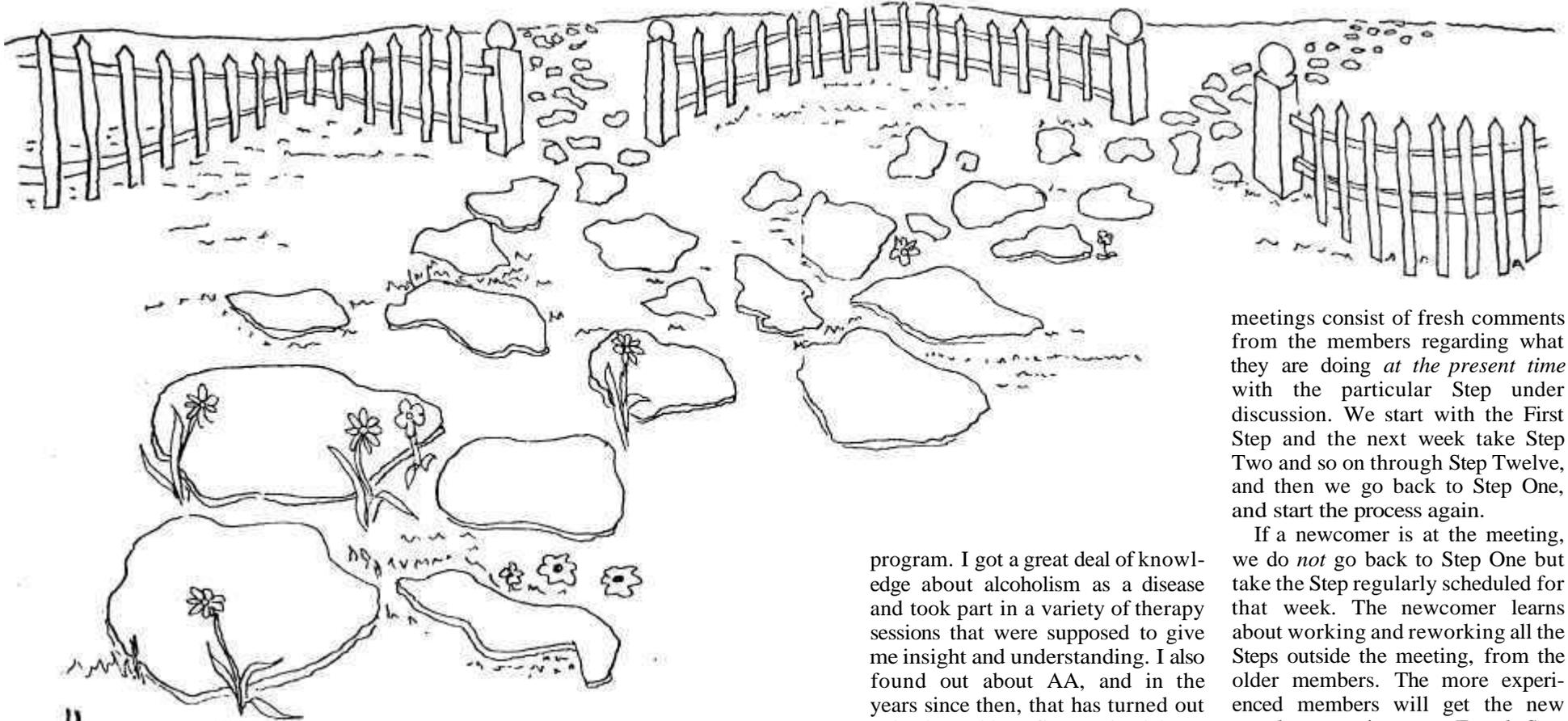


June 1981



STEP GROUP

IN AUGUST of 1976, I was sober fifteen months, but not drinking hadn't brought me the sanity and happiness I'd expected. The fear of insanity had driven me during the drinking years. I had a persistent dread that my family would have the court commit me to an insane asylum because of drunkenness and general craziness.

