

The

Wagon Wheel

MAY 2011

IDAHO AREA 18
NEWSLETTER



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Something IN THE Wind

One of Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick's books tells a story of a boy on the coast of Maine who asked an old sailor, "What is the wind?" The old man scratched his head,

"I don't know," he said, "I can't tell you. But I know how to hoist a sail."

Although the old sailor didn't know what the wind was, he had learned how to harness some of its great power.

Wasn't this what many of us in the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous had done? Metaphorically speaking, we had hoisted a sail and caught hold of something, and that "Something" (many called it God— some their Higher Power) was doing for us what we previously couldn't do for ourselves.

—Excerpted from
Spiritual Awakenings, pg. 66. Originally part of W.R.'s share in the April, 1987 issue of the GRAPEVINE.

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The OLD-TIMER'S FORMULA *for* RECOVERY

16 YEARS OF SOBRIETY

+ ONE 24-HOUR RELAPSE + 42 ADDITIONAL YEARS
OF SOBRIETY = 1 HAPPY, USEFUL ALCOHOLIC

My name is Ed, and I was born in Salt Lake City in 1928. My mother was of Scotch and Irish descent, and my father was Jewish. Mother and Father were married in Butte, Montana, in 1927. My mother's parents wouldn't attend the wedding because my grandfather was a severe anti-Semite. Mother carried this resentment on into her later life, helping to fuel her alcoholism.

When I was around ten or eleven years old, my parents sent me to a boys' summer camp up in Coeur d'Alene. We had a great time and I was very happy there. A year later, I went back to the camp without my brother, and got terribly homesick. I was so ridden with fear that my parents had to drive all the way from Salt Lake City to pick me up.

I remember my mother getting really drunk on the trip back to Salt Lake City. My father kept giving her booze because that's the only way he could keep her quiet. She could be mean and nasty at times like that.

Mother was petite, very pretty, and active in causes in Salt Lake City, but when she drank all bets were off. I remember bringing a friend home

for the night one time. My mother was yelling at my father, so I told my friend that they were just rehearsing for a play. In other words, I was horribly embarrassed and didn't want to admit she was an alcoholic. I had a lot of conflict in my life when she was drinking.

I had a lot of conflict in my life when she was drinking.

Overall irresponsibility and alcohol use conspired to get me kicked out of several high schools and college. By the time I was 23 I had reached the chronic stage of alcoholism. One day while schussing near the bottom of Alta mountain, I hit a tree with my legs. When I sat up I thought, "Uh oh, this isn't pretty." My legs were flopping because the bones in both were puncturing the skin. They took me to the hospital, where I was operated on, but the doctors couldn't get the circulation restored in one leg. Six months later I was still in that hospital, and becoming an addict along the way.

I was being given narcotics shots. Even though I'd had around 13 operations, I wasn't in too much pain.

But I learned how to fake it. Hospitals at that time were the greatest place to get hooked. No one was even wondering whether I was lying or not. I'd just water up my eyes and tell the nurses that I needed a shot.

I eventually elected to have the leg amputated. I got an artificial leg and my drinking problems returned with a vengeance.

One sunny morning while I was sitting on the porch of the Alta Lodge

the most amazing thing happened to me: I was in a good state of mind—not under the influence yet that day—when I had this overwhelming rush of energy within me. It's hard to describe this

spiritual awakening: It wasn't a voice, but it was the presence of what I'd now call my Higher Power. There was this sense of fullness. Something was inside of me. It's difficult to describe it more than that, except to say that it didn't disappear for a long time. God, as we understand God, was inside me.

In spite of that experience, I kept drinking. Two years later I took a dream job as a radio personality in the small town of Craig, Colorado. The memory of having been fired from two jobs in Salt Lake because of my drinking kept

me dry for a while, but eventually I got back on the hard stuff again and blacked out for a number of days. During one of those blackouts I apparently turned the power on at the station and played only Dave Brubeck records while talking drunkenly over the mike for God knows how many hours. End of that job!

