

A person wearing dark blue pants and white socks is walking on a large, weathered log in a forest. The ground is covered with fallen leaves and twigs. The background is a soft-focus forest scene.

# THE ROAD BACK

includes Service News

AUG - OCT 2024  
ISSUE NO. 446

STEP ONE

# Editorial

While driving along country roads, as I do most mornings with my work, I often marvel at the green fields divided by the thorn hedges and the river which meanders through the valley trickling along its natural path. Then one morning the scene changed, there was a bulldozer and digger parked in a field just off the road. The following morning, I witnessed with sadness that the grass was peeled from its position, the topsoil was removed and piled away from where it was settled for years. White lines marked where the digger would prepare the foundation, and deep tracks were ready to be filled with concrete to become the foundation on which a new building would be placed.

I remember thinking that was like my life, born into this world a human with all the beauty of the countryside and as I matured Alcohol became the bulldozer and digger, which had stripped me of all self-respect, dignity and left me naked and void of all meaning. When I asked for help it came in the form of Alcoholics Anonymous and so like the building site, the concrete was poured, the foundation was solid, and the reconstruction of my life started on a solid base. Step One "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol – that our lives had become unmanageable". Based on accepting this fact without reservation, building a new life through the twelve steps of our fellowship began and this work continues on a daily basis.

The construction in the country is now complete. The topsoil was replaced to form gardens but nothing like its original beauty. Just like me, I am happy with the result of my efforts in this wonderful fellowship.

This meeting in print is an opportunity for all of us in Ireland to put our story into words. Someone reading this Road Back publication might observe an account of someone's life and that in turn may change their life forever.

So, let's get on our laptops, write our story and send it to [roadback@alcoholicsanonymous.ie](mailto:roadback@alcoholicsanonymous.ie).

The theme for issue 447 will be "HOPE".

**Road Back Team**



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Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.

The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for AA membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions. AA is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organisation or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any casues.

Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

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# MY STEP ONE IN AA

I first came to the rooms as part of a 'dry February' plan. The idea was to get sober for a few weeks, learn to drink less and not make a fool of myself anymore. Sure I wasn't as bad as other people, was I? I did go to two meetings and I then I went back out as a reward for being sober for a fortnight. I didn't know what was ahead. I was to return a year later after my whole world fell apart and I had nowhere else to go.

My active alcoholism developed over several years. In the beginning alcohol was a friend who helped with my shyness, as I was LGBT+. It was fun – nights out, socialising, dancing, meeting people, partying and so on. But over the years it progressed. I began to have arguments with friends when I drank, I lied and invented stories to suit my drinking, I stayed out for as long as I could (sometimes days) and I was desperate to meet someone who would validate me. All the time I was looking outside for inner peace, love, acceptance.

I was single for many years and finally I met someone and fell madly in love. Long story

short, I self-sabotaged that relationship. One night I brought people back to my house while my partner was sleeping. He wanted them out and I choose to go with them. Ultimately my last drink was in a public park at 4 AM in the morning with very undesirable folks.

The next day I was sick, not just physically but I was full of guilt. My partner told me I broke his heart. I wondered how I could have done this to the one person I truly loved. Over the years I had always thought I drank because I am LGBT+ thinking it's what gay people do. I was always searching for an answer to why was I gay. But now a line was crossed, I had found what I was searching for why all the drinking and madness.

At the same time as this, my job was on the line, and I was living in a socially challenged area. I was afraid to go out and terrified to go home because of intimidation in the area. I had wanted to stop drinking but didn't know how, I was caught in a circle I couldn't get out of. I thought I was unique and different to others.

Alcohol was helping me deal with my problems because I have issues you don't have. If you had my childhood, or lived where I lived, you would drink too. How wrong was I?

But now something changed after realising the hurt I caused. I googled AA meetings in LGBT+ centers. These meetings are standard AA meetings and are open to all but they just happen to be in a setting that is a LGBT+ resource centre or a place where "live and let live" is a fundamental principle. That was hugely significant to me – I needed a safe space because of my shame of drinking, shame of being gay and shame of myself as a person. So, I arrived in AA and came a few minutes late. I listened, I cried. I didn't know how this would help. I left early, as I didn't want to meet anyone, I was so afraid. But I went to a meeting every day. I kept going back. There was something to it. I didn't think it would solve my issues, but I kept going. That is the greatest lesson to anyone – just keep going.

Step one says "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol that our lives had become unmanageable." Many people struggle with admitting they are powerless over alcohol and that they are an alcoholic. Am I really an alcoholic? I am not homeless and drinking out of a brown bag you could argue. But comparisons do no one any good – if alcohol is causing you problems best to look at it! Personally, I had no problem with admitting I was powerless over alcohol. Basically it was simple for me - I knew alcohol had caused many problems in my life. I knew alcohol had led me to a cycle of destruction. Call it what you will, for me there was no question, I am an alcoholic. The powerless was like the car had no brakes. There was no stop button. Admitting I am powerless over alcohol helped me start on my journey of recovery. Years later I still need to say "My name is J and I am an alcoholic." I say it consciously now, so I don't forget it.

I really knew was my life was unmanageable – that really rang true for me. My life was chaos after chaos after chaos. Even to do the small things such as tasks like driving my aunt somewhere, for example, there was drama, resentment or blaming others attached. My addiction meant my life was a nightmare - even in these small things. Manageability now means I can plan my day, I take responsibility for things, I don't blame others for my issues. If I am late I am late, there doesn't have to be a big story to it. I basically have become an adult. I have found inner honesty and that has helped me enormously.

To anyone starting on the journey of AA my advice is try it for three months before you decide if its for you. Look at step one to start. Your drinking – does it cause issues to you or others? If yes, how is your life on a day-to-day basis, is it chaotic or peaceful, are you present or distracted in your daily tasks? If you struggle with any of these, I recommend you attend a meeting. I did and I found some inner peace, love and I found me!

**John, Dublin**







The essence of our recovery programme is change. Many people in AA talk about a line they crossed between heavy drinking and alcoholism. Maybe such a line does exist or maybe not but there is surely a line everyone of us must cross if we are to maintain our sobriety.

“That line is the line between constantly thinking of ourselves and continuous thought of others.” Once having crossed this line there can be no way back if we are to remain contently sober not merely physically sober.

The prayer of St. Francis (12 x 12) step 11 makes it clear how this profound change is to be accomplished and sustained.

“It is in self forgetting that one finds it is by dying that one awakens to eternal life.”

Francis was not talking about physical death but dying to self. It was not by chance that this prayer was suggested in the eleventh step.

The third and seventh steps prayers prepare the ground for this final denial of self.

