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Update

from the author of

"Growing Up All Over Again"

H.K.

H K. is the author of "Growing Up All Over Again," which originally appeared in the February 1969 Grapevine as an article titled "Coming of Age in Sobriety" and was later retitled for the Third Edition of the Big Book. H. K. chose not to be interviewed for this series, but sent along the following update instead.



When I used the expression "growing up all over again," I thought that I was describing my first five years of AA so-

briety. Little did I know that it would more aptly fit my next twenty-eight years of sobriety in AA. My first decade in AA was a storybook recovery. My second marriage was an AA marriage and went well; we were blessed with a little red-headed daughter. I didn't lose my dental license after all and my practice grew; I began to hold a number of offices in the dental society. Our AA commitment continued, and we even got to meet Bill W. We also became friends with Clarence S. Guided by my sponsors, Bob W. (Whitney, Texas) and Jack B. (Roanoke, Virginia), we started the Ceta Glen AA Conference at a church camp near Happy, Texas.

Jack B. used to say, "Alcoholism is not a sin, it is a disease. Nevertheless it is the sinningest disease. So we have a lot to write on our inventories." We did many Fourth and Fifth Steps at Ceta Glen. In the mid 1960s we were active in Young People in AA, and in the late 1960s we became involved in International Doctors in AA (IDAA). I was traveling around to AA meetings "beating the drum" on working the Twelve Steps. I compared the Twelve Steps to ExLax with statements like, "You don't have to believe or understand the Twelve Steps, but if you just take them, you will get a result!"

I remember asking Chuck C. (Laguna Beach, California) what his toughest year of sobriety had been. Chuck had become a good friend and advisor, and he replied, "My tenth year." In my tenth year my wife, Pat, had gone back to college, and she suddenly decided that she didn't want to be married anymore. She wanted to pursue a career in psychology. This really threw me for a loop. It took over a year for this divorce to be final; I procrastinated in the proceedings because I hoped that Pat might change her mind.

I never drank or took any drugs when and after this happened, but I did

do some pretty crazy things. The mind set that saved me was a real gift from God: *it never entered my mind that my answer lay anywhere but in AA.* In my tenth to thirteenth years I contacted AAs I had met all over the U.S. for help in coming through all this sober and sane. Chapter Five states "those who suffer from grave emotional and mental disorders do recover if they



have the capacity to be honest." During this period I stayed in AA not only on the "sobriety" clause of our program, but also on the "emotional and mental disorder" clause. I took many postgraduate dental courses, I spoiled all of my children, I got back into the country club

golf and tennis set, I married a lady bank vice-president, but I did pray a lot too, I took numerous Fifth Steps, and I made a number of amends (particularly to my old patients and a big financial amend to my first father-in-law).

In all my frantic searching and running around, my third marriage lasted only briefly. I had to admit that I was somewhat baffled at what had happened to my storybook recovery. Life was tougher than I thought it was supposed to be. Suddenly something that Clarence had told me years before rang a bell, "In the early days of AA, 'First

Things First' meant only one thing: 'Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added.'" I decided to move to Hankins, N.Y. to be near Tom P. At an IDAA meeting in 1968 Tom had taught me repetitive prayer (Lord Jesus Christ, Have Mercy on Me) to use for ten minutes a day in my Eleventh Step time. Tom had been sponsored by Bill and lived in a community which emphasized working the Twelve Steps with the Four Absolutes as a yard stick. God had led me to what I needed.

In moving to New York I did learn how God changes my life *if* I let go absolutely. Not only did I learn more about working the Twelve Steps and using the Four Absolutes, but due to circumstances I could not predict, my red-headed daughter, Cinamon, came to live with me: moreover due to the physical problems of people in the community I was put in contact with a number of devoutly Christian holistic doctors. These men took me on as a pupil and literally changed the way I practice dentistry to this day. Our Big Book says "Be quick to see where religious people are right"! I spent many years before then criticizing religious people and not listening to anything they had to offer. Thank God at this time in my life I was willing to learn.

In the process of all this I hired as my dental assistant, Diane, a rather snobbish society lady Al-Anon, who had also moved to New York from another part of Texas to be part of the

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community. We had many difficult times in the office. I had had a number of years in AA and had had a successful dental practice in Texas. Financially, Diane didn't need the job. Our egos really clashed. Two "self-wills run riot." We were continually being led to work through these problems with the Twelve Steps and with help from other AAs and Al-Anons in the community. On my forty-fifth birthday I married Diane in the community church and her black-haired daughter, Kristi, became Cinamon's step-sister. We had over three years of this healing environment for all of us. My holistic practice grew to such an extent with patients from all over the U.S. and

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Canada that in the summer of 1978 we moved to a farm in Northern Illinois to be close to O'Hare Airport.

