

# **Sobriety and Beyond**

**Experience, Strength and Hope in North  
London**

**2013**

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## Foreword

As part of its archival work, North London Intergroup ( NLIG) decided to put together a record of the experience, strength and hope of our longer serving members. One of the benefits of such a booklet is that our archive will stay in the safe keeping of the Fellowship as a whole, rather than being locked away in a storage box. (The booklet runs as follows; a brief introductory statement detailing publishing information and a few lines about the project, a table of contents, the stories and index of names mentioned in stories.) The idea for the booklet was put forward to NLIG in 2006. Initially contributions were invited from members with sobriety of 25 years or more but it was decided later to amend this to 15 years. Contributions were invited by notices at meetings in the NLIG area (Enfield, Haringey and Barnet). They were received in a range of ways: hand written, typed, e-mail and tape. Jonny H collected the initial stories and did the initial work. A group took over the project in late 2009 from NLIG who transcribed and edited the remaining stories and tried to encourage some new stories especially from women as they were underrepresented. A number of contributors spoke about their stories at an NLIG Convention held in Sept 2011. The longest sobriety dated from 1966 (40 years in 2006).

The booklet is not 'Conference Approved Literature'. Each NLIG group will be provided with their own copy of the booklet – additional copies can be made available to interested AA members at cost via NLIG.

Contributors were asked to write in whatever way they felt most comfortable and cover some of the following questions.

*When and how did you drinking first become a problem?*

*What happened?*

*When did you first hear of A.A. and from what source?*

*Who made the initial outreach to you, in what manner, and in what year?*

*When and where did you get sober?*

*What were your early days like?  
Who did you first get to know in the Fellowship?  
Which meetings did you go to?  
Who do remember from those times and why?  
Have you “worked” the steps?  
Were you guided through the steps and by whom?  
What was it really like? What did you actually do?  
Which AA literature have you found helpful?  
What are your recollections of service in AA and how did you get involved?  
Any resentments?  
How has A.A. changed (if it has) since you first found it?  
What about those who are no longer with us?  
What about your recovery today?*

We very much hope that you find the stories interesting and that other members may be prompted to write their own versions for a future version

A number of contributors have sadly died (sober) in the time between writing (mostly in 2006) and publication in 2010. This booklet is dedicated to their memory with particular thanks to them and to all the contributors for carrying the message in the way they have done.

North London Intergroup of AA 2013

1. Kathy
2. Peter
3. Carmel
4. John K
5. Roger C
6. Golfer Roger
7. Steve H
8. Geoff
9. Anon 1
10. South African Bill
11. Cyril
12. Pauline
13. Alan W
14. Anon 2
15. Patrick K
16. Mick the Chef
17. Bridget London Colney
18. Larry B
19. Cliff
20. Anon 3
21. Steve S
22. Jerry M
23. Tony
24. Mary L
25. John 2
26. Alan

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## 1. I came into AA when I was 27- Kathy

I'm Kathy and I'm an alcoholic. I came into AA when I was 27, after about ten years of alcoholic drinking. Up until today, I've been sober since 29th December 1983. Has AA changed over those years? I feel the same elements are still there- the caring for one another, the same Steps on the walls and of course, the slogans. Phrases have entered into the sharing that I don't remember hearing before, like "dysfunctional family" and "the Big Book way" etc, but I feel the basic spirit of the Fellowship and the program is still there. I'm a happy customer. I love meetings. I love the simplicity of meetings. There are no passwords to key in, no logging on, just plain old-fashioned story telling, passing on our experience, strength and hope. It works too because we're not all sick on the same day. When I'm down, you're up, and you can help me. When I'm well, I can pass on my strength to someone else who's struggling. That reminds me of something I'd like to share with you.

Some years ago I was in a pet shop looking to buy a pet rabbit. I walked David M (Big David) from Muswell Hill. He told me he'd like to buy the rabbit for me as a gift because, he said, he wasn't there for his own children, and he'd like to make up for that by doing this for me. David was someone who would constantly nag me to get a job- at a time when I needed to work but was too frightened to look for a job. It was just another example of the kindness shown by members in the form of 'tough love'.

I was 12th Stepped by Footballer John and Little Debbie. They took me to about three meetings initially and rang me up frequently to check how I was doing. There were fewer meetings then but there was still a meeting within easy distance each night. I spent the first few months of sobriety in North Wales where my parents lived and went to two meetings a week. Every Friday night around a large table in a draughty church kitchen, there would be four of us for a meeting that lasted one and a half hours. I was scared to share in those days and very emotionally raw. There was no way I could stay silent with only four of us at the meeting, so I was persuaded to share and to get some of the pain and confusion out of my system. The other members would drive miles out of their way to make sure I found the meetings. I came back to London and as I wasn't working, I went to Hinde Street most weekdays for the next two years. After the hour long meeting we'd go over the road to an Italian café for coffee or lunch and the sharing would continue.

A few characters stand out in my mind from those days including Florida Danny whose saying was to bring everything down to its “irreducible minimum” when solving problems. There was Big Al and Michael, an academic. In my early days my concentration was very poor so I found the slogans and the “Just for Today” card very helpful and I could absorb it all bit by bit.

“Living Sober” was probably the most helpful for its practical approach. So far I haven’t felt the need to study the Big Book in any formal way. I hear it read out at meetings and I have used it for doing the steps, along with the Twelve by Twelve, which I hear read out every week at my regular Step Meeting. I’ve even met a lady visiting London, in her seventies, whose story appears in the Big Book. I went through the steps in my own way at first, taking them in the wrong order (not to be recommended). Later on I went through them again with an experienced member who had been taken through them by her sponsor. I’ve never really had a proper sponsor. I asked someone to be my sponsor in my very early days and then avoided that person because I was afraid of becoming too dependent upon her and also I didn’t want to reveal too much of myself. Looking back, it was just fear. Having said that, I always keep close to one or two members to help me along the way and I have a good network of friends. I make sure I always have a service commitment to keep me in middle of AA and not so likely to drift off. There was a saying around the rooms, which is “If you miss meetings, you miss what happens to people who miss meetings”. Very true. I don’t agree with everything I hear at meetings or how some meetings are run, so I go to where I feel comfortable and use my ‘AA Filter’ to take out what is useful to me. I stick close to the winners to keep me safe. Over time I’ve gained intuition and found confidence in myself by going to lots of meetings, sharing with my close friends, and turning my life and will over to my Higher Power.

Who was around in North London in my early days? Pat Q, Ivor, Teacher Peter, Musician John, Fireman Alex, Musician Roger, Fishing Charlie, Ironing board Arthur, Stockbroker John, Tottenham John, Belfast John, Fiona and Plumber Sam, Irene and Bob, Spiritual Jim, and Old Arthur (who was one month ahead of me in sobriety and about forty years ahead of me in age). Where are they now? Some have died drunk, some have died sober and others are still around sober. Let’s hope we’re all around for years to come, sober and living life to full with the help of this rare and wonderful Fellowship in AA.  
Keep coming back!!

Kathy

## 2. To Hell and Back- Peter

My name is Peter and I am an alcoholic. My drinking took me to what I describe as my hellhole and AA got me out. For that, up to today, I am truly grateful. For me the most important thing in my life is my sobriety- for without that I have nothing. I would quickly lose the many beautiful things I have received in my recovery. The Promises have really come true for me, although life is not a bed of roses either, as stuff happens and that is life. However, the miracle is that today I don't have to pick up a drink on it, irrespective of whether the event is good or bad or just plain ordinary and boring. I am responsible for me, and with my Higher Power, the Fellowship, Friends and the Programme, I need never drink again, - 'One Day at a Time.'

I was born and bred in North London. With the benefit of hindsight, I now know that my drinking was far from normal right from the outset. Why was one drink never ever enough? Why did I need to have a drink before going out for a drink? Why was the 'best' drinking on my own? Why did drink make me feel normal, free from fear and part of the human race? Why was it going to be better tomorrow? – Because, although I did not know it at the time, I was an alcoholic.

My family was reasonably well off, not dysfunctional except we never talked about our feelings, had no background of alcoholism and were not from an Irish or Catholic background. To my knowledge, I am the only one who thinks he is special and different –an alcoholic!

My drinking career spanned 25 years from the age of 13 and was characterised by desperate periods of attempted control, daily topping up, changing jobs before being pushed, an attempted suicide, many visits to doctors and psychiatrists for my illnesses (not alcoholism of course), lying, cheating and being impossible to live with. Although I was married, my love affair was with my bottle, not her. I also have two boys, but they just got in the way. I could not be bothered with anyone or anything, apart from of course, where the next drink was coming from. I ended up being sacked from my job, although surprisingly drinking was never mentioned. They had plenty of other grounds for getting rid of me, like just not being there, neither physically nor mentally. I was paid off and then proceeded to drink all the money, alone in my loft at home. My recollection of that last eighteen months is like one long extended blackout, totally isolated and desperately alone. I woke up in the morning with a feeling of

disappointment because I would have just preferred to just die during my fitful sleep.

However, my Higher Power had a different idea because during the night of 3 June 1992, I heard a voice going on in my head all night which was like no other experience I have had, either before or since. It said, "You are an alcoholic and you need help" over and over again. I now know this was my rock bottom and my first real encounter with a Higher Power. The following morning, I had a strong feeling that things would be OK, although I had no idea at that moment how this could possibly happen. My wife took me to our family doctor. It was no coincidence that he had been able to recommend another of his patients to Grovelands (now called The Priory at Southgate) six months earlier. She was doing really well and not drinking. That same afternoon, I was poured into the treatment centre (an up-market nut-house!) and up to today, have not had the need to pick up another drink. That is a miracle.

It was also fortunate for me that the centre was run along 12 Step principles. Very shortly after detoxing I was told I would be going to a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous. I did not know what to expect and was very fearful (very much how I had been feeling for most of my life, but now no drink to calm my nerves!). My first meeting was Oakwood on a Monday night. I don't remember much of what was said, but I well remember the feeling of knowing that I was no longer alone and in the right place. I went to two further meetings that week - not that I felt I had a choice! One was Grovelands Wednesday and the other East Finchley Friday. It felt very much like putting "one foot in front of the other" and doing what was suggested. We were all given a "Big Book" in treatment together with the smaller books, "Living Sober" and "Came to Believe". Not that I was into reading, understanding or concentrating on much then, but something was getting through my thick skull and I was starting to feel a little calmer. I stayed at the treatment centre for a month but was fearful of leaving. I was comfortable and cared for and without having to take any responsibility. How would I cope in the big bad world again, this time without a drink?

Well, my first reaction on leaving was that everything seemed to be moving so fast. It also felt that every TV advert was selling booze and all the programmes involved drinking in some shape or form. In other words, I was still obsessed with alcohol and my life felt quite stressful. I was surprised that my wife did not totally forgive me at once and treat me kindly and with compassion. I was to discover that regaining her trust was going to take rather longer than I had expected. It felt like I was walking on eggshells for at least the first two years of sobriety.



I looked forward to meetings and so that I could enter an oasis of calm for a couple of hours. I remember Fisherman Charlie from Oakwood with his immortal phrase – “keep bringing the body and one day the brain will come as well and it will make sense”. Lighthouse Denis always amused me with his dry sense of humour and his wish to be isolated from the “civilians”. Big Steve was so welcoming and supportive. He remembered my name each week, which was such a feat as far as I was concerned, as my brain was very fuddled for a long time after coming in.

After a few months, I kept hearing older members talking about the Steps and Sponsors. Such was my fear of picking up a drink again that I decided that I should get myself a sponsor. Easier said than done- what would happen if I asked someone and they said “no”? I was scared of rejection and my old ally, procrastination, came to the rescue! However, another expression I heard in my early days helped – “when it gets painful enough you will do something about it”. I asked Pat Q but was devastated at the time, when he said he didn’t sponsor anybody. However, I now know that he has helped many, many members with his direct, no nonsense advice but put across in such a kind gentle manner.

Another member did agree to take me through the Steps and he was to help me for many years, particularly on my sticking points of Steps 4 and 5 and later with Step 9. He gave me a structure of reading, making notes, praying and meeting him regularly to go further with the Step on which we were working together. He really managed to keep me focused and when it got too difficult or painful, he showed me tough love by not buying into all my excuses and stories. At the time, I remember thinking that there had to be an easier, softer way. But as it says in the Big Book – “half measures avail us nothing”. He kept me at it and I remember a wonderful feeling of release after completing Step 5. I walked away from his house that day truly grateful and full of a new spirit. This proved to me how important it was to continue with the Steps for my continued quality of recovery. This was despite a period of lengthy procrastination beforehand, thinking that I had to get Step 5 perfectly right. After a couple of attempts, I did it the “Big Book” way in columns which made me realise that “keeping it simple” was normally the best way.

Sometime later, I also got stuck on Step 9. This related to an ex-work colleague who I could never make amends to. The only one who was hurting was me. My Higher Power gave me a hand with this one by putting me in the same room as him at a business conference. I had a choice to pretend I had not noticed him or

bite the bullet. I am glad I chose the latter path as he was the last on my original list and this completion gave me a tremendous sense of freedom. I still have to make amends today, but I have learnt that courage and action are key for my recovery.

Early on my sponsor “suggested” that I attend a Step meeting. I was confused by the readings from the “Twelve by Twelve”, but slowly- by turning up each week at Muswell Hill Step meeting- they started making some sense, although today I still prefer the way the Steps are written in the “Big Book”. I remember Brian being the secretary with his marvellous sense of humour and using the advert phrase “Just Do It”. I also went to the Friday Step meeting at Napsbury. The hospital has shut down a few years ago, but it was a stark reminder to me that I could have easily ended up there. In my drinking days I had lived locally and this was where I had tried to ‘top’ myself. Noel was a regular member of that group and his sincerity and strength of recovery was a powerful example. His key expression was “as God is my judge”.

Another suggestion that my sponsor made was to be involved in service. My first commitment was setting up the literature at Oakwood. This gave me the opportunity to borrow books each week. What I also now realise is that doing service removed the choice of whether I would go to the meeting or not. The most challenging service was sitting up at the front, being a secretary. How important it was to make sure “my” meeting ran smoothly and had entertaining Chairs! I can now see how this was just another feature of the Programme bringing me down to right size. A spell as Hospital Representative at North London Intergroup proved interesting, but I found the meetings hard going. Whilst in this role I was asked to set up a meeting in a secure unit in Edmonton. The meeting became a regular commitment and I came to realise how fortunate I was to be let out once the meeting finished - “There but for the Grace of God go I” – was what went through my mind.

I realise the longer I’m around how many friends I’ve made and also miss for their words of wisdom, encouragement and help. But I need to think that they have just passed it on for the future members of this wonderful Fellowship. I recall Thelma and Shetland Peter of Friern Barnet, Pat Q and Douglas of East Finchley, Banker John of Potters Bar and Spanish Tony, Ivor and Fisherman Charlie of Oakwood. Typing their names here brings a tear to my eye. How wonderful it is to feel again and be part of the human race. For that I always need to remember those who came before and gave me the gift of sobriety.

Peter S.

### **3. 12 stepped by Belfast John- Carmel**

I first came to Alcoholic Anonymous in 1982. I was 12 stepped by Belfast John and another John whom I don't remember. My first meeting was Tottenham Monday night. I wasn't ready to take AA on board to stop drinking at this stage. I was very much in denial and thought I was in control of my drinking. I came back to AA to stay, in February 1986. I had lost everything including my home and children. Alcohol had beaten me. My regular meetings were the Tottenham Step, North Middlesex Hospital, St Ann's Hospital, and Finsbury Park.

Fisherman Charlie lived close to me at the time and he used to say, "Keep bringing your body to the meetings and one day, your brain will follow and it will all make sense". I must admit I didn't think it was going to work for me at the time.

It didn't work for me in the early days because I didn't work at it. I ignored all the good advice I got and did it my way, which resulted in me picking up another drink. My last drink scared me so much I thought I was not going to make it. However, to cut a long story short, it was the drink that helped me to accept I was an alcoholic. It was then I started to live in the solution rather than the problem. One day at a time, I have not had a drink since.

The Tottenham Step became very special to me, and it has played a large part in my recovery. I met lots of good people there, such as Marion and Alex, Scotch Margaret, Judith, Dave, Susan and Kevin. They all had varying lengths and degrees of sobriety. Other people that come to mind from other meetings are Arthur, Sam and Fiona, Pat Q, Kay M, and Damien.

I found a sponsor and worked the steps to the best of my ability. The early days were very difficult for me. I found sharing at meetings very scary. Why would they want to listen to me? I had nothing to give. It took time for me to realise I was there for me, and when I did share, I felt the healing power it gave me.

Learning to be honest was another difficult one. I was never honest with me or anyone else. I made it up as I went along- whatever suited the moment and what other people wanted to hear. I didn't have a clue who I was or what made me tick.

Through working the steps I found a higher power that I choose to call God today. I was able to have an honest, objective look at my life and see the part I played in it. I stopped blaming others and took responsibility for me and my

actions. I made amends to those I had harmed and I learned how to rebuild shattered relationships. I made a commitment to be there for my children and have been lucky to raise them in recovery.

I got a part-time job in early recovery; my sponsor was a believer in getting back to work. I must say that work has been an important part of my recovery- not only does it provide discipline which is very important for this alcoholic, but it also means I have to communicate and get along with other people. I have a very responsible job today, a job that used to be for other people. Through the help I have received in AA, I have grown up and am a responsible person today. I am able to be there for other people, both inside and outside the fellowship. I can give back some of what was freely given to me; I have had the pleasure of taking some people through the programme and seen them get well.

I like to attend regular meetings and have at least one commitment. Having commitments at a meeting not only helps me to give something back, but it keeps me coming back. I know some people who no longer go to meetings and I have reminded them of that very true saying 'people who don't go to meetings don't hear what happens to people who don't go to meetings'. I enjoy going to meetings today and I find that whatever problem I have, someone will have experienced similar, and they are always happy to share their experience with me. Alcoholic Anonymous, as they say, is the University of Life.

Yes I have seen changes in AA over the years. In my early days there were fewer meetings and they seemed stronger. Now we have lots of new meetings starting up everywhere, with different themes to them. Sometimes it seems like there is more than one AA programme. I tend to gravitate towards the meetings and the people that share and work the programme that was given to me when I came in. It's important for me to share that I have had some outside help, for issues that needed professional help. The inward journey was a very important part of my recovery. I would not have had this help if I had not come to AA in the first place. I see my recovery as God putting the right people in my path when I am ready. Alcoholic Anonymous has changed my life completely. I have had so much help that I will never be able to give back a fraction of it.

The 12 x 12 book is very important to me and I try to attend a Step Meeting every week. I will always hear something that I need to hear or need to work at- that is if I am paying attention and I must admit to being human and I don't always pay attention. I like to share that I am happy to be a recovering alcoholic, because if I never drank and never found AA I would have missed out on so, so much.

I wanted nothing to do with God or a Higher Power when I came to AA. I only turned to God because I had to-“no human power could have relieved my alcoholism; God could and would if he were sought.” I didn't like that bit, but when recovery got painful I was forced to my knees and I had to find something. What I am saying is this: if I wasn't forced to, I would have missed out on this wonderful spiritual life I have today. I have, over the years, improved my conscious contact with God and this is where I place my trust completely - well most of the time. I have done the inward journey both through the AA programme and therapy and it has been a very amazing and enlightening experience. It has not been an easy journey but it has been a very worthwhile one.

As I write this story and once again remind me where I am coming from, I see what a miracle it is that I am here today- by all accounts happy and healthy. Drink took me to so many dark and dangerous places. Each time I remind myself, I always feel that someone was taking care of me when I was out there. For me, that someone was God. I feel such a sense of gratitude for what has been given to me. When I came to AA, I thought my life was over. Sometime later I realised it hadn't even begun. The best years of my life have been in recovery, because I have learned how to live. I take the rough with the smooth and I FEEL my way through life today; I no longer need to drown everything in a sea of alcohol. So when I hear the chapter with this sentence read out: “in return for a bottle and a glass I have been given the keys to the Kingdom”, I think “yes, I definitely have.”

Keep coming back. If you don't get AA, then AA will get you.

Carmel - Muswell Hill Step Meeting.

#### **4. A Day at a Time- John**

I was born in 1950, and brought up in Coventry. My parents were from a largely teetotal background, and tea, not champagne, was served at their wedding reception. I first tasted alcohol when I was eight years old. In our home, the only alcohol consumed was a glass of sherry before Sunday lunch if we had guests. I found pleasure in upending the sherry decanter and licking the stopper. My parents took holidays in France, and brought back bottles of liqueurs from the duty free shop, which I enjoyed sampling. My parents never seemed to notice. But they, and others, did notice that I was dishonest.

At the age of 13 I won a major scholarship to one of the country's best-known boarding schools. That summer I discovered how much I enjoyed booze, because I thought it helped me in social situations to feel quite at ease. It was a massively important discovery for me – like finding the elixir of life. If I had just gone on getting that lift from drinking, without all the rest of the problems, I would never have wanted to stop. But straightaway my mother didn't like the way it changed my personality, and said so. She could always tell when I'd had a drink.

That September 1963, I started at the new school, a boarder for the first time. I was mercilessly teased and bullied. I took to drinking secretly at home in the holidays, one day being discovered by the vicar who called when everyone else was out. I was drunk from time to time as a teenager. At the age of 17 I left school and worked in Manchester as a Community Service Volunteer, and started drinking every day. At the end of that six-month stint I experienced my first blackout. The next day I realised I couldn't remember how I had got home from the pub, and then noticed that people at the hostel were laughing at me. I was going home that day. When I arrived my mother said that I smelt.

I was to have many more blackouts during the following six years. I got used to them in a way, but they always undermined my self-respect. If I asked people what had happened, I didn't know whether to believe them. I had no way of being sure what had happened, because I had no consciousness at the time, and no recollection afterwards.

I went to university that autumn, 1968, and got into a lot more heavy drinking, and cannabis (frequent) and LSD (just the once). I was a nuisance to my friends. They looked after me and ensured I didn't come to harm. They had to put up with all sorts of erratic, self-pitying, and basically drunken behaviour. I found it very difficult to make relationships with women, and when I did, one ended up in a mental hospital, and, when the other finished the relationship, ended up suicidal myself. One of my friends helped me through that crisis. It was a great privilege that, after I got sober, I was able to help him in a crisis.

