

# THE CONNECTION

Connecting the Barrington and Lake Zurich A.A. community with news, stories and articles of hope and inspiration



Visit [www.barringtonaa.org](http://www.barringtonaa.org) – For information about local meetings and AA assistance or contacts call our 24/7 answering service - 847-382-4455

## The 7th Step is “Humbly asked Him to remove all our shortcomings.”

By Dave G

**M**y first few weeks of sobriety are a blur and whether it was in meetings or talking with my sponsor or reading the Big Book...there was a whole new language to learn and I could barely understand any of it. When I read and heard the 7th step for the first dozen times, all I could think was that I just had one shortcoming...my drinking...and couldn't understand why we were talking about all of this other “stuff” or what bearing it had on my addiction.

Also in those first several weeks, when we broke out into our small groups on Tuesdays, sitting across from me would be this particular old timer. For some reason, it felt like for the first two months of AA, I was in this old timer's group every week and I definitely could not understand what he was trying to say. One phrase of his stuck with me each week and it was especially confusing, he would say “I can do just as much or more damage in sobriety than when I was drinking.” Ok, so I am doing this whole thing to get better and he is saying I can potentially make things worse by not drinking?

So, at just about a month in, I was sober but I was very confused and very agitated.

Christmas Eve rolled around and my family was getting ready for church. The church we attend and their Christmas Eves are, in my resentful opinion, very chaotic. They have services in the Church, the gym, the lunch room, etc... Parking is out of control, yada yada. If you want a decent seat...you have to get there early. And, as is often the case with my wife and two young daughters, we were late getting out of the house. I fumed the whole way to church. I **resentfully** berated my wife for not getting

everyone ready on time. Because there was a snow storm that year, I dropped my wife and girls at the front and then parked what felt like a mile away. I walked through the snow to church full of **self-pity**. My wife texted me there were no more seats and they were standing in the back as there were no seats left. And when I walked in,

seeing the other families we knew comfortably sitting, my **pride** was bruised with my family standing in the back with the other slowpokes. I stood there just **selfishly** fuming. As mass

started, for a brief moment, I looked over at my family and my kids looked so unhappy and my wife was softly crying.

And like this old timer said, without ever having taken a drink that day, I had swung a wrecking ball through the three people I love the most.

With that experience and many others, I started to learn what the program meant by shortcomings & character defects and the impact they had on my life. When I was ready to ask God to remove those shortcomings, I did the step formally with my sponsor and then incorporated the 7th step prayer every day.

And it felt like...nothing changed. I was still resentful of my wife for all sorts of stupid things. I still had fear about money. I still had all kinds of moments of pride, ego, and anger creating damage in my life. I was still a selfish jerk!

So why wasn't I suddenly a decent person after having asked God to remove those shortcomings?

***“..without ever having taken a drink that day, I had swung a wrecking ball through the three people I love the most.”***

Continued Page 2

## 7<sup>th</sup> Step

*Continued from page 1*

My sponsor had me read “Drop the Rock” this past fall, which focuses on Step 6 and Step 7. The title comes from a meeting lead in which the speaker describes a scene in which you’re on a boat with your friends, and somehow you take a misstep and fall overboard. You try to get back on, but you can’t quite make it to the surface. You sink, no



matter how hard you fight. As you struggle, you look down at yourself and realize that around your neck is a chain with a giant rock, a burden much too heavy to swim with. Your friends yell “Drop the rock!”, but you don’t. That rock is your defects. Your fear, your anger, your resentment. You have to drop it if you want to truly live.

And there were two, big insights for me from the book.

The first (which comes back to Step 6), is “To become the person we can become, we must drop the rock—all the grasping and holding on to old patterns of behaving, thinking, and feeling that are harmful to ourselves and to others.” When I searched my feelings and specific defects

*“Only by submitting to my higher power and realizing that I cannot change without God’s help, will true transformation become possible in my life.”*

## 7<sup>th</sup> Step Prayer Alcoholics Anonymous, p.76

“MY CREATOR, I AM NOW WILLING THAT YOU SHOULD HAVE ALL OF ME, GOOD AND BAD.

I PRAY THAT YOU NOW REMOVE FROM ME EVERY SINGLE DEFECT OF CHARACTER WHICH STANDS IN THE WAY OF MY USEFULNESS TO YOU AND MY FELLOWS. GRANT ME STRENGTH, AS I GO OUT FROM HERE, TO DO YOUR BIDDING.

AMEN

that I couldn’t seem to drop...it was almost always because I wasn’t really ready to drop them.

