



NATURE COAST JOURNAL

AUGUST 2020



This Matter of Fear

By Bill W.

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As the AA Book says, "Fear is an evil, corroding thread; the fabric of our lives is shot through with it." Fear is surely a bar to reason, and to love, and of course it invariably powers anger, vainglory and aggression. It underlies maudlin guilt and paralyzing depression. President Roosevelt once made the significant remark that "We have nothing to fear but fear itself."

This is a severe indictment, and it is possibly too sweeping. For all its usual destructiveness, we have found that fear can be the starting point for better things. Fear can be a stepping stone to prudence and to a decent respect for others. It can point the path to justice, as well as to hate. And the more we have of respect and justice, the more we shall begin to find the love which can suffer much, and yet be freely given. So fear need not always be destructive, because the lessons of its consequences can lead us to positive values.

The achievement of freedom from fear is a lifetime undertaking, one that can never be wholly completed. When under heavy attack, acute illness, or in other conditions of serious insecurity, we shall all react, well or badly, as the case may be. Only the vainglorious claim perfect freedom from fear, though their very grandiosity is really rooted in the

fears they have temporarily forgotten.

Therefore the problem of resolving fear has two aspects. We shall have to try for all the freedom from fear that is possible for us to attain. Then we shall need to find both the courage and grace to deal constructively with whatever fears remain. Trying to understand our fears, and the fears of others, is but a first step. The larger question is how, and where, we go from there.



Since AA's beginning, I have watched as thousands of my fellows became more and more able to understand and to transcend their fears. These examples have been of unfailing help and inspiration. Perhaps, then, some of my own experiences with fear and the shedding of it to an encouraging degree may be appropriate.

As a child, I had some pretty heavy emotional shocks. There was deep family disturbance; I was physically awkward and the like. Of course other kids have such emotional handicaps and emerge unscathed. But I didn't. Evidently I was oversensitive, and (*continued on page 3*) . . .

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Steps | Traditions | Concepts

Step 8:

Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.

Tradition 8:

Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.

Concept 8:

The trustees are the principal planners and administrators of overall policy and finance. They have custodial oversight of the separately incorporated and constantly active services, exercising this through their ability to elect all the directors of these entities

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(continued from front page). . . therefore over-scared. Anyhow, I developed a positive phobia that I wasn't like other youngsters, and never could be. At first this threw me into depression and thence into the isolation of retreat.

But these child miseries, all of them generated by fear, became so unbearable that I turned highly aggressive. Thinking I never could belong, and vowing I'd never settle for any second-rate status, I felt I simply had to dominate in everything I chose to do, work or play. As this attractive formula for the good life began to succeed, according to my then specifications of success, I became deliriously happy. But when an undertaking occasionally did fail, I was filled with a resentment and depression that could be cured only by the next triumph. Very early, therefore, I came to value everything in terms of victory or defeat - all or nothing. The only satisfaction I knew was to win.

This was my false antidote for fear and this was the pattern, ever more deeply etched, that dogged me through school days, World War I, the hectic drinking career in Wall Street, and down into the final hour of my complete collapse. By that time adversity was no longer a stimulant, and I knew not whether my greater fear was to live or to die.

While my basic fear pattern is a very common one, there are of course many others. Indeed, fear manifestations and the problems that trail in their wake are so numerous and complex that in this brief article it is not possible to detail even a few of them. We can only review those spiritual resources and principles by which we may be able to face and deal with fear in any of its aspects.

In my own case, the foundation stone of freedom from fear is that of faith: a faith that, despite all worldly appearances to the contrary, causes me to believe that I live in a universe that makes sense. To me, this means a belief in a Creator who is all power, justice and love; a God who intends for me a purpose, a meaning, and a destiny to grow, however little and halting, toward His own likeness and image. Before the coming of faith I had lived as an alien in a cosmos that too often seemed both hostile and cruel. In it there could be no inner security for me.