Step three says “God I offer myself to thee – to build with me and to do with me as thou wilt. Relieve me of the bondage of self that I may better do thy will.”

The next part of the prayer is the vital link to step 11.

“Take away my difficulties that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of thy power, thy love and thy way of life.”

We ask for our difficulties to be relieved not in a selfish way but in order that we “bear witness” or show others that it is God’s power not will power that creates change in us.

In step 7 the prayer reinforces the need to be a servant if we are to experience meaningful change. In fact right from the start of our book the authors have been preparing us for the

conscious contact in step 11 by interspersing reference to guidance.

The verb "guide" is defined as "to lead or divert, influence or regulate". Two synonyms are "to disclose" and "to show".

There are more than 12 references to guidance in the Big Book an example is on page 83 in the last sentence in the first paragraph.

"Asking each morning in meditation that our creator show us the way to patience, tolerance, kindness and love".

Another notable reference is to be seen on page 13 in Bill's story where he talks about meditation and guidance. The third line in the fourth paragraph reads:

"I was to sit quietly when in doubt, asking only for direction and strength to meet my problems as he would have me".

Going back then to the seventh step prayer it says:

"My creator I am now willing that you should have all of me, good and bad. I pray that you remove me from me every single defect of character which stands in the way of my usefulness to you and my fellows".

Having committed to this prayer we are now servants, no longer in control, totally surrendered and ready for improvement in our conscious contact with God in step 11.

The Big Book authors totally believed that "God speaks" to us. On page 57 paragraph 2 line 3-4: paragraph 3 lines 1-2 they say:

"He has come to all who have honestly sought him"

"When we drew near to him he disclosed himself to us"

At the bottom of page 69 there is yet another reference to guidance. Paragraph 3 line 6 says:

"In meditation we ask God what we should do about each specific matter. The right answer will come, if we want it".

The key to change therefore is to learn how to listen, God communicates with us through inspiration, an intuitive thought or a decision.

How do we know if the intuitive thought or decision is our will or God's will? We do this by simply asking ourselves if it is selfish, dishonest, self seeking or frightening, if these elements are present we can be sure that it is not from God.

These four elements are the basis for guidance in steps 4 – 10 and 11.

When in doubt and when it is important we discuss our revelations with someone else who is living this two-way prayer way of life. More light came in through two windows than one. Someone else who wants God's plan for our lives may help us to see more clearly. Many members talk over or tell each other what guidance has come. This is the key to unity. There are always three sides to every question – your side, my side and the right side. Guidance shows us which side is the right side – not which side is right. This is why many of our trusted servants become unpopular at times.

**WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU!  
SEND YOUR STORIES, POEMS OR FAVOURITE IMAGES RELATING TO YOUR  
SOBRIETY TO:  
ROADBACK@ALCOHOLICSANONYMOUS.IE**



We can only be sure of our guidance as we go through the process of acting upon it. A rudder will not guide a ship until it is moving. As we obey very often the results will convince us that we are on the right track. God has given us a free will – this means we are free NOT to listen to God's guidance. However we must be prepared to accept the consequences if we are not willing to follow our creators plan for our lives.

If we have been thorough and honest in steps 4 through 9 we will have removed blocks that hitherto prevented us from establishing a meaningful relationship with God as we understand him.

Working the twelve-step recovery programme creates change and there is no doubt about that. If we find by step 11 that we are not receiving thoughts when we listen the fault is not God's.

Usually it is because there is something we will not do.

Something God has already told us to do which we ignored.

A restitution we will not make.

A person we will not forgive.

A habit or indulgence we will not give up.

Something wrong in our lives we will not face or make right.

A wrong relationship in our lives we will not give up.

The above items are all discussed in our Big Book as part of our inventory and restitution process.

"When man listens God speaks, when man obeys God acts".

This is the law of prayer and the basis for change and change we must if we are to experience the 12 promises described at the end of step 9 in our Big Book.

**Tom D, WSD1**



**For further information on forthcoming AA Events please visit the events section of our website on: [www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie/events](http://www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie/events)**





## FIRST MEETING

My 1st meeting in AA was 25/12/2012. I hadn't had a drink for two days, my wife and her best pal brought me to the meeting. As I write this almost 12 years later, all three of us are still sober and active members of AA. I haven't had a drink since that 1st meeting.

I had been drinking for many years and daily drinking the last five years, I see what has happened in my life since that faithful Christmas Day as my own Miracle. I have seen many others but this one belongs to me.

My life is so much different and so very better since I admitted I was an alcoholic and my life had become unmanageable, The 1st step in the 12 step program of Alcoholics Anonymous. I was obsessed with Alcohol all my life.

It began as a young teen and it was relentless. A merciless obsession I learned.

I drifted through life without rhyme or reason  
No dreams or motivation, no real voice and  
good times or bad, always the Drink.

After that 1st meeting I met the Man who would become my Sponsor, he introduced me to the 12 step program and the Big Book of AA it has changed my life.

I began to slowly see my denial of my Alcoholism and how all of my problems had been firmly rooted in my Disease. I had to finally surrender and learned about the condition of Alcoholism and its effects on my mind, this phenomenon of craving once I took the 1st Drink and for me, impossible to control.

Thankfully and with great help I saw all of this in my own story and finally the blindfold of denial was removed, my Sponsor said to me we need to be 100% on this step.

I will always be...

**Mal, Dublin**

## Chapter 2

### THERE IS A SOLUTION

## COMING TO TERMS WITH STEP ONE

WE, OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, know thousands of men and women who were once

When I first encountered the principle of Step One in the Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) programme, I resisted. I had tried everything outside the book to control my drinking, thinking I could outsmart this illness. But as it says on page 48 of the Big Book, I was “beaten into a state of reasonableness” by the relentless force of King Alcohol. The progression of my illness was undeniable, and everything in my life had become unmanageable. I never imagined I would become a daily drinker, but I did. I never thought I would end up in rehab, but I did.

The moment that changed everything was when I decided to go through with the process of completing the Twelve Steps which enables a spiritual awakening. My life began to change when I started working with my sponsor, who guided me through the programme with compassion having experienced it for themselves. They explained to me why I shouldn't pick up that first drink. They revealed how one drink set off the phenomenon of craving, leading me to drink more and more in a futile attempt to achieve that sense of ease and comfort. I began to understand that I react differently to alcohol because I have an abnormal reaction to this normal substance which, as it says in the Doctor's Opinion, I can see others drink with impunity.