In spite of it all, I left university with a good degree, but no job, so I went off to train to be a solicitor. I was living alone in a county town near London and was lonely. My drinking escalated and I was having more and more blackouts and hangovers. I got through the course and went to work in a posh law firm in the City. There I soon found I couldn't drink at lunchtime. But I shot out of the office like a rocket to drink all evening. I wasn't able to work much some days.

Next May 1974, I came round (rather than woke up) one Sunday after blackout drinking and felt just as though someone had beaten me up. I got in these states every so often when I couldn't face a drink for a few days. I hated not being able to drink, and found it very difficult to get through a day without thinking that at some stage I could have a drink. This time I was still on the wagon on the Thursday, and found myself in a pub with my drinking friend. He told me how he'd passed out a party. I told him how I was feeling – bloody awful. In the course of talking to him I had the idea of phoning AA. I don't know where the idea came from. I told my friend, and it was a bit like asking his permission. He didn't think it was a good idea, but I went and phoned anyway. I was very impressed by the AA member I spoke to. She talked about her drinking in a way quite new to me. She sounded detached and happy about it, as it was clearly something that was over. I was always ashamed about my drinking and tried to make jokes about it. Not everyone thought it was funny. I think "pathetic" is the right word.

So, that evening, I went to my first meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> May 1974, in Wilberforce Road, Finsbury Park. I haven't had a drink since. I wasn't sure what to wear, but in the end I got there. But if the man who was twelfth-stepping me hadn't been waiting for me outside the church hall, I'm not sure I'd have had the courage to go in, so I am deeply grateful to him. I'm ashamed to say I cannot now remember his name and have not seen him for about 29 years. I arrived at the meeting during the last half-hour, and the members were kind enough to give me the newcomer stuff. I told them I knew alcoholism was an illness, which I did. I had no idea what kind of illness it was; as all I knew about it was that my drinking was out of control. I didn't know it had to do with how warped and narrow my life had become, and how full of hatred I was. After the meeting we continued talking in my car. He gave me two priceless gifts – identification, and practical advice. He told me how he had been sacked out of the police force for not being able to get it together to give his evidence in court the day after drinking. I knew what that was like. And he suggested that if I wanted a drink to phone him or somebody in AA first.

I had been given a starter pack at my first meeting. I was very attracted by reading in one of the leaflets that I would be able to take whatever life dished out, without a drink. I knew that, whatever life dished out, I always had to have a drink.

Ten days later, I wound up at a meeting closer to the place where I now lived, Muswell Hill. I told the secretary, Dorrie, that I had just moved into the area (true), that I wasn't an alcoholic (false) but that I did want to meet people (true

but pathetic). She just looked through me and gave me a cup of tea. The speaker was a young man with a story not unlike my own, but I couldn't understand why he made such a fuss about his drinking. I went to the meeting every week for about a month without really communicating with anyone. Then one Friday I felt lousy and didn't go to work, and later that morning rang AA. The person who answered suggested I get to a meeting that evening, and gave me the address of one in Notting Hill. That was quite an adventure, and I had a puncture, but I got there. Henry R, a member there, chatted to me and suggested I meet him at his house the next day and go to another meeting where Blind Charlie would be speaking. The experience was remarkable, for two reasons: it was the first time I had seen the inside of an AA member's home, and Blind Charlie was truly inspiring. I began to feel a whole lot better. I started getting involved more in meetings, and gave my first chair at Muswell Hill. I got to know Cathy and Robert, and my near contemporary Margaret S, and the Swiss Cottage "visitors" who were always there, Mike C, Pat Q and Joan R, and Roy and Jo, and many others. Later I was, with Tottenham John, to help to found the Archway Wednesday meeting at Whittington Hospital, where I took Stephen H to his first meeting, and still later I became a member of the East Finchley Friday meeting.

In those first six months I was very dismissive of the slogans, particularly the one about "a day a time". But early in November 1974 I found how much I needed to stay sober, just one minute at a time, hanging on till the next meeting, with the help of AA. That day I accepted my alcoholism and the AA programme of recovery. I found myself a sponsor ( Bruce McC) who was extremely helpful and supportive, talked to me a lot about my concerns, and the steps, and I eventually did a Step Five with him.

In those early days I didn't find it easy to read books other than AA literature. I found "AA Comes of Age" quite fascinating. I went to lunchtime meetings in the City and had the privilege of working with Leslie C (whom I miss a lot) on what was then Central London Intergroup. Later I was to get involved with London Region, as conference delegate and as chairman.

I had serious difficulties in 1976 when my mother nearly succeeded in a suicide attempt, and again in 1983, when my father died very suddenly. I took his death very badly. I didn't think of taking a drink, but I did need to start working again on the programme, and had a lot of help from Ian T.

My attention to the programme has varied a lot, and no doubt it would have been better for me, and others, if I had been "fearless and thorough from the very start". But I have learnt that the programme is about trying to be an adult.



That includes living with the results of my imperfect following of the programme in earlier years. I now feel that my recovery today is very much a matter of “a day at a time” and keeping close to the principles and members of AA.

I have been very privileged by having a wonderful loving wife and being able to retire from the City at the age of 48, in 1998, and I now live in a beautiful old house in the Welsh border country. I am able to attend excellent meetings and have great support from a local sponsor.

I don't think AA has changed very much since I joined, except that people say “Hi” or even “Hey” to each other at meetings and tend to hold hands for the Serenity Prayer at the end. I have always, from my second meeting, been very impressed by the Serenity Prayer, and have used it on many, many occasions to find peace at moments of confusion. I am extremely grateful to AA for my sobriety, my sanity, and my life.

John

## **5. Drinking was always a problem- Roger C**

Drinking was always a problem. From the first I had little control and any that I might have had quickly disappeared. For 14 years I tried to control and enjoy my drinking (the obsession of every abnormal drinker). That's a long time to keep repeating an experiment that goes wrong every time!

I had a promising career and was making rapid progress through the ranks. To the outside world all was well and most would have said, “There goes a young man with a future.” Before long everything was in tatters. Not only was my promising career over but I was unemployed and unemployable living like a tramp in my own flat (which was up for sale). Abandoned by friends and family alike, I finally admitted my problem to a consultant psychiatrist. I expected this expert to delve into the innermost recesses of my mind and somehow cure me of my affliction. In fact he listened to my tale of woe and said, “There is nothing I can do for you, good afternoon.” This was my rock bottom. King Alcohol was my master and I knew it. I conceded defeat and went to the pub to ‘think things through’. I had no idea that there was a way out. I had been given six months to live if I didn't quit. I accepted my fate and my only sadness was that I might live another six months. I was 32 years of age.

I knew of A.A. but knew nothing about it or how it worked. I was introduced to the idea of recovery by my twin brother (who had made one last ditch effort to help me and without whom I would surely have died). I agreed to see a member of A.A. and it was arranged that Bobby G. would come to see me.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> March 1981 Bobby G. arrived on my doorstep. I was drunk although I wouldn't have admitted to that at the time. However I was reasonably coherent and Bobby told me his story.

For the first time in my life I felt that someone understood me and remember asking him, "Why do I drink like this?" Bobby smiled a knowing smile and explained to me that alcoholism is a two-fold illness. He explained that I had a physical allergy to alcohol combined with a mental obsession that was so powerful that no amount of will power could break it. The allergy meant that when I took a drink I experienced the phenomenon of craving. This sets me apart from the social drinker who 'can take it or leave it'. He added that this combination would kill me and I knew that to be the truth. He offered to take me to a meeting the next night at Arnos Grove and asked me to try to stay away from the first drink.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> March 1981 I attended my first meeting. Sober now I was in withdrawals and should have had medical assistance (the DTs were not far off). I managed to get into the meeting room, which in those days was at the top of a flight of stairs. I sat next to an old lady who advised me to sit on my hands. Someone gave me half a cup to warm tea. I could hardly see because my vision was blurred by the withdrawal. The first speaker I ever heard was Sadie from Chingford. She told her story and although her life-style had been very different from mine, I listened avidly to the way she drank, her hiding of bottles, her obsession, her feelings and her torturous experience. I identified. For the duration of her share all withdrawals left me and I was able to listen as only the dying can. As she finished speaking I felt the return of withdrawal symptoms and was expecting a nightmarish scenario ahead. I cannot fully explain this but I actually experienced relatively mild withdrawal. I was able to eat a full meal the next day and the gift of sleep returned almost immediately. The A.A. members of that time explained to me that I had had a very deep spiritual experience. On reflection I believe this to be true. The desire to drink was lifted out of me on that night and it has not been necessary for me to take a drink of alcohol since that day. I now know that alcohol had humiliated me to the point where I had sufficient humility to receive the Grace of God. This is why I nearly always share that I am sober today ONLY by the Grace of God. "Of myself I am nothing, the Father doeth the works".

My first meeting came to an end and I had hope. People say that the only instant thing in meetings is the coffee. I don't agree. I received instant hope at my first meeting and with it a desire to get well that has always stayed with me.

It had been suggested to me that I should attend further meetings and I was happy to do just that. Actually when I look back I had little choice in the matter! Every night for the next 3 weeks two of the guys (Bernie and Simon) called at my flat to pick me up. These guys were around my age (30ish) and we became great friends. In those days there were only a few young people in the old North London Region and we pretty much well knew each other. There was a bond between us, which we felt to be important but even so we looked for our inspiration to the old timers. Back then I attended the Friday Enfield group, Saturday Finchley, Sunday Cheshunt (no longer there), Monday Friern Barnet Hospital (now closed), Tuesday North Middlesex Hospital (different room), Wednesday Wood Green (then held in a local school hall), Thursday Arnos Grove (now moved to a different location). These were my regular meetings for quite some time and I attended a meeting every night of the week. After a while I ventured out to the Hampstead Step meeting. There were no step meetings in North London in those days (except for one a month at Arnos Grove). Sometimes I attended Golders Green meeting on Monday night about which a whole book could be written. As a matter of record Golders Green seemed to spawn more characters and incidents than any other meeting I have ever known. Occasionally 'Second Hand Dave' would take me up to the Tottenham meeting in the Friends Meeting House. Those Quakers sure know how to rough it. I remember well the pain I endured sitting on those hard wooden benches.

After a while Bernie and Simon decided that I was well enough to get to meetings on my own. I remember very well the first time I did so. I got a bus to the old Wood Green meeting and felt ecstatic at my achievement, so much so that I could barely restrain myself from telling my fellow passengers all about it. Thankfully I kept quiet and turned up at the meeting unaccompanied.

By this time 'Train Dave' had become a close friend and encouraged me to get to know other members. He persuaded me to make the tea at the Friern Barnet Hospital meeting, a place that initially terrified me. This was a Victorian Mental Hospital with corridors at least half a mile long. The tea was actually made for us in the canteen and the only thing necessary was to collect it and take it to the meeting room on a tray. I was assisted in this by 'Spiritual Jim', a man who would be my constant inspiration over the next few years. Jim had the kind of faith that I think most of us would envy. Some years later when he was dying from inoperable cancer we met up at an A.A. social evening. He hugged me

and explained that he had approx. 6 months to live. I must have looked horrified because he smiled and said, “you know Roger; it’s a day at time. You might die before me”.

I was beginning to feel comfortable in the rooms but was puzzled by the number of ‘Johns’ I encountered. This was taking anonymity too far! Back then they were a ‘dime a dozen’ and each had his very own nickname. Two great friends were Belfast John and Tottenham John (both stalwarts of the Monday night meeting in Tottenham). I haven’t seen either of them for many years now but occasionally I have heard news of them. Then there was ‘Evil John’ who would counsel us all in the following manner, “When you get up in the morning, smile, get it over with”. Actor John became, for a while, my closest friend. I remember the excitement we both felt when the Joe & Charlie tapes first came out over here (probably around 1985). We sat up all night in his kitchen listening avidly, a Big Book in front of each of us. From the time we met we became co-sponsors. There was ‘Bishop John’ and so many others that I have forgotten now but all played their part in helping me.

As the ‘fog’ cleared it was obviously clear to me that not everyone was called John. As those first weeks, months and years rolled by I came to value the presence of the many regulars who attended the meetings then. Many have passed into A.A. folklore and some are still quoted to this day; such men as ‘Fishing Charlie’ who would recount tales of motor torpedo boat missions in World War II whilst under the influence of alcohol. “This programme will work for anyone”, he would say, “but you got to want it and sometimes you have got to want to want”. Charlie was a venerable old man who brought comfort, compassion, reassurance and love to many, many A.A. members. His consistent presence at meetings helped countless members to get sober and stay sober.

“Under the affluence of incohol” was the catch phrase of ‘Joe E.’ who maintained that back in the 50’s, an A.A. public meeting had been held at some considerable expense and that he was the only thing the members had got out of it. Joe was an A.A. pioneer in this country and would tell of the days when members would drive miles to get to a meeting. There were something like 3 groups in London when Joe got sober!

Another pioneer was ‘Pat Q.’ about whom I have never heard a bad word. Pat’s compassion and humour has often sustained me and his experience of living

sober for over 50 years inspires me to this day. Pat still attends meetings and is now in his eighties.

Ivor was a champion 12 stepper. To be truthful he and I didn't really see eye to eye but I can tell you that I was once at a meeting where every single person there (except me of course) had been 12 stepped by Ivor. This man had an astonishing reputation as probably North London's most prolific 12 stepper. Ivor was much loved and was a constant presence at the old Arnos Grove meeting along with 'Fishing Charlie', Pat Q and many other old timers. In those days there were a considerable number of old-timers (20 years +) who frequented both the Muswell Hill Group and Arnos Grove. I can remember that 'us youngsters' often felt intimidated by their presence and were often too shy to share (not what they wanted of course!). Cathy was Chairman of the old Intergroup in those days and was married to a fellow member, Robert, a seafarer who would return from his voyages full of tales to tell.

Martin was secretary of the Arnos Grove group when I first came around. At that time 'Blind Richard' was a regular member and had obtained all of A.A.'s literature in Braille. Unfortunately Richard returned to drinking along with so many others I once knew. I haven't heard of him in over 20 years. People often share that the doors of A.A. swing both ways but you know often they don't.

It's difficult to remember all the names of the secretaries of the other groups I've mentioned. 'Irish Dennis' was the secretary of Wood Green and is sober to this day but most of the others escape me now. Gay was secretary of the old Friern Barnet Group (which passed to me a year later) but I can't remember the others now. Gay passed away quite recently after many years of sobriety. Of course many of the old timers of those days have passed away now. They leave behind a wonderful legacy of love and service, a great example to me of the unconditional love found in A.A. rooms all around the world. They gave of themselves that others might live and I'm grateful to them one and all.

Having completed my 90 meetings in 90 days (very fashionable in those days) I wasn't too sure of my next move. My first sponsor wasn't too keen on working through the steps and my first year passed in something of a state of confusion. As now, there was a great deal of confusion regarding our 3<sup>rd</sup> Step. Everyone was advising everyone else to 'hand it over'. This advice is prevalent to this day and yet I have never found any reference to it in our Big Book or the Twelve and Twelve. We are not asked to hand over our lives or anything else for that matter to anyone or anything. We are asked to make a decision to turn

away from self-will towards God's will and ask for His care and protection. This is a very different proposition. A life run on self-will can hardly be a success.

In those days most speakers did not refer to our recovery programme even at Step Meetings! The format was generally a drunkalogue followed by how things had improved at home and work. Needless to say most of those boys are no longer with us. Bill W. stresses the point, "We must change or we die". A pretty emphatic statement if ever there was one!

There were notable exceptions. 'Mick the Tick' was a great speaker who addressed the problem of self every time he shared. He acquired his nickname because he wore a number of wristwatches along his arms. He was quite happy to sell you one too! Although I never met 'Ironing Board Arthur' he was, nonetheless, a legend in A.A. circles.

Stopping drinking amounts to abstinence from the symptom of my disease. And that is all it is. It takes care of the physical allergy. In reality drinking was not my problem! Actor John used to have a sign on his shaving mirror, which read, "You are now looking at the problem". The problem of alcoholism centres in the mind and A.A.'s 12 Steps are designed to bring about a fundamental physical change. When we straighten out spiritually we straighten out mentally and physically.

Eventually I was fortunate to meet Dave D. who showed me the way forward through our recovery programme. This, together with co-sponsorship, was a true revelation and a great blessing. I was reborn to a life of emotional sobriety.

Our programme is a simple one. It was designed as a way of life. It is to be lived on a daily basis in all our affairs. The book 'As Bill Sees It' was formerly titled 'The A.A. Way of Life' and our Big Book, 'Alcoholics Anonymous', contains a set of instructions and directions on how to recover from alcoholism. John C. will tell you that we need meetings because the Big Book doesn't have any pictures!

It may be simple but it isn't always easy to use this programme every day. Certainly not to any level of perfection. In my experience it does get easier. There used to be a TV ad for a certain brand of beer in which a lady asks some road workmen how to get to Carnegie Hall. Their reply was, "Lady, you gotta practice".

In 1981 Chapter Five of the Big Book was read out at every meeting and the Step 9 promises were certainly not in use at the end of meetings. At the beginning it was customary for the Secretary to ask for a “few moments silence to collect our thoughts”. In those days no one would have dared tell the group what to think about and yet at every meeting these days I’m asked to “spare a thought for the alcoholic who still suffers both inside and outside the rooms”. Fashions change but the basic format of meetings remains unchanged. Another fashion, imported from the USA, is to answer each speaker with ‘Hi’ and then their name. This is a sign of the times and is of little consequence but probably worth noting. Another big difference is that all meetings, or nearly all, were smoking venues. I particularly recall the dense fog that descended Saturday evenings at the tiny venue on Gravel Hill, Finchley. A.A. did not change this; it couldn’t for A.A. is non-restrictive. The change came because the hirers of venues imposed new rules following changes to their insurance policies. There is a continuing trend for A.A. members to quit smoking too and many have done so using our 12 Step Programme.

The biggest change in A.A. came about in the mid 80’s when most members were exposed to Big Book study groups and the undeniable work of Joe & Charlie whose influence, in my opinion, cannot be underestimated. In their wake came a multitude of 12 Step speakers carrying A.A.’s message of recovery. Many of these well-meaning souls have been criticised as being nothing more than inferior clones but I would ask that you don’t shoot the messengers.

There has always been controversy in the Fellowship from those who insist that we follow ‘their God’ (at one time there was a group of members who insisted God is a woman). My sponsor who vehemently insisted that Intergroup was totally unnecessary was not always the most popular of men!

In my experience the Fellowship and all that it stands for is bigger than any of these ideas and indeed the splinter groups and gurus that occasionally emerge. The 12 Traditions ensure our continued survival. The splinter groups and gurus never do.

The only word that has been changed in the Big Book since it’s first publication is in Chapter 5. Originally the 12<sup>th</sup> Step referred to a “spiritual experience” and this was changed to “awakening” because the majority of members do not share Bill W’s overwhelming experience, which he describes in his own story. Incidentally there is a stylistic shift in the writing of Chapter 5. This is the only chapter to be edited by the Akron Group and the New York Group. Can you

imagine Bill's torment as each group debated his writing and put forward their suggestions for amendments and emendations? I can only imagine that many prayers were offered up during the process and Bill stated he would not complete the rest of the book unless he was allowed total freedom from editorial hindrance.

As I said, I had completed my 90-day stint and continued to be amazed by member's experiences. Many had experienced imprisonment and long stays in mental institutions. At that time frontal lobotomy was considered by the medical profession as a cure for alcoholism. This led to the saying; "I'd rather have a full bottle in front of me than a full frontal lobotomy". These poor souls didn't stand a chance of recovery and the practice was dropped along with other quack procedures.

I have mentioned a few changes in meeting formats and recalled some of the old members. It isn't easy to remember all those who have gone before. If you are reading this and wondering why your name isn't mentioned please don't be offended. Just remember that each and every one of you has been my teacher.

I have tried to give an idea of the way things used to be and have mentioned some of the characters that used to grace the rooms. In reality I suppose nothing has changed too much.

I still regularly attend meetings and I love to carry A.A.'s message at every opportunity. The past 25 years has been quite amazing. A.A. promises a life beyond our wildest dreams. Think about it. It does not promise us our wildest dreams it promises us something beyond that! Wow!

Looking back I have achieved so many ambitions. I would never have dreamed it possible that I could gain a university education to postgraduate level. I would not have believed it possible that I could enter a new profession – one that I'm passionate about. Nor would I have believed that I could love so many and be loved in return.

My A.A. journey has been amazing. I have had the pleasure and privilege to watch many a newcomer get well. This is probably the most exciting and inspiring thing I will ever see. If you are new and reading this then I can tell you that the best years of your existence do indeed lie ahead. This is a journey you must not miss. I hope to meet some of you and to share with you the joy of living. Always there will be rainy days and sunny days for that is life. But deep down I know that everything will be all right.



Those who have gone before always continue to inspire me. I am so grateful to all of them and to all of you. As I have said before, "of myself I am nothing."

God bless you one and all.

Roger C.

## **6.From Herts to Kent and back again - Golfer Roger**

I was born in Barnet just before the War; we moved to Kent about six months later. Thinking back, I had a great childhood and was a happy child. My parents were well off and I was sent to public school as a boarder. I was not particularly academic but was good at sport so was quickly accepted into the life of the school.

Until a couple of years ago, I would have said there was no alcoholic background in my family; however, I recently found out that my maternal grandfather was dismissed from the police force for being drunk on duty for the fourth time but who knows, who cares... I won't go into any long war stories which anyone can hear when I do a chair – I will just tell you how it all started. I still remember the first time I got drunk; the next day, I thought I was dying and I said to myself, *never again*. What a load of rubbish. Two weeks later, it happened again but this time I didn't feel so bad and the seed was sown.

Soon after that, I was called up for two years National Service; there I learned to drink like a man. Everybody got p\*\*\*\*\*d but I managed to stay the course, got paid on a Friday, broke on the Monday. I got charged nine times, eight for being drunk – being one of the lads. I look back now and I was the only one who ever got charged, the ringleader they called me. I still have my demob record and it says *honest, sober young man*, makes me laugh now!

