

Kentuckiana News

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Kentuckiana News

AREA 26 NEWSLETTER - THE VOICE OF KENTUCKIANA - WINTER 2007

Gratitude...



...Our Bridge Over

Troubled Water

The topic of our next issue, due out in late January 2008 will be on 'What's Love Got To Do With It?'. We want to hear about how your feelings of love, your ability to love and your fears of love, have changed in sobriety.

You may email your contribution to kentuckiananewsletter@yahoo.com

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Gratitude...Our Bridge Over Troubled Water

My name is Susan, and I'm a grateful recovering alcoholic. The first time I heard someone say he was a "grateful" recovering alcoholic, I knew you were all insane. I had suspected it all along, but now I had proof. How in the world could one be grateful to be a dishonest, deceitful, self-serving, arrogant snot-slingin' drunk? I didn't understand. But since that first meeting, gratitude and the shape and weight of it has been perhaps the single most powerful force for change in my recovery. My first glimpse of gratitude in recovery appeared when I found a term to put to what was wrong with me... "alcoholic". That sounded ultimately so much better than being crazy, even though you told me I was still crazy. At least I had alcoholism to explain – not justify – but explain the way I felt. I was grateful for that, after decades of trying to change people, places, circumstances, jobs, husbands, houses and anything else but me to become comfortable. An even greater gratitude is that so far, I have survived alcoholism.

I have learned in recovery, through outstanding sponsorship and the grace of a power greater than myself, that life will continue to happen to me even though I no longer have the obsession to drink. That life will not always happen to me in a glowing, loving way. That even though I continue to do the next right thing, life will interfere with my little plans and designs. The key to my emotional sobriety and serenity has always been gratitude for my present circumstances and the humility to learn the lesson life presents me. Gratitude enables humility. When I can accept my circumstances and be grateful for them, serenity is less elusive.

When I came to Alcoholics Anonymous, I just knew that now that I had identified my problem, read the book, worked the steps and gone to meetings as not so subtly suggested by my sponsor, LIFE would get better. LIFE did not get better. LIFE got worse. Since coming to AA, I have been fired from a great, albeit political job at four years sober, lost my house, moved from my comfortable country town, been diagnosed with invasive breast cancer, incurred thousands of dollars in medical bills, went legally blind and had cataract surgery and lens replacements in both eyes. And I'll turn fifty years old this year. None of those life circumstances make me unique. I have seen people in our program stand tall through tremendously heartbreaking circumstances. Mine pale in comparison. But rather than look at my life and bemoan my fate

and ask why me (which I asked once and only once and got the pithy reply from my sponsor, "Why not you?" Never ask if you don't want to know the answer.) Life and all the messiness it entails did not get better. I got better. With a grateful heart, I will keep getting better.

I was raised in AA to look for the gratitude. I was raised in AA to believe that I do not get to see the bigger tapestry God has chosen for me, that I must have faith. For example, when I got fired after an election, I had to move here to Louisville. Besides the blow to my tremendous ego, I didn't want to be a city girl. I was content resting on my laurels. But the bigger weave of life's fabric, which I didn't see at the time, is that when I was diagnosed with cancer, it was here in Louisville where much better medical care is available than in my smaller little town. It was here, where I had the support of my family, support rebuilt through the power of Alcoholics Anonymous after being destroyed by my active alcoholism. It was here where I got a job (albeit in my continuing arrogance, one that was beneath me!) that provided a free mammogram that diagnosed my tumors... a mammogram I wouldn't have had routinely for several more years. For that I am eternally grateful.

Those life circumstances have taught me more than I could have hoped to learn. Those circumstances made me turn to my faith and depend upon the God of my understanding.

Those circumstances showed me that with the God of my understanding and the support of my AA friends and family, I can bear and benefit from life. Surrendering to those circumstances made me stronger. I am grateful for my life. Bill Wilson said, in *Language of the Heart*, that "I try to hold fast to the truth that a full and thankful heart cannot entertain great conceits. When brimming with gratitude, one's heartbeat must surely result in outgoing love, the finest emotion we can ever know."

I have kept a gratitude journal since the day I came to AA, and there are 16,575 entries in those journals of circumstances, people, emotions, pain and growth for which I am grateful. I hope to have another 16,575. But feeling grateful isn't enough. I must pay that gratitude forward through action. Through working with others, by living each day as the gift that it is. John F. Kennedy said, "As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them." My name is Susan and I *am* a grateful recovering alcoholic.