But the ease and comfort I sought were never

real. It was only ever a fleeting sensation, and I found myself reaching for more, powerless against that first drink. Again, it says in The Doctor's Opinion, my problems were piling up, becoming incredibly difficult to solve. Yet my sponsor assured me that once the drink problem was solved, all my other problems would begin to be resolved too. I would have a way of living that enabled me to face whatever came my way.

As I read Bill W.'s story, I found myself identifying with his drinking, his thinking, and his feelings. Though I couldn't relate to him as a man, a stockbroker, or a soldier, I could see myself in his struggles with alcohol. This identification was crucial—I started to understand that I, too, could be an alcoholic and that there was no shame in that.

Moving into Chapter 2, 'There is a Solution,' I began to realise that I had no control, power, or choice over alcohol. I reached the point of pitiful and incomprehensible demoralisation, with no other option but to accept the spiritual help outlined in the Big Book. Chapter 3, 'More About Alcoholism,' reinforced this understanding, teaching me about the mental obsession that could lead me back to drinking if I didn't gain a solid mental defence.

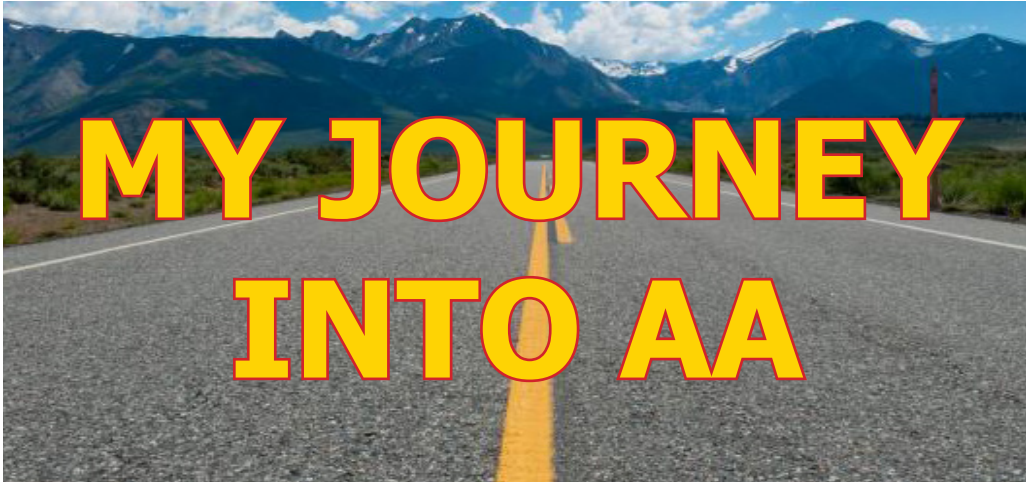
When I first came into the rooms of AA, I was



determined to prove that I wasn't an alcoholic. I judged others rather than looking at what they were pointing me toward—a programme of recovery that would change my life forever. But as I progressed through the steps and experienced a spiritual awakening, I no longer had to fight alcohol. I learned to live one day at a time, and my life became a beautiful journey of sobriety. Step One was the most difficult for me, but like Bill W., the moment I fully accepted it, the effect was electric.

Today, I am forever grateful to everyone who helped me eventually 'get it,' and now I have the privilege of passing it on. The greatest gift I have ever received is the opportunity to help others achieve sobriety through the Grace of a Power Greater than ourselves.

**Mags, Belfast**



Hi my name is Tara and I'm an alcoholic.

My journey into AA wasn't straightforward it took me a couple of attempts before I threw in the towel and accepted that I was an alcoholic and my life was unmanageable! At the age of 30 when I first entered the rooms of AA I thought I was too young to be an alcoholic.

Today I have a full knowledge of my disease and I know I'm exactly where I'm meant to be, in the rooms of AA and not drinking alcohol getting myself into dangerous situations and waking up the next day with guilt, shame, not remembering the night before! Today I'm three years and five days sober, I feel lucky and grateful I am reaping the rewards of sobriety

and so are my children, husband and family! I've a lot of gratitude for the AA fellowship, the program of recovery and the friends I have made in the rooms of AA.

I had to admit to myself I was powerless over alcohol, that I could not drink like a normal drinker! The insanity of telling myself the next time would be different and it never was.

Thankfully it's not like that today, I say this with a smile on my face and gratitude in my heart. I have peace in my life and I'm a safe place for my children.

**Tara**

# ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

Join us for a weekend of meetings, workshops and fellowship



## 68th All Ireland Convention

11th, 12th, 13th April 2025

### "Strength in Unity"

*Ní neart go cur le chéile*



The Clayton Hotel, Sligo, Ireland

Address: Clarion Road, Ballytivnan, Sligo, F91 N8EF  
info.sligo@claytonhotels.com  
Tel: +353 71 911 9000

For more information email [allirelandconvention@alcoholicsanonymous.ie](mailto:allirelandconvention@alcoholicsanonymous.ie)  
Hosted by Connaught Intergroup on behalf of the General Service Conference of Ireland  
Check our webpage for future updates here: [www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie](http://www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie)

### IMPORTANT REMINDER

**If you are leaving this publication in a public place such as a treatment centre, prison or doctors surgery - please be sure to remove the centre pages beforehand.**









# Heard at Meetings

I was asked under oath if a half empty bottle was mine. I replied, "If it were mine, it would be empty".

If you're coasting, you're probably going downhill.

There's no harm in having nothing to say. Just try not say it out loud.

My God box is becoming so full, pretty soon it will be a God crate.

I could have used a sponsor in creche!

My sponsor had me doing so much service, that for me, the a,b,c in How it Works stood for ashtrays, brushes and chairs.

## The Power of Public Information in Alcoholics Anonymous.

### Part One: Engaging at the Group Level

In the heart of our communities, the work we do within Alcoholics Anonymous has always been rooted in the simple yet profound act of one person helping another. This grassroots approach has a powerful ripple effect, bringing hope and recovery to countless lives. Today, we focus on an essential aspect of this mission: Public Information (P.I.) at the group level. By reaching alcoholics and professionals in our local communities, we can spread the message of recovery and change lives.

### What is Public Information?

Public Information in Alcoholics Anonymous means carrying the message of recovery to the still-suffering alcoholic by informing the general public about the A.A. programme. We do this by connecting with the media, schools, industries, and other organisations to communicate the nature and purpose of A.A. and what it can do for alcoholics. As our co-founder, Bill W., wrote: "Public Information takes many forms — the simple sign outside a meeting place that says 'A.A. meeting tonight;' listing in local phone directories; distribution of A.A. literature; and radio and television shows using sophisticated media techniques. Whatever the form, it comes down to one alcoholic carrying the message to another alcoholic, whether through personal contact or through the use of third parties and the media."