On demob I joined the family jewellery firm. By this time, I had achieved a lot on the rugby field and was well known. When you are on top of the pile, you get free drinks all night; so the 1960s for me were party time, booze, girls and everything that went with it. I was very fit, training mid-week and with weekends games, and could sweat it off. I was the leader in everything we did – not bad for a very shy young man but I had no fear playing in front of large crowds. Afterwards, the lads had tea or orange in the dressing room but for

me, there were always a couple of beers by my peg. In the 1970s, I was starting to lose the star role and that is when I think my drinking took off. I missed the buzz and adulation and drank to make up for it.

I was 30 when I met my first wife and we got married within the year. We had two great kids- a girl and a boy- but I was still married to the bottle and still acted like a bachelor I didn't drink every day but I had found a local pub and soon met people who drank like me, fast and furious- even the publican. He died of booze at 45.

In 1981, my divorce papers came through, I wasn't shocked- just sad. I decided to go to AA to try to save my marriage. My first meeting was in Bromley where I immediately saw two people from my old rugby club; all they said was "nice to see you, Roger". I think I said I was doing some research on drinking; looking back, "what an idiot"- as if they didn't know. I thought, "I can't go back there again" so the next night I went to Beckenham. They were there as well. I thought someone must have got them to follow me so I never went again. As I was working in London, I went to St. Vedas at lunchtime on Tuesdays and Thursdays. I made the tea, shared rubbish and thought to myself, I am nothing like these people. I left after seven months without a drink, which was no problem for me as I could go months on end without a drink (pure denial).

If I had stayed in the Fellowship, I would not have met my lovely Irish wife Pat; we were made for each other although I didn't realise it at the time. I was up to my old tricks: she had a flat, a good job and a cabinet full of booze. Anyway, nothing had changed; I was still living my old life. We got married, went on honeymoon for two weeks to Spain. I didn't touch a drop; we went back to the same place the following year and I rewarded myself for being sober the previous year.

Things started to go downhill and I thought to myself, "If you don't do something about your drinking, Rodge, that is it". It was then I realised that I really was an alcoholic. I started going to Barnet Wednesday meetings. Over the last 16 years, I have not taken a drink – but it is a day at a time. I waited a year before I found a sponsor; he took a lot of time with me, taught me self worth and how I could live a good life without booze. Ray is still my sponsor today although he has moved to Ireland - I can honestly say he is my best friend. We have helped each other along the way and it works both ways now. I remember David, Ray's sponsor (another Irishman), and Ray, asking me why I always drove to Europe. I replied, "No way can I fly".

However, a short time later, David said, "How about coming to Co. Clare with Ray and me, we'll go to an AA convention and play some golf". I said "count me in". A few days later I was told it was all booked. I asked, "where are we taking boat from?" They both laughed and said "Heathrow!" I said, "you b\*\*\*\*\*s!" At the airport, I went straight to the loo and prayed for courage. I would not let fear get the better of me. I managed, by the grace of my Higher Power,

On arrival, David said "how do you feel?" I said, fantastic, to which he replied "Don't forget you have to fly back!" School of hard knocks really. Now I fly anywhere; I don't enjoy it but I can do it on orangeade. I have been to many places and AA has paid for that with the money I saved by not drinking. It was under £1 for a pint when I came in. I have no idea how much it costs now. The hardest thing for me was to re-court my lovely wife who stayed through the bad times and we are still so very close and she is my rock. I have made my amends to my ex-wife, and my son and daughter, and friends. So life is good. A day at a time. Do service and give something back for regaining your sanity.

Remember, "*Mind your head*". *Live, love and laugh...*

Thanks to you all, take care. Golfer Roger.

## **7.Experiences of AA in the Early 1980's – Steve H**

I knew nothing AA prior to my first meeting other than what the letters stood for and if you had asked me for an opinion (of which I had many) I would only have been too happy to inflict myself on you with 'my view' for as long as you could listen.

I assumed AA was something between a housing project for the homeless and a tambourine bashing group of 'Do Gooders' trying their best to help the world's waifs and strays to see the light. Those who attended would most likely tramps and 'winos' unlike myself. Thus I am still surprised that I did contact the fellowship, on two counts; the first being my view of the 'target audience' (down and outs), the second, that I was in the process of dealing a crushing blow to my addiction, which today I believe only an act of providence could have made possible.

The initial phone call triggered, in essence, a completely new way of life for me. Today I am still reaping the benefits of that initial call.

All meetings I attended permitted smoking and members seem to continually be offering each other cigarettes. A visit to Finchley Saturday in winter would result in you getting well and truly 'kippered', as it was a small room with little ventilation and packed full of what appeared to be chain smokers (self included).

Muswell Hill Tuesday was the areas' super sober meeting (I avoided it like the plague)- full of super sober people (who also smoked profusely), with their many years. I felt somewhat fearful and also somewhat in awe of these members (many of which have now passed away from natural causes)

Whilst the Steps were talked about, many of the 'chairs' and much of the focus seemed for me to be on the physical aspects (the on-going 'ism'- something to sort out with you sponsor). One member was almost evangelical about the importance of eating chocolate -in particular Mars Bars. Tottenham John, as he was known, would share of his experiences of the Spike (a notorious 'doss house'). I do remember he was very kind and although he had lived on the streets, I knew we had many similarities and shared a common illness. Another former street drunk, Big Ian, was one of the first people to home in on getting the basics right in recovery (I guess he could see through my façade), which were eating properly, sleeping and getting to meetings every day. His suggestions were life saving.

During the early 80's, the charter clinics were opening up in London, and the word 'addict' started to appear, as did addicts themselves. There was tremendous controversy around this. After 9 months of sobriety, I was made secretary of a group in an area where there was such a clinic and young people were being bussed out to meetings. The appearance of addicts seemed to bring out the worst (righteous indignation) and best in some members. After one meeting, I felt totally battered by the members who had laid in to me as though it was down to me (my fault) but also felt supported by the fewer members who were supportive. There seemed to be little understanding of the group conscience and the application of traditions. Looking back the fellowship has really progressed in this area. I frequently hear at meetings in North London 'group consciences' being called. I learned the lesson about surviving AA and 'principles before personalities', Big Ian shared about how resentment took him back out for 6 years returning as a down and out, I vowed not to do the same

Service always was taken very seriously in those days; it was one of the cornerstones of recovery. Many members will have found an easy way into

service via the more basic tasks, one of which was essentially an ashtray commitment -now redundant (clearing up the ash trays and cigarette ends after a meeting). Being a secretary meant taking on and sticking with a one-year commitment. A personal view is that there were less groups- North London Intergroup covered from Kings Cross to Potters Bar but they were stronger. The concept of twelve stepping people into service was often applied and worked well.

Many of the Service Tasks did not have any training- you just turned up and did it, learning from older members. My first telephone duty session was a little nerve wracking. It was case of bowling up at the telephone office and starting (the subsequent introduction of a workshop was another good idea).

Many meetings opened up and folded such as the 'feelings' meeting in Enfield (possibly this was in the 90's?).

The early 80's were a bit of a crazy time for me, a big event had occurred the year I came in and I did not know about it (Britain had gone to war with Argentina over the Falklands), and I had somehow missed it (a reflection of the narrowness of my world). If anything, there were many characters in the fellowship. Many are no longer here, having passed away with good sobriety and borne a variety of illnesses with courage and good humour.

Members had (and still have) great, simple answers to all sorts of problems (such as Danny the builder who learnt to fly and cured a member of his fear of flying by taking him up in his plane). There was Ivor who would have looked at home in a World War II Hurricane Bomber with his handlebar moustache, who prompted me to start sharing when he said if you don't share you will drink, and that facing fear was the death of fear itself. When I didn't understand or feel I was fitting in, I would remember 'bring the body and the head will come along'.

I never did get to meet the tambourine bashing group saving the world and hosting meetings attended by down and outs. Instead I met bunch of fairly respectable and often generous hearted people, willing to go out of their way to help me identify my illness and a way forward, dealing with life one day at a time, demonstrating they had a 'daily reprieve' from alcoholism and could enjoy sobriety.

By Steve H

## 8. "Listen George, It's not working out"- Geoff

My name is Geoff and I'm an alcoholic. I want to try to say the same thing, roughly, as I would if I did a chair. June 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006 marked my fifteenth year sober. It's not fifteen years at a time though; it's a day at a time. I want to try and tell the truth without being too melodramatic.

I was born in 1962 in Wanstead in the suburbs of East London. I've got two older brothers and come from a fairly stable middle class family. There was nothing particularly unusual about my childhood.

I remember when I was young- four or five- my elder brothers used to fight each other. Not all the time, but when they did, I used to run next door to my Auntie Pat. I think of my childhood as being quite happy. I think I was pretty shy as a kid. My eldest brother had a few problems later on in his teenage years- when he was about eighteen or nineteen. He found God in a big way and became what could loosely be described as a 'religious nut' at this time. He was obsessed by religion. At one point he used to see angels and demons in his room. I was about fourteen when that happened.

I went to a small junior school where I knew everyone. There were only a couple of hundred kids in the whole school, and I moved to a large comprehensive school where I knew no one. This was a scary moment for me. I started drinking when I was thirteen. The first drink I can remember having was cider. I went round in a small group of mates at this time. It was my job when we went to the off-licence, to go in and buy the booze.

One of the only places that would serve us was the "Bottle and Basket" in South Woodford. I would go in and stand on tiptoe when I got to the counter. When I came out I would keep the change from the money my friends had given me as "danger money". With hindsight I can see that there was a deviousness about my drinking from the word go.

I honestly cannot remember drinking socially. I loved the effect of alcohol. It seemed to give me this huge energy. I found something that fitted me like a glove. I drank to get drunk from the word go. Friday nights became very important. At school I was doing okay. I tried to be good at everything. I think a lot of kids experiment with alcohol at this age. I assumed that everyone else at my school drank the same way as me. Looking back I don't think this was true.

Like most people, I wanted acceptance- to fit in. It was cool to be good at football; I was good at art and long distance running. When I was about fifteen I took my mock exams. I got bad results in all my subjects and thought that I was a failure. I wanted to keep up with my brothers who were both fairly academic. When it came to the real exams, I was entered in for CSE's and passed all of them. I went from thinking I was a failure to thinking I was Albert Einstein. I was drinking quite a lot at this point, mostly with people who were much older and bigger than me. I drank whenever I had the money, whenever I had the opportunity. Friday nights just couldn't come round quick enough. I drank in pubs when I was pretty young, The George, The Cuckfield and The British Queen. The Cuckfield was a very dingy place at this time so no one could see how old you were.

I realised I might be able to go to university. I had to choose A level subjects. I chose Art, English Literature, and Psychology. What this would qualify me for I have no idea. I had notions of going to study psychology at university. The headmistress of the school told us that these were not the sort of exams that you could work on in the last few weeks and pass. I thought I would prove her wrong on that one. I did quite a lot of drinking in the Sixth Form. I took my Art exam a year early and they told my father they thought they had "another genius on their hands". I weighed nine stone at this time and would sometimes drink nine pints in the course of the evening. I was still doing a bit of long distance running, but soon I would chose between sport and living the 'bohemian lifestyle'. I did a bit of work in the last few weeks of my exams and just passed with two 'E's in Psychology and Literature and a 'C' in Art. I decided to go to Art School.

I was about seventeen. At that time (in the early 80's) lots of kids were going on Interail tickets and going round Europe. I went to Paris where I got very pissed and then on the train to Amsterdam, where I did much the same plus soft drugs and ended having a psychiatric assessment. I had had a mental breakdown. Soon after, I started a foundation course in Art and Design. I drank whenever I could during this time and used alcohol as an anaesthetic. I had interviews for different Art Schools but got a place doing Time Based Media (T.B.M). I made short films and videos at Maidstone College of Art. At this point, I drank whenever I could get money or someone would buy me a drink. I craved alcohol or thought about it a lot of the time. I remember the other students at College but I wasn't to develop many real friendships or relationships. I was there from the age of nineteen till I was about 22. At one point during the second year, I fell in love. She was the most beautiful girl in the college. We went to Paris on holiday together. We talked about getting married by the

Captain of the ship. Perhaps we would go to Paris and get married afterwards. That's the plot I had written in my head. What happened was we went to Paris and we split up. I drank a lot in Paris: well, I was a bohemian. The penny didn't drop straight away. When it did, I said "It looks like I'm drinking for two now". I drank on the break-up for ages.

Not long after this I had my first contact with AA by telephone. I remember crying on the phone and talking to a woman called Maria who told me about driving her car drunk in the fog. My first AA meeting was on a Tuesday night at St Mary Abbots in Kensington. I didn't want to see any of my next-door neighbours. I wanted the posh cure. I went out to the pub across the road and a man called Ian followed me over there. This planted a seed but I wasn't ready for AA at this point. I went to Hinde Street about this time as well.

While I was at Art School, I used to drink on buses and trains to kill the time. I was drinking a bottle of Southern Comfort one time when someone asked me if it was my birthday. On another I was drinking a small bottle of whiskey on a country bus when someone gave me the number of AA. I couldn't honestly understand why they had given me this number, as I was deep in denial. I thought I was too young to be an alcoholic. I was about twenty-one at this point. I didn't come back to AA for a couple of years. I only just finished College. I actually left for a couple of days and went to see my uncle and asked him what I thought I should do. He said to me "if you don't complete it you'll always wonder what you could have achieved". I was very unhappy during college and had suicidal thoughts. I completed college, and the girl I'd been in love with left a year before me. The last year wasn't too bad; I remember swimming in the river. At about this point my drinking was at its peak. It was 1985. I had what I later found out blackouts were - I lost a whole week once.

I think I knew that my problem had a spiritual dimension. When I was drinking in the West End when I ended up in the Hari Krishna Centre heckling someone who was talking about the meaning of life. I went into churches and sat there and prayed for help. I tried drinking in different places because I thought that might be part of the problem. On one occasion I went to Harrods- there used to be a cocktail lounge in there on, I think, the third or fourth floor. Another time I drank in the Hilton and did a runner without paying, jumped on a bus that brought me right back to the place I was trying to get away from.

After College, I was on the dole. I landed on my feet a little. I had an affair with a French girl called Aline. I got a tax rebate about this time, which was enough to get me out of England for a couple of weeks. Her family lived in the South of France and her dad had a vineyard. I thought I had arrived. I drank red wine



with breakfast, dinner, and tea. I used to drive her moped into town and risk my life and others coming home on whatever side seemed appropriate at the time. At the end of a couple of weeks, her mother had to lend me the coach fare home. The first job I got on returning home was a job called a 'Twilight Assistant' - shelf stacking in the supermarket. I drank whisky on the way to work and after work.

I didn't drink all the time. Sometimes I would feel so ill, I'd stop for a bit. I lived in my parent's house and would steal bottles of vodka from the Fine Fare in the High Street. I'd have a long grey overcoat in the summer and pocket a large bottle of vodka. I never got caught fortunately but got chased round the aisle a few times when I was trying to put it back. I used to like listening to two of the worst sorts of music going at this time- Country and Western. Thankfully in sobriety, I have given these up as well. I would drink in my room to sad music or, if I had some money, in a pub somewhere. I had a series of boring jobs, including doing the figure work for the National Grid and compiling the Great Britain Handbook as well as Satellite Systems Procurement. They were all temp clerical assistant jobs- as dull as ditch water. When I worked for the CEGB doing figure work I was drinking Carly, Special Brews. At lunchtime I would sit on the bench just outside the offices. I started to have a series of accidents falling downstairs, falling out of trees, falling out of windows. One of the blokes at work noticed. Most people had pictures of their family around their computers. Most people had either fluffy gonks or pictures of boyfriends, girlfriends, husbands' wives or family. This bloke had a picture of a power station.

I bumped into a friend of mine from Art School. Her name was Karen. She was having a dinner party in her house. It was on a Tuesday night. I went along and got pretty pissed. I needed another drink- it was about one o'clock in the morning. There was a place nearby that had a late licence. She lent me her keys and I came back at three in the morning. The next day I spent some time with her. She was a stylist for music videos. She knew what my drinking was like as we'd lived in the same house at college and I'd caused her a few problems then. A girlfriend of mine had drawn in crayon all round her bedroom walls. She told me she went to Al Anon. She went to the one on a Thursday night at the Piazza in Chelsea. I followed her along there because I fancied her. She went along to her meeting and she said she thought I needed something a bit stronger "You should try that door there". I went along to the meeting for a while just to keep her happy. I was about twenty-five at this time. I had three years of having one foot inside AA and one foot outside.

It was the worst place to be. The things I related to were not so much what people said as what people did. I needed a sponsor. I wanted a really good one -someone who had been all the way through the card. I got wrapped up with someone who I shall call "Ben". I was to find out later that he had a few problems himself, apart from alcoholism, including being a compulsive liar. He told me he was dying of cancer, so for about a year, I did his shopping for him. I paid for him to go on holiday and nearly bought a car for him on another occasion. (It was only forty quid, but still).

One day I said to a friend of mine called Christine; "Do you believe everything that "Ben" says?" and she just started laughing. I realised that I'd been down the same route as a lot of others. He told all sorts of lies about himself to get sympathy to get attention. He'd tell people that he'd lost his children in a fire. He was a sick puppy. He wasn't all bad- he helped me a bit as well. I got a new sponsor as soon as I could. I didn't stop coming to AA though.

I didn't think I was the same as the people in AA that I met. I thought that I was worse or better but not the same. In those three years I would be sober for a few weeks, sometimes months, and then I'd go back to drinking. It was like being on elastic and as people told me, it got worse. I got stopped by the police after jumping out of the window of a restaurant because I didn't want to pay the bill. I was staggering along the road. My closest friends wouldn't drink with me. It felt very lonely at this point. I felt rejected by my friends and that I didn't belong in AA either.

On June 1<sup>st</sup> 1991 I had my last drink. On that day I stole some wine from a shop in the High Street. I drove my dad's car drunk, out to the coast. I smashed a shop window with a lump of concrete, stole a rowing boat, and then tried to steal a yacht moored at Leigh-on-Sea in Essex. The next day I woke up and remembered bits and pieces of what I'd done. All that I could decide for sure was that I was not a social drinker like my mum, for example, who would have a glass of sherry at Christmas and that's it. Whatever was going on with me, I felt safer and happier going to AA. My first meeting sober was Dagenham Sunday Night June 2<sup>nd</sup> 1991.

Something clicked; I'd been fighting it for years. My sobriety felt paper-thin sometimes. Early on, it felt I could go either way. There was a small group of us who knocked around the same meetings. The people who helped me early on, were people like Phil G, Sally and Gary M, Ron F, Sharon, Malcolm. Wednesday nights in Forest Gate became a highlight of the week. Service was good for me. I was literature secretary at one meeting, tea maker at another. I

couldn't take a lot of ideas on board. All I could remember were things like H.A.L.T- don't get too Hungry, Angry, Lonely or Tired as these were things that could lead you back to drink. I had a tendency to isolate sometimes. Early on I would hardly say a word to anyone. Making this first mistake with my sponsor brought me close to Christine and Harris. Harris became my new sponsor. They were both of great help to me. The thing I remember was that they invited me to their flat and gave me sausages and beans. They gave me their time. They had both been sober quite long periods of time and led 'normal' lives. Early sobriety meant going to lots of meetings, sometimes three in one day. I took up commitments for different meetings and made a commitment to staying sober. I went to a meeting pretty much every night of the week. I went to ninety meetings in ninety days. My new sponsor had a few similarities to me. He was someone who earned his living as a mechanic but was trying to break into the arts. I was someone who worked in the arts but needed to have a more practical way to earn a living as well. I went to meetings all over the place; South London, North London, Harlow, Epping, Upshire. I went to AA dances in Chelsea hoping to find a girlfriend. I ended up spending most of the time dancing round a pillar. There were times when I had trouble staying sober for twenty minutes at a time. I remember phoning a friend of mine one night- it was about 10.30. I told her I really fancied a drink and she spoke to me for twenty minutes. It went past 11 o'clock at night. I felt safe again. My sponsor said stuff to me like "don't make any major changes in the first two years". It was very fortunate for me. I think that I wasn't in relationship in the first two years despite my efforts to the contrary.

With hindsight I know I couldn't have handled a relationship at that time. What I wanted and what I needed were two very different things. There was a psychological barrier for me of a year. I thought a year, a whole year that would be an achievement. If I could do that I might be able to stay sober.

It's a day at a time of course, but I'm trying to describe my own particular thoughts at this point in my recovery. Months rolled by and I stayed within the bubble of AA. I did a bit of work here and there. When it got to my first AA Birthday, I knew that some meetings gave out birthday cakes as well as chips. Before I'd got to a year, I thought it was a lot of American, Happy Clappy rubbish to have chips and cakes. But when I got to a year, I wanted mine. I actually went to two different meetings and got two chips and two lots of cake. Well you know what alcoholics are like; one's never enough. Emotionally there were a lot of ups and downs. It could be something quite small like someone hadn't given me back a couple of quid they owed me, but if

it bothered me it bothered me. One of the first things to come back for me was sleep.

I realised that I hadn't slept properly for years. I wanted to do something apart from being in AA so I started to study outside. I did a GCE in French. On a day-to-day basis all sorts of things could cause me problems. One week, something would seem like the biggest problem in the world -a job application had not arrived and the next week, I couldn't remember what that problem was. It was difficult to see things in perspective; molehills could become mountains. After two years or so I retrained in a different profession, which I am still involved with today. I went to a college in Central London mixing with lots of new people. It was difficult at times. I felt 'buzzed out' by new people. These were good days. I worked as a recycling officer part-time and also started working a little bit in my new profession.

In 1994 locally to where I lived, there was a large road building construction under way. I got involved in the local protest group- at first on the fringes and then right in the middle of it. It was the protest against the building of the M11 link Road. Anyway, I got arrested with four others for climbing up the top of an eighty-foot crane and stopping the work on the site for the day.