The second is “I don’t get to choose what defects God removes.” What I realize now is that the transformation of my personality is something which comes much more slowly and at God’s pace..not mine.

And, another gem from the book states, just because I desire something doesn’t mean I deserve it.

My higher power knows best what will be revealed to me, removed from me, and when. I realized, once again, the words in the Steps were

chosen so specifically and this starts with Humbly for good reason. Because yet again in Step 7, the program reminds me that I am not in charge, and for good reason. Only by submitting to my higher power and realizing that I cannot change without God’s help...will true transformation become possible in my life.

## Milestones BY RYAN M.

Who doesn't like to be recognized when it is time to share anniversaries and receive those coveted coins that we use to mark our sobriety with? The lump sum of many a day's journey being tabulated and celebrated recognizing a great achievement. The emotions that one elicits from reaching this important event are many. There is joy, accomplishment, strength, and sometimes even relief. Every day, every month, every year, every coin marks a special milestone for us the alcoholic. However, there is no better



reaffirming of the importance of our daily journey and subsequent coin collecting than that of being able to be present in the milestones that occur within our livelihoods.

My oldest son turned 11 yesterday. Last year when he turned 10 (a milestone birthday for a young man) I was holed up in a Red Roof Inn on the third day of a grim bender that was going to eventually land me in the ER. A place I should not be when I was supposed to be with my son on his important day. I was rescued from the hotel that day before I could continue my freight train of wreckage

and taken to the hospital. There I laid as the alcohol worked its demonic way out of my brain and body as I sat in terrible emotional and mental anguish as I was about to be missing another important day in the life of my family. It was all because of this insidious disease that I possess. But there I was absent from the reality that I was afraid to face for reasons unknown. I missed it. I missed something important simply because I was running away again and hiding in my own selfish cocoon.

Yesterday, I was present. I was there with my son and what a gift it was which is ironic because on someone's birthday they are one to be receiving gifts yet I truly felt I was being given one as we spent the day together. Nothing monumental, no trip to a restaurant or special place just time together. His favorite dinner was made, dessert of course, and a few material gifts exchanged but what was most important was the time we were spending together. Time that had been robbed from both him and I due to my alcoholic past. We laughed, we smiled, and we felt relaxed and both reassured that we were in each other's lives with a full commitment because Dad is now sober and he is

now present. I can't say that there is no fear from my kids that Dad could get "sick" again but I know how much more confident they are at the current moment because he is now doing "well." I don't take this notion lightly. Being there for my kids with a sober and clear mind is one of things I

*"His favorite dinner was made, dessert of course, and a few material gifts exchanged but what was most important was the time we were spending together. Time that had been robbed from both him and I due to my alcoholic past.."*

talk to God about on a daily basis. Not only do they deserve but so do I.

Important days will continue to happen in all of our lives. These milestones are the events we so recently tried to get out off and be absent from all because of our mental obsession over alcohol. Now, I realize that I would not miss these days for anything and while it is true I can't go back and celebrate past events that I shortchanged I no longer have go through the shame and guilt of my absentia ever again. This is what my 24 hour coin tells me. Today I am sober and will be sober and I can experience all that today brings and possesses. Somedays are more important than others on our calendars but every day that we celebrate sobriety we are celebrating a new and well deserved milestone in our lives.

# AA GRAPEVINE

The International Journal of Alcoholics Anonymous

## Previous Cartoon Winners

Winning captions will be published in the Grapevine magazine.



"My sponsor wanted me to go back to basics, I just didn't know how far back he wanted me to go."—Kermie., Tucson, Ariz.



"But. It's keeping me sober!" —Lynne D., Carbondale, IL.



"Do you know if happy hour was cancelled?"  
Rob G., Chicago, IL

## I am a "Slow Learner" and a "Fast Forgetter" by Bob G.

**B**ut this understanding helps keep me sober. I heard someone at a recent meeting say: "I am a slow learner and a fast forgetter." Suddenly I gained a new understanding of my alcoholism and what I need to do to stay sober.

I was and am a slow learner. It took me 15 years, four treatments, three sponsors and many relapses to get sober, and to stay sober.

Looking back, I didn't want to recognize the truth about my drinking and its consequences because that would mean I would have to stop all together.

No more pretending that I could control my drinking...that I could drink less, that I could drink like others drink.

