognize many of the destructive behaviors that define me as an alcoholic. It is pretty difficult to start new behavior if I do not know what the old behavior looks like. People share

with me life-saving suggestions that I actually take and apply. Pain can only be a teacher if I am willing to learn and change—otherwise it just hurts and I stay stuck in it.

Finally, when I ask for help, I am helping someone else. Whether it is getting a ride to a meeting or sending out an emotional S.O.S. call, I am helping someone who helps me. Two alcoholics working together is the heartbeat of this program. The process reveals a beautiful mosaic of people who are becoming my family—a family that loves me no matter what.

Today I still have a hard time reaching out, and even more so trusting. The more I trust and rely on another human being, the greater my urge to run via relational sabotage. Some part of me still fights to go it alone, but one day at a time surrender happens. Whether I pick up the phone, go to a meeting or just plain pay attention to the here and now, my higher power is working all around me. Answers come when I do not even know I need them.

At the end of each day I am truly grateful for another day clean and sober—each one of those days is a beautiful outcome of asking for help and helping others. It does not get any simpler than that—and for that I am thankful.

-- Heidi
New Hampshire
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With Pinky's Help

An AA remembers someone who helped him more than he knew

When I was 13 years sober, my family and I were living in a small town in Manitoba. We felt a little bit like outsiders but maybe that was in my mind.

I got involved in the local AA group. Soon after, one of the members – whom I'll call Pinky sold some property and missed more than a few meetings. It was not very long after that he thought he had alcoholism beat.

I asked the long-term members to come with me to go and talk to Pinky. People balked and said that he knew where to find us. I couldn't believe the cavalier attitude they had.

One night after the meeting, I went and sat down with Pinky. I asked how it was going and expected him to be rageful and drunk. He looked at me with the saddest eyes I had ever seen. He said, "Not very good."

All I wanted to do was to give him a hug. Instead, I said, "Pinky, why don't you come by the house sometime and have dinner." I told him Bernice and the kids would love to have him. I felt like one town outcast talking to another.

A couple of days later, after the money was burnt and the friends were gone, Pinky came by and we had coffee and talked. He drank my coffee, smoked my smokes, and we talked, laughed, and cried. His eyes

were changing. They were going blank. Pinky would drop by every day. He told me that he felt he could never go back to the local meetings. The shame was too much. So, we had meetings in my family's home.

He would come by, smoke, drink the coffee, eat and share. He started to talk about finding a new home for his cat because he was moving. One night, I was invited to speak at a meeting about 60 miles away. Pinky came along with me. It was the first meeting he had gone to since he left AA.

All the way there, he talked about getting rid of his cat. I told him, I can't take the cat because my daughter is allergic. And I asked, "Where are you going? You have no money left." He told me Montreal. I thought, "Yeah, yeah."

A couple of days later, he came by my house with a big coffee can and tobacco. He said that he'd found a home for his cat and he was leaving. I said, "OK, Pinky. See you tomorrow."

Pinky didn't show up that next day or the next or the one after that. His brother found him in the bathtub with the toaster. He was gone.

I was racked with guilt. I should have seen the warning signs. I should have seen the warning signs. I should have said or done something. I went to my sponsor. He listened and then looked at me and said, "Why aren't you working your program?" "Pinky" continued on p. 9

I was angry. We yelled at each other. Then my sponsor said, "What makes you think that you are so important that God put Pinky in your life for you to help him? Maybe God put him there to help you!"

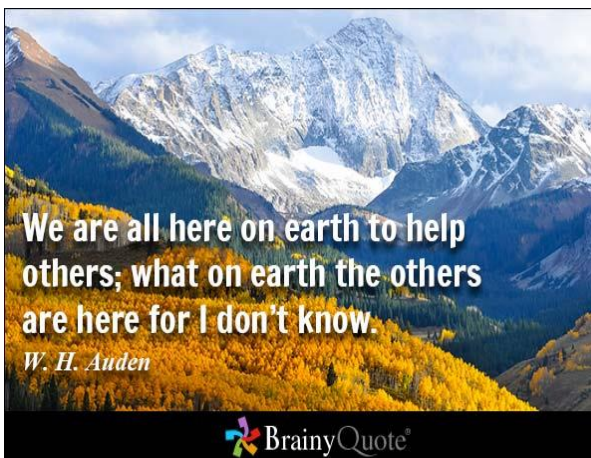
All I could do was sit there. And then I felt this peace come over me. My guilt was replaced with gratitude. I still have that can of coffee and tobacco. I think of Pinky whenever I need to take a closer look at my own program.