Gratitude... Our Bridge Over Troubled Water

That One Thing

A few months ago, our priest gave a homily (sermon, for you non-Catholics) on humility and asked people for their definition of the term. Of course, he got various answers and even a bonafied AA definition from one of Us, but I liked Father John's definition and it made me have to look at all I have to be grateful for right here, right now. He said, "humility is the ability to see the truth as it really is- no better, no worse."

The past few years of my sobriety (and life in general) have been stressful at times and I've even considered that a drink might be a reasonable answer to the dilemma at hand on an occasion or two. I thank my God for answering that often-asked prayer of, "God help me." For me, there is no place scarier than that nether world of this alcoholic's mind, when drinking seems like the answer to the problem at hand. The Big Book speaks of being "beyond human aid" and I've been reminded several times in just the past few weeks of that place, in my own thoughts and through the words, actions and inactions of another alcoholic in my life. But the truth, "no better, no worse" is that I have a life today that is somebody else's dream life. It was my dream life about twelve years ago, before I came to Alcoholics Anonymous and got sober.

I could make a gratitude list as long as my arm, but there's one very basic thing that covers a big area for me today. "They" (the alcoholics with emotional sobriety) told me when I got here that there would come a time when there would be nothing that stood between me and that first drink except the God of my understanding, so I'd better get busy getting in touch with Him. That's the bottom line of what keeps me sober today, especially when the s__t is hitting the fan. The fan has seen a lot of action at my house lately, and I have been in touch with my Higher Power even more often than usual. There are so many ways to get in touch and staying in touch, so I don't really have any excuse for spiritual abstinence today. There

are meditation books, speaker tapes, meetings, prayer, helping others (in and out of AA), etc. Anything I do, with or without the proper motive, that will get me out of my stuff and into His will, will work. I can be in the middle of mopping my kitchen floor or scrubbing the toilet and have a wonderful, insightful experience with God today, if I really try to make a conscious contact. I am very grateful for that simple truth.

As crazy as it might sound, I'm pretty grateful also for the fact that I wasn't brought up with any religious background. That has given me the opportunity to make contact without a whole head full of ideas of how I have to go about it. In chapter five of the book it says, "We had to let go of our old ideas. The result was nil until we let go absolutely." In my case, most of those were New Age, "old hippie" folklore, or just plain old made-up in my own head ideas and didn't make much sense to begin with, so I didn't have trouble letting go of them when the time came to let them go. And I do have a wonderful religious life today because of the God I met in AA, sitting around with a bunch of old men, cussing like a sailor and trying to fit in. It never ceases to amaze me that the same God we speak to as we open our meetings is in my church, car, house and every molecule of air that is sucked into my lungs every minute of every day.

Just knowing that He will keep me sober today, if I ask and don't pick up a drink, is the most precious gift I've ever been given. And it is a gift, not something I've accomplished by being in the right home group or inherited by being in a good sponsorship family or even in the right place at the right time. All those things are factors in my sobriety, but they aren't that only thing that stands between me and the first drink. No one human power, especially me- can do that and I am forever indebted to God for the willingness to believe that truth, no better or worse, in my heart of hearts today. Just like the acceptance of my alcoholism, it has to remain a basic truth to my inner most self.

Anonymous

Gratitude...Our Bridge Over Troubled Water

GRATITUDE-OUR BRIDGE OVER TROUBLED WATER

Hi, my name is Betty S., a GRATEFUL recovering alcoholic. I find myself saying on a regular basis, "Thank God for Alcoholics Anonymous". I have been sober for 21+ years now, and AA has truly taught me how to live. AA is not about not drinking; it's about how to live soberly through our trials and tribulations. I was taught early on in this journey to keep a gratitude journal. I did not realize how ungrateful a person I had been all my life. My early gratitude was for the basics, food, shelter, clothing and yes, the fact that I didn't have to GO to work; that I instead, "Get to go to work". An Attitude of Gratitude is easier to talk about than to live, but in order for us to be happy, joyous and free, it is an absolute necessity. I have learned that there are so many things I HAVE to turn over to the GOD of my understanding, and, yes, I'm grateful that Alcoholics Anonymous taught me how to have one. In my journey, I have so wanted to FIX people, places and things and found that only GOD can do that. When I know this deep down in my innards, then I am grateful to be able to turn them all over to HIM. When I came into AA, I had a car which the bank owned, very little money and had returned to Kentucky and AA after my last (I PRAY) drunk that lasted for six months in the Commonwealth of