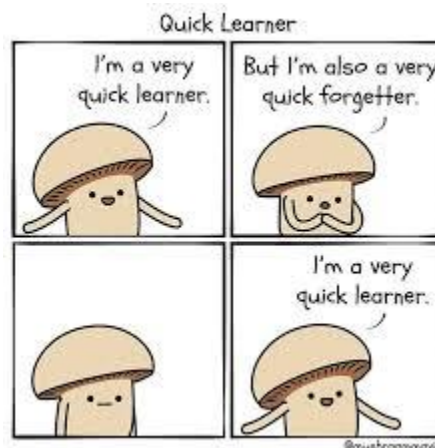
No more delusion about who I had become and who I was hurting beyond just me.

No getting beyond the fear I had about losing my best friend, alcohol. What I thought I needed to live in this big, bad world. Giving alcohol up just wasn't an option, especially because I had nothing to replace it with. Despite the lessons you tried to teach me about the principles of the Program, I wasn't open to learn....then.

In fact, I was one of those who "condemned prior to investigation". I wasn't open to AA as a possible solution for a problem I wasn't convinced that I had.

Slow learner: arrogant and ignorant. I was arrogant to think I was smarter than you, that I knew better than you,

and that I could do what you couldn't do: drink without consequences. This despite the wreckage my life had become, hurting the people that I love the most and losing who I once was. I was different...the rules didn't apply to



## Slow Learner

*Continued from page 4*

me. Denial, self-deception, stupidity writ large. But that's where I was then.

I wasn't really trying to learn as much as I was looking for loopholes. I wasn't really "powerless" over alcohol. I wasn't really "insane". No. Not much. Talk about fear clouding one's clarity, crowding out the truth.

Slow learner...not able to process or accept uncomfortable information...or to make changes based on that information. I didn't see it as true. I didn't understand then that I wasn't willing or able to change at that point. I wasn't ready. But I had people praying for me that the sunlight of God's spirit would touch me some day...and, finally, it did. Finally, I was willing and able to ask God for help and to accept that help.

So I did learn eventually. I learned to admit and accept and embrace my alcoholism. I learned it wasn't about me. I learned that I could live a happy life without alcohol. I learned that a life of service to others is a life full of joy.

But I didn't learn so much or so well that I didn't also forget. Because, like other alcoholics, I am a quick forgetter. I thought that my past pain was so real, so deep, so damaging, that I would always have it fully present...always have it top of mind. And that pain would help keep me

sober by being a counterweight to the craving to drink. But I would stop praying...stop going to meetings...stop talking to other alcoholics. And I would relapse. Over and over.

I am a quick forgetter. So I come to meetings to join you in reminding each other how it works and what works to keep us sober. I go to meetings so that we can talk to each other and listen to each other and pray to God together, so that we can stay sober and serve others together.

I need to read and re-read. Hear, and hear again. Serve, over and over. I can't learn or remember too much.

Because I have been lucky enough to learn – and to remember, that I am a newcomer today. I have learned not to take my sobriety for granted. I have learned to ask Him for help in being sober today...and in helping me help others today.

I also have learned that it helps me to be vulnerable...to admit my weaknesses...to laugh at my inability to deal with life sometimes. Because by talking with you, I now understand, that honesty and humility are what make us truly human. And that as humans, God wants us to keep working at getting better and better.

So for me, that means remembering that I'm a slow learner and a quick forgetter. It's central to my staying sober because it keeps me doing the things I need to do to stay spiritually fit. For that I am forever grateful.

## 1,2,3 Psychosis and Recovery BY ALICE S

It had been about three days since I had made any human contact. The floor was covered in broken glass.

My mind had been hijacked by mania. I was losing sleep and losing days. I was running low on alcohol. I poured a bottle of Listerine into a handle of Jagermeister that was three quarters empty, and then capped it off with a splash of water.

I had broken the statute of Michael the archangel my Grandmother had given me for my confirmation. I smashed it—that along with everything else that was of any sentimental value. It was primal; I was trying to talk to God. I was at war. I couldn't tell if he was listening or not. I wanted him to know I meant business and wasn't messing around. I kept hearing in my head "Where is your God now?" I went to the bathroom mirror

and stared deeply into my eyes. I saw strength but I saw fear. I went and grabbed the kitchen scissors. I was filled with energy and rage and started cutting off my hair. I cut it right to my scalp. The sink was littered with blonde locks. I again looked in the mirror, seeing a glimmer of hope and madness.

Continued Page 5

## 1,2,3..

*Continued from page 5*

God was here now. I wasn't done proving my loyalty.

