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Reading, 'Riting and Recovery



WHEN I first came into AA, I was a very sick man, with hallucinations and echoes of dt's. After three months of traveling some seventy miles to a nearby city twice a week, seeking some serenity, four other alcoholics and I formed a small group in my hometown. We jumped into Twelfth Step work too soon, but how else does a new group get started? Early in the formation of this group, we ran into man's old enemy — illiteracy.

Now, I fully believe that the program will work on illiterates as well as on college graduates. Yet, because I was young in AA and had had only a high-school education,

my feeling toward the Big Book was akin to the feeling a drunk once experienced toward water. This drunk crawled out of bed at three AM, with his guts on fire, and drank a tall glass of ice water. He enjoyed the cold water so much, he aroused his wife and little children so they could taste this wonderful drink.

I felt this way about the Big Book. It was so wonderful, all should be allowed to partake of it. So I set out to break down the Serenity Prayer, Preamble, and Twelve Steps into very simple words, and to teach one of my pigeons AA and reading and writ-

ing at the same time. He failed to attend meetings often enough to gain his sobriety. Of course, we fell flat on our reading and writing lessons also. The last time I saw him was at the county jail, as he was preparing to serve twelve months. Although I thought the result of this first attempt at teaching was nil, the guy had planted a seed within me.

A short time after this, Laubach Literacy, Inc., set up a workshop at a local Lutheran church. I enrolled and received a teacher's certificate after nine hours' instruction. In the meantime, I had been working with another alcoholic, Clay W., who had only a first-grade

*An
adventure
in teaching
literacy
along with
sobriety*

education. He had been in AA for several months and had had several slips. I started him on the first "skill book" in the Laubach course. In three weeks, he slipped again and was eventually hospitalized with a severe case of delirium tremens. After he regained his strength, we went back to Laubach. In a few weeks, he slipped again. This time, he was admitted to the state hospital. Upon his release, we continued his AA program along with Laubach lessons. We now have finished skill book one and are ready for skill book two.

Clay's progress in AA and Laubach is good. He recently picked up his red chip for six months' sobriety. I do not believe that Mr. Laubach will mind that I have mixed some AA into his book-learning program. Clay should soon be ready to read the Big Book, and some time later, by the grace of God, he should be able to realize his ambition — becoming chairman-of-the-month for our AA discussion group.

If there is a moral to this little adventure, it is: Never be afraid to plant a seed or to receive one.

W. B., Piedmont, S.C.