Virginia. I stayed with a friend for a week, knowing that I was imposing on her but didn't have anywhere else to go. I started calling about apartments in the classifieds, and went to see about one. I talked with the landlord, who, coincidentally, it turned out I knew, and was honest with him and told him I had no job, no damage deposit money, just enough for the first month's rent. He agreed to let me move in under those conditions and I was able, through the Grace of God and Alcoholics Anonymous to find a job, pay my rent and stay sober. It was a basement apartment in a very old house, which I lovingly refer to today as The Dump, because I shared it with a lot of varmints (very large bugs) and I lived more humbly than I ever have in my life. Yet, this is where I found true sobriety. When I mentioned coincidence earlier, I remember hearing at Dr. Bob's house in Akron, that there are no coincidences; that it is GOD acting anonymously. I believe when we truly try to live this program to the best of our ability with the guidance of AA and the GOD of our understanding, amazing events come to pass in our lives. My material circumstances have improved greatly since those early days, but I still have situations, as we all do, that arise. Again, thank GOD and Alcoholics Anonymous that today, I choose happiness. As the saying goes, "Suffering is inevitable; Misery is optional."

My first sponsor told me there were two things to say about prayer and meditation: first, I had to start and second, I had to continue. When I came to A.A. my spiritual life was bankrupt; if I considered God at all, He was to be called upon only when my self-will was incapable of a task or when overwhelming fears had eroded my ego.

Today I am grateful for a new life, one in which my prayers are those of thanksgiving. My prayer time is more for listening than for talking. I know today that if I cannot change the wind, I can adjust my sail. I know the difference between superstition and spirituality. I know there is a graceful way of being right, and many ways to be wrong.

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Enjoy From "Being grateful:"

"The thoughts we choose to spend time on in any given 24 hours can strongly influence the complexion of our feeling for that day -- bright and healthy, or murky and disheartened.

"It will come as a pleasant surprise to discover that it is not difficult to develop the habit of gratitude if we just make some effort....it soon comes easier, and can become a strong and comfortable force in our recovery. Life was meant to be enjoyed, and we mean to enjoy it."

Gratitude...Our Bridge Over Troubled Water

It just does not get better than this
 Everything any of us ever decides to do depends on our faith, our faith in the graceful gift of more time.
 So it must be that the best times we can ever enjoy are those we are in the midst of, since their guarantee has been realized. Nothing else should matter more than now.
 But we allow the non-now to matter more and sometimes to dominate. We are taught, and we teach others, that time is money. That planning is virtuous. And that it is better to work hard and save up now in order to enjoy a joyful, and stress-free, tomorrow.
 But really, there is no tomorrow.
 Must we be good today so we can go to heaven tomorrow?
 No.
 We must be good today so we can go to heaven today. It is possible. It is the promise of living and being human.
 A human being should be able to know what heaven is like now not later.
 Buddha says that life is suffering. To live is to suffer. And death is the beginning of a new birth.
 I believe that the Kingdom of God is within each and every person. This I feel to be true. This is my faith.
 Accepting that life includes suffering and that death is not the end but a new and different beginning has allowed me to relax.
 Heaven is not up there; it is right here, and it is right now, with all of the warts, and imperfections, and deceptions, and unjustifiable tragedies, and with all of the pain, and with all of the loss we have all felt, and known, and which we will always feel, and always know, as long as we are alive.

This, right here, right now, is everything. Heaven has to be now. We don't need to know any more. We don't need to have any more. We certainly don't need to do any more. Haven't we done enough already? We, simply, need to be.
 How blessed I am to have you, my fellow AAs.
 You have given me the greatest gift any person can ever give to another person: you gave me your time. That is worth more than anything and, I think, that is what love is. Time is not money. Time, is love.
 The same pop song I quoted at the beginning has this line near the end: "love is watching someone die." That might sound a bit dark, but I believe that embracing death as something to respect, and not fear, is a way to celebrate life, which, without death, is the only thing that any of us really ever has.
 One thing I have come to accept is the fact that nothing in life, no matter how hard I try, is purely the result of my planning and control. Nothing I do now to manipulate or steer what happens next will ever be a guarantee.
 I have come to find a liberating peace, and at times, exhilarating comfort, in this realization. It allows me to feel regularly that everything is going to be all right, not because it will be later, but because it is now.
 This right here, just this, is all I have. And since this is all I ever need, what I pray to God for is that this right here, just this, is all that I will ever want.
 What a gift, these lives we live. And this, right here, right now, is the gift.
 How lucky I am to have the gift of your time. It just does not get better than this.
 --Anonymous

Trudging

"Abandon yourself to God as you understand God. Admit your faults to Him and to your fellows. Clear away the wreckage of your past. Give freely of what you find and join us. We shall be with you in the Fellowship of the Spirit, and you will surely meet some of us as you trudge the Road of Happy Destiny. May God bless you and keep you -- until then."

c.1976AAWS, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, p.

