

*Big Book Stories — Updated*

*This is the third article in the Grapevine's series by authors of the personal histories in the Big Book, Alcoholics Anonymous. The Big Book was published in 1939; the revised, enlarged version came out in 1955. Now, the author of "Stars Don't Fall," page 401 in the revised edition, reports on the vital experience—some of it rough going—of the second half of her quarter-century of sobriety in AA.*

*At Last No Longer Apart*

WHEN they told me my story would appear in the "high-bottom" section of the last edition of the Big Book—the section labeled "They Stopped in Time"—I was hurt. Had I not suffered more than anyone else? Was I not a rag, a bone, a hank of hair, when I finally came staggering through the door of the old clubhouse at 324½ West Twenty-fourth Street? How could they say that I had had an easy time of it?

You see, I had a secret idea: Nobody really appreciated how much I had been through, how searing to the soul my last three years of drinking had been, how low I had really sunk when I had practically lived in the cheap Greenwich Village bars, never knowing how I got home. Of course, I had never been

in jail, in a sanitarium, or on the Bowery in actual fact. But this, I felt, was not any fault of mine. I had done my best to make the low-bottom section of the book. I said to myself (and most secretly I said it), "I am different. I am not quite like other AAs. None of them have been so self-debased, so bitterly ashamed, so mortally guilty. I don't care what they say; I don't believe that anybody else in AA is quite as bad as I was and, in many ways, still am."

This feeling of being a little bit worse than and therefore a little bit different from anybody else in AA stayed with me for many years. I could not shake a maudlin sense of unworthiness. I would lick it for a while and think, "Now I've made it. Now I'm really sober—on the program in thought as well as deed."

Then the old self-doubts would return, and I would sink into yet another long, black depression.

Thank God for AA and the meetings and thank God for my wonderful friends in AA. I had help, and so I was able to stay sober. And I could say to myself, "I have a great many wonderful friends. Since they like and love me enough to stick by me, I can't be all that bad." The person I couldn't really sell was myself. Trying to talk, pray, and work myself out of these moods was like trying to push an angleworm uphill on a rainy day. It couldn't be done. Of course, I dramatized this soggy condition. I called it "my inner sense of bleeding loss." I thought that perhaps I was trapped in the coils of original sin. My, my, how I did carry on! And then would come

another mood swing, and I would feel on top of the world again. Life was wonderful, everything was coming my way. I would never, never have another depression. And then, when something came along to upset me, back I would go into another long, dark tunnel, that surely, this time, was for eternity!

Well, I did work and pray and persist. And my friends did hang on, God bless them all. And I did keep going to meetings, no matter how I felt, and I tried to do Twelfth Step work, even when my pigeons were in better shape than I was! I knew one thing: I had not really been able to let go and let God. I did not trust anybody but me to get me out of this. Oh, I kept right on praying, as best I knew how. But it was that same old sense of *apartheid*—a

spiritual segregation from life—that was the problem. It had been my problem when I was drunk, too.

One day, a couple of years ago, I was walking along a sand road on the West Coast of Florida, when an answer came to me. I suddenly said to myself, "I want everybody whom I hate or fear, everybody who has ever injured me, or whom I may have injured—I want them all to be as happy as I want to be. I want them to be happy right now, wherever they are." And then I thought of a couple of people and named them out loud and said, "I want you to be happy." Something happened. It was as if a black bird flew suddenly out of my heart. I felt a wonderful sense of peace, and my eyes filled with tears.

After that, things began happening. The first thing that happened was that I slowly stopped fearing these people. I went through the whole time span and forgave them retroactively and in the present and on into the future. I forgave them forever, and in this way I slowly began to forgive myself. This self-forgiveness brought new self-respect. Even when things went wrong, I didn't hate myself as I had.

And then good things began to happen in the outer world. I was given help in several things where help was very much needed. The help seemed to arrive at the right time and in the right way. In May, 1965, things really began looking up. I experienced a joy of living that

I had not had before. It has been growing slowly ever since. I have made it a habit to pray at least twice a day, and sometimes oftener. (I have been praying ever since I first came into AA, but this is different.) I feel that the Higher Power is, in a mystical sense, the sum total of my true being, and is working with and through me at all times. This Power can and will do anything necessary for my good and that of others, if I let it. I have, at last, learned to trust God. And so, at long last, I am no longer alone, no longer segregated from everybody else. It has been a great relief not to expect life to be easy all the time.

I used to think prayers for specific things should be answered specifically. I no longer expect the answer to prayer to be the solution that I can envision. A lot of the time, now, I'm able to let go and let God bring about a solution that transcends any solution that I could have thought of. Things that would have thrown me for a loop two years ago, now merely upset me, as they would anyone, and I do the best I can about them. Under these circumstances, a load of minor irritations or a couple of real big problems *don't frighten me as they used to*. For I am not alone. As for the good things of life—great and small—why, I never knew what happiness was until now.

Oh, wonderful, wonderful, wonderful, I am sober at last.

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