Dr. Carl Jung, one of the three founders of modern depth psychology, had a profound conviction upon this great dilemma of the world today. In paraphrase, this is what he had to say about it: "Any person who has reached forty years of age, and who still has no means of comprehending who he is, where he is, or where he is next going, cannot avoid becoming a neurotic -- to some degree or other. This is true whether his youthful drives for sex, material security and a place in society have been satisfied, or not satisfied." When the benign doctor said "becoming neurotic" he might just as well have said "becoming fear-ridden."

This is exactly why we of AA place such emphasis on the need for faith in a "Higher Power," define that as we may. We have to find a life in the world of grace and spirit, and this is certainly a new dimension for most of us. Surprisingly, our quest for this realm of being is not too difficult. Our conscious entry into it usually begins as soon as we have deeply confessed our personal powerlessness to go on alone, and have made our appeal to whatever God we think there is -- or may be. The gift of faith and the consciousness of a Higher Power is the outcome. As faith grows, so does inner security. The vast underlying fear of nothingness commences to subside. Therefore we of AA find that our basic antidote for fear is a spiritual awakening.

It so happens that my own spiritual perception was electrically sudden and absolutely convincing. At once I became a part -- if only a tiny part -- of a cosmos that was ruled by justice and love in the person of God. No matter what had been the consequences of my own willfulness and ignorance, or those of my fellow travelers on earth, this was still the truth. Such was the new and positive assurance, and this has never left me. I was given to know, at least for the time being, what the absence of fear could be like. Of course my own gift of faith is not essentially different from those spiritual awakenings since received by countless AAs -- it was only more sudden. But even this new frame of reference -- critically important though it was -- only marked my entrance into that long path which leads away from fear, and toward love. The old and deeply carved etchings of anxiety were not instantly and permanently rubbed out. Of course they reappeared and sometimes alarmingly.

Being the recipient *(continued on page 4)* . . .

(continued from page 3). . . . of such a spectacular spiritual experience, it was not surprising that the first phase of my AA life was characterized by a great deal of pride and power driving. The craving for influence and approval, the desire to be the leader was still very much with me. Better still, this behavior could now be justified -- all in the name of good works!

It fortunately turned out that this rather blatant phase of my grandiosity, which lasted some years, was followed by a string of adversities. My demands for approval, which were obviously based on the fear that I might not get enough of it, began to collide with these identical traits in my fellow AAs. Hence their saving of the Fellowship from me, and I saving it from them, became an all-absorbing occupation. This of course resulted in anger, suspicion and all sorts of frightening episodes. In this remarkable and now rather amusing era of our affairs, any number of us commenced playing God all over again. For some years AA power drivers ran hog wild. But out of this fearsome situation, the Twelve Steps and The Twelve Traditions of AA were formulated. Mainly these were principles designed for ego reduction and therefore for the reduction of our fears. These were the principles which we hoped would hold us in unity and increasing love for each other and for God.

Gradually we began to be able to accept the other fellow's sins as well as his virtues. It was in this period that we coined the potent and meaningful expression, "Let us always love the best in others -- and never fear their worst." After some ten years of trying to work this brand of love and the ego-reducing properties of the AA Steps and Traditions into the life of our society, the awful fears for the survival of AA simply vanished.

The practice of AA's Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions in our personal lives also brought incredible releases from fear of every description, despite the wide prevalence of formidable personal problems. When fear did persist, we knew it for what it was, and under God's grace we became able to handle it. We began to see each adversity as a God-given opportunity to develop the kind of courage which is born of humility, rather than of bravado. Thus we were enabled to accept ourselves, our circumstances, and our fellows. Under God's grace we even found that we could die with decency, dignity and faith, knowing that "the Father doeth the works."