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Praying Rightly

We thought we had been deeply serious about religious practices. However, upon honest appraisal we found that we had been most superficial. Or sometimes, going to extremes, we had wallowed in emotionalism and had also mistaken this for true religious feeling. In both cases, we had been asking something for nothing. We had not prayed rightly. We had always said, "Grant me my wishes," instead of "Thy will be done." The love of God and man we understood not at all. Therefore we remained self-deceived, and so incapable of receiving enough grace to restore us to sanity.

TWELVE AND TWELVE, p. 32

Gratitude...Our Bridge Over Troubled Water

GRATITUDE IS THE BEST WORKING KEY IN MY HOUSE OF SOBRIETY. HAD I NOT LEARNED TO BE THANKFUL I WOULD NOT HAVE HAD THE DOORS OPEN TO MY LIVING CONDITIONS, MY EMPLOYMENT SITUATION OR THE NEW FRIENDS IN MY LIFE. I HAVE LEARNED THAT BEING GRATEFUL IS LEARNING TO SHARE BLESSINGS AND BEING OF SERVICE TO OTHERS. SOMEONE WAS THERE FOR ME AND TO KEEP THE DOORS OPEN I HAVE TO BE THERE FOR THOSE WHO COME IN BEHIND ME AND IN TURN ONE OF THEM WILL HOLD THE DOOR FOR THE ONES THAT COME AFTER THEM. GRATITUDE COVERS A WHOLE FIELD OF CIRCUMSTANCES. IT TEACHES ONE TO CONNECT TO THE HIGHER POWER, IT GIVES ONE PEACE, IT HELPS US TO GROW FROM THE INSIDE-OUT AND IT ALLOWS ONE TO BE ACCEPTABLE OF LIVES' EVENTS. IT LET'S ONE CONTINUE FORWARD, IN SPITE OF AND IT HAS CAUSED ME TO LET OTHER PEOPLE BE WHO AND WHERE THEY ARE. I HAVE THE MOST GRATITUDE IN MY NEW WAY OF THINKING. HAVING AN OPEN MIND IS POWERFUL. I CAN SEE GOOD IN ALL AND KNOW THAT EVERYTHING HAPPENS FOR A REASON. ALL IS WELL TODAY DUE TO THE FACT THAT I HAVE GRATITUDE IN NOT HAVING TO MEDICATE MY FEELINGS. I LOOK FORWARD TO PASSING THROUGH STORMS WITH

FAITH THAT THERE IS "THE OTHER SIDE" AND KNOWING WHEN I COME OUT ON THAT OTHER SIDE ALL WILL BE WELL BECAUSE I EITHER LEARNED HOW "TO" OR "NOT TO" DO SOMETHING. LIFE IS NOT A CHALLENGE, AS I ONCE THOUGHT, LIFE IS A JOURNEY TO BE EXPLORED AND EXPERIENCED. LIVE, LOVE AND LAUGH AS OFTEN AS POSSIBLE AND ALWAYS SHARE IT WITH SOMEONE ELSE GRATITUDE IS A KEY AND IT CAN OPEN MANY DOORS. DOORS THAT I NEVER THOUGHT I WOULD BE KNOCKING ON OR EVEN ALLOWED TO APPROACH. TODAY THERE ARE NO DOORS THAT I CAN'T WALK UP TO. THAT IS POSSIBLE ONLY BECAUSE I HAVE GRATITUDE IN LIVING THE KIND OF LIFE THAT WAS INTENDED FOR ME ALL ALONG. BEING SELFISH WILL NOT GET YOU THROUGH THE SAME DOORS AS GRATITUDE. GENEROUSITY WILL TAKE YOU TO THE DOOR OF GRATITUDE. DAILY INVENTORY WILL ALLOW OR DENY YOU ENTRANCE TO THE DOOR OF GRATITUDE. SERVICE WILL DEFINITELY HELP OPEN THE DOOR OF GRATITUDE. TODAY IF I AM NOT GRATEFUL I TEND TO NOT BE WILLING TO DO WHAT I NEED TO DO TO HAVE SERINITY. SO, FOR ME GRATITUDE GIVES PEACE, HOPE AND JOY IN THE GIFT OF SOBRIETY AND ALLOWS ME TO KNOW A FUTURE IS THERE IF I AM WILLING TO GO FOR IT.