### Local Impact: The Role of Groups

The needs and experiences of people in your own area, whether large or small, urban or rural, will shape what you decide to do within your group. With approx. 770 A.A. meetings across Ireland, we have a phenomenal opportunity to engage with people directly in our communities. By

bringing to life the experiences of our members and showcasing how our programme of action has transformed their lives, we can reach those who still suffer.

### Building Community Relations

The A.A. programme works when an active alcoholic seeks help and an A.A. member is available to provide it. Often, behind the scenes, there is the support of a doctor, an alcoholism agency, a relative, or an employer—someone who knows about A.A. and how to find us. From the beginning, A.A. has depended on good community relations to keep these helping hands informed and ready.

### Practical Steps for Groups

To effectively engage in P.I. at the group level, consider these practical steps:

1. Outreach to Professionals: Connect with local doctors, therapists, social workers, and other professionals who may encounter individuals struggling with alcoholism. Provide them with A.A. literature and information about meetings.
2. Community Events: Participate in local health fairs, community festivals, and other events where you can set up an information stand to distribute A.A. materials and talk to people about the program.
3. Schools and Universities: Reach out to educational institutions to offer presentations about A.A. and alcoholism. Educating young people can have a long-term impact on awareness and prevention.
4. Local Media: Develop relationships with local newspapers, radio stations, and community newsletters to share stories and information about A.A. and its services.

5. Visible Signage: Ensure that signs for your A.A. meetings are visible and clear. This simple step can make it easier for someone in need to find help.

## Creating a Welcoming Environment

One of the most powerful ways to engage in P.I. is by creating a welcoming environment within your meetings. Encourage members to share their stories, offer literature to newcomers, and make it easy for people to understand how to access support. When people feel welcomed and supported, they are more likely to stay and spread the word about the help they received. Get Involved and Share Ideas

We encourage all groups to brainstorm and share ideas on how to enhance their P.I. efforts. Whether it's through organising a community event, developing partnerships with local organisations, or simply ensuring your meeting information is up to date and accessible, every effort counts.

## Looking Ahead

In the next edition, we will delve into the National P.I. approach across Ireland, exploring how coordinated efforts can amplify our message and reach even more people. Together, we can ensure that the lifesaving message of A.A. is heard loud and clear, from the smallest village to the largest city.

In the meantime, getting involved in Public Information (PI) is a great way for groups to help spread awareness about Alcoholics Anonymous in their local community. A selection of newly updated posters is now available on the AA website: [alcoholicanonymous.ie](http://alcoholicanonymous.ie), and your group can order them online at no cost apart from covering the postage. Alternatively, downloadable versions of the posters are also available, allowing you to add your group's details and share information about upcoming Open or Open Public Information meetings.

These posters can be placed in a variety of locations such as GP surgeries, community venues, places of worship, libraries, and local businesses. This simple yet effective action can make a big impact, especially as we approach the Christmas and New Year period—often a time when many people decide to seek help for their drinking. By placing these posters in your local area, you'll be playing an important role in guiding those in need toward AA and the solution it offers.

By embracing Public Information work at the group level, we are not only helping to carry the message of recovery to those in need but also strengthening our own commitment to service and community. Let's continue to work together, support one another, and bring hope to the still-suffering alcoholics in our communities.

Stay tuned for the next edition, where we will explore the exciting initiatives and strategies of the National P.I. Subcommittee and how you can get involved.


In the spirit of unity and service, let's keep carrying the message and changing lives, one person at a time.

## Public Relations (PR)

[pa-blik ri-'lġ-shanz]

Managing how information about an individual or company is disseminated to the public.







Another chance at life

**Alcoholics Anonymous**

- > [www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie](http://www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie)
- > 01 842 0700 (ROI) / 028 90 351 222 (NI)
- > [gso@alcoholicsanonymous.ie](mailto:gso@alcoholicsanonymous.ie)

 All enquiries are treated in the strictest confidence 



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Drink problem? We get it...



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# SEVEN NEW PUBLIC INFORMATION POSTERS

**You're not alone**

Drink problem? We get it...



**Alcoholics Anonymous**

Meet us online or in person

- > [www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie](http://www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie)
- > 01 842 0700 (ROI) / 028 90 351 222 (NI)
- > [gso@alcoholicsanonymous.ie](mailto:gso@alcoholicsanonymous.ie)

  Scan for more information

All enquiries are treated in the strictest confidence

## EDITABLE PI POSTERS

**You're not alone**

*Drink problem? We get it...*



**Alcoholics Anonymous**

This is an editable text box  
Type in your information here



Scan for more information

All enquiries are treated in the strictest confidence

**You're not alone**

*Drink problem? We get it...*



**Alcoholics Anonymous**

This is an editable text box  
Type your information in here



Scan for more information

All enquiries are treated in the strictest confidence

A selection of newly updated posters is now available on the AA website: [alcholicanonymous.ie](http://alcholicanonymous.ie), and your group can order them online at no cost apart from covering the postage. Alternatively, downloadable versions of the posters are also available, allowing you to add your group's details and share information about upcoming Open or Open Public Information meetings.





# “MY NAME IS NOEL”

My name is Noel and I'm a deaf alcoholic.

I have been asked by a fellow AA member to write an article describing my experience, strength and hope. As I write this story, I see how time in sobriety has passed quickly. Every day since 2009, I have learned from AA that recovery is possible if we attend AA meetings and work the 12 steps with a sponsor. Because of these learnings, I've not had a drink in 15 years. I thank my Higher Power for the life I have had since the day I stopped drinking. One day at a time.

I became deaf when I was four years old. Although I lost my hearing, I'm still able to speak. For many people, hearing and speaking are closely tied. To be able to communicate you have to be able to hear. For example, when I share my story in the rooms, AA members will hear what I'm saying, but I can't hear the stories that they share. Although I'd see some familiar faces at the meetings, I'd never know their names. I'd never know how long they were sober.

I'm totally deaf in my right ear. I have partial hearing in my left ear which can be enhanced with the help of a hearing aid. It is important to understand that the hearing aid does not

give natural and functional hearing. It helps me hear the sound of people's voices, but it doesn't make it possible to know what they are saying. Even if I have a hearing aid on me, I can feel isolated. I don't use the aid anymore. After a prolonged period of time, it causes headaches and ear soreness. I quite enjoy the silence, which is part of who I am. The other part of me is Irish Sign Language (ISL), my first and preferred language. It has all the grammatical components required for human languages to function. It can also be expressed through the movement of the hands and body.

ISL is a visual language and is more accessible than spoken English. It can be seen rather than heard. There are many aspects to my identity in which both ISL and the experience of silence are vital parts. But the part I'd like to write about is my alcoholic self.