We were charged with causing fifty thousand pounds of damage to concrete. We became known as the "Concrete Four". Whatever your view on road building, this was the most stressful time in my sobriety to date. I was just finishing college at the time and had been going out with a girl called Christiana. I thought it would be happy ever after with her. But one night in the kitchen of her flat she said, "Listen George, it's not working out" I said "My name's Geoff". Anyway we split up. I thought this was a disaster. She came to court at the tail end of our relationship to see what the magistrates were going to do with the "concrete four". It was completely dismissed. This day was a Monday. In the morning I was in court and with a possibility of going to prison and in the evening I went out with a Hungarian girl called Andrea who was cast as my wife in a play. It felt like Christmas- after months of stress good stuff was happening again. Andrea and I got together. We lived together in London for a while- then we shared a flat in Budapest.

Being with Andrea for those two years was one of the happiest times in my sobriety; going to the seaside, going on holiday. In Budapest I went to English speaking meetings on Tuesday and Thursday evenings. I've always stayed pretty close to meetings. When things aren't going well, AA is always there.

With Andrea this was the first proper relationship I'd had sober so there were lots of ups and downs, which were all new to me. I tried to get different sorts of work over there with some degree of success. Andrea and I split up after two years and instead of returning home, I got a flat on my own in Budapest. Once or twice when things were bad, I phoned friends back into London. All these experiences were good for my sobriety because I was taking part in life. I had a normal life. I was living an interesting life – I was growing up.

I came back from Budapest and joined a touring theatre company. We toured in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Dorset. I did a showcase and got an agent. I had a little bit of work here and there. I had had bits and pieces of acting work but needed another way to earn money instead of signing on the dole. I did a CELTA (Certificate of English Language Teaching to Adults). I didn't use the qualification straight away. In 1999 I moved to Barnet through being in a show with a friend from AA.

I lived in a room at the end of Barnet High Street for four years. While I lived there I did a bit of building work, a bit of teaching and sometimes a bit of acting. I used to go to Potters Bar on a Tuesday, Barnet Hospital on a Wednesday. After a while I got to know people. I did lots of normal stuff like washing, shopping, paying bills. One time I was so broke that I had to look down the sofa for enough money to buy an onion. I was doing creative stuff, writing plays, putting an Art Exhibition together with my brother; selling a few pictures. I went to an Art class one Friday and one of the other students there told me about a teaching agency. I got a little bit of work and gradually moved from being a builder of sorts to being a part-time teacher. I taught people individually and then worked in Summer Schools. I then got work in colleges and then got work in better colleges, -which is what I do to this day. During this time, I also got a bit of work doing an advert on telly. I went up for loads of auditions- most of them I didn't get. This one though, they put as first choice-advertising lager during the last World Cup. I said to my agent I can't drink alcohol, and they said okay. On the day, they washed out a tin of beer and I was paid quite a lot of money for drinking lucozade.

While in Barnet, I hadn't been in a relationship for a couple of years. There were a couple of women who were friends, but no dates. One day I met Anne through a mutual friend. She was just a friend at first. She was French and a couple of years younger than me. She lived at the bottom of the hill and I lived at the top. She was only an 84 bus ride away. She then moved and lived around the corner from me. Not long later we moved in together in a flat in New Barnet. I told her early on that I was in AA. The flat we found was quite cheap

for the area. It was a nice place to live. We looked after each other, we went on holidays together, we talked about getting married and having babies- not necessarily in that order. We lived together for three years. In the last few months there were problems. Should we have a trial separation? We agreed to spilt at the beginning of this year. My dad was very ill at about the same time. He had a severe heart attack. At one time the doctor gave him a five percent chance of regaining consciousness. My mum and dad were returning home after seeing something I'd written that was shown at the Hampstead Theatre. I felt guilty about having invited them. The truth of it was if he hadn't had his heart attack on the tube he probably would've died at home. He was very lucky that a member of the public, who knew first aid, happened to be sitting next to him.

This was a stressful time for me and my family. Christmas of this year was the most difficult time I've had recently- my dad was ill, I was splitting from my girlfriend and I had to move home. I went to lots of meetings. The heating in the flat where I was living even broke down at Christmas. The car broke down .You know what it's like: it never rains but it pours.

I've just recently had my 15<sup>th</sup> AA Birthday and I'm living on my own which is ok. I'm writing again and going to art class. I don't like change sometimes.

It's possible to live sober and have good times and bad times and just stay sober. I'm still pursuing my dreams and enjoying my life. I'm looking forward to a holiday. It's all only possible with AA and the people who have helped me, and by me putting time in to help others.

Geoff.

## **9. People who enriched my life- Anon 1**

I first contacted AA in 1968. 18 months later I put down the drink. It was then I stated to meet some wonderful characters that helped me stay sober.

Ilford was my home group with great gents such as 'Shetland John', Charles, 'Bob the Chemist', Eric the Jeweller', 'Smiler Bill' and Stuart whom all became my friends up until the day they died-people who enriched my life.

My second meeting was Toynbee Hall with the most colourful of characters; there was 'Mick the Tick' who sold watches, 'Mick the Van' who collected drunks to save their souls, 'Paddy C' who made good in the world since finding AA and who helped to rehouse many a poor unfortunate who was trying to work the programme. Paddy was never one to tell anyone about his help. Then there was Joe E, who, sold ladies knickers. 'Plaistow Bill' sold cassette tapes and the two Peter's- young one and old one- both still going strong in the fellowship. Then there was Rolly, a lovely gent whose brother's business in Covent Garden was the first AA phone number in this country. 'Plaistow Bill' and 'Young Peter' are still on my list today as two of my very best friends.

Chingford Thursday was another of my early meetings. There I was to meet a lady called Emily who ran an Off Licence. Her story was that her husband and son used to plan what to do with her when she died. They decided they would have her stuffed with a Guinness in her hand. She was guaranteed to make a meeting very light hearted.

A few short years after, I was to meet a lady named Vi and a chap named Mac who married in AA -both now sadly passed away.

Anon 1

## **10. If drink costs you more than money -South African Bill**

I was a steward in the Merchant Navy and we docked in Wellington- it was in 1950 and I was 20 years old. I was drinking ashore one day and that evening we sailed around the coast to Auckland. I think I had depression before I drank. That night at sea I attempted suicide by throwing myself over the railings on one of the upper decks and the reason I am still here is I kept hold of the rail and managed to get back on the ship. If I had not been drinking I doubt if I would have made the attempt. An old timer here in London coined the phrase "If drink costs you more than money it could be a problem" so really it almost cost me my life then. I did see a psychiatrist when I got back to London, told him all I thought was wrong with me and he told me there was nothing wrong with me, to socialise by going dancing, find myself a girlfriend, get married and don't drink. I did not get married but carried on drinking and I lived and worked in London staying with sisters and brothers, mostly drinking beer at weekends.

In 1961 I made a 'geographical' to South Africa and in no time I was drinking daily and got on to brandy. After a couple of years I knew I drank too much as I was finding it difficult to hold down a job. I tried stopping myself but could not manage. I did meet a man in the somewhat boozy hotel I was staying in and he told me he had not had a drink for ten months and was going to Alcoholics Anonymous. In fact we were in the residents tea lounge and the reason I was there was that I was trying not to drink and it did not dawn on me that AA could help me, so really I was not with it. By now I was suffering blackouts, wetting the bed, and one night I came out of a blackout and found myself driving around in a field. There was a Higher Power, which I now call God, looking after me as I drove under the influence of alcohol many times. It was the manager where I worked in a cardboard-box factory that tackled me about my drinking. The outcome of that was that I was put on Antibus and told if I drank on top of that I would become violently ill. I now found myself not drinking and being able to get up in the mornings and get to work. I moved into a boarding house (no bars) and I was there some three weeks when the man who told me about AA also moved in and I asked him what AA was about. He told me it was meetings and I asked him if he would take me and he took me to my first meeting, which was in Johannesburg in 1964. I remember the person in the chair saying it was "staying away from the first drink one day at a time" and I thought 'that is something I could do' as by now I had not drunk for a month as I was on Antibus. I did drink a couple of months later and it was a disaster. I finished up with no job, homeless and little money. I ended up in Durban, which was the premier resort of the country but I was on no holiday. I did get into a home for destitute men, which was open because a wealthy woman left a legacy for that purpose. I did manage to get a room in a house, do some work, get back to AA meetings and, with great help from members, had my last drink in March 1966. In my first year I did service in the group and some twelve-step work. One of them was a married man. He and his wife had three young children and she was expecting another. They were living in one room and he was not working. I got a car and this was a Godsend as there was very little public transport at night and one night I went around to pick him up for a meeting and when I was there his wife had birth pains, so I found myself driving her to the hospital and praying the baby did not come in the car. Thank God it was a false alarm and she had the baby a week later and they named him William after me. He did stop drinking and an AA friend got him a job in a rope factory and they managed to move into a small house. I mention this case as it illustrates the power of AA as in those days there was no social security and very little help elsewhere. When I achieved a year sobriety I had a 'Spiritual Awakening' in that I was an alcoholic and belonged somewhere- that is in AA and in fact AA was my family.



I came back to home here to London in 1968 and the first day I was back, I went to a meeting that night in Great Chapel Street, off Oxford Street, where I met some 40/50 women/fellow members. It was down in the basement of the building with no fire exit and almost everyone smoking. After a couple of years we had to move out of that basement, as it was a potential fire hazard. The meetings in the City, also First London, were run by largely by atheist members and I recall American visitors would share on the Steps, spiritual aspect of the programme and they would be verbally attacked and they were somewhat shocked. An American woman Mary who lived in London went to the City meeting one day and shared like the visitors and she was taken aside at the end of the meeting and was told if she wanted to share on the Spiritual aspect of the programme to open a meeting elsewhere. The only literature at those meetings was the "Where to Finds". Mary and another, Mary B, opened up meetings called the Akron groups and in 1974 the first Step meeting opened up in the Methodist Church, Hinde Street, West End. Mary B. was 5ft. 2ins. She had been to America and knew something about the Steps, Sponsorship and the Programme. She actually sponsored men. One I remember- Monty, 6ft 2ins, an ex-RAF sergeant and there were others. They in turn, sponsored newcomers. From 60 meetings in 1968 there are now 600 meetings in London. There was a man called Mick the Tick and he is still mentioned at meetings (he died in 1983) and some asked recently why he was called that. I was actually at a meeting way back with him and after the meeting he took off his coat and there he had all watches strapped around his arms ticking away nicely and ready for any buyers. There was Christie R. who thought a P45 was a colt revolver. Mind you, there were a few around that had not had a regular job for years- among them a good friend of mine Paddy O'C and he went on to build up a business as a market trader employing a couple of people. In 1968 there was a one-day event, Saturday at the Grosvenor House hotel in Park Lane and I recall in the afternoon having tea and it was served up on a silver tray silver teapot etc. and it cost then half a crown which was two and six pence. In the evening there was a dinner and dance in the ballroom and tickets were one pound. At the top table were Sackville from Dublin and Richard P and others I cannot recall. Mind you, I think some member had some connection there, as it is a very posh place and a far cry from some of our meeting rooms then. The General Service Office was at 11 Redcliffe Gardens, Chelsea and also the London telephone office was there. I did some telephone duty on my own, mostly at weekends and there were empty slots some times and the service was put on answer phone. I found my self at times spending the whole Saturday or Sunday there. There were meetings Tuesday and Friday nights and once when I was at the meeting, I popped my head into the telephone

room afterwards to say "Hi" to the people on duty and they said they had a Twelve Step for me. Lo and behold! it was for a Marie who lived nearby and I took another member, Butcher Bill, with me to visit her. (There were few women to Twelve Step way back then). He went the next day with his wife and took the Twelve Step over as I was living in North London and working there. Marie got sober and she got very involved with the telephone service, became the manageress and got it streamlined as it is to day. In 1968 I was living in Hornsey and I would go to the Tottenham meeting on Monday night started by Jewish Joe who had a business nearby and he lived in Ilford. On Tuesday night it was to Friern Barnet Hospital and a woman doctor would take what patients she thought would benefit from AA to the meeting and sit by the door to ensure none of them absconded. I did hear some of the group were at odds over with the doctor and rather than offend her, moved the meeting to Tetherdown Hall Muswell Hill. I recall Cathy, her husband Robert and Dorrie there. The Wednesday meeting was in the primary school in Wood Green and we sat on small children's chairs and there was a man Bill and Elaine I remember. A meeting started up in Chingford and I met Stan and later, Baker Bob there. A meeting started in Arnos Grove on Thursday, which I recall was a Step meeting, and a man, Ivor, who was a very dedicated member and a great person doing twelve step works. There were not too many women to twelve step women then and they also often did not have transport. He had a passion for big American cars, Cadillac's etc. and it was not uncommon to see him drive into the Arnos Grove meeting full of women and men he had collected, so I would imagine their first impression of AA was of grandeur. I have relatives in Potters Bar and sometimes I was out there visiting on Saturdays. If I wanted a meeting that night, I would have to go right into central London, the crypt St. Martin in the Field Church, Trafalgar Square. A man from Potters Bar did start a meeting in St. Albans at the weeknight and that was in the 70's. I went to Enfield Friday night and Michael H, I believe, was involved there. I did go to meetings in central London and there was only one Intergroup then and, I believe, some fiery discussions so I never ventured to it. South London decided to have their own Intergroup, which they did. I went to the meeting in the Lambeth Mission when North London formed their Intergroup and it was a nice orderly affair. I wish I could remember the members present then but, alas, my memory is not so good. By the end of the meeting, all positions were filled. If my memory serves me right, a man Raja was elected chairman. In the early 70's there was a weekend convention in the Bloomsbury Hotel central London and I dropped by for a couple hours as I was working that night. The committee were expecting a large crowd on the Sunday and hired Sadler Wells and there was an entrance charge of five shillings and that caused a lot furore and controversy at the time.

In 1971 I was in emotional turmoil and I sought out this older member, Robert, who was an actor and I confided in him all that was bothering me. He did a lot of telephone duty during the day and was a sound member. He told me to write to the consultant psychiatrist of the alcoholic unit, Pinel House Warlingham Park, Surrey.

The outcome of that I was invited into the unit and I knew they wrote out a life story and read it out in the group. Although I was not drinking, I decided to go in and I viewed it as I could do a fourth and fifth step and the group was my sponsor. There was a chaplain and a senior nurse, Mr Thomas, also there and I did Steps 2/3 while I was there. A coach was laid on three times a week to take the patients to AA meetings- which one had to go to. Also there was an AA meeting in the unit Sunday 6p.m. One could go back home at the weekends but you had to be back for that meeting. When I left, I lived in Purley for a year and moved back to North London in 1973.

But in 1977 to 1983, I eased up on meetings. I did nearly drink and the reason was I stopped being concerned about another alcoholic and not doing service. I then started getting back in proper to AA and doing the steps again and also my first service was doing the teas at First London. I saw the people I had been friends with before and they were well and enjoying life. I met my friend Paddy O'C and he got me going down to the Bristol Reunion and then after, continued to go to Big Book study groups, Step meetings and did another 4/5 step and also going to retreats. Paddy had been to the 1980 World Convention in New Orleans and talked a lot about it. Through him talking, it dawned on me I could go to one of them and I went to the 1985 World Convention in Montreal and Paddy came as well. It was a wonderful experience in that Lois, 90 years of age (Bill, our co-founder's wife) spoke for thirty minutes at the opening meeting in the Olympic attended by 55,000 alcoholics. Also Al-anon held the first world convention and some 12,000 attended that. Lois founded Al-anon. In 1990 I went with a Glasgow fellow member, Bill, to Vancouver. He was visiting his sister, brother-in-law and niece (who is in AA). Her partner was also in AA and his nephew. We went down to Seattle where the world convention was being held and there was a meeting on the Saturday afternoon. The theme was 'Pioneering in AA'. Doctor Bob's daughter, Ann, and son, John, spoke at the meeting and recalled when as teenagers, Bill (our co founder), stayed in their home for months. I spoke with them after the meeting- a very powerful, emotional and happy occasion. In the 80's and 90's I did Twelve Step work and got one for the posh area in Hampstead. It was a very large house and I thought I got a millionaire at last. It turned out it had been a residential home for

the elderly and because it had no lift, it closed down and now was rehusing the homeless. A dishevelled man with a long beard answered the door and he came to the meetings for a couple of months and left the home to go down south.

AA has become much larger over the years but the message is the same and where I live in Inner London, I see newcomers come in and get sober. It is great to see even in the first year they get involved in all levels of service and some of these are women with young children and some groups would not have carried on without them. One meeting I was at in the 1980's was held in the crypt of a church up from Kings Cross and a man who been drinking was asked to stay quiet or leave and he left. After the meeting when we went to leave, the big wooden oak door was locked. Somebody had left the big open padlock on the door and when the man left he just locked it shut behind him. There were no mobiles then and there was a graveyard and park outside and we did not even have a loo inside. It took two strong young men a half hour to batter it open with their shoulders. A lot of people I have mentioned have passed on and I miss them very much. There was another friend Paddy, who was a Cork man, who died a few years ago. He was here in London going to meetings in the latter 1960's and he married and went back to Ireland where he and his wife brought up a family. He was very successful in business and remained a very humble man. The people he knew back all those years were always welcomed to visit him and stay with him and his family. He attended some 40 Southern England conventions and once he told me, when I appeared in AA in London, that I was viewed with suspicion as I appeared out of nowhere and was two years sober and they did not know what to make of that. Another good friend John is retired and gone back to Ireland to live and he was involved with the Friern Barnet Hospital meeting a long time and used to go to the conventions in Camber Sands Kent, Bournemouth, Eastbourne and a whole gang of us from North London went.

I learned how to play golf in the early 80's When I retired in 1994, this was useful as I would play golf one day and go swimming another day, doing service at a couple of meetings and on the twelve step list and the Promises had come true for me and it was great for some years. Unfortunately some nine years ago I got influenza and was left with secondary depression and I was thankful I was right in AA and had service commitments, as I have been given the strength to live with it. Three years ago, I stopped playing golf but I had eighteen years of playing, met many interesting people and some good fun. Mind you, at times, I could hardly hit the ball. On the good days I would hit the ball straight down the fairway and then look up to the skies and thank my Higher Power for that and being out in the open with nature. The saying goes is that when one door closes another one opens and near where I live they

opened up a computer centre. They had an open week and I went to see what was what and I was sat in front of a computer, given headphones and the voice of Carol Voderman took me through various stages. One exercise I could not manage and I had the bright idea to skip that one and when I did, the voice of Carol came back with "you are a plonker" so I have a resentment with the said lady. I did get a CLAIT word certificate and got to learn e-mails and I can come to the centre during the week and spend time doing various tasks. I still go to 4/5 meetings a week and have service positions in two meetings. I did do the literature at the Hinde St Monday lunchtime and through that, met Peter from Copenhagen. In the last six years when he comes to London, we meet up go to meetings and also we have been to conventions in Blackpool, Birmingham, and looking forward to Brighton in January. So really AA is a great fellowship and Sobriety is a great gift. I have been indeed fortunate to have met all these people on this journey and continue to meet the present members and the new members coming in. For some time I toyed around the idea I would write something. Now I have learnt to use the computer but alas I am a great procrastinator and I am very grateful to the North London Archives Committee for the invitation to be part of the project and giving me the impetus to do this article.

I THANK YOU.

South African Bill

## **11. REFLECTIONS - Cyril**

My first experience of AA was a few days short of my 30th Birthday, when I found myself at the North Middlesex Tuesday night meeting with Chingford Dennis, who twelve stepped me. Cyril was the strongest influence on my recovery till he died in sobriety after many years of unstinting and selfless service to the Fellowship, and to many, many members like myself.

The North Middlesex has been my home group ever since, and I have brought all my problems, big and small, good and bad, funny and tragic to my friends in the group, and always felt better for doing so. Not immediately, it must be said, but reflection has shown the value of sharing everything, if I am to stay well.

At that first meeting I was totally preoccupied with the problems that had forced me to contact AA at the time. Yet I still remember very clearly the unconditional love that was tangible in the Room- the sense of hope I recognized for the first time and the amazing honesty I heard from everyone.

I felt I had all the best reasons not to be in AA -I was too young, too bright, and my job involved counselling clients with drink and drugs problems, so I thought I knew the theory, thanks very much.

I was to learn you have to walk the walk not talk the talk, and you have to feel-right to the core of your heart- what it means to accept being an alcoholic, one day at a time, for life.

So, early sobriety meant putting on hold my ego, my habit of wanting to take control of every organization I've ever been involved with -taking things on trust, and doing what was suggested.

From being an organizer and someone who spent my life advising people what to do, I learnt that I had to "listen to learn and learn to listen" -and it was a lot harder than it sounds!

Over time, I learnt the full power of living life one day at a time, although in the early days it was more of a case of one hour at a time, and one problem at a time,

But that's the great joy of AA. If you practice doing the right things, then, amazingly, the right things happen. Despite myself, I realised that if you stop adding to the pile of problems we come in with, then, one day at a time, they resolve themselves.

Like so much of AA philosophy, these simple universal truths about the human condition revealed themselves, and taught me more about life than years of academic study!

So, I went to meetings every day as Dennis suggested, and a new world opened up. I was particularly fond of a couple of other meetings.

One was Monday night at Claybury Psychiatric Hospital (since closed down to make way for luxury flats. It still distresses me to pass the place ten years on!). I did ward visits there for many years, and people would often swap between being inpatients or members of the group, or both. I found it a revelation to see the illness at such close quarters and of course realise, none of us is immune to what may happen if we fail to arrest this illness, one day at a time.

The other meeting that had a big effect on me was Sunday Morning Upshire Discussion group. We used to drive through Epping Forest to reach this meeting, and it was as though I was properly observing nature, and the beauty of the natural world, for the first time. This was like a spiritual experience for me, and indeed, sowed the seeds of a life-time interest I have now developed in gardening and being privileged to be able to visit many exotic locations round the world to see rare plants etc. It seems lots of AA' s get in to gardening in sobriety, and I thoroughly recommend it! It taught me about everything having its own season, and the rhythm of Nature. If you plant a seed, you need to wait to see it develop in its own time. You won't see a tree develop, or a flower

bloom often till a long time later. The best expression I know of in AA to describe this is;

'The only thing that's instant in AA is the coffee! '

The other great thing about Upshire Discussion was that it was the first meeting I attended where we went round the room, so you were encouraged to speak even, or especially, when you didn't want to. Although this was often uncomfortable at the time, these were usually the times when I was most honest, as, despite ourselves, the experience of sharing in an AA meeting makes us speak the truth about how we feel, and this, of course, was to be an essential part of recovery.