Gratitude

Well, it was Aug 15,2006 and enough was enough-finally. It only took me 18 years to get to this point! (I first came to AA in 1988.) This was the first time I tried sponsorship and working the steps. (And I wondered why AA hadn't worked for me before!) Was I terminally unique? No. Simply going to meetings wasn't enough to bring about a "psychic change".

After asking for a sponsor and working the 12 steps to the best of my ability, everything has changed. The promises in the Big Book have come true-really. I am way more than amazed! I have since joined a home group, become active in corrections, and been chosen as an alternate GSR in my home group. I now see the natural growth process in Recovery, Unity, and Service. For once I am excited to be "a part of", instead of desiring to be "the center of". What used to be "the God thing" has become a personal relationship with God, to whom I owe this life. I am very grateful for all that has come my way as a result of a "desire to stop drinking" one day at a time. And thanks to all who came before me who felt "responsible" when this drunk found the doors of AA.

Diane S.

Mayfield, KY

Gratitude...Our Bridge Over Troubled Water

Gratitude and Staying Sober Through Adversity

Each year as we begin the fall season, I am usually filled up with an overwhelming sense of appreciation and respect for the gifts of my sobriety, and for the gratitude I feel most days. My gratitude is an unexpected gift I have received as a result of living life sober, one day at a time and doing a few simple things every day to the best of my ability that day. Throughout my recovery in AA, I have continually been shown what my purpose is and what my next steps should be – two things I never experienced during my using days, or in early sobriety. Having these two things in my life, along with feeling some bit of serenity and peace of mind, most every day that I am blessed to stay sober fills me with joy and an often overwhelming feeling of gratefulness.

You may be saying to yourself – “sure, it’s easy to be full of gratitude when everything’s going great for you” – or maybe, “she wouldn’t feel so grateful if she had to deal with my problems!”. Those who know me know my recovery has been riddled with many, many times of adversity throughout the past 20 years. Here are just a few of the “highlights”: financial difficulties, problems with the IRS, an apartment fire, lots of emotional pain and losses, numerous health problems, including a life threatening illness, etc., etc.

Thought to Consider . . .

Through adversity, we find strength.

~~* AACRONYMS *~*~*

F A I T H = Facing All In Trusting Him

I am most grateful for each day I have been able to stay sober, especially throughout the many times I have been faced with adversity. During the difficult times I have done what I’ve been taught to do by my sponsor, which has been proven to work in my life over and over again. I continue to go to meetings, pray, read my daily meditation books, and say “yes” to whatever I am asked to in and for AA. I’ve learned that staying in touch on a regular basis with my sponsor and support group, and being real honest about what’s going on with me has helped tremendously. My sponsor has told me that if I will stay in the middle of AA and not drink, no matter what happens in my life that I will be OK. Throughout the most trying times in sobriety, if I’ve done that, I have stayed sober and most days had some bit of serenity that day, even in the midst of life’s storms.

It really helps to “Keep it simple” and just focus on the basics we’re taught in AA: Don’t drink, go to meetings, read the Big book and follow the directions and stay in touch with my sponsor. I try as best I can – no matter how difficult life on life’s terms is – to take an active part in my recovery each day as I feel led to do by my Higher Power. So far, I’ve been blessed to be able to weather the storms that have crossed my path. Right now I’m facing another one and with guidance from God and support from those in AA who share with me and walk with me, I have hope that I will survive this storm, sober too.

Thank you AA for my life. - CM

Thought to Consider . . .

When brimming with gratitude, one's heartbeat must surely result in outgoing love, the finest emotion we can ever know.

Bill W., March 1962

Gratitude...Our Bridge Over Troubled Water

Hello to everyone,

My name is Fred G. and I am an alcoholic. The miracle of my sobriety began on April 4th, 1982 and it has continued on a consecutive daily basis from that day until this very day {10-6-2007}. This is by thanks to the Grace of God and consistent and persistent effort, on my part, to practice certain principles contained in the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions of AA.

One of the traditional principles of sobriety, through the virtues of AA, is the practice of gratitude. May I remind myself here that grateful is an adjective but gratitude is an action. I ask God {and the Patron Saint of my return to sanity, St. Theresa}, to help me always to be a practitioner of gratitude. In the practice of gratitude, I have found God's Mercy. If I were a pretender of gratitude, I could very well come face to face with God's Justice {not punishment}.

