

March 1972

How Would You Answer These Questions?

The average length of sobriety of our Grapevine Editorial Board members is twelve years, ranging from four to twenty-eight years, with a wide variety of AA experience. We asked them to respond to some questions about the Big Book. Here are their answers:

1. How did you first come in contact with the Big Book?

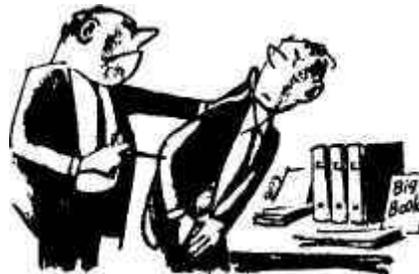
"My psychiatrist gave it to me. I read it with a drink in my hand. I returned it to her and said, 'Not for me.' But deep down I took the First Step: I was powerless... At her suggestion, I went down to Vesey Street and talked to Bill. I soon joined AA."

"My sponsor lent me her copy."

"I bought one in my second month in AA because I was advised to do so by an older member."

"Sponsor told me to buy it."

"After my second meeting, I bought it for cash."



2. What was your first reaction to it?

"It not only answered questions I had in mind, but revealed things that were of service during continued sobriety."



"The opening chapters were much too religious for me. Further, I was not ready for AA at the time, and my outlook as I skimmed the beginning of it was distorted, like my attitude while listening to speakers at meetings."

"I hated it, but was fascinated by it at the same time."

"It bored me."

"Bewilderment. I couldn't figure out what it was supposed to be — a self-help manual, case histories, the history of AA, or what. Only after I had read *AA Comes of Age* did I make sense of these peculiarities."

"Hung on every word. Read and reread every sentence to make sure I was not missing anything. Definitely not casual — I treated it as an instruction manual."

"Yes! That's it! Hooray! I'm home! Now I see! It's not as well written as *I* would do it, but that doesn't matter."

3. What influence did it have on your early AA life?

"It fortified a very early belief that I was lucky to have gotten off the elevator before it went any lower."

"As a book — not much. But Chapter Five and the Twelve Steps are another matter. I was lucky enough to join a Step group, and part of this chapter is read aloud at each closed meeting. Its meaning (interpreted by so many different voices) keeps getting clearer and stronger."

"A great deal. I used it constantly as a reference when working with new people. The chapter 'Working With Others' is dog-eared and underlined."

"It filled empty hours with eye-opening wonder; gave me confidence that I could get sober, too."

"I accepted the fact that, like all parts of the program, it would help me stay sober. So I read it. I followed suggestions."

"Enormous. It was a talisman, icon, or something. It was *the* book. It was — to my befuddled brain — the only *thing* I had to show that I was in AA. I guess I expected a certification or card or something. And so I entered on the flyleaf the date on which I had had my last drink. The problem was that it wasn't my *last* drink."



4. *Have you read it more than once?*

"Parts of it, by selection. Not straight through."

"Never from cover to cover. But most of it. My own story is in the second edition."

"I have read parts of it many, many times — clear through, only about three times."

"No — not completely."

"I am now reading it for the *fifth* time."



5. *Have you found continuing use for it as the sober years go by? If so, give examples of ways in which you have used it.*

"I don't like the first part of Chapter Five, which is so often read at meetings. I often read the rest of Chapter Five. This, to me, is the heart of the matter. Sometimes I read my own story, just to see where I'm at now. Today, I would change this story somewhat."

"Yes, I have used it to review the Steps."

"I decided that it would be wise to read it once a year. That is why I have read it four times. I read it sometimes in the morning, a few pages perhaps. I keep a marker in it, so I know where I am. *Each time* I reread it, I find something helpful."

"Well, I suppose I feel that I should have read it — or in it — more than I do. The Grapevine, frankly, seems to me more to the point in managing a sober life. But the Big Book is a symbol to me, and an extremely important one, not only of my own recovery, but of the whole *gestalt* of AA."

"Yes, I still find use for it. Chapters Five, Six, and Seven I use as guidebooks — 'how to.' When I am puzzled by current AA practices, I keep going back to the book to check the source. I make a point of remembering that it was written (primarily by a guy only three years sober) *after the fact*, and without previous source material. It is *how he* (they) *remembered it*. I think if any of us stayed sober together three years without any written material, then sat down to record how it happened, we would write a parallel account."