We of AA now find ourselves living in a world characterized by destructive fears as never before in history. But in it we nevertheless see great areas of faith and tremendous aspirations toward justice and brotherhood. Yet no prophet can presume to say whether the world outcome will be blazing destruction or the beginning, under God's intention, of the brightest era yet known to mankind. I am sure we AAs well comprehend this scene. In microcosm, we have experienced this identical state of terrifying uncertainty, each in his own life. In no sense pridefully, we AAs can say that we do not fear the world outcome, whichever course it may take. This is because we have been enabled to deeply feel and say, "We shall fear no evil -- thy will, not ours, be done."

Often told, the following story can nevertheless bear repeating. On the day that the staggering calamity of Pearl Harbor fell upon our country, a friend of AA, and one of the greatest spiritual figures that we may ever know, was walking along a street in St. Louis. This was, of course, our well-loved Father Edward Dowling of the Jesuit Order. Though not an alcoholic, he had been one of the founders and a prime inspiration of the struggling AA group in his city. Because large numbers of his usually sober friends had already taken to their bottles that they might blot out the implications of the Pearl Harbor disaster, Father Ed was understandably anguished by the probability that his cherished AA group would scarcely settle for less. To Father Ed's mind, this would be a first-class calamity, all of itself.

Then an AA member, sober less than a year, stepped alongside and engaged Father Ed in a spirited conversation -- mostly about AA. As Father Ed saw, with relief, his companion was perfectly sober. And not a word did he volunteer about the Pearl Harbor business.

Wondering happily about this, the good father queried, "How is it that you have nothing to say about Pearl Harbor? How can you roll with a punch like that?"

"Well," replied the AA, "I'm really surprised that you don't know. Each and every one of us in AA has already had his own private Pearl Harbor. So, I ask you, why should we alcoholics crack up over this one?"

-Bill W.

January 1962



Those Crazy AA Slogans Set Me Free

By Steve N.

Part V

The people in the rooms of A.A. and a fantastic sponsor taught me that being open and honest with myself allows me to forgive and become okay with who I am. And that facilitated my cleaning up the wreckage of the past. Being open and transparent also allowed me to connect with others, something I was never able to do outside of A.A. As I listened at meetings, I realized I was not alone in my thoughts, actions, or past behaviors. This connection marked the beginning of healing for me and enabled me to finally step out of isolation. Suddenly in these rooms I felt accepted and had a sense of belonging.

My sponsor taught me that the longer you keep something buried, the longer you have to continue to lie to yourself. By getting honest with yourself and others around you, you can step out of denial, accept your flaws, and check your addiction at the door. It was hard for me since I was so dishonest, I conned even myself. Fortunately, I had a sponsor who constantly reminded me we say honesty three times in How it Works.



“You’re only as sick as your secrets” is a commonly known phrase by those in AA. Alcoholics deceive others in order to cover up their addiction; they can even hide the signs and symptoms from themselves, making it easier to justify their behavior and stay firmly rooted in denial. This is why many recovering alcoholics are so painstakingly honest; any return to the habit of deception, they believe, risks backsliding out of sobriety. This slogan basically means that a secret kept in the dark grows and becomes more harmful, but once it is exposed to light or released, its power is lost. This slogan basically means that a secret kept in the dark grows and becomes more harmful, but once it is exposed to light or released, its power is lost.

Secrets can fester negativity and self-loathing, while keeping us sick and trapped in addiction. That’s why the need to get honest is a very important aspect of recovery. It’s all about leaving the deception behind, because deception is something that’s fundamental to keeping an addiction alive.

The people in the rooms of A.A. and a fantastic sponsor taught me that being open and honest with myself allows me to forgive and become okay with who I am. And that facilitated my cleaning up the wreckage of the past. Being open and transparent also allowed me to connect with others, something I was never able to do outside of A.A. As I listened at meetings, I realized I was not alone in my thoughts, actions, or past behaviors. This connection marked the beginning of healing for me and enabled me to finally step out of isolation. Suddenly in these rooms I felt accepted and had a sense of belonging.

