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A Walking Tour Through AA Literature

The many miracles of Alcoholics Anonymous work at myriad levels and in infinite ways. No two alcoholics work, practice, or live the program in exactly the same way. Some achieve sobriety and a richer more rewarding life after only brief association with AA. Others become immersed in the Fellowship with many meetings, service, and repeated returns to and reviews of the Big Book. As we say - and it is true - it takes what it takes.

I fully appreciate this and in no way want to take other people's inventories. However, I've observed that there is one tool used less than almost any other in our bag of tools, and that is the literature of AA.

In my view, AAs seem to be largely a verbal breed of critter and our program is at its very core a verbal program, with sharing the key element and most dynamic of its many ingredients. Reading often takes a back seat to sharing and is not as essential a tool to recovery. And yet, for achieving sobriety and a fit spiritual condition, it can't be beat.

I am one of those who started read-

ing in my early AA days, long before my last drink, because I happened to go to meetings that prominently displayed the entire array of AA pamphlets and books not in a dark corner but on the way to the coffee and cookie counter or by the main entrance. Very soon, daily reading, perhaps only ten to fifteen minutes at a time, became part of my program, which I still practice today. Usually it's an article in the Grapevine, a few selections from *As Bill Sees It*, or a piece or two from *Best of the Grapevine*, "Box 4-5-9," or a local intergroup newsletter.

Here are the books which helped me at the start of my AA journey and which continue to be a part of my program for sober living.

Alcoholics Anonymous. Believe it or not, many AAs admit they have never read the Big Book or have given it only a once-over-lightly. For myself, I can't conceive of having obtained



anything but an unhappy, white-knuckle sobriety without the Big Book to guide me in the early months. I still derive a lot out of rereading chapters two and three because I never fail to see there a grim portrait of myself. Rereading chapter four helps keep the spiritual aspect of the program in focus and reinforces my evolving perception of my Higher Power. And the stories in the back can serve as an occasional substitute for a speaker meeting because they tell what it was like, what happened, and what it's like now.

AA Comes of Age. I have heard it said that no AA can fully appreciate the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous until he or she has read *AA Comes of Age*. How true! It's not a chronological history of AA, but it does chronicle and reveal the start and growth of the Fellowship in its first twenty years and how Bill W. planned the graceful transfer of power to the membership. If you *like* AA now, you'll *love* it when you've read this book.



Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. I was thrust without enthusiasm into a Step study meeting even before I had had my last drink. But, wow, what a key role it played in my eventual sobriety. Reading and then listening to others discuss what each Step meant to them and how they interpreted

them helps a newcomer immeasurably and lights the way for a journey through the Steps. I decided to reread this book when I began this piece and was elated at the fresh perspective it provided. The Steps came alive again for me.

Living Sober. This book was recommended to me before I had stopped drinking and was attending three meetings a week. I took this slim book with me on a long trip, feeling the Big Book was too heavy and bulky for a lot of air travel. Each day I read one of the thirty-one brief sections - each a tip for not taking that first drink. Over a period of six weeks and only one AA meeting, I didn't have a drink, which was a new record for me. *Living Sober* is a must for the newcomer, especially - but not exclusively - one who's still fighting a craving. Many sponsors give their sponsees a copy at the start.

Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers. Probably the least read of the AA library, this is to me its most moving. It tells the story of Dr. Bob, and it describes the early years of AA in Akron and throughout the midwest. How the early program of AA was hammered out in the crucible of trial and error is a remarkable story. For example, hospitalization for "defogging" was originally required for newcomers, most of whom were low-bot-



torn drunks. They were required to kneel and surrender aloud in the presence of another AA member. The prescribed diet for the wet newcomer was sauerkraut, tomatoes, and Karo syrup. Many AAs carried a pint of booze around to give to the detoxing newcomer. Bill W. even gave Dr. Bob a bottle of beer to steady his hands while performing surgery just after his last binge. That bottle was Dr. Bob's last drink. I had tears in my eyes when I finished this book.

As Bill Sees It. These pithy and cogent excerpts from the writings of Bill W. are excellent for short periods of reading and a quick fix for the blahs or a shaky serenity. It is indexed to help locate topics that suit your current need or mood. One meeting I know uses random selections from this book as discussion topics.

Came to Believe. When I was casting about in search of a concept of a Higher Power that I was comfortable with, this little volume of 118 brief testimonies of AAs concerning how they came to find, believe in, and use a Higher Power was extremely useful, even inspirational. This can also serve for those brief periods of daily reading and reveals an almost infinite variety of attitudes and outlooks on the concept of a Higher Power.

Pass It On. I found this one hard to put down. It's a beautifully written biography of co-founder Bill W.'s personal battles as well as his arduous role in building the Fellowship. It's a touching and balanced story of a remarkable man.

Best of the Grapevine, Volumes I and II. Both volumes are collections of articles from the Grapevine, which

has been published since June of 1944. These are excellent for brief daily reading and for providing an ever broader understanding and appreciation of the critical role AA plays in the life of alcoholics from around the country.

The Language of the Heart. Perhaps the least widely known of Bill W.'s many contributions to the building of Alcoholics Anonymous are his prolific articles for the Grapevine over twenty-five years. One hundred and fifteen of those articles are included here. I frequently pick up this book and read at random an article or two whose titles strike my fancy at that moment. I use it for my brief daily reading period and often get swept away and read several before I stop.



Daily Reflections. I had used several other daily meditation books for several years but soon replaced one of them with this. It is the only AA Conference-approved collection of daily meditations. It's written by alcoholics for alcoholics. Each day's entry starts with that AA's favorite passage from AA literature followed by a few sentences about what it means to him or her. That each entry is written by a member of AA gives the reading more meaning than some whose authorship is unknown and which are broader in scope than just alcoholism.

Naturally there were many times when my AA reading extended far beyond ten or fifteen minutes daily, because I was swept up in some of the books. In fact it was five years before I had read them all, so they slowly became an important part of my life.

I was lucky to be attending meet-

ings that used literature displays as part of their Fifth Tradition policy of carrying the message to the alcoholic who still suffers. In addition, those groups' secretaries regularly called attention to the literature display and introduced the literature chairman for those who had questions. Later I was attending a meeting where I noticed quite brisk sales of the books and saw that the prices of the books were displayed on the cover via a Post-It note. Many members were pleasantly surprised to notice the low price of the AA books, compared to the general run of prices for books these days.

So that's how I became an avid reader of AA literature and how developing this habit early on contributed mightily to my sobriety. I know it has enriched my love for Alcoholics Anonymous and heightened my awareness of the miracle of the Fellowship. I suspect many AAs would likewise find their AA experience enormously enriched if they put this lesser-used tool to work.

Ernie K., Indian Wells, Calif.