The girls had horses, goats, calves, chickens, and cats. We had an organic garden. We remodeled an old farmhouse into a home-office. The highlight of our move was when our son was born the first day of spring of 1981 on the farm with all the natural things we had learned about childbirth and health in general. This was a long way from my being drunk during the birth of my first two children, and my wife Diane's first husband not even being present at Kristi's birth.

Another bonus in our move to northern Illinois was to reassociate my-

self with Paul M. (Riverside, Ill.). Paul was another old-timer who had stayed active in AA, who advocated working and reworking the Steps, who was always ready to "swap a Fifth Step" (one of Paul's original terms), who always wanted to know where you were with your amends, who wanted to know if your tithing was up to date, and who wanted to know how long you were spending in your Eleventh Step time. ("Everything is connected, you know," he would say.) It was a 110-mile round trip drive to his La Grange meeting, but I was addicted to old-timers by now and always made it on Wednesdays.

I'm still active in AA; I go to two other meetings a week in my home town. I "swap Fifth Steps" every two weeks on Sunday at five. I still need AA desperately. You see, I am now sober three times longer than I drank. I am sober some ten or more years than I was sober growing up before I began to drink. My marriage to Diane, a lady I love dearly, has now lasted longer than all my other three marriages put together. All new and uncharted waters for me!

Carrying the message pays off big. As my story in the Big Book states: my father's sponsor started AA in Amarillo, Texas and got me into dental college. My father, an attorney, made arrangements for one of his wealthy client's nieces to get dried out and into AA. This lady some thirteen years later came and took me to my first meeting. In the mid 1960s I sponsored a painter,

and in the early 1970s I sponsored an attorney. When my oldest daughter, Katrina, was in a mental and emotional mess in the 1980s she called me from Amarillo. "Dad, I've tried the church and the psychiatrist, and I don't know what to do." My quick question was, "Would you try Al-Anon? I know a painter's wife and an attorney's wife who are great Al-Anons, and I'll call them to come see you." As a result of that, my daughter is doing great as a mother, a wife, and a teacher, and is still an active member of Al-Anon. My son Scott has been sold on AA from the time he was old enough to talk to our AA friends, like Paul, and the men I sponsor in the program. He claims to be the Cal Ripken of the Marengo open AA meeting as he hasn't missed a meeting since its inception. His teenage honesty, openness, and enthusiasm for AA's spiritual way of life keeps us young, and also motivated to help new people work the Steps. You just can't outgive AA!

I think that I have grown up enough to realize that life's journey can often be tough. All the great spiritual books, for example, the Holy Bible and the Philokalia, state this rather emphatically. Although God's grace shining through our AA program does give us a touch of paradise on earth, God's grace through our program strengthens us for the blows of life which come to us all. We lost Diane's father and my mother in the space of nine months. Our daughters got into some of the teenage

problems so common to this present generation. Finances were often tight. As parents we got to make some amends to situations we had messed up in in our youth. Most of all, in our troubles we learned, first, how to pray "without ceasing," second, how much we had to have God in our lives, as well as the spiritual awakening as the result of our Steps.

I have had to grow out of the immature idea that because I am sober in AA, God should suspend the laws of his universe so that he can shower continual good experiences on me. My first sponsors Howard M. and Ralph G. used to say, "A spoiled brat like you shouldn't have trouble figuring out the Third Step: just do what you don't want to do, and don't do what you want to do!" This still applies today. If I really want to practice the AA way of life, I'd better hang my ego on the coat rack, roll up my sleeves, and go to work!

Every alcoholic feels that his or her situation is different. I thought that traveling and moving all over the U.S. and being involved with many of the AAs who were instrumental in AA's growth in the 1940s and 1950s would teach me something unusual or unique. Fortunately, this is not what I found. I found that as I had troubles and asked the old-timers what they had done, I discovered that they all did pretty much the same thing. They all followed the same path. They got rigorously honest and retook the Twelve

Steps. This is what they have helped me to do.

A few people might question using the Four Absolutes in this day and time. I sincerely believe that were I not in AA, these would be impossible for me to even consider: however in AA we "claim spiritual progress, not spiritual perfection." This makes the Four Absolutes quite practical. I have been one of Scott's baseball coaches, and I

approach the Absolutes as you do base stealing: sometimes it isn't how big a lead you have, it is which way you are leaning at a certain moment. I may never be a skilled practitioner of the Absolutes and that's not important. What is important is whether I'm leaning in the direction of the Four Absolutes as I continue to work the Twelve Steps at this moment.

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