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(continued from page 5)... you, you can step out of denial, accept your flaws, and check your addiction at the door. It was hard for me since I was so dishonest, I conned even myself. Fortunately, I had a sponsor who constantly reminded me we say honesty three times in How it Works.

This rule is not meant to take away from the hard work and efforts of a person while struggling with alcoholism. What it tries to communicate is that even if alcohol abuse recovery is quite a significant process one should take seriously, there's no need to go through it with a grim and grumpy attitude. You can have fun and adopt a positive attitude which will make you feel better during the process. If you're still not sure how to do that, here are some tips that might help:

7 Ways to Not Take Yourself Too Seriously in Recovery

1. Be open to change.
2. Laugh at yourself.
3. Socialize and be with new friends
4. Attend fun events.
6. Find new hobbies
6. Conquer your fears
7. Set new goals

The Story of Rule 62

The story is described in Alcoholics Anonymous book The Twelve Step and the Twelve Traditions (known in AA as the 12 and 12). The basic story is that early in the history of AA, a group out in the hinterlands somewhere convinced the local town to fund a recovery/treatment/AA facility. This was going to be an elaborate facility with space for medical treatment, residential recovery, and AA meetings. The local group setting all this up started coming up with rules on how the place would be run, who could be admitted etc. And naturally, there was much disagreement over all this. To try to resolve their differences, they sent a copy of their 61 rules to the NY office of AA. The volunteers at NY had no idea on how to run a large facility or what to say to this group about their rules. While they were discussing it, another message from the group was delivered saying simply: Rule 62, don't take yourself so damn seriously. Apparently, they had decided that the potential ego-driven rewards of running a big facility were not worth the risk of tearing their group apart.

This episode is used to illustrate the development of AA's fourth tradition: Each group should be autonomous...



For me the exclamation "Don't drink!" or its equivalent is one of the most important statements in recovery. This is the painfully simple, often overlooked solution. I didn't even realize that it was the drinking that was killing me and that had already taken so much from me. It was in the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) that I learned that if I didn't drink, I wouldn't get drunk. A.A. provided me with this insight and the program helped me stay away from alcohol once I stopped.

So often we try and change the outward circumstances of our lives in an attempt to deal with how we feel. (continued on page 7)...

(continued from page 6)... We buy new clothes, a new car, or change jobs, relationships or geographical locations. Sooner or later the old thoughts and feelings are back-- for many people the unhappiness is vague and not intense-- but for us alcoholics the unhappiness is intense and there is no way of getting away from the illness other than by accepting it, not drinking and changing ourselves.



This was one of those expressions which really startled me when I first heard it. It was totally new to me, yet when I thought about it I immediately understood the meaning of the slogan and it had a peculiarly powerful impact. Even now as I say it to myself it seems catchy and surprising. I had tried numerous geographic cures. None worked. I learned in the rooms of A.A. that the problem is me and I can't get away from me so I need to fix me.



It may not sound like a slogan, but it's said by every AA member at every meeting. It's about being honest to yourself and admitting it. Not hiding your issue helps you stay in front of it.

For a long time, I could justify my behavior and so it allowed me to ignore the obvious fact that I had an unhealthy relationship with alcohol. Even when I realized I might have drinking problem, but immediately I went into denial about it. And that's where admitting the problem came in. A.A. taught me that must admit to yourself that your drinking is problematic and that you must take steps to get control of it. I discovered that A.A. is a program and fellowship that helps me address the root causes of my alcohol addiction. The Big Book constantly describes me to a "T." It also provides me with the resources to maintain long-term sobriety. I could not get sober on my own. I needed you and the program of A.A. because the twelve steps I was following were the twelve steps of insanity. You taught me the twelve steps to sobriety. They work a lot better.