I called AA soon after that and a wonderful man from the Program came and visited me on a 12th-step call. I was wasted, but must have heard a

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few things that registered in my scrambled mind. Most importantly, he gave me a Big Book – first edition, 33rd printing—which I still have.

My drinking continued, though.

I woke up one day in the hospital—a 25-year-old full of drugs and alcohol—and there was a family friend my father's age named Henry W. sitting across from me.

He said, "Hi, Ed. Are you an alcoholic?"

I said, "No, I'm too young."

He said, "You lucky son of a bitch." Then he told me his story. When he left, I looked in the mirror and saw this haggard face staring back at me. I was in horrible shape. The next day, my first sponsor, Ray L., came and took me

to my first meeting.

I started going to more meetings and worked the steps. I was sober and proud of myself. Self-esteem came back and I got a job selling health and accident insurance for Mutual of Omaha. Their hot product was a \$17 dollar policy for accidents. I had all these acquaintances and friends, so I did a hell of a job! For people that didn't know me and said that they'd never have an accident, I'd just lift the pant leg and give them a glimpse of my prosthesis. Now that's a closer!

I called my friend Alf Angin, the director of the Alta Ski School and told him that I wanted to learn to ski again. I became a proficient—but not pretty—skier.

I married a woman named Lois and we stayed together, raising two children, for about 16 years. I was sober for that time, but became very indifferent about Alcoholics Anonymous. I always had an excuse for not going to meetings. And during that time I was horribly introspective and so self-centered that I didn't work at becoming a better husband. I was very busy with my job, but I neglected my wife, eventually resulting in our divorce.

The grass looked greener elsewhere so I moved to Connecticut to work for the Olin ski company. I stayed

dry, but still wasn't attending meetings.

I met a wonderful woman who lived in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and we became friends and lovers. I was very indifferent and often didn't follow through on the plans we'd made together. My ego ran riot, which caused her to dump me. Crazy as it sounds, I had horrible feelings of abandonment. So I decided to drink, and that's when I went on a crazy, one-day drunken spree around New England. It was 1969.

I knew right away that I had to admit to somebody, besides my friends, that I'd relapsed. I had a meeting schedule and knew where there was a meeting in Hartford, so I went to that church where there was a big AA meeting in progress. I'd never been there before. Toward the end of the meeting I went up to the chairman and asked him if I could say a couple of words.

He said sure so I told the group, "My name is Ed and I am an alcoholic and I've had a relapse." God, they all stood up and

clapped and said what we always say, "Welcome back!"

That was the beginning of my new life really. That's when I learned that there is only one way for me to survive: I go to a LOT of meetings, try to help others, always have a sponsor, and do the steps daily. That still works for me 42 years later. (*conclusion next page*)

*I always had an excuse
for not going to meetings.*

A
lot of things
have happened
since I got sober again:
hospitalizations, emotional
problems, etc., but meetings remain
my lifeline. I know that I don't have all
the answers, but I also know that I want
to continue to do battle with the things that
come up in my mind: I locate the character
defect and try to see what I'm going to do with
it. Have I offended anyone? If so, I use the
10th step.

When I was in my early 70s, I went back
to school and got my degree in Alcoholism and
Drug Abuse Counseling. I basically wanted to re-
invent myself. I believe I'm alive today because of
that willingness to change and to work
on myself.

Some of the young people who come
into the rooms look at me and my years of
sobriety with awe: "He's got it!" Well, I'm
sober today, so I guess I've got some of it.

-Ed S.
SVAM Group
Ketchum

THE FREEDOM SEEKERS GROUP

A PRISON AA GROUP PROVES
THAT THE PROGRAM OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS CAN WORK
MIRACLES IN THE LIVES OF BOTH THE INCARCERATED
AND THOSE THAT SUPPORT THEM

My name is John and I am an alcoholic. When I was first asked to submit an article on the Freedom Seekers Group at the Oregon Department of Corrections Snake River Correctional Institution (SRCI), I was not sure where to start. As it turns out, the answer was right in front of me all the while: Recovery—and not just for the men in those meetings, but for every alcoholic that hears from that group, and for the many members that have come to that prison to share their story.

