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'A Very Satisfactory Life'

The story of a long-time Grapevine contributor who is still going strong!



Marty, my sponsor, and Priscilla, our good friend, and Lois K., and Maeve. These were the founders of the Grapevine, along with Chase H. and Bud T. I was in Marty's New York apartment when they first talked about a magazine devoted to AA and alcoholism. It would be about eight pages, rather like a tabloid, with beautiful print that would be easy to read. Priscilla, who was the art editor of *Vogue*, designed the title page. She drew the grapes, hanging on the vines as a background. Then she drew "The Grapevine" as the title in big black letters almost an inch high. You can see this beautiful title page and read all eight pages when you visit the Grapevine office or the AA archives in New York City.

I had a letter addressed to AA in that famous first edition. I said I was so grateful to be sober. For a year and a half I had not had a drink. I said to

myself in part, "All right — you're fifteen years behind in your life. Fifteen years behind in your career. (I am a professional writer.) Thank God you came into AA when you did. Now you can begin to get your life back." I ended by saying I felt I had to write this letter because I was grateful to AA for seeing me through the growing pains of early sobriety.

I signed the letter Felicia G., which is my maiden name and the one I write under. In the last thirty years I've been signing my Grapevine articles with the initials F. M. I was married to another AA, John M. We both stayed sober through three and a half years of perfect hell. Then, thank God, we got divorced.

Priscilla had wanted me to write something for that first edition and I had said I would. But I was pretty new in AA and my self-esteem was wobbly. Although I was earning my pork chops writing for such slicks as *Colliers*, *Mademoiselle*, and the *Saturday Evening Post*, I felt the eyes of

the Grapevine founders fixed upon, me. My Lord, *this* piece had to be great. It had to be as good as Shakespeare — maybe even a little better than the Bard. I wrote and wrote and tore it up and wrote and tore it up.

Priscilla phoned from her office at *Vogue* and said I was late with it. They were going to press in hours. She was coming right up herself to get it.

I burst into a sweat. I went back to the typewriter and typed out a piece with a beginning, a middle, and an end.

I jerked the last page out of the typewriter, read it over, and said aloud, "This stinks."

I ran down my five flights of stairs and, happily, the garbage man hadn't come by yet. The garbage cans outside my New York apartment house were filled with refuse, and so I plunged my typed pages down into the first can, and ran back up my five flights.

I was going to be all sweet and nonchalant when Priscilla arrived. Unfortunately, I was still sweating and close to tears when she rang the bell

Dear Grapevine: I've been in A.A. a year and a month and I'm so happy, so glad at last, to be alive. A year and a month ago I wanted to die—although I didn't do anything about it except go on drinking, which is a pretty good way. My career, for I happen to be a writer, was at a standstill, and my way of living, my habits and emotions were as distorted as the view I used to see of myself in the bottom of a glass.

Now, very, very slowly, I am becoming the person I'm supposed to be. Normal habits and pleasures come back slowly. Things like enjoying food, gardening, going to the theatre, spending an evening with friends while conscious—all these habits had to be reformed, like a paralytic learning the re-use of his limbs. Just the other day I said to myself;

downstairs. I was a little afraid of her. She was my friend, to be sure. But she never put up with nonsense, and she had a very sharp tongue.

She came through the door of my apartment, in a chic beautiful suit and a pair of spanking clean yellow cotton gloves.

"All right, darling," she said. "I'll take it just as it is. We'll correct it if need be."

"You — you — you won't take it," I said. "It isn't here."

"Where is it?"

"It's elsewhere."

"And where is elsewhere?"

"I couldn't write it."

"All right—you're fifteen years behind in your life. Fifteen years behind in your career. Thank God you came into A.A. when you did. Now you can begin, slowly, and get your life back." Perhaps some of you know this experience of discouraged impatience. Perhaps you've been sober a certain number of months and are beginning to say, "Well, so what?" Don't go out and get drunk, as I came so near doing a month ago. Weather this let-down period between first getting truly sober and getting yourself adjusted to life and living. Work like a beaver with an extra spurt of effort in, for and with A.A. That's the solution. I am sure of it. I had to write this because I'm so grateful again to A.A. for seeing me through these "growing pains". *Felicia G.*

"You mean you haven't *written* it? Come, come, my girl, you said —"

"Oh, I typed out a few pages of stuff, and it just wasn't any good, Priscilla. You see, I'm a fiction writer, probably because I have a very weak grasp of fact. I mean, a fiction writer is a failed journalist. This is well known."

"Where did you put what you wrote?"

She wandered toward my wastebasket, which was filled with torn up manuscript.

"No, no," I said. "It's down on the street. It's in a garbage can."

Priscilla turned and ran down the

five flights and I ran out on my rooftop terrace and looked down. I saw Priscilla put one beautiful glove into the stinking mess, take out the pages, straighten them, shake garbage off them, read a few words, and then turn toward Park Avenue to hail a cab.

Why, heaven help me, it was worth running in the Grapevine! Or so it seemed. I let out a sigh. But then I said to myself, "They sure are desperate for

material."

Marty had written an article for that inaugural issue too, though she did not sign hers, which is just a little longer than my letter. It's called "AA Goes to Sea." She says, in part, "Doctor Florence Powdermaker, a well known psychoanalyst, sent us a patient who promptly dried up, pleasing the good doctor no end. Then Doctor Powdermaker (this being World War II) put on a naval uniform and took up the problems of tired or shell shocked seamen. Oddly enough she found that many of them had just the same problem we land lubbers are cursed with...they were



alcoholics and they wanted in the worst way to get over it."

Well, I was the patient whom Doctor Powdermaker sent to AA. She had gone to a meeting of psychiatrists in New York to hear Bill W. speak and she said to me, "These people were active alcoholics and they've stopped drinking. Perhaps you ought to go and see them." I had been rolling around on her couch for a couple of years, either drunk or terribly hung over and filled with guilt at my behavior.

Dear Florence. Of course, I resisted her at first. Finally I went down to Vesey Street, in the Wall Street section of New York, where Bill and his staff had a small office called The Al-

coholic Foundation.

Bill said, "Do you think you are one of us?" The greatest thing anyone had ever said to me. Drinking alone in bars in Greenwich Village, I had been cast out by most of my friends. I hadn't been part of any group for a long time. I nodded my head and said "yes" to Bill. "Yes." This outrageous, immoral behavior of mine — why, it entitled me to be part of a group! Here was Bill, here was Bobby B., Bill's assistant. They were like me, sick not bad. Bill, having explained this to me, sent me to see Marty, who became my wonderful sponsor. Priscilla was a sort of second sponsor. Both of them are gone now, but the three of us became lifelong friends.

After two years, I think it was, the Grapevine was taken over by Chase and his pigeon and friend, Tom Y. They agreed to run it for a couple of years. Chase and his wife, Josephine, owned and ran the Washington Square Bookshop, which was on 8th Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenues, down in Greenwich Village. On this lively block, crowded with eccentric Village types, this bookshop was well known as an oasis for local artists and writers, who dropped in all day long. On the same side of the street was a gay bar called "Main Street." Also the bar where I used to drink most evenings. This was called "The Old Colony Bar and Grill." I was such a good customer that the bartenders always got me into a cab and gave the driver my home address.

Chase got sober after he had a major miracle. He was drunk in someone's apartment in the Village, using the John, next to a wide open window at night. He stood there swaying with his pants down. Suddenly he fell out of the window. He landed in a barrel of soft ashes. The next day, he went, all hung over, to look at that barrel. Right next to it was a barrel of broken glass. He *could* have landed in that. He had resisted AA, but now he joined in a hurry.



And he became another sponsor of mine, after I was sober. Being the co-owner of a bookshop, where AAs now dropped in all day, he knew an awful lot about literature and about

life. He put out a wonderful Grapevine. And he was also a wonderful sponsor.

When Jack, the creator of Victor E., and Paula C. and Lee were editors, the office was in a building near the United Nations. I worked in that office as an editorial assistant. I loved it, but I wouldn't stick to it. Alas, I wasn't ready to commit myself to anything permanent. I see now that I missed something very good. I wish I'd gone on working in that office till I was ready to retire. However, I have contributed articles over the years. I always love to do that. I loved writing this one. It makes me remember Grace O., Lois K., Marty and Priscilla, Chase and Tom Y., and Paula, and Bill, our co-founder, whom we knew well. And dear little short fat Florence Powdermaker looking rather absurd in a naval lieutenant's uniform. All of them are gone now. I'm sure that the AAs are attending the Celestial Group. I bet that Florence visits them, talks to them. Florence, then Bill, then Priscilla and Marty, then Chase. These five people have saved my life. Without them I would not have been sober. I would not have stayed sober. I would have been locked up or crazy, or dead and buried.

That article in the first issue of the Grapevine was my first written statement about my sobriety, my sanity, and despite a few ups and downs, a very satisfactory life as a member of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Felicia M., New Canaan, Conn.