I also recall some of the amazing characters you find in AA -people who would not normally mix -but AA is the most egalitarian group I have ever encountered in this respect. We're all the same, here for the same reason, sharing each other's experience, and learning about life and ourselves.

One person who stands out for me was Tower Bridge Len.

Len was a street drinker from the Embankment, who was incredibly supportive to me through my early years, and hopefully we were able to offer different things to each other through recovery.

Our lives could not have been more different, yet the common bond of alcoholism brought us together, and made us good and loyal fiends. I can think of no other setting in which that could have happened with such mutual respect and concern for each other.

For over 20 years now, I have been a strong and happy member of AA, and a strong and happy atheist. Its important for me to mention this, because, as an atheist, I struggled a lot with AA in my early sobriety, and, naturally, it gave me an excuse not to stay.

It is important to state that AA is a spiritual programme, not a religious one, but I cannot ignore the fact that the language we use is often perceived as Christian, because it is, and it takes a lot of trust on behalf of the newcomer, as it did in my case, to stay around long enough to appreciate this distinction.

So, over the years, I have come to believe there is a power greater than me in the universe, but, as an atheist, I choose not to refer to it in the first person as God, as the majority of members do. I believe AA affords my view the same degree of respect and tolerance as I afford those with a more mainstream understanding, and I think this is one of the virtues that give AA such universal appeal.

However, working in the professional counselling world as I do, I regret there is still a lot of misunderstanding amongst professionals and the outside non-AA world on this point, and explains why many organizations do not refer alcoholics to AA as they should.

It is my wish, in the years ahead, that the fellowship comes to acknowledge this point (as up till now I've felt it somewhat disloyal to speak in these terms), Language is of critical importance, and times and circumstances move on. I believe that the language used 60 years ago when compiling the Big Book of course suited that time and place, but does not comprehensively do so today.

Attending meetings in London as I do, it still distresses me that AA is not yet attracting alcoholics in sufficient numbers from other communities, cultures and faiths, as I know they are as much in desperate need of AA as we are.

I put this marker down for the future, as I passionately believe in our Steps and Traditions- none more so than:

*'Our primary purpose is to stay sober, and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety'*

Yours in Fellowship

Cyril

North Middlesex Hospital Group

November 2006

## **12. I'd got to do something about it- Pauline**

It was the 9<sup>th</sup> October 1986 that I first came to Alcoholics Anonymous. That was after having a last (what I would call emotional) drink the night before. I had been called by one of my residents to sort out a security mishap- myself being the resident warden of the sheltered accommodation. I can always remember thinking to myself that "if I go down now they'll find out I'm drinking", and of course I had been drinking. I'd been drinking for the last 16 years. However, I did go and do the security check and of course, what happened was that I must have gone into a blackout because the next thing I realised, it was 8 o'clock the next morning which was Friday. I saw all my underclothes folded neatly and realised that either they did find out that I'd been drinking or they didn't.

Whichever the way was, I had been drinking, gone into a blackout and here I was on Friday morning the 9<sup>th</sup> October 1996 knowing that I'd got to do something about it. It was my first real spiritual awakening. I've had spiritual awakenings before- before I came into AA. Such as the time when I knew that my 28 year marriage was over and that I needed to do something about getting rid of this man- parting from this man who didn't care two hoots about how much I drank as long as I didn't interfere with his life and womanising. Also I



had three daughters- two at that particular time, who were just 13 and 15 when I chucked their father out and that was in 1980. This spiritual awakening was a deep, deep spiritual awakening from God telling me that I needed to do something about my drinking and saying “Do you want to lose this job?” and “Do you want to lose this home?”- because that was exactly what had happened in 1980.

Oh yes, I chucked the man out, but for 16 months I drank on that- a real 16-month bender which in effect was the result of me losing my job and slowly, slowly getting into debt. The bank did write a letter to me after those 16 months to inform me that I was overdrawn and asking had I sold my home? etc., etc. which of course I hadn't, because of course I had been so busy drinking to shut out the fact that I was now on my own with two young teenage girls. And what I did do after that 16 months? When I came to my senses and realised in that moment of sanity that I had to do something about it- so I went and gave a party.

It was my 50<sup>th</sup> birthday and I decided to give a party to the divorced and separated club that I joined around about that time. One young woman said “what a lovely party and what a beautiful place you've got and you do this so well” and I found myself saying “Yes but I'm in so much debt, I don't know which way to turn” and she (this young woman) being very down to earth and practical (as we woman can be when we're sober) she said “well, don't you think you should get your house in order financially before you give any more parties” and that again was another little reminder that God was watching over me, another mini spiritual awakening saying “hang on a minute you're going in the wrong direction”.

I was born into a working class family and had good parents and a happy child life. My mother was a very Victorian, strict woman but she had values, principles, morals and personal integrity. There was no way that I needed to be an alcoholic, although both of my grandfathers were heavy drinkers and my father was also a heavy drinker. I often used to hear my mother say, “Tom, do you have to keep on drinking?” but by the same token I don't think that had anything to do with me being an alcoholic. I did not pick up my first drink until I was at least 39 years of age. I had drinks offered to me and I have had a brandy and orange in front of me over the years but nothing that I wanted to drink- I was just being sociable. I got married at 21 because I was pregnant – I didn't drink on that. I got married, had the baby and had a little hairdressing shop. That went down the drain to a certain extent because I had another baby which was stillborn and that was my first taste of tranquillizers but I didn't drink on that. The third time I was pregnant (and this was when I was just 31 years of age), I thought “well this time, I've got to come out of business” and I had to go ahead with selling my part of the business and buying some

sort of a house. Well that's neither here nor there because none of this was during the time that I was drinking, so by the time I had my fourth daughter, I had more or less got my life sorted out.

I had a brand new semi-detached house in Essex and got rid of the expensive car and we drove an old car. We were paying our way. In those days salaries were like £2,000 a year and houses were £3,300 and new cars were £600 but it still didn't make a lot of difference- one still had to budget because the wages were so much different to what they are today. In 1965 we emigrated to Canada – my marriage was in a very sorry state- it was not a good marriage. My husband worked for his father- he was the boss's son. I was from a working-class family, trying to match everything and be accepted in this middle-class family and to win their approval. I tried to do it for 28 years and all they did on me in the end was die on me, broke and both alcoholics- so there you go.

So what I'm saying is in 1965 we emigrated to Canada – I didn't want to go but I felt that I had to go. My husband didn't want to get a job after his father died. The factory was sold – the factory had gone broke. I wouldn't go on the DHSS, which was very silly because, had I done that, we probably wouldn't have had to emigrate. I had a 5-month old baby, a 2-year-old little girl and a 12-year-old girl and that's exactly how I landed in Canada with these three daughters- and not wanting to be there.

All I did for the next 8 years was wish I was back home in Britain, in London. Although I'm a Brummie, I wanted to go back to live in London. By the time I'd been in Canada for 2 or 3 years I was on Valium: by the time I'd been there 4 years I was a chronic alcoholic. I don't know how that happened. I picked up a drink and it seemed to work for me and allowed me to sleep 8 or 9 hours. I had no knowledge about alcoholics apart from the fact that my in-laws were both alcoholics but I didn't associate with them. I was an alcoholic and because of my closeness to my father and the fact that he was dying of cancer, in 1973 I came back and watched him die. I went back to Canada and there again was God saying to me "if you want to get out of here, if you want to change all this- you've got to do it now". Within 6 weeks we had all our furniture on a container and left our house to be sold by a solicitor. I can honestly say that that big house- which was one of 28 round a man-made lake and three cars in the driveway- did not do a thing for me. Belonging to the golf club did nothing for me. I would spend most of my Sunday afternoons with a bottle of scotch or a bottle of brandy down at the local Laundromat (even though I had a laundry in the basement of my house), so that I could speak to the Englishwoman who ran it and I could drown myself in my brandy- we had to drink the best.

In 1973 I came back and in 1980 I chucked the bastard out and all I can say is that the best thing I ever did was join AA. The first thing that happened was I went to the Enfield meeting. Cathy B 12th Stepped me, and she also gave me most of her cigarettes and in that first 2 or 3 months she tried to help me. Over the first 6 or 7 months, three different people tried to 12 th Step me and tried to stand as a sponsor, including Sheila who lived out in Essex and Susan who lived in Chingford- but it didn't work. I had too much to say for myself and I was too quick to tell them how to 12th Step me. They all got fed up with me and of course today, after 20 years in the fellowship (on October 9<sup>th</sup> 2006), I realise that they had to protect themselves. Their quality of sobriety came first; their sobriety came first because that's how I feel today. My sobriety comes first. Nothing and nobody comes before it, because without my sobriety, I have nothing. Arthur from North London gave me the 24-hour book and I have read that on a daily basis for last 10 years. Initially I would read it occasionally, as I would occasionally think that I should do something about the Steps but I didn't. It took me 6 or 7 years in the fellowship to realise just where I was- that this arrogant, argumentative and rude person that I was, was getting nowhere. I was really more concerned with what I was wearing, how my hair looked, whether people were looking at me, what they thought of me, rather than listening to the chair and doing whatever I should be doing or what was suggested. So I suffered.

There's nothing worse than the pain of an alcoholic who's joined AA and has stopped drinking but has not got on the programme. I mean "programme, what programme, what steps?" My arrogance was such that on one occasion I went along to Claybury on a Monday night and I had lost my way because I didn't bother to study how to get there. I just thought I knew the way there. It should have been 17 miles but I had done 44 miles before I had actually reached there, the way I had gone around losing my way. I was late, too scared to go into the meeting and I had to stop by the door and be my old nasty self and compose myself and say 'I'm sorry you had to start the meeting without me'. Of course everybody roared with laughter and I thought, what's the matter with that lot? They should be so lucky that I'm gracing their rooms with my presence! This was my attitude. As I went on, I got involved in the first three years trying to do the right thing for the right reasons and I did service as Secretary 5 or 6 times- all to show you lot how clever I was. I arranged six or seven AA dances over a period of years- just to let you lot know how well I can organise anything. A couple of Christmas Breakfast's at Upshire -and all of this was just to show you lot what a clever little girl I was. And that's what I was- a silly little girl.

Having said all this, I did acquire a sponsor -Big Vick, and he was very good. The first thing he said to me, because he knew that I was going to ask

him to be my sponsor, having spoken to Janice- he just said to me as I approached him; “Ring me every day for a month and don’t give me any shit”. Well I tell you. Talk about “what you see is what you get”, which is how I am. What you see is what you get- straight down the middle. If you can’t be honest with yourself, you can’t be honest with anyone else. Until Vick died, he was my sponsor and he told it as it was. It took me a long, long time to get rid of that arrogance and to think of changing my ways and to think of doing things for the right reasons. I was so full of myself and so afraid that you lot would find that I was afraid, and I didn’t want you to know that I was afraid. I used to go abroad every time I had a few pounds to spare, due to the fact that I felt I was entitled to it. I forgot that I had to take myself abroad, and every time I went abroad and I came back, I used to think “well what was that all about?”

As much as I have been well-travelled both in and out of booze, I realise that I have to feel comfortable with where I am and who I am and with myself and to like myself. Today I do. Today I am happy with myself. I do like myself and I’m quite happy with myself. I have to struggle at times because the ‘old me’ will occasionally come up. I have things in my life that I’m not coping with very well – my health has deteriorated, I’ve had lots of tests and at my age, (I’m just coming up to 75), I find myself struggling not exactly with acceptance of the age but with acceptance of the fact that I can’t prance all over the place like I used to, because the body’s not that willing. The mind is, but the body isn’t.

I did have an obsession in my third year with an old-timer who should never have got involved with me and I should never have got involved with him but we both learnt. He dumped me after six weeks and I stalked him for about 8 months. Then I got a bit of an obsession with a newcomer and that went on and off, on and off for nearly 12 years. On my 12<sup>th</sup> AA birthday I did a chair in Enfield because I’d been to Jim’s wedding and he asked me to 12<sup>th</sup> Step a young woman and by the time I’d finished 12th Stepping, the wedding was over and the meal was over. That was again God saying to me “don’t you think you should do something about the quality of your sobriety? You are in so much pain, you are so unhappy. It’s your 12<sup>th</sup> birthday in AA, you haven’t drunk for 12 years but you’re not really happy”. That night I went back to Enfield and Larry was the secretary and I asked him could I do the chair. I bared my soul to the whole group and told them exactly how I felt and where I was and where I was coming from and the fact that I’d got to do something about it and that I needed some help. It was one big uphill struggle. I had to get myself a ‘one to one’ if not a sponsor, which Cathy has been. Cathy’s been my ‘one to one’ for the last ten years and we discuss things and we exchange opinions.

I have to say that although it wasn’t a happy event when Drew picked up a drink after 12 years and phoned me and asked me to help him. The fact

that I did was because I wanted to, because we'd had this 'on and off' relationship during that 12 years and I used to pray to God that we'd be together and we could do some 12<sup>th</sup> Step work together. Well you have to be careful what you pray for because for two and a half years, I nursed him. For two and a half years he couldn't put the booze down and when Drew asked me to marry him, on Valentine's Day in 2004, I didn't have to give it too much thought. At first I thought "why do I need to be married, I've been on my own for 22 years?" Then I thought, "well I'm not going anywhere, I've lived on my own for 22 years, Why not?" I knew that it was a situation where he really wasn't sober and I was emotionally involved but I did pray about it. We got married; my grandchildren were part of the wedding. My granddaughters were the flower girls and my grandsons were involved. One gave me away, one was best man (at the age of 14) and the other two grandsons were the ushers. It was a very happy occasion. We were married at the beautiful West Lodge Hotel set in 132 acres. 38 recovering alcoholics came to the celebration and it was a wonderful day from 9am till 12 midnight.

I have an on-going saga at the moment with the people in the first floor flat above me. I have the ground floor flat that I bought 18 years ago. . They bought the lease from a builder who is in the fellowship and he got rid of the freehold for £1. They didn't even bother to go into the ins and outs and dug up the front garden when I was on holiday. It ended with me going to a solicitor and now we've been to court and we go back to the appeal court. That is causing me a lot of upset in my heart. Every single day I have to get up and read my 24-hour book and I have to pray like mad that God helps me through the day. I do not want to pick up a drink and the self -discipline and God's hand in all this, is helping me live in the moment and live in the day. Every time I see this couple upstairs, I just feel like I could smash their faces in which is not good thinking for a recovering alcoholic.

Here we are today. Jerry has asked me to tell my story - he's a dear friend from the Chase Farm Hospital meeting. I've got many, many friends in AA -good sincere friends. I don't have too many friends outside of AA. I have managed to let go of my two daughters who, for some unknown reason, could never forgive me for my drinking. For the last two years I haven't really had much to do with them but I am in touch with my eldest daughter who's now 53. I see my six grandchildren from time to time. Drew and I are getting on very well considering that we have to keep it in the day, keep it in the moment. We both have to learn something on a daily basis- it's a learning process. My gratitude is such that, by the grace of God and the power of this fellowship and the people in it, I haven't picked up a drink today. If I keep it in the day, this is how it should be.

Pauline

### 13. Sobriety at last- Alan W

My introduction to AA was on the phone. I was at work or should I say, trying to work. I was on my 2nd half-bottle of scotch and my brain just couldn't concentrate. I didn't know what to do. I was alone in the house where I was working and I needed help and advice. I don't know where the idea came from, but something told me to ring AA. I got the number from a phone book. A lady answered and asked how she could help. I poured out my story to her and she asked if I had any drink left and I told her "Yes". She advised me to pour it down the sink but I told her that I needed it. Her advice to me was that I should lock up and leave the place I was in and go home. She told me about a meeting that night at Wood Green in a school and asked if I would like to attend it? She said she could arrange for someone to take me, but I said that I could find my own way. For the first time in my life, I did as was suggested.

I got to the meeting, not knowing what to expect and very shaky. I was met by Fisherman Charlie who soon put me at my ease and said, "Is it your first meeting?" "Yes", I replied. He gave me a cup of tea and said to take a seat and listen to what people have to say. After the meeting I got talking to some of the boys and I found one lived not far from me so I gave him a lift home in my van. He invited me in for tea and I went in and he explained basically what AA was all about and he asked if I would like to go to another meeting the following night. I said I would and that was the start of a three-month introduction to the fellowship. We went to meetings together and it was the start of a good friendship.

That was way back in 1986. It's funny that in the meetings then you would hear people talk about old timers. I never thought I would become one and be proud to be called one. In those days there seemed to be more characters about. I remember one bloke who lived in a car. Another man lived in a garage- Peter was his name. He complained to the G.P.O. that he wasn't having his mail delivered and they told him to install a letterbox! Everybody knew the 'man in black' (no, not Johnny Cash), his name was Austen and he's not forgotten in Wood Green. The secretary 'Plumber Sam' was also very instrumental in my recovery and a good friend. 'Old Arthur' was also a well-known face around the Edmonton area and many, many more. I think people are younger when they come into AA these days, or maybe I'm just getting older? Also I think they stay around longer, giving AA more of a chance to work. Myself, I went back out to try drinking again- much to my regret. There followed visits to detox centres and counselling. I look upon this now as part of my growing up process.

I have done some service in AA. I made the tea at Enfield with the help of my friend Charlie and I was also teamaker at Chase Farm. I was also secretary at Chase Farm too for quite a time. I must say that tea making at Enfield was very enjoyable because of all the people I would meet and chat to. The Friday night meeting at Enfield was a big meeting in those days. There were some good solid AA members there plus some honest sharing and plenty of laughter. Laughter is very important (we should never lose our sense of humour). Some of the things members shared would be unbelievable to an outsider but we know they really happened.

My own drinking had spanned 30 years, and on reflection it had been out of control for quite a few years. I was sinking further and further into the mire. My wife and four children didn't know what to do to stop me and I didn't either. I tried cutting down and stopping but to no avail. My wages went on drink; I was doing two jobs but it was never enough. I was getting more and more in debt but more importantly my health was suffering. By this time I needed a drink in the morning. I was topping up during the day at work and after work it was the pub. Then I needed to make sure I had a drink for when I woke up during the night and some for the morning – it was a nightmare! I didn't want to wake up in the morning to have the nightmare start all over again. I just lived for the next drink and oblivion. It was no life for my family or me. I'm one of the lucky ones as my family stuck by me (so many lose everything) and for this I have to thank the AA fellowship.

Where would I be today if I hadn't picked up that phone and rung AA? There are many people who are not around today. Some returned to the bottle and a lot died sober thanks to the fellowship. It is my hope that I too die sober - but hopefully not for about 30 years or more! When I hear a newcomer say they are about 3 months sober I think back to how proud I was when I achieved three months sobriety. I was proud to think I had managed to be without a drink for such a long time. The months have now turned into years but I still believe to wake up and not think of a drink is a miracle – today the 'Tennent's Super' is replaced by a coffee!

In the morning I like to have a chat with my Higher Power and if I have a problem he usually gets me over it. I remember one day not wanting to go home (it was in my early days of sobriety). Anyway, I did go home, and as I opened the front door a voice shouted "Granddad", it was my granddaughter. She ran across the room into my arms and I wondered why I had ever been

worried about going home. When you go home sober, little things mean so much more.

I recall another example of my Higher Power helping me in my early days. A new man had moved into the yard next to mine and we got talking. I asked him round for tea, as his yard had no electric. We chatted easily and eventually the talk got onto the subject of drink. He told me that he hadn't had a drink for 10 years, so I asked him how he had managed it. He said he went to AA. I told him that I too was in the fellowship and every day after that we had our own little meeting. He helped me so much. Whenever the head started going, I would go round and have a chat with John. We became very close friends and I believe he was sent to help me keep sober.

At the end of a meeting when they read out the promises, I think to myself that in my case, they are an understatement. Today I have two daughters and two sons, eight granddaughters and one grandson and a loving wife who has always stuck by me. This year my eldest daughter split with her partner and I was able to help her in her hour of need. When my youngest daughter had a new baby girl I got the job of picking up my grandson from school. If I was still drinking I wouldn't have been able to do any of these things. I have a house in Cyprus and the Larnaca AA group is my home group when I am out there. It's always amusing when someone comes to the meeting from England and says "I haven't seen you at so and so meeting?" It's a small world.

Words cannot express the depth of gratitude I owe to the AA fellowship. Where would we be today without it? The answer is unthinkable.

Alan W (Chase Farm)

#### **14. On a hot July day - Anon 2**

On a hot July day in 1969 I went to my doctor in North London for yet another sick certificate because I was unable to work due to my drinking. My sobriety dates from this time as I made contact with AA in the next few days. At thirty-one years old my drinking had spread over the previous twelve years and had been a problem from the start. I had always found other members of the human race difficult and had only one serious ambition as a



boy and that was to be a lighthouse keeper. The attraction was the possibility of being on my own and reading books all day.

The advent of drinking fulfilled my need for a lighthouse as one could isolate in the middle of a city and the drink helped to keep other people at bay. During a drinking session in Dublin somebody informed us that he had been to an AA meeting and somebody had shared about drinking three and a half bottles of gin every day and had now quit. The other local drunk and I looked at each other in amazement. We would like to have been in the position of affording three and a half bottles of gin and stopping would not have been a priority. Nevertheless I remembered this conversation ten years later in London when the time came for me to stop.

My drinking took place in three different countries and two continents. There was nothing heroic, romantic or sexy about it. The drink made life a little more bearable. The time came when life was as bad with the drink as without. I telephoned the old telephone office in Redcliffe gardens and spoke to Joe M. who informed that there was a meeting at Wood Green the following night. Having replied that I could not go because the Arsenal were playing he said, "You can suit your bloody self". I did make it to Wood Green and heard the most important thing anybody has said to me "stay away from one drink one day at a time and come to meetings"

The early years were difficult as the little boy, who wanted the lighthouse, emerged when no drink or drugs were being ingested. I should add that one of the first pieces of advice somebody gave me nearly killed me. He advised me to throw away all the tablets the doctor had prescribed. I did so and went into withdrawal fits and had to be hospitalised. The lesson from this is that I am not in AA to give other people advice but to share my experience, strength and hope. My first two sponsors stopped coming to AA but neither drank. When we met up we had little in common so we lost contact with each other.