My friend, Brian W., and I went to our first meeting there in the spring of 2007 with no clue what to expect. What we found was a desire to live in recovery. However, not everyone in the room wanted what we have and, as a result, the meetings were bit rocky for a while. Unfortunately, some men went back out. In prison that's not as difficult as it may sound. But those who stayed had a desire to grow in recovery, and we slowly began

to grow as a group.

First, we had to establish a spirit of cooperation with the administration and the correctional officers. Brian and I agreed that we would do two things: One, we would be reliable and consistent; and Two, we would never look for a pat on the back. We knew we'd also have to practice Steps 3 and 11: listening carefully to God's will for us.

We soon discovered that there were some old timers, winners in a place that would seem hopeless to members on the free side. They had a desire to carry the message whenever and wherever they had the opportunity.

The wheels of change turn slowly in a system that is designed to punish offenders, so the group realized they had to change their old ideas and gain the trust of those in

charge. The group started communicating with the staff, and everyone began to let down the walls that had been built up over time. In 2008, SRCI got a new

The wheels of change turn slowly in a system that is designed to punish offenders.

superintendent. His initial reluctance to help the Freedom Seekers Group began to disappear, and today he is a friend of this group.

When hope began to grow, the Freedom Seekers began to be attractive to many inmates wanting to hear the message of recovery. The most amazing help came in the form of their monthly business meetings, where group conscience began to take a foothold. The group took responsibility for their meetings by way of written proposals to the administration, and with help from the chaplain they began to see that if they practiced the principles in all their affairs, things would change.

In the Spring of 2009, the group was allowed to publish its own newsletter. It was also allowed to establish its own trust account (to help the group be self-supporting through its own contributions) with which to buy paper and ink. Those newsletters have made their way into many home groups on the free side, and to many other institutions.

Growth did not stop there, as they also began to use more of the tools AA had given them. Many men being released from this facility have requested a Temporary Contact on the outside. And some are sitting in an outside AA meeting today as a result of hearing the mes-

sage on the inside.

In 2010, the Freedom Seekers Group was allowed to sponsor a fundraiser at the prison. It was a full-day event. Five outside members rode their motorcycles onto the yard, and many more volunteers walked in. We were greeted by about 225 inmates that day, and they all heard the AA message of recovery. From a spiritual standpoint it was a God day.

I believe that the God of my understanding has shown all of Idaho Area 18 what we, as a fellowship, can do for the confined alcoholic when we listen to, and act upon, God's will for us. We should have a meeting like the Freedom Seekers Group in every prison. We can if we put what we have been freely given into action. We hear at every meeting

Maybe it is time to . . . bring in the sunlight of the spirit, and to let it shine.

about the path, and how we rarely fail if we follow it. But there is another path available to all of us—the road less traveled. Maybe

it is time to shake up the status quo and ask our Higher Powers to guide us into the dark, hopeless places; to bring in the sunlight of the spirit; and to let it shine. I believe that is what the Freedom Seekers have done.

I would also like to mention the gratitude the Freedom Seekers Group has for those outside volunteers who come from all over Area 18 to bring the message inside, and for the Spanish-

speaking members who travel from other districts so the Hispanic inmates can have a meeting in their own language.

It is with love and gratitude that I submit this news of Happy Destiny. May we meet on the road less traveled.

—*John P.*, Alternate GSR
Freedom Seekers Group

61st General Service Conference Presentation

AN INFORMED GROUP CONSCIENCE — USING THE THREE LEGACIES

So, most all of us know that Recovery, Unity, and Service are the Three Legacies of our AA experience. They influence the remarkable process of finding group conscience, and are our spiritual principals in action! The Twelve Steps are the Legacy of Recovery. The Twelve Traditions stand for the Legacy of our Unity. And our Concepts represent our Legacy of Service. AA service is anything that helps us reach a fellow alcoholic. It could range from the Twelfth Step itself to a phone call or to having a cup of coffee with someone. AA's General Service Office assumes responsibility for national and international action. All of the above examples of service are included in our Third Legacy, but World Service is the heart of the matter.