Giving a litany of what I am grateful for does not make me grateful. That's just one part of the action of gratitude. To be grateful requires of me to practice principles before personalities in ALL of my affairs, this by twice daily prayer and meditation, reading AA literature daily, going to meetings {daily for me, I'm retired}, carrying the message to other alcoholics, being a power of example that this Fellowship works, having a sponsor and being sponsored, service work at any level and other ways.

I now take the time to tell you what I am grateful for: sobriety, the love of a good woman {married for 43 years}, I sold my soul for alcohol and God bought it back for me, I was mentally and emotionally insane and have been restored to reasonable sanity. I was once a worthless piece of garbage {or so I thought} and my dignity as a human being was restored. I live with the spiritual treasures over the passions of the flesh and with truth over lies.

Some of the adversities and troubles of my sober life have been: my 3rd lumbar back surgery, the surgery to implant 2 each artificial knees and hips, rotator cuff surgery, gall bladder surgery, a heart procedure {stent implant} and a few other odds and ends. When I could not get out of my bed, my AA friends brought meetings to my bedroom. When I could not drive, my AA group friends took me to meetings and to speaking commitments. They visited me in the hospital and prayed for and with me. They did the shopping for my wife and I. These things say something to me about one alcoholic's love for another alcoholic.

It's best I close now with prayers for all in living the miracle of sobriety. Remember, AA folks who trust God come to understand the truth and these same AA folks who have faith in God come to live in God's Love

Vaya Con Dios,
Fred G.

Gratitude

"A complete change takes place in our approach to life. Where we used to run from responsibility, we find ourselves accepting it with gratitude that we can successfully shoulder it. Instead of wanting to escape some perplexing problem, we experience a thrill of challenge in the opportunity it affords for another application of AA techniques, and we find ourselves tackling it with surprising vigor."

c. 1976AAWS, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, pp. 311-12

Pain

"Though I still find it difficult to accept today's pain and anxiety with any great degree of serenity -- as those more advanced in the spiritual life seem able to do -- I can give thanks for present pain nevertheless. I find the willingness to do this by contemplating the lessons learned from past suffering -- lessons which have led to the blessings I now enjoy. I can remember how the agonies of alcoholism, the pain of rebellion and thwarted pride, have often led me to God's grace, and so to a new freedom."

Bill W., Grapevine, March 1962

c. 1967AAWS, *As Bill Sees It*, p. 266

Gratitude...Our Bridge Over Troubled Water

Gratitude from Rick D.

As I sit and write this article about "Gratitude, Our Bridge Over Troubled Waters", only a few hours remain until my oldest daughter gets married. My first baby. And because of that, I hope you'll pardon my deviating from the intent of this issue's topic - how I've remained sober through troubles and diversity. I'm compelled to write what I'm about to write, just plain gratitude. I can't tell you the intense feelings of gratitude, joy at seeing the woman my daughter has become, happiness for seeing her happy. All three of my daughters have grown into beautiful (inside and out) women. I love them so much and wish them ALL the happiness in the world. But it wasn't always like that. When my children were young, they lived with a fully-active alcoholic, me. Their lives were not as most little girls would imagine them to be. Sleep-overs at our house didn't happen often. As a matter of fact, few of my children's friends visited. There was one particular occasion when a friend did come over and I remember hearing my daughter say, while I was in a "brown-out", "Oh, that's my Dad on the floor, just step over him." I was an embarrassment to my family. So much so, that they stopped bringing friends over and they began visiting other homes themselves - to get away from me. We all pulled away from each other. And I went right on progressing in the disease of alcoholism, selfishness, egocentricity, and apathy. I built walls around myself so high that NO ONE could get in. That was one of the hardest things I had to do in my fifth step, was admit to my sponsor how little I cared for the happiness of my little girls. I will never be able to make a full amends for that - how do you give someone back their childhood? But the 5th step was easy compared to the 9th step. Talking with them and admitting that I'd taken their childhood away from them. But this article is supposed to be about gratitude, not regret, guilt or remorse. I was able to help my

daughter set up her wedding yesterday. I had a long talk last night with my youngest daughter about the health of my mother. I will be the "official" wedding photographer today (which scares the hell out of me). My ex-wife will be there and we will talk like old friends. My wife, whom I love to the depth of my soul, will be there too and I'll be proud to walk by her side. My parents, brother, relatives, will all be there. I'll be but a small part of it all. But you see, that's the way it should be. I am inexpressibly grateful to be able to be a part of this today. God, AA, the 12 Steps, my sponsor and you crazy alcoholics (you know who you crazy ones are) have given me back all these people and much much more. I likely wouldn't have been invited had it not been for AA and a number of years for forgiveness to replace hurt. Let me quote Paul Simon from the song for a moment:

Sail on silvergirl,
Sail on by.
Your time has come to shine.
All your dreams are on their way.
See how they shine.
If you need a friend
I'm sailing right behind.
Like a bridge over troubled water
I will ease your mind.
Like a bridge over troubled water
I will ease your mind.

The line "Sail on, silver girl" is often reputed to refer to a needle (meaning the song is about heroin) but it actually refers to Simon's girlfriend and later wife who found a few gray hairs and was upset. The lyric was meant as a joke. But I can see how those same lyrics are appropriate to the progression of life I'm about to witness today, one of my "silver girls" is about to be married. And with God's help, one day at a time, hopefully, I will remain a responsible, loving, father and friend. And for that I'm tearfully grateful.

Rick D.

Gratitude...Our Bridge Over Troubled Water

Some one once said that gratitude is the hinge on which our sobriety swings. I stood in the bathroom one evening asking God to help me have a normal life. I couldn't quit drinking. After asking him alcohol was removed from me that evening. The committee meeting wouldn't slow down or stop. I was admitted to the sixth floor three months later (psychiatric ward). I thought I was fine. The Dr. had informed my wife that I was suicidal and psychotic. I hadn't wanted to kill my self at that time. After spending a week there they released me to an outpatient treatment center. My mother dropped me off to my first AA meeting; she gave me a dollar told me to put it in the basket, and said some people will talk a lot and some not at all but try and listen. Her last suggestion was to get a temporary sponsor that night. Then my Alanon mother drove off. I sat down at the meeting and started balling. They asked if anyone had any announcements, I raised my hand and said that I needed a temporary sponsor. I have had three sponsors since that time. My current sponsor instilled service work and many meetings. I didn't start to regain my sanity for at least three or four years. The committee wouldn't shut down during that time. I had to take a job at the local YMCA

changing light bulbs and doing odd jobs part time. After a few days after meeting my sponsor he invited me out to dinner his treat. We went to his local hang out the Salvation Army. We ate lunch there for the next two years about every day. He said we were on a mission to help others and to bring laughter into others life's. In hind sight my Life in AA wasn't bad at all, I only thought it was. My sponsor had me show my gratitude by performing other service work: Big book study's at the local treatment center, jail meetings for over a year, cut grass at our meeting place, take people to medical treatment, many visits to the hospital to people I didn't even know (he said it didn't matter), sponsor many people. I say this not to brag, it takes a lot of work to get a sick person like myself better. I've been married fourteen years now and have two daughters 12 and 14. AA has made me a better father, husband and friend and for that I owe God and AA the credit, which I hope I will spend the rest of my life trying to give back what was freely given to me.

Salem V

Thought to Consider . . .

Joy isn't the absence of pain -- it's the presence of God.

One Sunday in October, during my morning meditation, I glanced out the window at the ash tree in our front yard. At once I was overwhelmed by its magnificent, golden color! As I stared in awe at God's work of art, the leaves began to fall and, within minutes, the branches were bare. Sadness came over me as I thought of the winter months ahead, but just as I was reflecting on autumn's annual process, God's message came through. Like the trees, stripped of their leaves in the fall, sprout new blossoms in the spring, I had my compulsive, selfish ways removed by God in order for me to blossom into a sober, joyful member of A.A. Thank you, God, for the changing seasons and for my ever-changing life.

Trouble

"There was a time when we ignored trouble, hoping it would go away. Or, in fear and in depression, we ran from it, but found it was still with us. Often, full of unreason, bitterness, and blame, we fought back. These mistaken attitudes, powered by alcohol, guaranteed our destruction, unless they were altered. Then came AA. Here we learned that trouble was really a fact of life for everybody -- a fact that had to be understood and dealt with. Surprisingly, we found that our troubles could, under God's grace, be converted into unimagined blessings."

