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A Friend of the Fellowship

I am one of those lucky medical doctors who for years have had the pleasure and privilege to cooperate with AA and be accepted as a nonalcoholic friend of the Fellowship. (It means so much to me that sometimes I think of myself as being a part of it, so please forgive me.)

But first let me introduce myself. I had my medical education before World War II. After being a refugee in Sweden for three years during the war, and serving a four-year term as a member of the Norwegian Parliament after the war, I returned to my hometown and my medical practice in 1949.

In 1947 a friend and colleague of mine, Dr. Gordon Johnsen, a well-known psychiatrist in Oslo, had told me about a little group of Alcoholics Anonymous. He supported the tiny group, because he had seen the implications of the Twelve Steps.

So AA was not completely unknown to me when an AA group started in my hometown, and I was asked to support the group as a kind of medical advisor.

In some kind of medical enthusiasm (or maybe medical arrogance!) I thought I could contribute a lot in helping alcoholics stop drinking. I soon had to realize that while I knew a little about the consequences of hard drinking, cirrhosis of the liver, DTs, etc., I had to learn from the members of AA and from the AA literature what it was all about, and how to recover and stay sober.

On the initiative of the groups in the area a little treatment center was established in 1954. I was physician in charge of the treatment center for 25 years, and retired in 1979. (I am still working with alcohol problems in a community center part time.) During all those years the cooperation of the

AA groups in the clinic has been very important, and the AA members are valuable participants in the activities of the clinic, though they are not involved in administration.

I have also had the privilege for many years to be a nonalcoholic member of the Norwegian Board of Trustees for AA, and served a four-year term as a World Service Meeting delegate. I have had the opportunity to participate in four AA conventions, and attend service conferences in England and other countries. I had the pleasure to meet Bill W. and Lois when they visited Norway in 1950, and met Bill again in New York in 1965. On that occasion I asked him, among other things, to give me, in a few words, his explanation of the Twelve Steps. His explanation was: the Twelve Steps are not the Ten Commandments of the Bible. There is no "you must" in the Steps. Notice they are written in the past tense. The experience of the first members of AA, how they learned a new way of life, is condensed in the Twelve Steps. You can't compel anybody to follow the Steps, but you can suggest to a newcomer to give them a try.

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What is my experience with AA during these forty years since my first encounter with the Fellowship? First of all I am thankful for the invaluable support Alcoholics Anonymous has been in my clinical work, and my experience is that AA fellowship is very important for the alcoholic in maintaining his sobriety after treatment, and in learning how to live comfortably with oneself, others, and the Higher Power.

I am thankful to serve as a member of the Literature Committee in Norway, which gives me an opportunity to be up-to-date with the AA literature that has meant so much to me personally.

As it has in most countries, AA has gone through difficult times in Norway. I have witnessed the rapid growth of AA in Norway in the first years, then years with stagnation and even decline. But luckily, the last years have been filled with new growth, new groups, new spirit and enthusiasm. In my opinion AA is one of this century's miracles, and I am sure that AA still has a job to do in this troublesome world in creating individual miracles.