As we work
with others,
it changes
who we are.

That said, our leaders are but trusted servants—they do not govern. God, as He may speak in our group conscience, is our sole authority. (I stole this from the July 1955 edition of the GRAPEVINE)

Integrate the Three Legacies and you have the makings of a great life. Of course, on occasion, the principles that we hold near and dear can suddenly slip away from any of us—and can have a negative impact on the process of finding group conscience. As we utilize the Twelve Steps, they allow us to grow and change. As we work with others, it changes who we are. We begin to feel that spirit of being responsible for the future of Alcoholics Anonymous everywhere—being responsible for preserving what was so graciously given to us. We

begin to be very mindful of the Twelve Traditions that are the glue that hold us together. Putting our common welfare first ensures that no harm will come to Alcoholics Anonymous.

My experience since has been to pay attention to the Twelve Concepts, which help us toward equality. Each of us has a voice. Group conscience—the Power of us—derives its authority from that loving God, as He may express Himself.

At the General Service Conference we are the voice of AA. In *AA Comes of Age*, Bill talks about wanting a “feel” of all of us. Delegates have been entrusted to lis-

ten, participate, and make decisions on behalf of our beloved Fellowship.

Remarkably,

we are even protected against any tyranny of the majority! Our Co-founders created a delicately balanced set of 12 Steps, 12 Traditions, and 12 Concepts.

I believe in the group conscience. It is a great opportunity to practice Concept 9. To lead people into service—not drag, but lead. Many of us have seen loving discussion become heated when trying to find group conscience. We have felt the moment when one of us stood up and said something that calmed the room. Have you ever been working toward group conscience when

a representative of the minority spoke and changed the whole feel of the room—swinging the vote the other way? Amazing.

Through good leadership we can make sure that we have all of the information necessary to have an informed group conscience. And we have all had the experience of the vote going the opposite way we might have wanted. This would be one of those moments that we get to look closely at our other Legacies. Work some steps. Take a good look at our Traditions. Respect the Group Conscience. Be an example of our Legacies in action!

I have a story:

I was raised in Alcoholics Anonymous by a wise woman. She taught me a lot of what I

know today. Something she taught me was to carry on her resentment that she had with an Assembly planning committee years ago (I didn't recognize it then). Mostly, I just wanted to recover, and to have her like me. So I set out to be the perfect student. Her issue was that she didn't agree with the group conscience to have the little ribbons under our name badges. Her argument was that it implied that we were somehow better than others. She felt it was dangerous to alcoholics, fed their egos. Made sense to me. So there I was, years

Putting our common welfare first ensures that no harm will come to Alcoholics Anonymous.

later, representing my group as a GSR at our Area Assembly. I was chatting with the delegate. He happened to ask, “Where’s your ribbon?” I very proudly pulled out my gift-wrapped resentment and let fly all of my profound wisdom . I was going to dazzle him, but he simply looked me right in the eye and said, “It was the group conscience”. Boy did I feel humbled. It felt like I’d been hit right between the running lights! It was similar to the sensation I have when the minority speaks and the hair on my arms stands up. Needless to say I have proudly worn the ribbon every since.

*Have
you ever been working toward
group conscience when a representative of the
minority spoke and changed the whole feel of the
room—swinging the vote the other way?
Amazing.*

Here are a few thoughts that I came across while looking through the March, 1971 GRAPEVINE: Bill said, “The group conscience of AA is a wonderful, though sometimes a fearful, thing. We have with us the conservatives, the liberals, and the radicals. The conservatives often put an end to many an unworthy project. But if they had their way entirely, almost nothing would be done. Sometimes they would rot us by preventing action. On the other hand, the radicals would quickly ruin us, if they had their way, by all sorts of actions that are no good. So the course of progress is somewhere down the middle All of the influences, good and bad, are needed as spurs to progress.”