I ran and got a black permanent marker, looked deep into my eyes – the fear was leaving me, I began to trace my eyes with the marker. This was my war face. This was my war cry. I began to scribble all over my entire face until there was no white left. "Can you see me now God?" Through the madness I was a warrior, I saw faith, I saw discipline, I was willing. God wanted me to be a warrior- I do what God wants even if it makes me seem crazy. Lets be honest, I was completely psychotic. Not long after I had tried to rinse the marker off my face my parents showed up to my apartment that I had turned into a war zone.

What they saw was their daughter with a shaved head and smeared black marker covering her face sitting in a minefield of broken glass. I had reached my bottom- I was beyond powerless and my life was unbearable, completely unmanageable. Beyond the chaos I had only began to scratch the surface of what it would take for me to recover. I was willing; I was willing to do anything and everything God asked of me. I wish I could say that I instantly sobered up and was instantly restored to sanity. I wasn't, I went to the psych ward that memorable day and again after three months sober. Those first three months of sobriety I flew pretty high and was in a continuous state of mania. At three months sober I finally agreed with the hospital psychiatrist that I would take anti-psychotics. I had spent the last 13 years of my life avoiding the proper medications in fear of their side effects,

but I was finally sober enough to see that my way wasn't working.

The anti- psychotics removed all my thoughts, I couldn't hear or feel God, I

***"I wanted to feel sorry for myself, but I could not afford the negativity. I had to keep moving forward."***

didn't feel happy, I didn't feel sad- I just was. I kept praying, I kept going to meetings. Life had stopped getting worse. At six months sober I wanted to drink from the moment I woke up, all day, and all night. This lasted a month. A thought came through my medicated silence "ask god to remove the craving" so I did. It was genuine. I asked God "Please take this craving away from me." The next morning I woke up and the cravings were gone. God worked; I had proof. I kept praying, I kept going to meetings, I worked closely with my sponsor, I completed the steps and was working 10, 11, and 12 on a daily basis. My life was coming together.

Something happened in my conscious--- all of a sudden there was a thought of reason, compassion, love, and power. The alignment of my psychotic thoughts, and my character defects paved the way for my path to God. This allowed me to understand. Nothing I had been through was in vein; I was forgiven and given meaning- a light was shined upon my past and my life. This was God; this was the spiritual awakening I was waiting for. It was pure, it was alive, and it was sublime. Realizing how powerful God was and what he was capable of scared me. I had never experienced God without being hospitalized or manic so I was pretty freaked out. God consciousness took over my mind,

even being properly medicated. He was there. So what did I do?

I was defenseless. I ever so spiritually went and bought a nice bottle of red wine and drank the whole thing. It tasted awful, but God didn't go away. I couldn't shut him out of my brain- he was ever so present. God said "Don't do this, don't destroy what a year of sobriety has given you, just go back." So I did. I had a rough night of broken sleep and a full set of shakes and the freight train of thoughts at 3:30 in the morning (just like old times.) I woke up and called my sponsor and told her I drank, told her I was going to the next available morning meeting. It was a weird day. I wanted to feel sorry for myself, but I could not afford the negativity. I had to keep moving forward.

In the afternoon I drank a single serving wine bottle to calm the resilient jitters. Then that was it. I went to another meeting that night and came to the understanding that God was with me and there was nothing I could do to rid myself of him. I learned more importantly that I didn't want God to go away. I like the thoughts of reason in my mind. I had no desire to drink and the phenomenon of craving had disappeared. I was of the belief that a power greater than myself was bringing me to actual sanity.

Everyday I wake up and decide to turn my will and my life over to the care of God as I continue to understand him. Everyday gets better. As I make my way through good days and bad days sober, my life becomes a success. I thank God and this program for that. Life is good. God is good.

## Trust, Forgiveness and Respect by Curt S

I was recently in a meeting with a fellow AA who had recently announced her one-year anniversary. She expressed frustration that her family and friends still did not show forgiveness and trust, despite her having made her Amends in the 9th Step. She said she did not understand their lack of acknowledgment of her obvious hard work, growth, and improvements in her life – not giving her the respect she deserved.

In sobriety, I think that many of us have shared some form of frustration for this same thing. I know I did. In our Amends, we had made a commitment that we would no longer act in the same way we had in the past. But we may have secretly hoped for forgiveness.

I had reached out to my sponsor and other AAs with more sobriety than me. And I asked for advice and guidance on how to ensure those I had wronged would forgive me so I could earn their trust. I have heard great comments in meetings, usually precisely at the time I needed to hear them. And it has changed the way I see my sobriety.