Bill W., Letter, 1966

c. 1967AAWS, As Bill Sees It, p. 110

Gratitude...Our Bridge Over Troubled Water

THE OLD AND THE NEW

OLD) THE FIRST THING I SEE TODAY IS THAT I TOUCHED SOMEONE WITH A WORD OF INSPIRATION, THINGS LIKE THAT MAKE MY DAY. I'M ALWAYS GLAD THAT TODAY I CAN SAY SOMETHING THAT MATTERS. I FEEL BLESSED KNOWING THAT TODAY I SPEAK POSITIVELY TO OTHERS, AND THEREFORE GET POSITIVE RESPONSES. RECOVERY HAS BEEN ONE BLESSING AFTER ANOTHER. I ALWAYS KNEW THAT GOD TAKES CARE OF HIS OWN, BUT I DID NOT KNOW THAT IN FOLLOWING HIS WORD, SHARING WITH OTHERS AND STAYING IN CONTACT WITH HIM THAT MY LIFE WOULD BE SO FULL OF PEACE. THAT WAS WHAT I HAD BEEN SEARCHING FOR ALL THE TIME. ADMITTING MY POWERLESSNESS HAS GIVEN ME THE POWER THAT I WAS LOOKING FOR, THE POWER OF SERENITY AND JOY. THE STEPS HAVE TRULY LED ME TO THE LIGHT OF LIFE. MY CUP IS NOW FULL. MY HEART IS ALIVE. GIVING FEELS GOOD. I THANK THE PROGRAM AND THE GOD OF MY UNDERSTANDING FOR AWAKENING ME. I NEVER KNEW THAT "I" WOULD HAVE THE TRUE INNER PEACE, LOVE AND HAPPINESS THAT IS MINE TO SHARE TODAY. NOTHING HAPPENS IN GODS' WORLD BY MISTAKE. NO ONE COULD HAVE PAID ME TO BELIEVE THAT A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO. EVERYTHING

THAT I'VE BEEN THROUGH WAS TRAINING FOR THIS SIDE OF LIFE. I TRY TO ENCOURAGE AND GIVE HOPE DAILY TO ALL THAT I COME INTO CONTACT WITH WHO SEEMS TO BE STRUGGLING. I WALK IN THE PROMISES TODAY. SERENITY, COURAGE AND WISDOM FILL MY LINE TO GOD. THE FIRST THREE STEPS ARE THE KEY TO LIFE IN EVERY FACET AND THE LAST TWO PULL EVERYTHING ELSE TOGETHER. HARDSHIP IS THE PATHWAY TO PEACE. WE NEED TO SHARE THE LATTER TWO THIRDS OF THE SERENITY PRAYER MORE OFTEN. SORRY FOR TAKING UP SO MUCH TIME, BUT I'M OFF TO A GREAT START THIS MORNING, ALL BECAUSE YOU ACCEPTED MY BLESSING TO YOU YESTERDAY. AGAIN, BLESS YOU AND YOURS.

NEW)THIS PASSAGE, ALONG WITH A WHOLE LOT OF GRATITUDE ARE WHAT LIFE IS ALL ABOUT. TODAY I KNOW WHO I AM AND WHOSE I AM. GLAD TO BE ONE OF THE ONES WHO GOT SAVED FROM THE MADNESS AND ONE OF THE ONES WHO WILL HELP TO BUILD A LIFE FOR THOSE WHO COME AFTER US. GRATITUDE, GRATFULNESS AND GENEROUSITY WILL SAVE LIVES ONE DAY AT A TIME, ONE STEP AT A TIME AND ONE PERSON AT A TIME. BELIEVE AND YOU WILL ACHIEVE YOUR HEARTS DESIRES.

ELLEN S. KY.

A "Special" Experience?

I was the recipient of a tremendous mystic experience or "illumination," and at first it was very natural for me to feel that this experience staked me out as somebody very special. But as I now look back upon this tremendous event, I can only feel very grateful. It now seems clear that the only special features of my experience were its suddenness and the overwhelming and immediate conviction that it carried. In all other respects, however, I am sure that my own experience was essentially like that received by any A.A. member who has strenuously practiced our recovery program. Surely, the grace he receives is also of God; the only difference is that he becomes aware of his gift more gradually.

GRAPEVINE, JULY 1962

Gratitude

"Another exercise that I practice is to try for a full inventory of my blessings and then for a right acceptance of the many gifts that are mine -- both temporal and spiritual. . . I try to hold fast to the truth that a full and thankful heart cannot entertain great conceits. When brimming with gratitude, one's heartbeat must surely result in outgoing love, the finest emotion that we can ever know."

Bill. W., March 1962

c.1988AAGrapevine, *The Language of the Heart*, p. 271