What was it like for me?

I hope I'll never forget because, if I do, I will probably end up back drinking again. In 1993, not long after my girlfriend broke up with me, I went to my first AA meeting in Rathgar, Dublin. At the time, we were planning to get married but she couldn't tolerate my behaviour any longer. I went to Rathgar thinking I could

“fix” what was wrong with me and that I’d start drinking like a gentleman. How wrong I was. I discovered the AA program was about staying away from the first drink, a day at a time. I was asked to share at the meeting but I declined. I was uncomfortable and never went back there again. From then on, my drinking got progressively worse. I drank only at the weekends but soon after I started drinking every day. I just couldn’t stop. I drank too much too often. It was never enough. I always wanted more. I was admitted to a treatment centre in 1996 and experienced 10 months of sobriety. I relapsed and started drinking again. I hoped that somehow things would be okay but it got progressively worse. I had brief spells in AA before slipping back out again. This happened repeatedly over a period of 13 years or so.

Things got so bad in 2009. By that stage, I had lost my job and my drinking was out of control. I was on my knees. I knew I’d be dead if I kept drinking. I surrendered and went back to AA with a firm resolve to get sober. I did something I never did before. I got a sponsor. I asked him to help me work the Steps. We had one-to-one meetings at his house which made it easier for me to read his lips. He was very open, patient and understanding about my disability, and never once forced me to do anything I didn’t want to do. It was all about helping me do the work. I got sober a day at a time. Soon the obsession and compulsion started to fade. I kept going to meetings. I’d sit at the front to get a clear view of the person doing the chair. I only get 30% of the shares because lip reading is not reliable. It didn’t matter to me that I couldn’t hear the others. I had to be in the rooms regardless. I was terrified at the thought of drinking again. It would mean going back to that dark place. I had been there before.

I must have felt a deep sense of isolation. I think it was four years after my last drink that I realised I couldn’t connect with people. Once

I felt okay sitting in the rooms, but now I was feeling self-conscious about being in the rooms. I never met another deaf alcoholic, someone who could understand what it feels like to be surrounded by hearing people. Someone who would know the fear of meeting hearing AA members. Someone who might know what it feels like to see a couple of members look uncomfortable whenever I approached them after a meeting. Someone who might sign “yes, I was there” when I tell him about AA member who was unwilling to engage in conversation. Someone who might give a nod and sign “I know” when I tell him about an AA member who stayed silent while leaving me to carry the burden of conversation. To this day, I can never get the meaning of AA message that we reach out the hand of friendship. I did got to experience it myself. The message “keep coming back” wasn’t really much help either.

I began to drift away from the AA programme and eventually stopped going altogether. In the years outside of AA, I was fortunate that I never took a drink. but I wasn’t well. I think it was fear that stopped me from drinking. I was what we might call a dry drunk. I wasn’t well. My whole attitude and behaviour was exactly the same as I was when I was drinking. I became increasingly irritated and angry over the smallest of things. I was once involved in a road rage incidence, and I noticed people were avoiding me.

I’ll never forget the fear inside me when my mother died. The thought of going back drinking was terrifying. The day after the burial, I returned to AA and met my former sponsor. He said I’d be better off finding another sponsor, and I’m glad that he did. The person I asked to be my sponsor was not like the others. He wasn’t even nervous at being around me. He reminded me that if I followed in his directions, I’d be okay. I am grateful that he gave me a firm hand in guiding me through the Steps.

I completed the 12 Steps. For me, working the Steps is the path to freedom. I'm grateful to my higher power for guiding me back to the meetings.

In 2018, I met Tom, a fellow AA member, who was anxious to reach out to deaf alcoholics, to try and make AA meetings accessible. A deaf alcoholic of my acquaintance had stopped going to meetings because her request for help from AA for an ISL interpreter was refused. This was a huge lesson to be learned. Things had to change. Tom had walked the path of recovery for over 40 years. He graciously imparted his wisdom to me about AA. In July 2018, his help has proved invaluable in setting up the Sober Signs AA group in Dublin. We managed to get an ISL interpreter to make the meeting accessible to deaf and hard-of-hearing people. Most of the members at the meeting were hearing people, but the service of an ISL interpreter allowed deaf and hearing members share freely together. A number of other deaf alcoholics also attended from week to week. This meeting was the first time that I had full, unfettered access to member-to-member sharing. I now know them by first name. And I know their struggles, their experience strength and hope, just as they do mine. There is something special about finding identification with others. I get to experience the connection that had been missing all those years ago. I no longer feel isolated.

When COVID-19 hit our shores in March 2020, we were forced to switch to online meetings. We continue to meet on Zoom once a week. In August 2022, I shared at an online Open Meeting with an ISL interpreter present. I am grateful to Molesworth Street AA group for agreeing to have an ISL interpreter present once a month at one of its physical meetings which started in November 2022 and continues to the present day. This is the only physical meeting in Ireland which provide access to an ISL interpreter.

I travel to Dublin almost every month to attend this meeting. Every journey to the capital is worthwhile.

I am deeply grateful to the AA groups for making AA meetings accessible to deaf alcoholics.

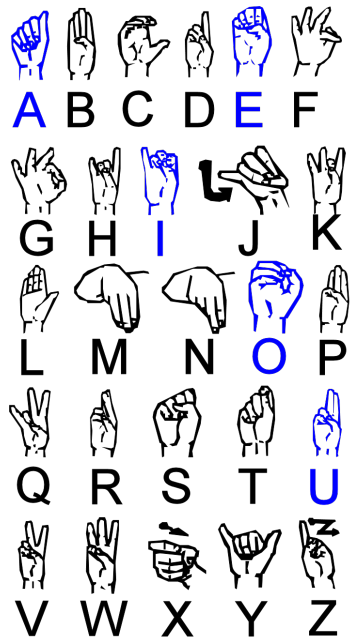
My name is Noel. I am deaf and alcoholic.

An ISL interpreter is available at a physical meeting in Molesworth Place, Dublin 2, D02 K023, at 2pm on the 2nd Saturday of each month.

An ISL interpreter is available at an online meeting of the Sober Signs Group at 7pm every Thursday night on Zoom number 5956783434 with password sobersigns.

A BSL sign-language interpreter is available at an online meeting at 7pm every Tuesday night on Zoom number 83250253148 with password 136402.