Twelve Steps of Insanity

1. *We admitted we were powerless over nothing- that we could manage our lives perfectly and those of anyone who would let us.*
2. *Came to believe that there was no power greater than us. We believed God didn't take direction well and the rest of the world was insane.*
3. *Made a decision to have our loved ones turn their wills and their lives over to our care even though they could not understand us.*
4. *Made a searching and fearless moral and inventory of every one we knew.*
5. *Admitted to the world and to God the exact nature of everyone else's wrongs.*
6. *Were entirely ready to make others change, using our self will and directing God on how to help.*
7. *Demanded others and God to do our will, because we were always right.*

(continued on page 8)

(continued from page 7)

8. Made a list of all persons who had harmed us and became a willing to go to any lengths to get even with them or at least turn to our addiction for comfort.
9. Got direct revenge on such people wherever possible except when to do so would cost us our lives or at the very least a jail sentence.
10. Continued to take inventory of others and when they were wrong promptly and repeatedly told them about it.
11. Sought through complaining, addictions and medication to improve our relations with others and God, asking only that they do things our way.
12. Having had a complete physical, emotional, and spiritual breakdown as a result of these 12 steps, we blamed it on others and tried to get sympathy and pity in all our affairs.



It is simple and a nice little reminder that if we continue to do things the same way all the time, we should not expect a different outcome.

Our bad habits will not be broken by wishful thinking. Instead, it takes a genuine commitment to a new way of operating to make any significant and long-term difference in our life.

Breaking the routine of drinking can be a challenge; it requires commitment and strength to change lifestyles and activities. This means we won't see change unless we change something. At the end of the day, recovery from alcoholism isn't as much about having willpower as it is about making a lasting transformation.

Luckily, change can come in many different forms. When it comes to recovery, however, there's nothing more important than changing the people, places, and things from your past. These factors can keep you trapped in alcoholic behavior and addiction.

To succeed, we have to change who we spend time with, where we hang out, and even how we think. It's crucial if we want to make our sobriety a success.

First A.A taught me I needed to make changes. It was easy for me to wish that things would change for the better, but you folks taught me that unless I do the work and change things, then I'll always be wishing. You taught me through your stories that people can and do change. You Made me want those changes in my life. In rehab they taught me that doing the same things over and over and expecting a different result was insanity. This was described on page 37 of the Big Book with the story of the jaywalker. That is what got the message through to me. I am still working on it.

CONTINUED IN NEXT MONTH'S JOURNAL . . .

UPCOMING ANNIVERSARIES

AUGUST 2020



WOMEN'S FRIENDSHIP

(JULY)

Caitlin 1

AUGUST

Sue C. 37

Little Feather 36

Genet 32

Char 32

Linda A. 5

Donna K. 4

Nanci 1

REAL HAPPY HOUR

AUGUST

Ben C. 2

SOBER SAND GNATS

AUGUST

Sheila S. 30

Cery L. 27

EVOLUTION

Submitted by Denis S.

The Covid Pandemic has proved to be a challenging period for members of Alcoholics Anonymous. Who doesn't miss wandering into a packed AA room and getting face to face or shoulder to shoulder with his or her comrades? The absence of AA events and social gatherings is also a big loss to all.

However, despite all that, it seems that AA might be going through some kind of an evolution that hopefully will leave it better than ever. Of course, AA has always been evolving ever since its

inception in 1935 and most people believe it has come a long way. However, the recent deluge of online meetings seems to have kicked that evolution into high gear and everyone is wondering what the new normal will be when the dust settles. Members are enjoying zooming into meetings all over the world and here in Florida it is common to hear people say they were able to be back at their old home groups up north and talk face to face with all their old buddies. People who were unable to go to meetings because of illness or home responsibilities can participate in AA meetings again. Some meetings that have resumed

meeting physically are allowing members to participate remotely by moving a "voice only" device around the room to protect anonymity. There is also praise of the fact that the clock has been opened and AA is available all day every day.

In the realm of the Service Structure the 2020 General Service Conference has already taken place virtually as has the North Florida Area Assembly. All in all, it seems like there is plenty positive going on in spite of the obvious negatives. But doesn't that describe the whole history of AA:- a lot of positive going on in spite of the obvious problems.