Some deep-seated problems emerged in my emotional and mental life as time went by. Living in London made it possible to access different forms of therapy, for which I was grateful. I felt repressed that I could not do a fourth and fifth Step in the usual manner. I engaged in psychoanalysis, which lasted for sixteen years. At first I felt guilt that I could not do the Steps in the usual way but later realised that not drinking and having a meaningful life is what matters. I am happy with the fact that I am not a fundamentalist in or out of AA. I am also happy with the reality that I would have no meaningful life without attending AA meetings. When confronted with a situation or obsession that I cannot handle it would be easier to go into the back room and tell my pussycat about it but this does not work for me. I must come to my meeting and share it. It is not for advice but to hear myself sharing out loud in front of the group, in a safe place.

AA has changed in my time but for the better. New people come with new ideas but the basic message is the same. I am as powerless now about drink and many other areas of my life as when I came and the need for the higher power and fellowship is as strong as ever.

At nearly seventy years of age my life is better now than at any previous time but new coping mechanisms for ageing have to be learned. Going to meetings regularly and still doing service is still the way to go. The hardest lesson to learn was that I am unable to change by using some mental skill. The only answer is to attempt to hand over and let the higher power help. It is easy to say but hard to do for a control freak. Even the bad times, and there still are some, are an opportunity for learning.

I owe my life to AA and am happy with that fact.

May your God go with you.

Anon 2

## **15. AA in North London - Old Timers**

As an "old-timer" I am amazed that I actually fit in to this category, but I do in AA terms. I was told 15 years continuous sobriety qualifies me. I can in fact claim a longer period but am ever mindful it's a day at a time.

My first experience of the fellowship was in Ilford when I had admitted to having problems with drink and it was suggested I try AA. I had a pre-conceived idea of AA, which proved not to be as I had imagined. There were one or two people who were to have a lasting impression on me. In particular Shetland John, a man who had lived south of the border for many years and died peacefully in his sleep having achieved some 27 years sobriety. I must point out however that I was one who looked for the differences and after a short while thought I wasn't a real alcoholic so I dropped away. When I finally returned having gone through a number of "yets", I was to find the same people who had remained on the programme and consequently kept sober. John approached me and said "laddie, you can have the years of sobriety I never had". He didn't get to AA until he was in his 50's.

Fate brought me to Enfield and I have lived there for 18 years now and my home group is Enfield Friday Evening at St Andrews Church Hall. As with Ilford, I have met some very fine people in Enfield and a few that are also old-timers. Chingford Dennis sadly left this world a few years ago but was a good stalwart and is greatly missed. Another, whom I first met at Ilford, was Spanish Tony; he too has since passed away and also very much remembered.

One of the members who was at my first meeting in Ilford is Moyra. She lives quite a distance away now but sometimes comes and pays us a visit and it's always lovely to see her. Another, whom I remember from my early days, is Michael who, like Moyra, moved away but still keeps in touch and sometimes comes to Enfield.

Golden oldies!

Patrick K, Enfield

## **16. SOBRIETY IS A HEALTHY FOOD- Mick the Chef**

My name is Mick and I am an alcoholic. I first recognised that I had a problem with drink in 1974 when I went to my doctor about it who recommended a Dr Glatt in Paddington Day Centre. He suggested either St Bernard's Addiction Unit in Southall or to try AA.

I then contacted AA on Tuesday night by phone and spoke to Belfast Archie, who to my knowledge is still around today. He contacted Eddie who Twelfth Stepped me and I met him at my first meeting in Mayfair on a Saturday afternoon. This was the first Twelve Step Group in London and from that meeting I went to many meetings for about 15 months. Although I did not drink, I did not change – especially my attitudes. I then chose to drink and believe me, this is a progressive disease. It was so much worse. I lost my job, wife and house in a space of 3 months and landed in St Bernard's where slowly, a day at a time, I started to change and recover. I am in my 31st year.

After that I moved to Canterbury- to a halfway house where I believe I was loved back to life- I returned to Neasden, London in the summer. Fortunately for me, a near neighbour was Mick the Tick who became my sponsor and we went to many meetings and started working the Steps.

In my early days in Golders Green and NW London, I met some wonderful people such as Paddy O, Scotch Peter, Michael C, Michael H, Dirty Jimmy and Guardsman John. Some have gone to the big meeting upstairs and others like me are still around.

How my life is like today! After 18 years of sobriety, I met Bridget, a fellow member of the fellowship and we married at Brentwood Town Hall. At the reception- held at my old working place ('The Green Man'), it was 50/50 AAs and non-AAs, so we were toasted in water and champagne. It was so different to my first marriage. It was full of love and a mutual understanding and a special bond.

AA to me today is still basically the same as it was but there are some things such as standing and holding hands that I find not what I was used to, but I go

with the flow, accepting life on life's terms. Regarding literature, my examples and learning is at meetings, which I find relevant to me. Involvement in AA is a 'must'. Bridget and myself have just stepped down from being Joint Secretary and who knows where we will be involved next in service. To me it is a must in order to keep sober. One has to give back to the fellowship.

I occasionally see some of the Old Timers such as Michael H, South African Bill and my first sponsor, Eddie F. It shows this programme works if you want it to. My life has its ups and downs. Life happens. It goes on and although I will always have this illness, if I don't drink, I won't die from it.

Today I have a life beyond my wildest dreams. There is peace and contentment that I did not think possible, but it is possible for anyone and all because of a small price to pay. What more can I say but to thank God for AA, and to thank God for the life I have today.

Love in the Fellowship  
Mick the Chef -London Colney

## **17.On the Sober Road to Contentment- Bridget**

My name is Bridget and I am an alcoholic. Looking back now I can see my drinking was always a problem. I drank to change the way I felt. My first blackout was at 15 when I had been to a party, got drunk and fell down a flight of stone steps. This was the first of many blackouts throughout my drinking. There were problems and crises throughout all my drinking. I had several admissions to psychiatric hospitals-on three occasions under the Mental Health Act as being a danger to myself. Doctors told me on several occasions that I was an alcoholic. I was introduced to AA for the first time at 23 and in hospital and again when I was 24. I attended an AA meeting on each occasion. I liked the people, found them friendly and welcoming but I did not want to give up drinking.

A few years later, after several more hospital admissions and suicide attempts I contacted AA. I was, as I have heard said many times, "sick and tired of being sick and tired ". I was 34 and felt really old- as if I had lived several lifetimes. I phoned AA on a Sunday in November 1982 and Jerry came round to 12<sup>th</sup> Step me and take me to a meeting. I lived on the 16<sup>th</sup> Floor of a tower block in West London. My first meeting was in Kensington on that Sunday evening. I had had

a drink that day but by the evening, felt just jittery. I got a lot of hope from that meeting. I found that people were talking about the things that bothered me- the feelings of despair and the hopelessness of drinking. Jerry, who had taken me to the meeting was very encouraging, introducing me to other women and marking off in my 'Where To Find', meetings that I could get to in my area. I had about 5 months of going to meetings, wanting what was in the room and wanting to drink until 'the penny dropped' and I had my last drink up until today. It was 16<sup>th</sup> April 1983. I went to meetings in London. St Mary of the Angels in Notting Hill was one of my regulars as well as St Mary's Hospital in Paddington, Ladbroke Grove and Hammersmith.

I went around to as many meetings in London as I could. I went to many meetings with my husband and he got to know what AA was all about. I remember the 'old timers ' from my early days- Paddy O'C, Scotch Peter, Mick the Tick. I found there were more men 'old timers' than lady 'old timers' at the meetings I went to.

I was 3 years in AA without a drink when I first got a sponsor. She was a lady about a year longer around than me who had worked the Steps and who I knew from my early meetings in Hammersmith on a Saturday night. She took me through the Steps. By this time I was willing to work them and I felt great benefit from having a sponsor. A few years later I found a different sponsor and did further work on the Steps.

I got involved in AA very early on, making the teas at a Sunday afternoon meeting before I had completely stopped drinking. I have remained involved since, at all levels, both in the group and for a few years at NW London Intergroup- variously as chairman, secretary and member of the social committee. The later was great fun. We would meet at each other's houses to plan events. We arranged many workshops, dances etc.

I feel that AA has changed in its format over the years. When I came in and people said their name and that they were alcoholic, there was no come back- that started a few years later. Also we never stood up and held hands when we said the Serenity Prayer. There is more talk these days of treatment centres and other addictions. At most meetings, however, the AA message is still strong.

I knew many long-time members of AA who have died sober and are sadly missed.

My recovery today is that I continue to go to meetings. I am now married to 'Mick the Chef' for the last 12 years. We often go to meetings together. I remain involved in service. Mick and I have just finished as year as joint secretaries of

a Steps meeting. I have had the privilege of sponsoring many people over the years and continue to do so. I have made a good life today; hold down a responsible job where I am well thought of and am able to be there for people family and friends. By going to AA, being involved and doing what was suggested I have a contented useful life today.

Bridget – London Colney

## **18. Peace at last after a 180° turn- Larry B**

I am now back in butchering after a 15-year gap. I work with six grown men with extreme personalities and I could not be happier. I really believe this job was sent by God and for a non-believer that is a bold statement. You see, I was mini-cabbing for 15 years and I hated it. I'm not ungrateful as it paid the bills. But, 10 months ago, my car broke down yet again and this job was in the local paper- just at the right time: fate? I am still with my wife of 26 years. She is not 26- we've been married 26 years. You see, I even have a sense of humour; some would say. This is all such growth for me. We live with our two sons, who are a credit to my wife and me. They are both working and single. I was born in Kings Cross -a very rough area. I was a mixed up, skinny boy - the youngest of 3, having 2 older sisters. My dad was from Clacton-upon-Sea and found London a very hostile place. Mum was born in London. She was not very sympathetic. If anybody was ill or feeling down, she would say "get off your arse and get on with it." I was confused because my mum was hard and my dad was soft. This of course did not make me alcoholic but it did add to my make-up as an adult in my opinion. They are both deceased now and I made my amends to them before they died with the help and support of an AA member, Nurse Ann. I stood up in front of all my relatives and said how much I loved them both. I am so grateful to AA.

I did not come into AA to go on exotic holidays but becoming sober has allowed me to do many things. Travelling and enjoying holidays with family and friends is one of them. I will not go through all of them but a safari in Kenya and the pyramids in Egypt were unforgettable. I am also off on my second cruise soon, to include going through the Panama Canal and I could not forget to mention Graceland. You see I'm not even frightened to admit to being an Elvis fan. I have made many friends over the years inside and outside AA. One of my close AA friends Canadian Brian, introduced me to Ceroc which is modern jive dancing which I love and it was such an achievement for me to learn sober, as I am a very shy nervous person. But this has improved immensely. I am also

prone to depression but the gym and dancing bring me out of it. People from dancing also come on the cruise; it's so nice to be with people that want to be with you.

I of course feel at home in AA and it is only by going to meetings, getting a sponsor and working the Steps, that I have the life I have. I know if I had not found AA, I would be dead; there is no doubt in my mind about that. There were not many Step meetings when I came around, so it took me a while to get going on the Steps. In hindsight I can see I was working the Steps from day one. My sponsor, Tony, pointed that out.

STEP 1. *We admitted that we were powerless over alcohol and our lives had become unmanageable.* When I made my first call to AA, I admitted there and then that my life was unmanageable and that I was addicted to alcohol (but it did take a while to believe it in my gut).

STEP 2. *Come to believe that a power greater than ourselves can restore us to sanity.* When I started attending regular meetings and speaking to my sponsor, I had come to believe that a higher power would restore me to sanity. (I; I came; I came to; I came to believe).

STEP 3. *Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God, as we understood him.* This was more tricky, as my belief in God was not good, but I did try to look in the mirror every morning and tell myself I loved me, as I was told to do by Big Mick- one of my sponsors. He also said; if I could not love myself first, then how could I love anybody else unconditionally? It is a selfish program and we come first- we are no good to anybody drunk. This was not easy. I repeated "I TURN MY WILL AND MY LIFE OVER TO THE CARE OF GOD" (a higher power of my understanding). Often I would take it back during the day, but at least I was trying to live a more spiritual, sober life. I always have a better day when I'm not in charge. Manchester Mick explained Step 3 to me by using a coin and said by turning our life over, it was like turning the coin- turning over a new leaf. We were sick and we became well; unloving became loving; uncaring became caring; angry became peaceful etc. Me, Mick and Lyn organized a weekend AA retreat together and while I was there, we all went to the chapel at this point in the Step and turned our will over to God. It was a very moving experience.

STEP 4. I wrote out my life story (this was how *I made a searching and fearless moral inventory* of myself). I felt at peace with that, except I have a fear about my writing, as my spelling and English grammar is not that good. I had a bad

experience at the telephone office; Spanish Tony suggested I go with him early on in my sobriety and one day he was not there. Nobody wanted to be team leader but one of my good points has always been that I will have ago at anything. So I volunteered. You have to log all telephone calls to the office; this entails a lot of writing, which I found difficult. After coping with my insecurities and with God's help, it gave me so much confidence. I carried on as team leader for years. Writing this Step was such a release, to get all that crap of my chest. I had never told anybody what was going on in my mind- they would think I was mad and there was nobody there to help me, not even my parents but I trusted Tony my sponsor and AA. I also met old Tottenham Mary at telephone duty- what a character she was! She would talk all the time. It was all good advice like "keep coming back- it gets better".

STEP 5. When I read my story to Tony I was *admitting to God, to myself and to another human being, the exact nature of my wrongs*. It was a good job I did, because my opinion of my defects were; I drank too much; smoked too much; swore too much and spat too much. (Well, I still swear a bit). He had already read it, but could not understand it all, so I read it to him. There was a lot of resentment against authority; I don't like being told what to do. I blamed my parents for everything, and I was very envious of other people (which worked to it's advantage in AA because I wanted to be 10 years sober like other people) Now I am more than that a day at a time, by the grace of God. Also, I was a control freak but apart from that I was F I N E -(F..ked up, Insecure, Nauseous, and Emotional).

STEP 6. I was *entirely ready to have God remove all my defects of character*. I learnt from going through my life story, with Tony my sponsor, that fear was crippling me. FEAR ( F..k., Everything, And, Run). So I started Facing , Everything, And, Recovering, with God's help.

STEP 7. I became humble but not a doormat. By *humbly asking him to remove my shortcomings* I became aware of who I really was and that God was healing me in his own special way. I started seeing God and good in others.

STEP 8. I *made a list of all the persons I had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all*. Again, with my sponsor's help, I tackled this Step. He told me I was the most important person on my list and I must make amends to myself first, which I was doing by working the Steps and making amends to others. My wife and boys were at the top and by staying sober, I was making amends to them. My Mum, Dad and sisters were all there, friends and work colleagues, even old bosses and ex-girlfriends. The list was long.



STEP 9. I was *making direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others*. I returned money I had stolen and I tried to repair relationships and property I had broken. Sometimes my apologies were not accepted but I had tried and I could do no more than carry on doing what I was doing- working the Steps. I am a great believer of the Steps. They are there to help us and you do them in your own time. It is not a race, but when the pain becomes bad enough- that is the time to take action. DON'T DELAY. Pain is the keystone, At least try to make amends, even if it is only in our minds. It can kill us. Resentment has no place for the alcoholic.

STEP 10. I *continue to take personal inventory and when wrong promptly admit it*. Well I am 100 % better than I used to be. It's much easier to say sorry and mean it straight away, than to let it fester. At the end of the day, I lie in bed and think about what sort of day I have had and if I feel at ease with myself. Then you can safely say: "I have not offended anybody and I have not misjudged anybody else's comments or remarks". Of course, sometimes other people are in the wrong and then we have to pray for them. If we are in the wrong, then we have to make amends as soon as possible. This is where the serenity prayer (*God, grant me serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can and wisdom to know the difference*) is helpful.

STEP 11. *Sought through prayer and mediation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understand him, praying only for knowledge of his will for us to carry that out*. I love to meditate. I lie in my bath, light some candles, put on some nice classical music and repeat a mantra (affirmation), which can be the serenity prayer or even Saint Francis of Assisi's prayer, "*God make me your channel...*" or whatever you feel comfortable with. This is a very personal time- just for you and your higher power. (I was not and am still not very good at getting on my knees and no one says you have to. I would be embarrassed if my wife or boys- who are now men- found me praying). I've still a long way to go. That's me personally. All I say is my own opinion and not what AA says. I just try to follow what I read and what AA members (including my sponsor) suggest to me. Anyway, Ironing Board Fred said that his sponsor suggested to him to kick his slippers under the bed and in the morning and when he was on his knees, looking for them, to pray to God (or your Higher Power), that he would not take a drink that day (keep it simple). There is something about being on your knees that makes you feel humble. But be careful what you pray for- it might just happen.

STEP 12. I feel that I have *had a spiritual awakening as the results of working these Steps*. However it's not really for me to say. I let other's attitudes towards me tell me. If I am getting on with people (and them, with me) then I must be doing something right. I feel different inside; I can love myself and others. I try my best and I live a day at a time. (When I first came round the *Just For Today* card was my bible. I still try and do something for others and not get found out. Doing something for 12 hours that you don't want to do, is good for the soul. So *is being as happy as you make your mind up to be*. Most important, just for today I will not take the first drink. Also *Living Sober* helped to keep me sober. It has questions and answers. Like Q, "What is a sponsor?" A. "Someone you find you can confide in and trust to take you through the 12 Step programme". Q. "What is a home group?" A. "A meeting you attend regularly where all the members know you; when you look low they can help you through it."

*I try to carry this message to other alcoholics and to practice these principles in all my affairs.* I have been involved in all types of service, starting with putting out chairs and cleaning ashtrays, making tea (very good for getting used to talking to people), secretary at Friday night Enfield for 3 years in a 9 year period, shared with Cliff J and Pauline (whose wedding I attended to another AA member, Drew). I have also been secretary to other meetings, GSR for Thursday Step and Friday Hoddeson. It was there that I found out how important the AA guidelines are because the position of GSR came up and members from other groups were interested in trying to take on the position so they could vote on a delicate matter at Intergroup. Being new, I wasn't sure what to do. I phoned my sponsor and he said look at the Guidelines and it stated they had to have been a regular member of the meeting so that was that. I have done telephone duty, including team leader and helped out with conferences and AA dances. I am now on the 12<sup>th</sup> step list and have been for years as well as call out rep. But my most challenging position was that of Probation Liaison Officer. It brought me a lot of conflict over the chit system. I had to do a presentation in front of 10 Probation Officers who I considered to be a lot more intelligent than me but at the end, they thanked me for a very professional insight into AA. I mention all this, not to boast, but to show that by just following a simple program, you can go from being a useless drunk to being a useful human being. It is a simple programme for complicated people.

I started drinking at a very young age. When I do a Chair, I have often said I was about ten or eleven but in hindsight I don't really remember. I had all these thoughts going round in my head. I know I felt very uncomfortable as a child. I just did not feel relaxed with people- whether it was my own age or older. As a teenager, I was scared stiff of girls. I often say, if it were not for alcohol I would

have had a mental breakdown (which I ended up having at the age of 32 any way due to drink)- but I will go into that later. I remember hiding under the table and nicking drinks from the table and the warm glow it gave me inside and a feeling of acceptance, which I had never felt before at my tender age. I did not know at the time that was the start of my alcoholism. It was followed by many years of experimenting with all different drinks, starting with cider in youth clubs to brandy and pilsner in pubs, with every beer and spirit in between. I got into fights and arguments especially with my wife, who I love. I crashed cars, lost jobs and friends but worst of all, I was losing my spirit and mind. Even though I struggle with a God, I do believe that my higher power kept me alive through those troubled times and that he kept me alive for a reason- to be a good husband and father and to help others as he helped me.

I first phoned AA on 29 December 1989. To my knowledge no one had told me about AA and only my wife had mentioned that I was becoming an alcoholic. I did not know what an alcoholic was but I thought I knew I wasn't one, which I told her in no uncertain terms. Anyway, I had drunk for two weeks solid, which I did not normally do. I would normally stop on Sunday and Monday. I owned my own butchers shop and could do what I liked- which suited me. No one at this time would employ me, although I was good at my job. It was the drink and my attitude that got in the way. Once I took the first drink, I could not stop. I would drink until I passed out. It doesn't matter how much you drink or how often, it's what it does to you. But I would normally drink at least 12 cans of Pilsner lager and half a bottle of Brandy. My dream was always to own my own shop and this was my second shop. Anyway, I returned from work with the jitters. I could not even hold a knife without shaking. My wife cooked me macaroni cheese five minutes too late. By the time she had cooked it, I felt sick. I shouted and swore at her and blamed her. She took my sons aged 2 and 4 and left. I ended up crawling to where the drinks were. It was Christmas and there was plenty of alcohol in the house. I looked at the beer and knew that if I drank one I was not going to stop and she would leave me forever. At the time the fear of this was bigger than the fear of stopping drinking but I was like Jekyll and Hyde and the good in me knew I needed help fast. I phoned the Samaritans, who I had never phoned before. I had never asked anybody for help, not even my parents. (I should mention at this point my Dad was a manic-depressive and hypochondriac and cried a lot. I, at the time, hated him and did not want to be like him. I saw him as being very weak and not standing up for himself. He was also very unhappy, so I decided at a very young age not to be like him. The trouble was I realise now, that I was like him and needed the alcohol to combat the fear and insecurities). I accept now that I can be weak and sensitive and I can be strong and secure. They are all part of my make-up. I am not afraid to

cry and show my feelings, I used to think men don't cry, but I realize now it is a good way to release your anger.