**Noel**



# I LONG DEFENDED ALCOHOL

From a young age I have always defended alcohol, long before I ever picked up a drink. Be it my own alcoholism or somebody else's disease, alcohol was never to blame. Admitting powerlessness over alcohol was not an option for me. My early days of drinking were spent trying to navigate the effects of alcoholism, while not accepting or realising I had the disease of alcoholism, probably long before I ever picked up a drink. I started out as a weekend drinker, and my disease told me I was normal, that the horrendous hangovers were normal when in fact it was the physical allergy to alcohol I was actually experiencing. Working all week just to make it to the weekend seemed normal. My life was ruled by alcohol yet I refused to entertain the idea that I was an alcoholic, because admitting this would mean I'd have to stop. Instead, I blamed everyone and everything around me. I compared myself to people I was certain were alcoholic, and convinced myself I was OK, I was a normal drinker.

I still had my family and I could hold down a job. Several years of progressing alcoholism, mental torture and hurt ensued. Having used alcohol as a coping skill for most of my adult life, the mental disease caught up with me and I started to silently admit I had a problem with alcohol. I was very willing to accept this fact, but not tell anyone. I had accepted this

way of life, thinking there was no solution. My life was completely unmanageable, in every aspect. I lost friends, family relationships, and my job was to be next yet I was still unwilling to put down the drink. Alcohol was still my best friend. I could not comprehend that not taking the first drink was a starting point in clawing my life back together.

The disease of alcoholism finally took over my head, adding to the physical and spiritual disease within me. In one fleeting moment of clarity I finally admitted to another person that I was powerless over alcohol, I could not stop drinking on my own. Stepping into my first meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous I discovered I didn't have to do this on my own, and I was most certainly not unique. Attending regular meetings of AA helps me understand the nature of my disease, how my life can be unmanageable even without a drink, but most importantly showed me the coping skills and life skills to keep my disease at bay. Meeting by meeting, my life became a little bit more manageable every day, simply by not taking the first drink, and asking my Higher Power that led me into the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous to help me throughout the day, one day at a time.

**Anon**



# DR. BOB'S LAST DRINK

Bill W. had met a kindred spirit in Dr. Bob. Both men were born in Vermont, both were intelligent and both were alcoholics. They somehow knew that fateful evening in Henrietta Seiberling's Gatehouse home both of them were going to be okay.

After a few weeks of working with each other and attempting to deliver the message of recovery to other alcoholics, Bill and Dr. Bob did not appear to be discouraged. Despite their not being able to bring another rummy into the fold - they were staying sober. Quite a feat for Dr. Bob who had been attending Oxford Group meetings for a few years, even prior to getting together with Bill.

Dr. Bob was feeling so secure that he decided to attend a convention of the American Medical Association. He had not missed a convention in 20 years and did not plan on missing this one. Bob's wife, Anne was set against him attending the convention. She remembered previous ones where he had gotten drunk.

Dr. Bob assured her that he would not drink. He said that alcoholics, even those who had stopped drinking, would have to begin to learn how to live in the real world. She finally agreed and off he went.

Dr. Bob kept his promise to Anne. That is, until he boarded the train to Atlantic City. Once on the train Dr. Bob began to drink in earnest. He drank all the way to Atlantic City, purchased more bottles prior to checking in to the hotel. That was on a Sunday evening.

Dr. Bob stayed sober on Monday until after dinner. He then resumed his drinking. Upon awakening Tuesday morning his drinking continued until noon. He then realized that he was about to disgrace himself by showing up at the convention drunk.

## 24-Hour Blackout

He decided to check out of the hotel and return home. He purchased more alcohol on the way to the train depot. He waited for the train for a long time and continued to drink. That was all he remembered until waking up in the home of his office nurse and her husband back in Ohio. Dr. Bob's blackout lasted over 24 hours. There was a five-day period from when Dr. Bob left for the convention to when the nurse called Anne and Bill. They took Dr. Bob home and put him to bed. The detoxification process began once again. That process usually lasted three days according to Bill. They tapered Dr. Bob off of alcohol and fed him a diet of sauerkraut, tomato juice and Karo Syrup.

Bill had remembered that in three days, Dr. Bob was scheduled to perform surgery. On the day of the surgery, Dr. Bob had recovered sufficiently to go to work. In order to insure the steadiness of Dr. Bob's hands during the operation Bill gave him a bottle of 2 beer. That was to be Dr. Bob's last drink and the "official" Founding date of Alcoholics Anonymous.

The operation was a success and Dr. Bob did not return home right after it. Both Bill and Anne were concerned to say the least. They later found out, after Dr. Bob had returned, that he was out making amends. Not drunk as they may have surmised, but happy and sober. That date according to the AA literature was June 10, 1935.

June 10, 1935 has been considered as AA's Founding Date for many years. After all, it was the date Dr. Bob had his last drink - or was it? Recently discovered evidence appears to differ with the "official" literature.

## The "Official" Date

The Archives of the American Medical Association reportedly show that their





convention in Atlantic City, in the year 1935 did not start until June 10th. How could Dr. Bob have gone to the convention, by train - check into a hotel - attend the convention on Monday - check out on Tuesday - be in a blackout for 24 hours - go through a three -day detoxification - perform surgery on the day of his last drink - June 10, 1935?

Five days had passed since Dr. Bob left for the convention and returned to Akron. There was the three-day detoxification process and then there was the day of the surgery. Approximately nine days had passed from when he left and the date of his last drink.

If the records of the American Medical Association are in error as to the date of their convention it is possible that June 10, 1935 was the date of Dr. Bob's last drink. If the records are in error, the 1935 convention would have been the only one in the history of the American Medical Association that was listed with the wrong date.

It now appears that the date of Dr. Bob's last drink was probably on, or about, June 17, 1935. Maybe AA should keep the June 10th date as a symbolic Founding Date rather than claim it as the actual one? Maybe the date should be changed to reflect historical accuracy?

Either way, Dr. Bob never drank again until his death, November 16, 1950. Dr. Bob sponsored more than 5,000 AA members (which if you do the math equals more than one per day in the 15+ years that he was sober!) and left the legacy of his life as an example.

Dr. Bob told those he sponsored that there were three things one had to do to keep sober:

TRUST GOD, CLEAN HOUSE, HELP OTHERS.

More will be revealed...

**Mitchell K.**

R. H. SMITH, M. D.

2ND NATIONAL BLDG. AKRON, OHIO

TELEPHONE: HE-0523 REG. NO. \_\_\_\_\_

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**R** ...if you really and truly want to quit drinking liquor for good and all...we know that we have an answer for you. It never fails, if you go about it with one half the zeal you have been in the habit of showing when you were getting another drink.

Dr. Bob M. D.