So it is my belief that the Three Legacies are the equilibrium of group conscience. They keep us right side up and right sized. Thank you so much!

Sincerely yours in service,
Angela H.,
Panel 60/Idaho Area 18 Delegate
Shoulder to Shoulder Group
Idaho Falls

The Skinny on H&I West

A FEW INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT HOW THIS IMPORTANT SERVICE GROUP HELPS ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS CARRY THE MESSAGE

What do I really know about Idaho Area 18 H&I West? What do I want to know about it?

Have you ever wondered what H&I does? I mean what do they really do? I hear they give Big Books to anyone who wants one. I hear they have too much money. I hear they send people to PRAASA. I hear they have thousands of dollars of books in a warehouse somewhere in the underground. These are just a few of the things being said. Some of these statements are true and some are like weeds – the more we feed them, the larger they get.

Have you ever asked how many meetings H&I West takes into facilities? How large an area does H&I West include? Or who actually gets the literature?

H&I West takes meetings into facilities from McCall to Murphy, from Ontario to Mountain Home. H&I West facilitates more than 4 meetings a day – that's over 120 meetings a month! H&I bridges more than 10 members a month. For some of these meetings Big Books are provided. For some, 12x12s are provided. For some,

both books are provided. For other meetings, Grapevines and/or literature such as Inmate to Inmate, Experience, Strength and Hope, or Living Sober are provided, to name only a few.

At some institutions literature is given to those who ask for it. Other inmates or residents get it through channels required by their institutions. For some inmates, this is the only access they have to AA material. Having the literature in stock makes it easier for our facilitators to distribute.

At one time H&I West had more than \$12,000 in inventory. Some of this was due to a large order H&I made before the book price increase by AA World Services (AAWS). AAWS was nice enough to announce the coming price increase, so H&I West took advantage of that information and stock-piled books and literature.

On average, H&I distributes a little over \$1,000 worth of literature a month. If you look at this on a per-meeting basis, that equates to just over \$8.30 per meeting. How much does it cost your home group to have a meeting? Would your group have a Big Book

*H&I West
takes over 120 meetings a
month into facilities!*

for a newcomer who asked to purchase one? Does your home group have a selection of literature available for those curious about what AA is or how it may help them? Today more people get their first exposure to AA through H&I than through any other avenue AA offers.

H&I West was asked to donate money to Treasure Valley Intergroup Central Office (TVICO). We didn't tell the member who asked for the donation to get lost. Instead we suggested he take his concerns about central office to the groups. H&I West cannot give money donated for H&I work to outside entities. If we gave it to one, what would we tell the next group that asked for a donation?

H&I West does send members to PRAASA, and other H&I related conferences. This has given many members—maybe even someone from your home group—a chance to learn about AA service. In 2010, H&I West spent over \$2,500 to send eight people to a conference in Kansas City and to PRAASA in Los Angeles, an average of \$312 per attendee. That is about the same as it costs to send someone to an Idaho Area 18 assembly. These trips have given members a chance to learn more about AA—and AA service—than they would have without these opportunities. The conferences have given our trusted servants a chance to learn better ways of providing H&I services to the Hospitals & Institutions Com-

mittee and to the meetings they facilitate.

So, you see, to some extent the questions and comments are all true. H&I does dispense a lot of literature. H&I does have a book and literature inventory. H&I does appear to have money. H&I has sent people to PRAASA. H&I West members have probably made some mistakes (who hasn't?), but these trusted servants have also done a lot of good. Our volunteer facilitators have helped others in many ways. Isn't that the purpose of our Twelfth-Step work? We trudge the Road of Happy Destiny, and as we trudge we share the freedoms we have gained from this awesome program called Alcoholics Anonymous.