I was asked a simple question ... why did you become sober? I had been a chronic “retread”. Each time I returned to AA, I was asked the same thing. Are you willing to do anything to get sober? Many of us have ulterior motives for coming to AA. To get our family off our back, to satisfy court requirements, to save our marriages, to save our jobs, or to make ourselves believe we were doing something about our drinking. But when I finally “got it”, when I hit my bottom, I sought sobriety, not for others, but for myself. Others will fail us, expectations will not be met, and full support may not be given. But a commitment to

*“... take care of myself  
and see me as valuable  
enough to do so.”*

work the Steps for myself alone, truly admitting the 1st Step, put the responsibility squarely where it belonged – on me. Regaining trust and forgiveness is not the goal. It is us that matters ... our self-health. This is a healthy form of ego. I am of no value to anyone, my fellows or my Higher Power, if I am not sober. The Steps taught me something I had never done, or at least not in a long time ... take care of myself and see me as valuable enough to do so. This was a fundamental shift in the way I saw myself

It is dangerous for me to believe the purpose of the 9th Step is to seek forgiveness. It was to acknowledge my part and clear my side of the street. It was to wash away the guilt and remorse I had been carrying around that made me believe I needed to escape, providing me with yet another tool to improve my defense against the first drink. There were people that would not talk to me on my 9th Step, and there are still family members that are angry with me. Many are still waiting for me to start drinking again.

I may never receive forgiveness and trust from loved ones, and it hurts. But I need to focus on my journey. I have done what I was told, practiced love and tolerance, and tried to do the next right thing. I was told to get forgiveness, do forgivable things. To be trusted, do trustworthy things. To get respect, do respectable things. This applies not only from others, but to me as well. The Forgiveness I now seek is from myself, the Trust I now seek is in my Higher Power, and I now seek the actions that grant me Self-Respect. For these are some of the greatest gifts of the Program.

# News & Events

**MAY 11**  
Sat

**30th Annual McHenry Soberfest @ McHenry Township Hall**  
May 11 @ 5:00 pm – 9:00 pm

Doors open at 5 pm – speaker at 7 pm

Speaker – Roxanne D from Racine, WI

Cost – \$5

Food, Fun, Dance to follow.

For more info call Michael B. 224-548-0466, Paul H 630-352-7896 or info@soberfest.org

[Download or print the flyer here.](#)

CATEGORIES: GROUP EVENT

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**MAY 18**  
Sat

**Winners and Beginners Anniversary Party @ Messiah Lutheran Church**  
May 18 @ 5:00 pm – 8:30 pm

This is a FREE open adult anniversary event.

Speaker: Chris K. from Chicago

Feel free to bring a dish to share.

[Download flyer for directions and more info.](#)

CATEGORIES: GROUP EVENT

[Read more →](#)

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**JUN 22**  
Sat

**Summer Assembly @ Lord of Life Lutheran Church**  
Jun 22 @ 8:00 am – 4:00 pm

One month after GSC.

Lord of Life Lutheran Church, 40W605 IL Rt 38, Elburn, IL 60119

Hosted by District 12.



**NORTHERN ILLINOIS AREA 20 PRESENTS**

**SUMMER ASSEMBLY**

WHERE: LORD OF LIFE CHURCH

Registration and Coffee 8:00 | Meeting starts at 9:00  
lunch \$10; will be served around noon

HOSTED BY DISTRICT 12

WHEN: JUNE 22nd

CONTACT: Karen 815-609-7351

Address: 40W605 IL Rt 38, Elburn, IL 60119

CATEGORIES: AREA EVENT

[Read more →](#)

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**AUG 3**  
Sat

**Summer Committee Meeting @ Lord of Life Lutheran Church**  
Aug 3 @ 8:00 am – 4:00 pm

Hosted by District 71.

CATEGORIES: AREA EVENT

[Read more →](#)

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**AUG 9**  
Fri

**2019 AA Illinois State Conference @ Sheraton Lisle Naperville Hotel**  
Aug 9 – Aug 11 all-day

**2019 AA Illinois State Conference**

Hosted by Northern Illinois Area 20, District 43

AA and Alanon Speakers  
Panel Discussions  
Alcathon meetings  
Fellowship  
Dance

For more information visit the conference website or download the brochures below:

[website](#)

[Download brochure in English \(pdf\)](#)

[Descargar folleto en español \(pdf\)](#)

CATEGORIES: AREA EVENT DISTRICT EVENT REGIONAL EVENT STATEWIDE EVENT

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