# A STORY IN PICTURES

Here are a few photos from my trip to the gate lodge where Bill and Bob first met. I have many great photos of an amazing trip to Dr Bobs home, Stepping Stones, Rosary Hall St Vincents Hospital in Cleveland and the building where Sr Ignatia spent her last years. I was given a VIP trip by Charles, around the Cleveland Ohio part of AA origins. It was fascinating to hear of how so many people were involved and their different roles. Also got a VIP tour around the gate lodge before heading to Stepping Stones for another amazing experience. I now look at the beginnings of AA in pure amazement and adoration.

Dave H



# Q&A WITH ANNE-MARIE

## **Q. How long have you been sober?**

A. My date of sobriety is 17th September 2018.

## **Q. What brought you to the fellowship?**

A. I had literally ran dry of options. I had not got another excuse for being caught out on my lies and trying to protect the booze. My escapades had escalated and although I can't say when exactly I crossed the line with alcohol, for a long time I thought it was normal. I believed I just had to learn how to drink like other people and not get into the same scrapes, falls, blackouts, general trouble alcohol always landed me in. I had been very loyal to drink. I had gone to great lengths to get it, to keep it hidden, and keep it available to me.

My family called weekends 'the Saturday show' – I was unpredictable because at that stage I was topping up in the weekend mornings and my behavior was erratic and unpredictable. I used excuses including not eating, medication causing me to act peculiar – especially diazepam. I used my poor me stories to get me off the hook- I always had trauma to fall back on.

Staggering back to our apartment on holiday my husband offered to carry my beach bag for me and pulled out a litre bottle of vodka that I had been supping on the sly from early morning. He tossed it in a bin and told me that he was done with me. He had enough and wasn't prepared to live this way any longer. The call was made home exposing us again (booze and Annemarie), he told my family exactly what was going on and I could find my way home.

Something happened and for the first time I could see I was not the only person affected by my drinking, and I admitted I needed help. I was terrified that because of this admission I couldn't withdraw it. There was also relief in

outing my 'little' problem.

Over the next couple of days, I called treatment centers across the island of Ireland. Turns out it's not easy to get a place but if I stayed sober over the next few days, Smarmore Castle County Louth would take me and it would take all my savings too. Home in Ireland I went in on return from holiday.

I was introduced to the 12 steps of AA on my first day at Smarmore and learned about AA when former patients came in to share their experience strength and hope with us. During that first week I got a chance to go to AA and see for myself.

## **Q. Did you know about AA prior to this?**

A. I had heard of it. I'm not proud of what I thought I knew about it. It would not have been for me- after all I had not lost everything, yet.

## **Q. what were your thoughts at your first meeting?**

A. I belong here. These people were not a bunch of losers. I was impressed with everything about it. People were well dressed, smart and I could relate to what they were saying. There were men and women literally sharing the feelings I had openly, and I admired them for the strength they had. They wore their hearts on their sleeves and stories were the same as mine; same only different.

## **Q. Was there any aspect of what was on offer that made you think "NO WAY"?**

A. People doing the job of sharing at the meeting. I remember thinking there is no way I would ever be able to do all of that! Over time I have done just that.

I had learned enough in Smarmore and by going to AA to know I needed extra help and went on to do 6 weeks in the Northlands Centre.





On leaving Northlands I was told frankly that I am a chronic alcoholic. Told I was a sitting duck for addiction and that without all the help I could get, it would all be too much. I chose at that point and journalled about it that I decided to continue to make AA meetings the most important part of my recovery.

**Q. What slogan would you say is your favorite?**

A. 'What other people think of you is none of your business'- is one I have difficulty with. My ego gets in the way a lot and I can set myself up for resentment because of trying to be who I think you want me to be. That's tough- it means setting and resetting boundaries and making sure that recovery doesn't get pushed to the bottom of the pile.

**Q. Does your family feel the ripple effect of your sobriety?**

A. Absolutely, 100% yes. My husband and family can trust me. None of them want to know all about AA and my alcoholism, they respect my choices around it and support me. My husband encourages me to get to meetings and is not ashamed of me. He introduced me to people I had no idea were alcoholic and they arranged to take me to my first local meeting.

My mother once exclaimed 'Where has our Annemarie gone'?! This hurt because I didn't know myself and that fed into my self-pity even more. Today I am told often how proud they are of me. In the last few years, we have had trips together sailing the waterways of Ireland, I have been on a cruise with the family, I have abseiled Belfast Castle for Autism with my nephew. I have been available for them for hospital appointments. The gifts of recovery have been overwhelming.

**Q. Has your ability to do your job improved and how?**

A. When I was sick, I worked long hours and traded the drink off as well deserved. Poor me, I have no help, I'm the only one who knows

how, I don't get a break, blah. In trying to control it all at work, I procrastinated and spread everything too thin. Today I still take pride in my work, but I delegate and take things less seriously. I have 'Practice the Pause' as my screensaver and when others mess up- I try to look at them with soft eyes. The 12 step program applied to all of my affairs. I'm human, I do my best and if I mess up, I own up and move on.

**Q. Is just taking what is on offer enough or do you feel the need to give back?**

A. No I don't think it would work for me to take what is on offer with no need to give back. I have heard and seen too many people who went about this piecemeal and it doesn't work. I have a strong inclination to isolate and if I stay away from meetings for more than a few days I pay the price for it. Besides, it keeps me sober. I spent enough time drinking so it makes sense to give the same time into everything that keeps me well. The power in sharing with another alcoholic is incredible.

**Q. What is your message to the newcomer?**

A. Above all, put recovery first even when life gets in the way. Nothing is more important.

**Q. Is there anything you would like to add or give a short summary?**

A. In a treatment center I was told "You are a chronic alcoholic. You are a sitting duck for addiction and without all the help you can get, there is a good chance you will drink again. You are likely to die from this disease". I was told not everyone gets out of this- I want to be one that does, and you can be too, God has given us a second chance that is second to nothing. Embrace this gift and guard it with everything you have.

**Q&A With Anne-Marie, Cookstown**



# THE IRISH OVERSEAS

Searching for a power greater than me

I came into AA in 1978 and I never had to take a drink again, but that took a lot of soul searching and change to get me to where I am today. It was slow and painful it took a lot of courage to look at who I am and what I am. I made a lot of mistakes, I ran from country to country, from my wife and children but the message was still the same, there are twelve step of recovery. I ran to England then to the U.S.A not wanting to change. The twelve steps were still the same no matter what country I went to, I found people who were willing to help me on this journey, by going to many meetings and listening (which I found very hard to do), talking to people, sharing honestly I came to see I was the problem, not the countries.