H&I West meets on the third Saturday of the month at the SNL meeting room at 1111 South Orchard, and needs and wants your help and input. Please join us, get your questions answered, and become a part of H&I's invaluable service work.

H&I posts most of its reports for everyone to see. Check them out on the web at:

<http://handi.idahoarea18aa.org/reports.html>.

Darel P.
Boise

The One Commandment!

I'VE LEARNED ALONG THE PATH OF RECOVERY THAT THE HIGHER POWER OF MY UNDERSTANDING WORKS IN MY LIFE IN MANY WAYS. OCCASIONALLY THAT AWESOME GREAT SPIRIT ACTUALLY SPEAKS TO ME . . . IN WORDS! IT HASN'T HAPPENED OFTEN, BUT WHEN IT HAS THERE'S BEEN ONE THING IN COMMON: I AM ALWAYS QUIET AND SETTLED ENOUGH TO BE ABLE TO HEAR THAT "STILL, SMALL VOICE." IN EVERY INSTANCE SO FAR THAT HAS BEEN WHILE I WAS MEDITATING AS PART OF MY DAILY 11TH-STEP PRACTICE.

ABOUT A MONTH AGO, I WAS QUIETLY MEDITATING WHEN—INEXPLICABLY—I HEARD THE MUSICAL REFRAIN TO AN OLD SONG FROM CHILDHOOD, "ROW, ROW, ROW YOUR BOAT..." FOR A SECOND I THOUGHT TO MYSELF, "WHAT THE...?!" BUT THEN I FINISHED THE VERSE IN MY HEAD AND LAUGHED ALOUD AT THE WISDOM: "ROW, ROW, ROW YOUR BOAT GENTLY DOWN THE STREAM. / MERRILY, MERRILY, MERRILY, MERRILY, LIFE IS BUT A DREAM."

THIS ALCOHOLIC HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE POSTER BOY FOR THE OPPOSITE OF OUR SLOGAN, "EASY DOES IT." I'M ALWAYS MOVING WAY TOO FAST, WHETHER MENTALLY, EMOTIONALLY OR PHYSICALLY, AND IT HASN'T ALWAYS SERVED ME WELL. BUT OUT OF THE BLUE, THAT STILL, SMALL VOICE OF MY HIGHER POWER POINTED ME TOWARD THE WISDOM IN A CHILD'S SONG, OF ALL THINGS. I SO NEED TO REMIND MYSELF DAILY TO ROW MY "BOAT" GENTLY. AND I NEED TO REMIND MYSELF THAT THIS REMARKABLE LIFE DRAMA—IN WHICH WE ALL HAVE OUR ROLES TO PLAY—ISN'T REALLY AS DEADLY SERIOUS AS I OFTEN MAKE IT. I CAN CHOOSE TO MOVE THROUGH THIS 24 HOURS CONSCIOUSLY, PLAYFULLY, AND YES, EVEN MERRILY.

Brad D.
Bellevue

GEMS

from
AA Literature



“It doesn’t matter what you drank, how much you drank, or how long you drank,” he growled, looking right at me. “If you got into trouble when you drank, you belong here!”

–From Chuck M.’s piece on pg. 20 of the December, 2004 issue of the GRAPEVINE.

“All about me and through me there was a wonderful feeling of Presence, and I thought to myself, ‘So this is the God of the preachers!’ A great peace stole over me and I thought, ‘No matter how wrong things seem to be, they are still all right. Things are all right with God and His world.’”

–Bill W.’s memories of his spiritual awakening, from *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, pg. 63.

“Distilled Spirits AA in Eight Words:

- Quit drinking
- Trust God
- Clean House
- Help others

–Ms. Sam H., from pg. 23 of the July, 2003 issue of the GRAPEVINE.

“Dr. Bob’s character undoubtedly had a strong influence in shaping Akron meetings. As Bob E. remembers, ‘We did not tell our drinking histories at the meetings back then. A man’s sponsor and Dr. Bob already knew the details. Besides, We already knew how to drink. What we wanted to learn was how to get sober and stay sober.’”

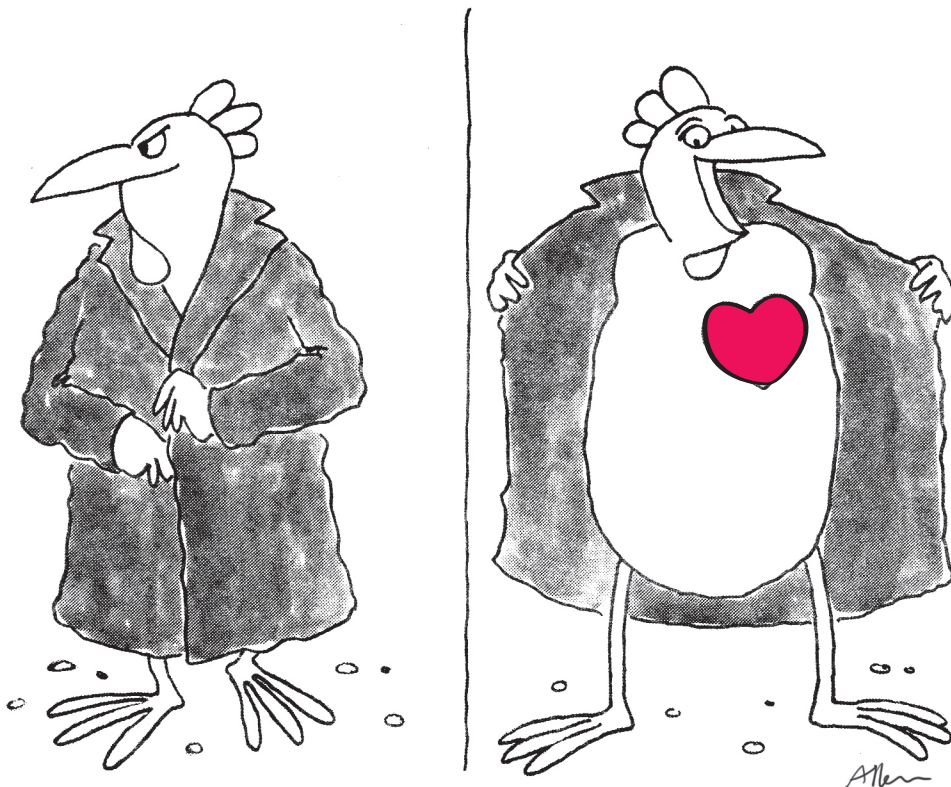
–DR. BOB and the Good Oldtimers, pg. 222.

“Perhaps one of the greatest rewards of meditation and prayer is the sense of belonging that comes to us. We no longer live in a completely hostile world. We are no longer lost and frightened and hopeless.”

–*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, pg. 105

"I
find that
the essential
ingredient of the
Fellowship of Alcoholics
Anonymous is a group of people
who care, who respect, who are
responsible, and who understand.
People who have a mature
love for one an
other."

—Excerpted from *Spiritual Awakenings*, pg. 37.
It originally appeared in a 1965 *GRAPEVINE* piece by Don McF.



PLEASE CONSIDER SHARING YOUR EXPERIENCE, STRENGTH, AND HOPE

with your fellow
Area 18 alcoholics,
for the August issue of
the WAGON WHEEL



Contact Information:

- Send stories or other contributions as e-mail file attachments to zorbabury@earthlink.net (Please put the words "WAGON WHEEL submission" in the subject line.)
- Send typed or handwritten stories, etc. to
WAGON WHEEL, c/o Brad P.,
38 Fox Hollow Gulch Rd., Bellevue, ID 83313.
- Send contributions as file attachments to the Idaho Area 18 website at idahoarea18aa.org (click on "WAGON WHEEL newsletter" in the left column, then on the "click here" button on the right).

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ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