As I was phoning the Samaritans, I suddenly had this thought of what I needed – AA. I don't know where it came from but I believe this was a spiritual premonition. I spoke to Jock. I tried to convince him I had alcoholic poisoning and if I stopped for a day or so I would be all right. Unfortunately, I have never met him. After listening to me he suggested that maybe my problem was worse than I thought. We spoke for hours. I think he was just trying to keep me away from the drink (this is one of the reasons I did telephone duty for nine years non-stop). As I was talking to him, my wife had returned without my sons. She had tried ringing but could not get me and she was worried how I was. She heard me admitting that I had a problem with alcohol and she cried with relief. I cried. I said good-bye to Jock and thanked him. He had told me it would take 24 hours for the alcohol to leave my system- so I sat in front of a clock with no clothes on watching the time running out. I should explain that I had told my wife to hide all the alcohol, as suggested by Jock- but the Hyde in me knew where she'd hide it. The Jekyll in me was frightened I would hurt her to get the alcohol, so I told her to get my brother-in-law over (he was bigger than me) to stop me from leaving. To make sure, I also took my clothes off. I wasn't insane, was I?

The 24 hours passed. In the mean time, Spanish Tony had been trying to contact me. I gave my previous phone number by mistake so he came round to my house. I was not good. All I remember him telling me was that he sold oranges (he later told me he did not sell oranges). This is why I have done 12th step work since I was a year sober and I try to do for them what Tony did for me. He became my sponsor until the day he died sober. I owe him my life and love him dearly. Anyway, he took me up the hospital because I could not stand. They said that I should be hospitalised. I had also taken 20 or more Sudafed, which were like uppers. They were for my sinus, but I was taking them like Smarties. I did not realize what they were doing to me. I had dabbled in drugs but was very aware what these could do, even legal drugs like my dad was on. He ended up having electric shock treatment. I was shocked when I was told I had become addicted to alcohol and wanted to know why. I now know why- because I'm an alcoholic.

After drying out, I thanked Tony and the doctors but said I would be okay and I needed to get back to my butchers shop, I was also a workaholic. So I had no time or need for hospital or AA (I've heard this a lot on my 12<sup>th</sup> step work). My father-in-law had bet me 500 pounds that I could not stop drinking for 3 months,

so in true alcoholic defiance I took up the challenge. But I got towards the end and I was going even more insane than I already was. I actually won the bet but I never got the 500 pounds. I remember telling big Mick, who was also was my sponsor, that I wasn't insane, so how could God restore me to sanity? In hindsight I can now see I was insane but he said such a clever answer- he said it would be insane to take another drink. I ended up having a breakdown. I was not drinking but I had nothing to replace it with. I was doing it with gritted teeth. I rang Tony. He could not take me to a meeting, but suggested I go to Arnos Grove. It was upstairs then. I was desperate so I went on my own. He told me ask for the secretary and to tell them it was my first meeting. I was sure you would all be wearing raincoats tied with bits of string. As I walked up the steps, my legs were like jelly. I smoked yet another cigarette and opened the door. There was a smoked filled room. It was packed (there wasn't so many meetings in those days -March 1990). Peter was the secretary. He moved out to Ware some years ago. Ivor spoke to me first (he died sober). I said to him "I'm not sure if I'm an alcoholic" he said "you're better off being here not sure if you're an alcoholic, than being out there- being an alcoholic". He said every time he drank, he came out in spots -London, Paris, New York. I did not laugh -I had no sense of humour, but something told me he was trying to help. He had warmth about him. I did not like the way everybody was so happy. Did they not know I had a serious problem? I asked Pat if he knew Jock and he said there were many people in AA and he wasn't sure. I think he was just trying to be nice (although in those days it was more likely to know most AAs). Ian was there and Big John and after John had spoken, he said he also was called Big Ian but when he came in AA he was on his knees and he wasn't so big. Dan was in the chair and he said "listen to similarities not the differences". He said he went from owning 5 pubs to drinking aftershave and sleeping on a park bench. I did not identify. I thought that would never happen to me but he spoke of loneliness and despair, fear and insecurities. This I knew of. I could identify and I have identified ever since. I was told that if I go to enough meetings I will hear my own story. I have but not in one person's chair, but in lots of different chairs because I now know I'm not different. I'm not a special case. I am just another alcoholic-Thank God. Dan gave me a card, which had lot of nice sayings, but the most important one was 'When you're feeling alone, pick up the phone' and there was his phone number. What a lovely man! I owe my life to so many people. All you alcoholics, I thank you.

I could stop here. I feel that I have given a good account of my early days in AA and for me to be able to pat myself on the back is such an achievement. But, there is so much more, so much more kindness, so much more love. Big Mick used to say, 'which are the most important letters in the alphabet?' Of course

the answer is L, O, V, E. AA is full of sayings like that. Fisherman Charlie said the most important book in AA is the 'Where To Find' and of course his favourite saying was "keep bringing the body and one day your brain will come." Also "AA works if you don't believe in God, if you do believe in God and even if you think you are God". I cannot remember who said it, but a good one for me is "what are two days in the week you don't have to worry about". I said Saturday and Sunday and of course it is yesterday and tomorrow. We live one day at a time.

There was Sam the Hat. He used to buy a hat every time he got drunk. I did telephone duty with him, and he would always say, "life's not too bad when you have got a cup of tea". Tesco Dave- first he was Angry Dave but talked so much about Tesco's they renamed him. He could not understand why people did not talk to him after a meeting, but it was probably because when he shared he said his fist had a habit of coming out his pocket and hitting people. He forgot to mention that's only when he was drunk. I had great times with him and Chingford Dennis (died sober) at Camber Sands. Cockney George took me to my first AA dance and I danced for the first time sober. How important they are for a bridge to normal living. Taxi Sam helped me so much with my mini-cabbing. And young Tottenham Mary is such a good person. She always said she didn't have a lot of friends, but the ones she had were so important. Last, but not least is Big Mick, who I have already mentioned. He would go round to all the conferences and show his Father Martin films. He was greatly missed when he died.

There are just not enough hours in a day and not enough days in a week and when I think back to the days when I phoned Tony and would ask him what am I going to do with all my time. I have met so many people in AA and 12<sup>th</sup> stepped many and sponsored a few. It's all good for my sobriety. I have changed so much I now know how to love myself. I don't smoke, I eat regular healthy food, I exercise, I don't wet myself anymore and I keep myself clean and tidy.

I would like to thank my wife for helping me with this and Jerry for asking me.

Larry B  
Thursday Step  
Enfield

## 19 Back to Happy Family Life- Cliff

My name is Cliff and I am an Alcoholic. My drinking started to become a problem when my career as a professional footballer finished. I was very good at playing football and got a great buzz out of the game. I did drink during my playing career but it never controlled me, football did. But when my career finished, the drink came in and it was a gradual progression into alcoholism, including drinking on my own, hiding drinks around the house so that my wife couldn't find them and driving my car in blackouts-amazingly never losing my licence or being involved in an accident. My wife, family, friends and work colleagues became very concerned about my drinking and matters came to a head at Xmas and the New Year 1984 when my behaviour became unacceptable to everyone.

By this time my wife realised there was very little she could do about my drinking and she had been told about AA and started to go to meetings. She also got in touch with a very good friend of mine who was a recovering alcoholic and he came to see me. He saw all the signs in me and said "Give AA a try", which I must admit surprised me. He said "Go with an open mind and see what you think" so I went to my first meeting in the New Year of 1985 at Enfield.

It took a great deal of courage to come through those doors but what I got from that meeting was a sense of hope - people were sharing how much they had enjoyed Xmas and the New Year in sobriety and I wanted what those people had. But I didn't get it straight away, because I had great difficulty in Acceptance but that was to come on June 29<sup>th</sup> 1985 -my last drink. I had become sick and tired of being sick and tired.

During these 6 months I had met 'Chingford Dennis' who was a great source of help and support for me. He got me involved in service, which he said was the way forward. He would say "to keep your sobriety you have to give it away" and you will do that by attending meetings on a regular basis and by doing service.

And that is what I have done and it WORKS for me. I also remember "Tottenham Charlie"- a real old timer and I remember him saying to me, "if you want to get sober read this book" as he gave me the "Where to Find"- that's keeping it simple. He would also say "This programme works if you believe in God, it works if you don't believe in God, or you think your God" and he was right. Sadly these two gentlemen have passed away but their presence is still in the rooms passing on the message that this programme works.

When I first came around I got to as many meetings as I could, Monday - Oakwood, Tuesday - Potters Bar, Wednesday - The Priory Southgate, Thursday - Amos Grove, Friday - Enfield, and Sunday - Cheshunt. The first time I went to Amos Grove I went on the wrong night and when I arrived in the room

there were people sitting around a large table. They all had bibles and at the head of the table was a clergyman. I thought they don't mess about here and when he asked me what meeting I attended I replied Enfield. He then asked me what chapter I was reading from the Bible and it dawned on me that I was in the wrong meeting!. I then asked him if this was the meeting for Alcoholics Anonymous and he said No, this was a Bible Reading class, and he kindly said that I was welcome to stay, which I declined to do. I smile when I think about it now and I always make sure that I get to the correct meetings now. Meetings are very important to me and I know that if I go to meetings on a regular basis, and do service I can cope with most things and be positive about myself. If I stay away I become negative and life gets more difficult, I know this is correct

Cliff, Enfield

## **20. I had my first drink on the hospital ward – Anon 3**

I had my first drink on the hospital ward when I was doing my General Nursing training. It was my first Christmas in England. I was 19 years old. I don't know whether I had one drink or more. I can't remember. I came off duty at 5 pm and on my way to the nurses home I was singing "9 green bottles hanging on the wall". My bedroom was next door to the assistant matron's and she knocked on my door and asked me to be quiet. I thought "silly woman, its Christmas evening". I had no problem with drinking for many years but I did enjoy drinking and being with people who drank.

In 1973 I had found the more seedy clubs. I used to go to the Irish Club in Eaton Square- the only good thing about this was that the men were older, wealthier and could afford to buy the drinks. I could control my drinking then. Next year, after 4 weeks holiday in the USA, I could not control my drinking. That was in April 1974. For the next 9 months, I paid many visits to my doctor, always followed by sick leave. On the last visit to him it was just before Christmas and he thought I would benefit from seeing a psychiatrist and he gave me a letter. I was off sick for a week and on the morning I was going back to work, my senior nursing officer rang me and said she would see me at 2 pm in her office. This was serious and I thought she was going to sack me. She was new to us and I had only met her on two occasions at meetings. She was very nice- Irish and psychiatric trained in nursing. She took me to see a psychiatrist friend of hers- Dr Moran at Chase Farm hospital. She asked me to take his advice and to do what he told me. He asked me about my drinking and



I told him that a relationship the previous April in the USA didn't work out and I had been depressed since. It was only an excuse. He asked me to take only a couple of drinks, a couple of times a week and he also gave me medication to take at night. I continued to drink daily and went to see him the following week. He asked me about my drinking and I lied. I said "a couple of times". He offered me two weeks in the psychiatric wing of the North Middlesex Hospital and I said "no thanks".

For the next 3 1/2 years, I tried to control my drinking. The only way I could do it was by not drinking on a daily basis. Once I had the first drink, I could not stop. I had many rock bottoms during this time but my final one was this.

I got home on a Friday evening. I was off for the weekend and as soon as I got in I started to drink and blacked out. The next morning when I got up, I realized I hadn't washed my uniform and polished my shoes. I always did this when I was off for the weekend. Everything became very clear to me and I realized the only problem I had was that I could not stop drinking. I phoned the Samaritans and they told me to phone AA. Before I did, I finished off the whisky and went down the road and bought some cheap sherry. I proceeded to drink. It was 3.30 pm. I blacked out and I don't remember any more until 9.30. Next morning when the phone rang - it was a man from AA. I don't remember phoning AA because I was in a black out. That was my last drink, one day at a time with the help of God and this Fellowship.

I was taken to my first meeting in Cheshunt by two people - a man and a woman. I was able to identify with the drinking and since that meeting, up to today, I haven't had a drink - one day at a time. My last drink was on the 3rd September 1978. I got sober in North London. Ivor and Eileen W who 12 stepped me, both lived in my working area and they both invited me to visit them, which I did frequently. It was known as 'Fireside AA'. My first year in AA was wonderful. I attended meetings almost every night and I used to pick up Eileen and we would go together. It was lovely and I did an awful lot of sharing with her. She was a retired nurse. I was given such a lot of love and support from Eileen and Ivor, RIP. I played golf on Saturday afternoons with Ivor and also with Cynthia. I was wrapped up in the fellowship that first year and I also worked full time.

In response to my phone call to the telephone office on Saturday afternoon, Ivor phoned me and took me to the Cheshunt meeting on Sunday evening with Eileen W. My home groups were Arnos Thursday and later Arnos Sunday (it was opened by Ivor), Friern Barnet and Oakwood Tuesday. Then I used to go to other meetings as well. The people I remember from those early days are

Thelma (Finchley), Angela, Pat Q, Cynthia, Monica and Wood Green Kay. She has been my friend since I first came into AA and still is.

When I came around there wasn't any rush to do the programme- just not to take the first drink, one day at a time. I did Step 1 with Ivor- *powerless over alcohol and that my life was unmanageable*. I did Step 2 with Cynthia- *came to believe that a power greater than my-self would restore me to sanity*. She explained to me that it was the awful things I did in my drinking that were insane- that made sense to me. Step 3, I did with Ivor. He said ask God to help me to stay away from a drink each morning and that was God's will for me. He also said it was also important to do the rest of the programme. I coasted along very nicely on the first 3 steps and Step 12- *carrying the message to the alcoholic who still suffers and to practice these principles in all my affairs*. I was around 2 years when I did step 4 and 5- *made a fearless moral inventory of myself and admitted to God, to myself and another human being, the exact nature of my wrongs*. I did Step 4 and 5 because I was going to any lengths to stay sober. I knew that if I didn't do them, I would drink again. I did Step 4 with Ivor's help (he was my sponsor). I did a life story, going back through my life as far back as I could remember. I shared Step 5 with Ivor. I invited God in to help me with sharing step 5. My sponsor said I had done a wonderful step 4 and 5. I did steps 6 through 12 on my own.

About 12 years ago, Grovelands 4.30 meeting opened as a Big Book study. I started going to that meeting and I knew I wanted to be taken through the programme as it is in the book.

My sponsor, who had been taken through the programme as it is in the Big Book, took me through the programme.

I did it using the six columns- whom I resent, cause and part of me affected, whom I harmed, my mistake and part of me affected. I did a fears list and reviewed my sexual conduct. I listed my defects of character. I went back over the years- as far back as I could remember. Then I shared it with my sponsor. That was Steps 4 and 5 completed.

I didn't find it necessary to do Steps 1, 2, 3, as I had been doing them since I came into AA. We just read through them, we said the Step 3 prayer and commenced the rest of the programme. I only found one other amend when I did Step 4.

*I became willing to have God remove all these defects of character and 7, humbly asked him to remove my shortcomings*. I said the Step 7 prayer. Steps 6 & 7 completed. I had a list of all people I had harmed from Step 4. *I made direct amends to such people wherever possible except when to do so would injure them or others*. I was very willing to make amends. Some amends I made just by staying sober. Some people I had lost contact with. I made face-to-face

amends and I keep my amends open in case I need to make other amends. Step 10 takes care of my day-to-day amends. Step 10. *Continued to take inventory and when wrong promptly admitted it.* I review my day and check to see if I have been resentful, angry, selfish, self-pitying, dishonest or fearful. Do I owe anybody an apology or do I need to share something I have been keeping to my-self? I do a written inventory list daily and a gratitude list. It only takes a few minutes to do it; and it gives me real peace of mind. Step 11. *Sought through prayer and meditation to improve my conscious contact with God, praying only for knowledge of his will for me and the power to carry that out.* I pray and meditate each morning and at night and keep contact with God through the day.

12. *Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps we tried to carry the message to alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs.* After been taken through the programme I became Step 12. Step 10 -12 is my programme.

Right from me first meeting, I have asked my higher power to give me the strength to stay away from a drink on a daily basis and I still do it today. It worked for me then and today. Literature I read in my early days was *Living Sober* and the *12 Steps and 12 Traditions*. Now I find all I need in the *Big Book*. Having been taken through the programme as it is in the *Big Book* has helped me greatly with doing Steps 10-12.

I will be eternally grateful to the people who helped write the book. I thank God that the *Big Book* is the way people are taken through the programme today. Service was much the same when I came around as it is today. My first meeting was Cheshunt and after 6 weeks sober I became tea maker and treasurer. In my 2nd year sober, I became secretary of Hendon Friday and in my fourth year sober, I became secretary of Arnos Grove. That was my home group. I have always done service in AA over the years. It keeps me sober, kept me going to meetings and I am grateful to AA for keeping me sober and able to carry the message to the suffering alcoholic.

AA has changed very little since I came in 27 years ago. The only difference is that newcomers are urged to get a sponsor quickly and to be taken through the programme quickly. Wonderful progress.

I was given tremendous care and love. When I came in, a newcomer was a rare sight in those days. I was helped by Ivor and Eileen W (who twelve stepped me) and later by Oakwood Martin (who came around about the same time), Jack K, Elaine and Barbara. I will always be so grateful to them for their time help, love and friendship

## My Recovery Today.

I have been sober for 27 years. I have been happily married for 20 years. I have 3 lovely stepchildren and their partners as well as 6 lovely grandchildren. I am well mentally, physically, and spiritually and have real peace of mind. I go to two meetings a week -Grovelands Saturday and Friern Barnet Monday. I also like the newcomers meeting at Grovelands Wednesday. I do service at Grovelands Saturday when needed as it is my home group. I do GSR for Grovelands Saturday and Friern Barnet. I have a Sponsee. I play golf and I also play bridge, which I enjoy. I have lovely friends both in the fellowship and outside the fellowship. We go on nice holidays, which we enjoy. I am only sober with God's help, AA and the AA programme. AA has been the best thing that has ever happened to me. It saved my life. These past 27 years have been the best years of my life. I am a very grateful recovering alcoholic.

Anon 3

## **21. Sobriety with Gratitude- Steve S**

I first became aware alcohol was a problem when I was twelve stepped in 1978 and eventually joined the fellowship in 1979. I slipped twice during that year and regard my normal birthday on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1979 as the time I became sober.

It took me a few years to completely embrace the AA programme, mostly by accepting and surrendering and became willing. This happened when I started reaching out after a bad emotional break up. In the old days of drinking I would simply drink on this and find someone else to fill the gap. This made me look at myself, 'warts and all'.

I became aware that the AA programme was not just about drinking, but also about a way of life which I had been looking for all my life. From then onwards I started to alter my attitude slowly, a step at a time. I became aware of the Higher Power (whom I chose to call God) and realised he had been in my life for a long time before.

Before I joined, my life was a mess. I loved booze- it made me feel good in the beginning and I could not understand why it took over my life which became a nightmare due to my drinking and driving, eventually being caught whilst driving under the influence with a three-year ban in place. This was my rock bottom

and I expected to be jailed, but to my amazement I got off with an extended ban and a heavy fine.

Another aspect of my drinking was the damage I did to my then family i.e. my wife and two daughters. I was a good father materially. They had a good home, travel and a university education, etc but I was also unfortunately an unpleasant drunk -so much so that I have never been able to make amends to my then family as they refused to talk about it and we eventually became estranged. I have not seen them for many years and had to use the 3rd Step and 'let go' with love and completely detach.

I remember when I surrendered and reached out, there were about 6 people who were always there for me. Their suggestions were always the same- "keep coming to the meetings" and this is what I have been doing since. I remember people like Ivor and Don. Sadly some wonderful people died and some simply drifted out of the fellowship and I lost touch.

When I came in, I bought the *Big Book* and the *12 x 12*, which are wonderful books where I identify with the contents. I bought a lot of literature but found the meetings to be a 'living AA'.

Since I joined the programme I came to understand the importance of service and have had the privilege of being a secretary, treasurer, etc in a number of meetings in the North London area. I am also aware of the importance of sharing and passing on the message, particularly greeting newcomers.

Steve S. St Albans Saturday Afternoon Feelings meeting

## **22. O, for friends and a Higher Power- Jerry M**

A funny thing happened to me on the 17<sup>th</sup> March 1977. I stayed off the drink and went to AA. It was funny because that day was Saint Patrick's Day, Ireland's national holiday, when most Irish have a drink to celebrate. I didn't have one drink, thanks to AA and I'm off it since to this day.

I'm from the west of Ireland but started my drinking in Dublin, where I was working. I was nineteen. My drinking took place in what I thought was normal for a young fellow- in pubs. After a few years I came to live and work in London and continued drinking in the 'normal' way. Eventually I had regular blackouts

and decided to stop drinking after seventeen years of drinking. I found this very difficult and so I went to AA, whom I had heard of.

My first meeting was Kingsbury North London. I eventually did all the Steps with my sponsor, who was Peter, the first person I met in AA. I did my Step 5 with Peter and a priest.

The literature I first found helpful was “*Share Magazine*”, “*Living Sober*” and particularly the *Big Book*.

As my first group in AA was very small (four members), I was involved in service of one kind or another from the beginning – particularly literature secretary. I have been involved in service most of the time being treasurer for two years and being secretary on numerous other occasions. I also did a lot at Intergroup as GSR. All this has been very helpful to me.

Some of my stories are funny.... Going home on the tube one evening I ended up in Wembley sidings locked in the tube – the driver eventually got me out. Of course, it was his fault as far as I was concerned.

With my boozing, I ended up in a doss house for a few weeks run by the Guinness Brewery in Dublin.

My first blackout happened in Colwyn Bay, North Wales. I had a blackout at one in the afternoon, after drinking what I was told was ‘Red Biddy’. I was nineteen. In my blackout I found an ‘underground’ betting show where I backed ‘Roddy Owen’ which won the Cheltenham Gold Cup that day at 5/2. I came out of my blackout in an ice cream parlour at 6pm but couldn’t remember where the ‘underground’ betting show was, to collect my winnings. I’m still wondering where that shop is?

But I think the funniest thing happened to me a month before I came to AA. A man, who had seen me drinking, came over to me and told me to go to AA. He said AA was very good and he went to it. He was drinking a bottle of Guinness at the time. It just goes to show that anyone can carry the message, whether they are drunk or sober. It’s ‘getting the message’ that is most important. I got the message.

AA has changed in some ways since I first joined. There are far more ladies at meetings nowadays- I am not complaining! There are more meetings and there seem to be fewer characters now than when I first came around.

I have made many friends and acquaintances and met many characters from day one in AA.