Of course, meetings were different everywhere and I had to fit into them in America, the meetings could be anything from 50-60 people even as many as 100. I grew up in Ireland, the meetings were small, after meetings we went

to someone's house for coffee, discussing, arguing, this was a big part of finding out about myself. A variety of meetings i.e. step meetings, discussion meetings and taking on board one of the best quotes for me (contempt prior to investigation). I found I had to be a part of not apart from and that helped me to understand the disease I suffered from, Online meetings via Zoom arrived on the scene about five years ago and that gives me access to meetings all over the world, I like to go to meetings in Ireland twice a week as well as others worldwide.

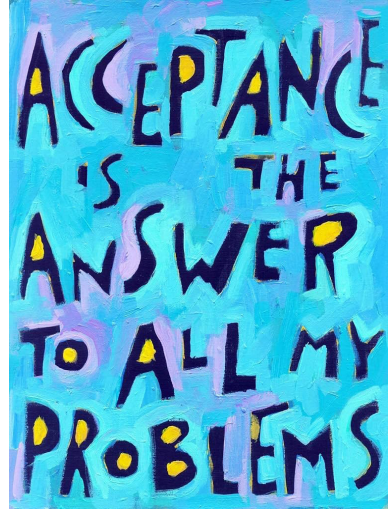
I know my life has improved in every way and I try to accept life.

**Seamus McK, Massachusetts**





# Humour



**Q:** What's the difference between an alcoholic and a drunk?

**A:** A drunk doesn't have to go to all those meetings.



"Being wrong is NOT one of my problems—so how can I take inventory?"



SADANDUSELESS.COM



# DELERIUM TREMORS

Quare dreams come crowding in  
from scarcity of talk and multiplicity  
of senseless words –  
deficiency of alcohol  
along the flow of blood.

The eye of fever-stare  
comes from behind  
a splintered mirror  
on the wall.

Transfusion  
of red blood  
through veins of clinging  
shadows in the night –  
a cold and lifeless  
obscuration.

My curse upon  
the day  
when I was spawned  
into a world of murkiness –  
a planet of the universe  
where dimness  
and disorder  
hold their sway.

And the light of sun  
is sometimes  
as the dead of night.

*Vincent, Raheny*

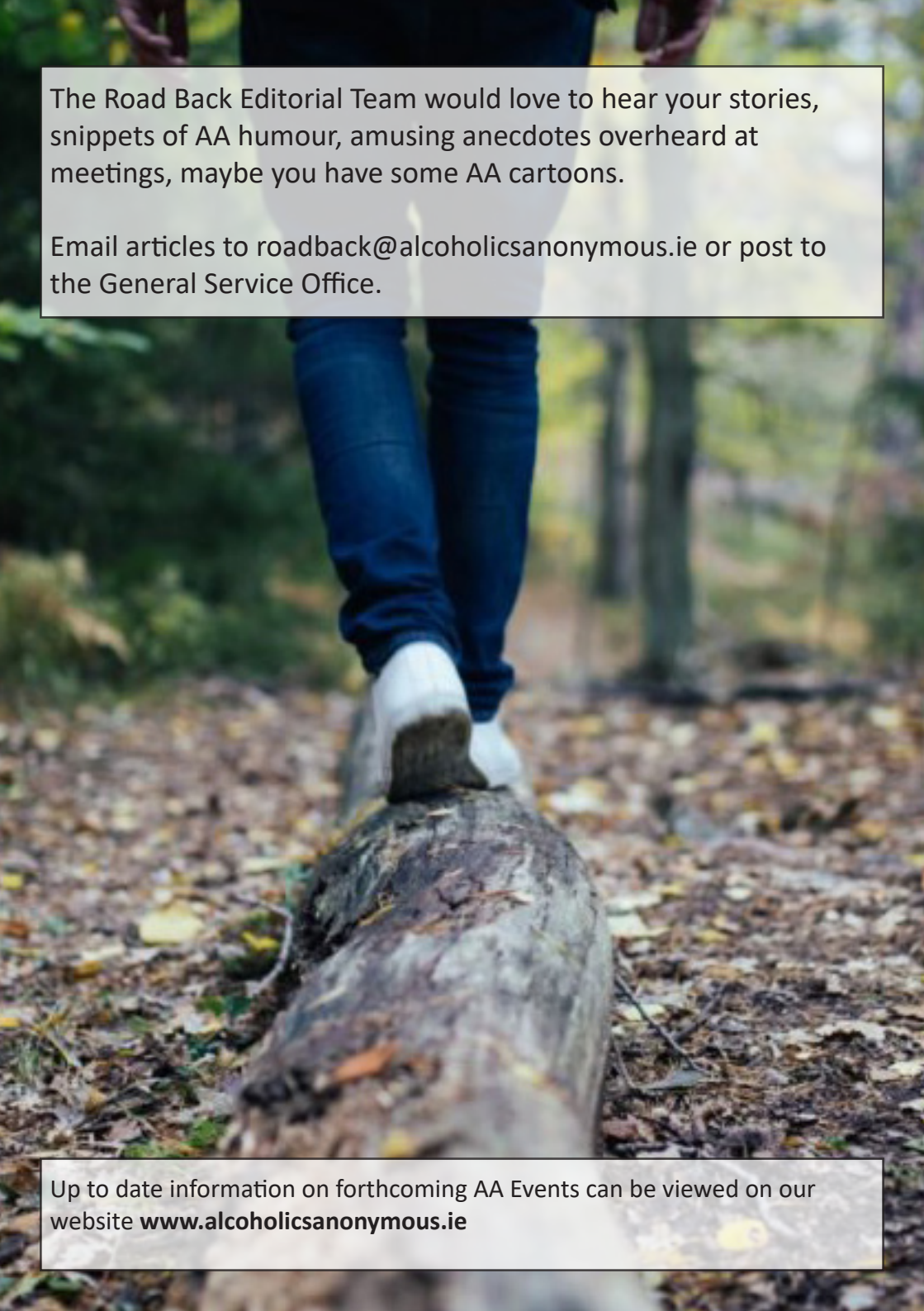
## The Twelve Traditions

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority — a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose — to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.
6. An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever 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

## The Twelve Steps

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



A person wearing blue jeans and white socks is walking on a large, weathered log in a forest. The ground is covered with fallen leaves and twigs. The background is a blurred forest scene with trees and foliage.

The Road Back Editorial Team would love to hear your stories, snippets of AA humour, amusing anecdotes overheard at meetings, maybe you have some AA cartoons.

Email articles to [roadback@alcoholicsanonymous.ie](mailto:roadback@alcoholicsanonymous.ie) or post to the General Service Office.

Up to date information on forthcoming AA Events can be viewed on our website [www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie](http://www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie)