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Second in a series of articles
on authors of Big Book stories

Interview

with the author of

"Stars Don't Fall"

FELICIA M.

*F*elicia M. is eighty-nine years old and has been sober for over fifty-one years; she joined the Fellowship in the fall of 1943, when it was only eight years old. Her story, "Stars Don't Fall," is in the Third Edition of the Big Book.

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On a clear cold afternoon last January, the managing editor of the Grapevine and an editorial assistant drove up to the small town in Connecticut where Felicia M. lives. We found her modest house on a quiet

back lane. Several big evergreens were in the front yard; in the backyard, a bird feeder hung from a bare tree. Inside, her house was cozy. A whole row of cookbooks filled a shelf over the kitchen door. The walls were hung with pictures — western scenes with men and women on horseback, a painting by a grandson, a large oil by a well-known abstract painter of the nineteen fifties, and some watercolors by Felicia herself, who began painting during one period when she couldn't write (Felicia is a professional writer). The three of us sat in Felicia's small book-lined living room, where the winter light filtered through the draperies,

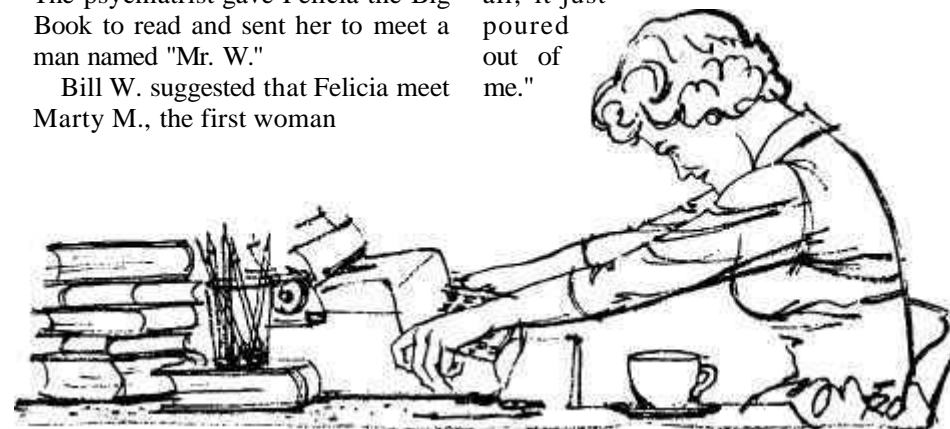
and Felicia served us coffee and cookies as we talked about AA and her recovery from alcoholism.

In her Big Book story, Felicia tells about the turbulent times of her drinking: from her chauffeured "self-guided" tour of Europe's wine countries to being the down-and-out habitue of a Greenwich Village bar, where the other customers took to moving their stools to avoid her. Drinking wasn't a pleasant experience for her; it was, she wrote, like getting a "tap on the head with a small mallet." Felicia told us, "I had low self-esteem and behaved accordingly — and so of course I got into trouble all the time." Her analyst was one of the earliest members of the psychiatric profession to learn about Alcoholics Anonymous; Felicia explained, "Bill had addressed a bunch of shrinks, you see, and my analyst heard him. She said to me, 'You've been coming here either drunk or hungover for a year. And I think these people have something.'" The psychiatrist gave Felicia the Big Book to read and sent her to meet a man named "Mr. W."

Bill W. suggested that Felicia meet Marty M., the first woman

to get — and stay — sober in AA. Marty became Felicia's sponsor: "She was my sponsor until the day she died. I still miss her very much." When Felicia was sober less than a year, she wrote a short piece for the first issue of this magazine, in June 1944 (she was then known as Felicia G.). Over the years, she wrote a number of articles for the Grapevine and worked for a time, without pay, reading and editing manuscripts. During the 1970s, she was active on the Grapevine's Editorial Advisory Board.

Felicia has written both novels and nonfiction. She published several novels while she was still drinking, as recounted in the Big Book. She said, "Of course I used to write when I was drunk — my writing was quite a mess. Since getting sober, I've written some things I'm not ashamed of." How did she write her Big Book story? "I was down in Florida, and it just came out — I didn't correct at all; it just poured out of me."



"My life," Felicia said, "is so much better in sobriety. The main thing is that I believe in God and I can appeal to him and I can get results." She added, "If I hadn't stopped drinking, I'd be dead: if you had buried me with an acorn in my mouth, I'd have raised an oak tree by now."

One of the benefits of Felicia's sobriety is that she and her family were able to make amends. "The thing that I'm very happy about is that I was able to make friends with my mother before her death. We forgave each other. My daughter and I didn't get along for quite a while but now we're really good friends — and I get on with my four grandchildren. I've gone out to Wyoming to see them, and they've been back East. And this is all because of my being sober. I can look back six generations in my family and see only fighting and hatred, and now it's stopped. I go back and pray for my fighting antecedents! I think that's why I was put here — to put an end to the whole business of discord in my family, to break the cycle."

Are there any regrets? "I didn't marry the right man. I wasn't able to live a happy life in that way. I hope that in the next world, I can do it."

The process of change hasn't stopped simply because Felicia has been sober so long. She tries to go to a meeting a week, and she stopped smoking "fairly recently." She still battles what she called in the Big Book "my mortal enemy — the inner me." She

said, "I've always had trouble with my temper and with speaking out. I remember Bill had a room in the old Hell's Kitchen clubhouse on Forty-Fifth Street, and one day over there I lost my temper and I went for this woman — actually went for her. She started crying and Bill just comforted her and said nothing to me. I was very ashamed. Oh! I still remember it. I need the 'soft word that turneth away wrath.' I'm still working on that. I'm trying to learn to be tolerant and understanding of those who differ with me."

As we were preparing to leave, Felicia told us, "I don't know what more I can say. I can only tell you the difference between then and now: I have a belief in God. My life is happy."