My first meeting, which was Kingsbury Thursday Step, March 1977 had four people as well as me-Peter who was the secretary, Tom, a man from Watford and a man who appeared to have a problem with his dog. They all helped me in the beginning. Then I went to Harrow Friday, South Ruislip Saturday, and Hendon Friday in the Convent. Then a new meeting opened on Wednesday in Hendon Convent for shy sharers like me. I was at many newly opened meetings in North West London in the early days.

People who made big impressions on me then were Peter and Tom from Kingsbury, Norman, Welsh John, Scots Jack, Bruce and Captain Robert from Hendon, Christine from Harrow, Pip, Bighead Jeff and Thelma.

I did the telephone service – 6pm until 10pm – on my first Christmas Eve in AA 1977 with Norman, Welsh John and Scots Jack. On the next day, Christmas Day, I had my Christmas dinner at Norman's house where I watched the Mike Yarwood Christmas Special on TV with his family.

Other meetings I went to then were Hendon Sunday Morning, West Hampstead Sunday Evening and Gravel Hill as well as Finchley Central on a Saturday evening where I became secretary for a year. At Gravel Hill I met Martin, Ivor and Ram who helped me a lot. I also went to Golders Green meeting Monday night where I heard Freddie the trumpet player (who wrote a book on alcoholism), Michael C and Guardsman John. Phyllis of Gravel Hill used to bring me a bottle of milk for nourishment every week - I needed it!

In those days, my recovery was based on acceptance, 'easy does it', and getting to meetings every evening and I travelled long distances for many of my meetings. I first went to Oakwood from Kingsbury, where I lived in 1977. I was later to live near Oakwood. The meeting was at the Benedictine Monastery when I first went there but later it transferred to St. Thomas's Church, Oakwood.

Another meeting I went to regularly was Froggnal on the Finchley Road on a Thursday evening. I went to it first when it was beside Froggnal Station in 1977 but it soon moved to opposite Finchley Road Tube station. Scots Peter was a great sharer at that meeting.

I went to live in Ladbroke Grove at the end of 1978. I was soon to take over from Mary O as secretary of St Mary of the Angels Wednesday evening meeting. Vivienne was treasurer. Vivienne, Mary and Rosie from that meeting were friends of mine.

I also met Mick the Tick and Paddy O'C at St. Mary's of the Angels; they were great for me and AA, being characters though and through at that time.

At Abingdon Road on a Sunday night Marie (from the telephone office) and her husband Trevor opened a meeting. It was great and they helped me and many others.

On Friday evening I went to First London in Baker Street where I met Wick who was a regular member there. He was then over thirty years sober in 1978. At this time I also met Andre and Spiritual Jim, who were well known in AA in Central and North London then.

Other meetings I went to regularly included Ladbroke Grove on Friday night and Bridgehouse doss house Latimer Road, Ladbroke Grove where I did many chairs. As I went to so many meetings, which included Central London and Chelsea, my recovery improved a lot.

In 1985 I went to live in Enfield, where I still live today. I now go to four meetings a week, all in Enfield. I met quietly spoken Ivor again here but generally, although I have made many friends in AA in Enfield, the characters of old do not seem to be so prevalent. Still, there are many people who are helping me and I hopefully help them. Just to mention a few I would like to thank Big David of the Enfield Thursday Convent meeting and Debbie of the Chase Farm Hospital meeting.

Many of the before mentioned people had very interesting comments for their sobriety which I'll never forget. Here are a few I can remember: -

Norman: Called his Higher Power "the big fella".

Welsh John: "Without you there wouldn't be me".

Pip: When once asked how she was feeling replied "I am FEELING- that's what it's all about".



Martin: "We are like a train running out of control. We see the red lights but we don't stop."

Ram: Stressed that we should be ruthless with our own sobriety, putting sobriety first in life.

Marie (Telephone Office): Pointed out that as well as being a physical, mental and spiritual illness alcoholism was also "an emotional illness".

Mary O:said "you have got to want to want your sobriety".

Mick the Tick: Told me when I pointed out that I didn't feel so good going to work in the morning on the bus "you should smile at everyone no mater how they look at you".

Paddy O'C: Regularly said "You shouldn't see through a person you should ("Norwich for porridge") see them through". He also said when he first came to AA he would rather have a bacon sandwich than the Big Book. He went on to be a great character in AA with his funeral attracting a huge attendance of AA members in Westminster Cathedral in the mid 80's.

Most of the people in my story are still in AA. To my knowledge none of them has had alcohol since they first came to AA. The remainder have died sober R.I.P. It goes to show how effective AA is in the recovery from alcoholism. If you work for your recovery, recovery will work for you.

I have worked hard at my recovery since I came to AA, making sure I went to my meetings every week.

Staying off the first drink, one day at a time was the 'big one' for me. The days went by, and then the weeks and years until today (in 2006), I'm 29 years sober- one day at a time of course.

A great help for me is believing in God, as I understand him. It means I have always someone or God to help me in my recovery-morning, noon and night. Helping others is also on my priority list and also I have some sponsees to help through the Steps.

With God by my side and having good friends, I can manage my sobriety just fine. I also keep gratitude in mind in my life, "If you're not grateful for what you've got, you'll lose it". I'm grateful for AA

Jerry M

### **23. My name is Tony.**

My name is Tony but I'm known as Big Tony. I first started drinking when I was 14 years old, and it became a problem soon as I started work. I started a job at 15 years old, where I was paid 11 pounds a week in the year of 1967, which meant I was able to go to the pub all week, unlike most of my friends. When I was 26 years old and married, it started to get out of control, so somehow I was introduced to AA. I think my wife heard someone talk about it. I went to one meeting and thought it was a waste of good drinking time, so after 8 weeks went back drinking.

In Sept 1988, I phoned A.A. and was given a meeting. 1<sup>st</sup> London in Chilton Street off Marylebone road.

After going to meetings all over London, I went to a convention in Camber Sands and met the man who became my sponsor and so started to go to the meetings in Kentish Town.

My early days was going to meetings in Hinde Street in the afternoons, and going to a meeting at night, sometimes going for coffee after the meeting just so I had no chance of going for a drink. The people I got to know in the fellowship were Joe- he was from Manchester, Big Harry- everybody knows him, Billy the Post, John (snuff box), & (little Irish) Tony from Kentish town  
The meeting's I went to were Camden Town (Buck Street), Kentish Town (Lady Margaret Street), Tottenham Court Road (American church), Highgate (Holy Jo's), and Wood Green.

The people that I've known over the years included Billy the post who became my sponsor.

I don't do the steps; **I live the last 3 steps.**

What was it like? That's a hard one. I would get up early in the morning and not know what the day would bring. I would just go to meetings and at the end of the day, go home to my mum- tied and worn-out and just hope for a good nights sleep.

***Where To Find*** was the best literature and also ***As Bill Sees It, Big Book, Living Sober,***

Over the years, some of the most memorable activities have been telephone duty, helping with the A. A. dances and being involved in the 50<sup>TH</sup> Great Britain Convention in Blackpool. And on one of Louis' (Bill W wife) last visits to England, Billy & I were asked to look after her & keep the crowd back, because everyone wanted to touch her and talk to her & she was a frail old lady. I think it was in Birmingham, 1989-1990.

Resentments. Yes I've got one. When I came to A. A., Billy The Post said, because I was not drinking I might get a craving for chocolate, which was ok. But he never told me when to stop- now I am diabetic; it's his fault...Ha! Ha!

When I was going through the 4<sup>TH</sup> Step something stopped me. Billy would say "what is the problem?" After many weeks he said the same again, so I knew that I had to tell him. This is what I said. "One day when I was at school, I stole a bike and I think it was yours". He said to me " if you did, I forgive you-now get on with the Steps".

Yes A. A. has changed a lot over the years. There are a lot younger people and that is great. Some times it's hard to sit and listen to those who talk about their drug days.

Over the years a lot of friends have passed away. Whenever I think about them, I remember something that they might have said to help me stay sober. What is my life like today? After working at the same job for 42 years I retired, so now I am able to go to afternoon meetings with all the old AA members that

are still alive, and work with newcomers and tell them about the good old days. Not bad for someone who was told at 36 that he would not see 40 ...

Big Tony

## 24. Not bad but sick- Mary L

I don't remember where I got to hear about AA nor where I got the number to ring but I did find AA and I did ring. It was the best thing I ever did. My drinking by this stage had got to oblivion drinking. My bottle was the most important thing in my life. I was full of self-hatred, fear, depression and guilt. Oblivion took these feelings away.... for a while. I didn't know anything about alcoholism or even alcoholics. I knew no one like me.... evil!

At the time I came to AA there were many 'old-timers' and I was shown much love and compassion. They seemed to care about me, not 'in spite' of what I was but 'because' of what I was. I didn't understand this. It was all a new experience for me. I was continually told that I was a 'sick' person trying to get well and not a 'bad' person trying to be good. Being full of guilt, I thought this was a cop out. But, I gave time, time and came to accept my illness. This basically formed the basis of my recovery. AA gave me a name for my illness and also gave me a solution- our programme.

My first years in AA are still a bit hazy. But what I **do** remember is love, kindness and generosity. Belfast John, told me in my early days, to look in the mirror and say 'Hello friend!' I did do this but with disgust at what I saw looking back at me. I stuck the poem "The man in the glass" on my mirror and continued on a daily basis to look at myself and read the poem. I still hated what I saw and believed that I would die with the burden of guilt still with me. I continued doing the programme as best I could and when the time was right I was given the gift of courage to write my 4<sup>th</sup> Step and then the gift of trust to take my 5<sup>th</sup> Step. Over a period of time I began to feel free of my guilt and I was granted the gift of forgiveness. I forgave myself. I began to like what reflected back at me, just a little bit. This grew as the years went by and I realised that in order to love and respect others it had to begin with me.

I remember how petrified I was when I first became secretary at Tottenham and every Monday I felt ill with fear. I said out loud one night how awful I felt. My

friend, Austin, quietly told me that I didn't have to do it. I did have a choice! It's strange but once I realised that I had a choice, the fear started to subside. AA gave me choices for the first time in my life. Just as I chose not to drink the day after my last drunk, I chose to face my fear. This new concept of choice was my full acceptance that I was an alcoholic and the beginning of facing my fears. My dear friend Mary B, took me under her wing, a bit like an AA Mum and it was she who got me involved in 12<sup>th</sup> Step work. I didn't talk much in my early days so my Twelfth Step visits with her were more a nodding of the head in agreement to what she said. It's very different now; some people would say I talk too much.

Peter B introduced me to call-out duty, which I did for many years. At first, it was difficult for me. I was so introverted. But it did become easier as I didn't have to say much and because I didn't have to face anyone. I even started to chat a little bit to the 12<sup>th</sup> steppers.

Mary B took me along to Intergroup with her and when North London split and we became North-East London Intergroup I got very much involved in Public Information. There were people out there like me who have never heard of AA and I wanted them to know. I wanted to be part of the hand of AA that reaches out to others. I wanted that responsibility.

Over the years I have often doubted whether I was working the programme 'properly' and questioned whether I was really doing my best. I still do.... sometimes. The difference is now I don't dwell on it. My best varies from day to day, just like everyone else.

For the difference in me, from powerlessness to usefulness, I thank God for sending me Mary B, Alex (my guardian angel), Richard, Johnny, Belfast John, Marion, Alec, Susan, George, Austin and all the others who have held my hand and guided me along my way and given me the faith in myself to reach out and try to pass on what they so freely gave to me. Just to finish: A few years ago I was speaking to Jane, who came to AA around the same time as myself. We were talking about members who were much loved and who had recently died. I remember saying to her "It's not the same without the old-timers". She answered back "but Mary, we are the old-timers now".... scary or what???

Mary L  
Tottenham

## **25. There is no doubt in my mind- John 2**

My name is John and I'm an alcoholic. There's no doubt in my mind, that AA is the best thing that ever happened to me, although when I came in, I didn't think so. I disliked AA and most of the people for such a long time. I thought a lot of people in AA were 'Do Gooders'. My whole attitude was wrong about so many things. I was very ill for years in the fellowship. I felt completely washed up, finished, but that was how it was for me. I went right down to the basement. My drinking was sheer terror in the final years. I ended up lying in a hospital waiting to die. My weight plummeted down to nine stone. I am now a healthy fifteen stones thanks to AA. I didn't want to change. I was full of terrible rage, fear and defiance. I never dreamed in a million years that I would make it. I did everything the wrong way round, and upside down. I was very outspoken at Step meetings, and in general, I'm sure I upset a lot of people. I couldn't stand sponsors, and still can't. I don't believe in a Higher Power, I certainly don't pray. I just follow my instincts. If someone suggests anything to me, I'll always do the complete opposite. You could say I found my own way- the hard way. Change was a long time coming for me and recovery for me was much worse than my drinking. There was nothing to take the edge off. It was very raw indeed, but I didn't quit- I kept coming to meetings, no matter what. I would go to the pub under any circumstances, so I could certainly apply that to my meetings. I have now been sober for eighteen years, a day at a time. I have my 'off' days the same as everyone else but my life is brilliant, compared to what it was when I was drinking. I've achieved so many positive things. I was promised "a life beyond my wildest dreams" and this has happened- I just can't believe it. If I can make it, anyone can. I owe all of this to AA. Without it I am like a man in space without a spacesuit- I will surely die.

John 2

## **26. Alan's story**

### **When and how did your drinking first become a problem?**

When I was a teenager I used to urinate in my sleep when I was drunk. I did it everywhere. My home, at school, my Aunt's house, and later on in hotels. I was so embarrassed by it. But then my problems got bigger and I just learned to live with the 'bed-wetting'.

Eventually I had to keep moving jobs as my drinking became more noticeable. I was sent by my employer to talk to a Doctor about it. So I decided to leave that job. I was jailed while on a business trip to Holland in my next job.

### **What happened?**

I wanted to be dead but I couldn't kill myself. I had totally run out of options and I did the last thing I was ever going to do. I called AA.

### **When did you first hear of A.A. and from what source?**

Somebody at work had left AA literature in my desk, with a note, "from a friend".

### **Who made the initial outreach to you, in what manner, and in what year?**

I called AA on Easter Sunday 1987 and met John C, a builder from Kilburn. He told me about the Draycott Terrace meeting on Sunday evening.

### **When and where did you get sober?**

I got sober in Minnesota in October 1987, just after the stock market crash and the storms that wrecked England.

### **What were your early days like?**

Difficult. But I was scared and had no other options. I was depressed and thought I had wrecked my life. I wished I could have kept it going without having to stop drinking. Or I wished that I had stopped before I had run up such huge debts. My last credit card bill while drinking ran to 11 pages.

### **Who did you first get to know in the Fellowship?**

John S the accountant, Richard J the lecturer, Ray C from Ireland, Miles, Malcolm & Betty, Christine E, Jonny H

### **Which meetings did you go to?**

Lots. Arnos Grove, Thursday and Sunday, East Finchley Friday, Friern Barnet Monday, Grovelands Wednesday, Finchley Saturday and Hinde Street lunchtimes and the city breakfast meetings in Lombard Street.

**Have you “worked” the steps?**

I have. And I still try to practice these principles in all my affairs

**Were you guided through them and by whom?**

By my sponsors, John C and Stuart S

**What was it really like? What did you actually do?**

I made a list of the things in my life that were unmanageable and decided what to do about them

I prayed

I tried to give up my will, wherever I could, recognising that it wasn't what was best for me.

Made a list and didn't leave anything off

Shared it with my sponsor

Prayed some more and reviewed what I had done

Made amends

Learned to admit I was wrong and to apologise - on a good day

Learned to meditate

Tried to carry the message through service

**Which AA literature have you found helpful?**

*Living Sober* was great and when I was desperate I got great solace from the *Big Book*.

**What are your recollections of service in AA and how did you get involved?**

It was vital. Taught me how to show up when I said I would and helped me to feel that I belonged.

Intergroup and Region (!) taught me that I wasn't as sober as I thought I was but more importantly I learned how AA works. And I see the value in the Traditions.



### **Any resentment?**

Yes. A chap I knew in early recovery, who had been sober a while, used me to make a bit of money for himself. I cut him out of my life completely and I would like to tell you that I wish him all the very best life has to offer!

### **Any funny stories?**

The secretary of meeting introduced me to do a chair: "My chair blew me out at the last minute so I've brought my Dad along". One of my proudest moments!

### **How has A.A. changed (if it has) since you first found it?**

More young people. More focus on recovery.

### **What about your recovery today?**

It's a life beyond my wildest dreams. I have a lovely relationship with my beautiful wife. We have two amazing children - one in the Fellowship for 6 years and the other born in recovery who is studying Neuroscience at Sussex University. I have a business of my own which provides me with interesting varied work with clever, pleasant people all over the world. I have interesting hobbies and some wonderful friends with whom I can relax and enjoy myself.

I am deeply grateful.

Alan

## Appendix 1. Names from NLIG stories of 15+ Years sobriety

<p><b>Story 1</b></p> <p>Kathy David M (Big David) Footballer John Little Debbie Florida Danny Big Al and Michael Pat Q Ivor Teacher Peter Musician John Fireman Alex, Musician Roger Fishing Charlie, Ironing board Arthur Stockbroker John Tottenham John Belfast John Fiona Plumber Sam Irene and Bob Spiritual Jim Old Arthur</p> <p><b>Story 2</b></p> <p>Peter S Lighthouse Denis Big Steve Brian Noel Thelma Shetland Peter of Friern Barnet Pat Q</p>	<p>Douglas of East Finchley, Banker John of Potters Bar Spanish Tony Ivor Fisherman Charlie-Oakwood</p> <p><b>Story 3</b></p> <p>Carmel Belfast John Fisherman Charlie Marion Alex Scotch Margaret Judith Dave Susan Kevin Arthur Sam Fiona Pat Q Kay M Damien</p> <p><b>Story 4</b></p> <p>John Dorrie Henry R Blind Charlie Cathy Robert Margaret S</p>
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**Story 5**

Roger C  
Bobby G  
Sadie from Chingford  
Bernie and Simon  
Second Hand Dave  
Train Dave  
Evil John  
Bishop John  
Fishing Charlie  
Joe E  
Pat Q.  
Ivor  
Cathy  
Robert  
Martin  
Blind Richard  
Irish Dennis  
Gay  
Mick the Tick  
Ironing Board Arthur  
Actor John  
Dave D  
John C

**Story 6**

Golfer Roger  
Ray  
David

**Story 7**

Steve H  
Tottenham John  
Danny the builder  
Ivor

**Story 8**

Geoff  
Christine  
Phil G,  
Sally  
Gary M  
Ron F  
Sharon  
Malcolm  
Mike C  
Pat Q  
Joan R  
Roy  
Jo

**Story 9**

Shetland John  
Charles  
Bob the Chemist  
Eric the Jeweller  
Smiler Bill  
Stuart  
Mick the Tick  
Mick the Van  
Paddy C  
Joe E  
Plaistow Bill  
Rolly  
Emily  
Vi and Mac

**Story 10**

South African Bill  
Mary B  
Monty  
Mick the Tick

Christie R.  
Paddy O'C  
Sackville from Dublin  
Richard P  
Marie  
Butcher Bill  
Joe  
Cathy  
Robert  
Dorrie  
Bill

**Story 11**

Cyril  
'Chingford Dennis'  
'Tower Bridge Len'

**Story 12**

Pauline  
Cathy B  
Sheila  
Susan  
Arthur  
Big Vick  
Janice  
Larry  
Drew  
Jerry  
Cathy

**Story 13**

Alan W  
Peter  
Austen  
Plumber Sam  
Old Arthur  
John

**Story 14**

Joe M

**Story 15**

Patrick K  
Shetland John  
Chingford Dennis  
Spanish Tony  
Moyra  
Michael

**Story 16**

Mick the Chef  
Dr Glatt  
Belfast Archie  
Eddie  
Mick the Tick  
Paddy O  
Scotch Peter  
Michael C  
Michael H  
Dirty Jimmy  
Guardsman John  
Bridget  
Michael H  
South African Bill  
Eddie

**Story 17**

Bridget  
Jerry  
Paddy O'C  
Scotch Peter  
Mick the Tick

**Story 18**

Larry B  
Canadian Brian  
Tony  
Big Mick  
Manchester Mick  
Lyn  
Spanish Tony  
Tottenham Mary  
Ironing Board Fred  
Cliff J  
Pauline  
Drew  
Jock  
Peter  
Pat  
Ian  
Big John  
Dan  
Sam the Hat  
Tesco Dave/ Angry Dave  
Chingford Dennis  
Cockney George  
Taxi Sam  
Tottenham Mary

**Story 19**

Cliff  
Chingford Dennis'  
Tottenham Charlie

**Story 20**

Ivor  
Eileen W  
Thelma (Finchley)  
Angela

Pat Q,  
Cynthia,  
Monica  
Wood Green Kay  
Oakwood Martin  
Jack K  
Elaine  
Barbara

**Story 21**

Steve S  
Ivor  
Don

**Story 22**

Jerry M  
Peter from Kingsbury  
Tom, a man from Watford  
Norman  
Welsh John  
Scots Jack  
Bruce  
Captain Robert from Hendon  
Christine from Harrow  
Pip  
Bighead  
Jeff

**Story 22 cont**

Thelma  
Scots Jack  
Martin, Ivor and Ram from Gravel Hill  
Freddie the trumpet player  
Michael C  
Guardsman John  
Phyllis  
Scots Peter  
Mary O  
Vivienne,  
Mary  
Rosie  
Mick the Tick  
Paddy O'C  
Marie  
Trevor  
Wick  
Andre  
Spiritual Jim  
Ivor  
Big David  
Debbie

**Story 23**

Big Tony  
Joe,  
Big Harry,  
Billy the Post,  
John (snuff box),  
(Little Irish) Tony from Kentish town

**Story 24**

Mary L  
Belfast John  
Austin

Peter B  
Mary B,  
Alex  
Richard  
Johnny  
Belfast John,  
Mario  
Alec  
Susan  
George  
Jane

**Story 25**

John 2

**Story 26**

Alan  
John C  
John S the accountant,  
Richard J the lecturer  
Ray C  
Miles,  
Malcolm  
Betty  
Christine E  
Jonny H