—Les L., Medicine Hat, Alberta
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Q: How do you know when you're too drunk to drive?

A: When the tree you've been dodging all night turns out to be the air freshener hanging on your rearview mirror.

—Deborah B., Wichita, Kan.



A Sponsor's View

When Jay removed his glasses, the Big Book came alive—yes, even the pages with Roman numerals.

Didn't know how lucky I was when I finally asked this guy to be my sponsor. God sure helped me out on that day. I did not ask him because he was a man living with spiritual principles. I actually asked him because he wore black high-top sneakers like I did. Thanks to God's grace, Jay and I became sponsor and sponsee.

He said that he would like to meet weekly at his house and start taking the Steps out of the Big Book. That was something I had never done before. I also had never stayed sober before. I finally saw the connection. Our journey started. The first time that we sat at his kitchen table, I was both nervous and excited. Despite being desperate and willing, I still had some smugness about me. When he asked me to draw a circle and a triangle inside it, I remember thinking to myself that I hadn't come for art lessons. I kept that thought to myself. I was amazed to learn about our Three Legacies of Recovery, Unity and Service. It was clear why I had relapsed so many times. My journey into real sobriety started on that day. And on we went.

As we started reading and talking, a new world opened up to me. Jay would read, and I would listen. We actually read the preface and all the forewords and the pages with Roman numerals. I would've

'Sponsor' continued on p. 10

skipped over them if I'd been running this show. Luckily I wasn't.

Jay would pull his chair close to the table, put his glasses on and start reading. The words seemed to leap off the pages. I had never heard them before in my four years of being in and out of AA. I listened as he read, and so many things seemed to make sense. I was enjoying our weekly meetings and came to look forward to them.

As we continued meeting, it finally dawned on me what was happening: After reading for a while, he would stop, lean back, slowly remove his glasses, and, after taking a deep breath, he'd start to tell me his own experiences with the words we had just read. He showed me how important it is to connect our experiences with the words in the book. With his glasses off, I learned so much more.

I realized that both glasses on and glasses off were needed to truly take these Steps. I started to look forward to what we were going to read next. When I saw that we were going to read the part that says, "self-centeredness is the root of our troubles," I just knew we were in for a good session with the glasses off. Every time the book closed and the glasses came off, I just smiled and listened. I found myself in the pages of the Big Book, and I found the Big Book in the story of my life.

Today, I'm fortunate to have 14 years of sobriety and to be able to have several men come sit at my kitchen table as we

take this beautiful journey together—with glasses on and glasses off.

Luke H.-Allendale, N.J. Copyright © AA Grapevine, Inc. (Feb 2015) Reprinted with permission



Have you ever heard of alcoholic Alzheimer's disease? You forget everything but the resentment. From A Rabbit walks into a Bar p.124



Announcements

Alcoholics Anonymous: www.aa.org

NIA 20: www.aa-nia.org

Our thoughts and prayers go to the friends and family of Michael Mark who passed away on Nov. 15, 2016

Winter Assembly, Dec 10, St Charles Borromeo Parish in Hampshire

District 51 Open House @ Stepping Stones Conference Center Dec.14, 2016 @ 7:45 pm Stepping Stones Conference Center 1620 Plainfield Rd Crest Hill, IL Contact: Michelle E. 815-922-9717

Winter Committee Meeting, Jan. 14, 2017 @ 9:00 am Lord of Life Lutheran Church 40W605 IL-38 Elburn, IL Melissa L. 815-409-9364

ECR Conference of delegates Past and Present Feb. 10-12, Holiday Inn, French Quarter 10630 Fremont Pike Perrysburg, OH 43551 Contact: John C. 419-340-9646



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Districts 23 & 40

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