Finally, I got dried out in a hospital and went through its alcoholism

meetings consist of fresh comments from the members regarding what they are doing *at the present time* with the particular Step under discussion. We start with the First Step and the next week take Step Two and so on through Step Twelve, and then we go back to Step One, and start the process again.

program. I got a great deal of knowledge about alcoholism as a disease and took part in a variety of therapy sessions that were supposed to give me insight and understanding. I also found out about AA, and in the years since then, that has turned out to be the real benefit I received there. The value of the therapy and the "insight" has long since run out.

AA, on the other hand, has proved to be the vehicle for living I had sought for many years. After fifteen months of not drinking and not doing much of anything about the Twelve Steps, I received another gift. I learned about continuous reworking of all the Steps. I found a Step group that actually works them continually and repeatedly. The

If a newcomer is at the meeting, we do *not* go back to Step One but take the Step regularly scheduled for that week. The newcomer learns about working and reworking all the Steps outside the meeting, from the older members. The more experienced members will get the new member to write out a Fourth Step inventory by listing specific character defects. We use the example on page 65 of the Big Book as a model and often help the newcomer write the inventory. After this first Fourth Step is finished, we suggest showing it to another group member of the same sex — especially including anything the newcomer really wouldn't want anyone else to know. (This is where some freedom from the bondage of self may begin.) The other

alcoholic takes the Fifth Step with the newer member at the same time.

Many of us in the group take the Third Step aloud (page 63, Big Book) before swapping Fifth Steps, and, afterward say the Seventh Step prayer aloud (page 76). We often repeat these prayers on the phone with fellow AAs. We suggest this to a new member as a way to improve contact with God and increase the effects of these Steps in our lives.

After sharing Fifth Steps with newcomers, we suggest that they get right to work on Step Eight and list the people they have harmed. This written list will include all close relatives, friends and enemies (past and present), former employers, fellow employees, teachers, classmates, and anyone else harmed at any time before, during, or after drinking. Even though amends cannot be made to people who have since died, Step Eight asks us to list the names of *all* people harmed. Financial amends due are also listed, and a payment plan set up.

Step Nine follows, and we suggest to newer members that they get right to work on direct amends by going to each person on the list and expressing regret for any harm caused. If, for some reason, a personal visit is impossible, then newcomers can phone or write letters. There are many tangible benefits from making amends. One of them I experienced was that my prayer and meditation took on a whole new dimension and strength.

For some time, I've been working with Step Eleven in two twenty-minute periods daily, as well as saying other prayers during my waking hours. The prayers may consist of phrases linked with surrender or petitions for help. In the meditation,

*"AA...has proved
to be the vehicle for
living I had sought"*

I generally repeat a word like "truth" or "love" or perhaps a phrase such as "Thy will be done" or "God is love." I find this helps to slow my thinking and break my preoccupation with nonsense. Sometimes, I simply sit quietly and watch my thoughts drift by. Watching the thoughts helps to slow them and allows some sanity to creep into my generally undisciplined mind.

We try to help new members move through the Steps and experience their healing power as soon as possible. I try to use Step Ten daily, and I suggest to newer members that they do the same. Step Ten, of course, says, "Continued to take personal inventory," which I interpret to mean that I must first work Four and Five. I encourage new people to practice Step Ten on this basis, and I try to set an example by doing it regularly myself.

In our experience, alcoholics who

will do this kind of work with the Steps will have an effective message to carry. They will understand Step Twelve as an opportunity to help other people stay sober and will begin to put their own lives in order. In carrying the message to other alcoholics, I simply encourage them and help them to work the Steps. The Steps will change them — I cannot. However, I can make a solid effort to show them precisely how the program works. Then, they begin to learn from their own experience exactly what is available to them if they follow the directions in the Big Book.

What is available is freedom — freedom from fear, resentment, guilt, and all the other unpleasant conditions that are tied up in our self-centered alcoholic personalities. Newer members who are willing to work on the Steps begin to understand serenity and peace. They start to live on the basis of what *is*, rather than what they'd like life to be.

The Steps also provide growing awareness of God in our lives, because they chop at the roots of the ego and cut it down to size. Unfortunately, my ego has remarkable powers of recuperation. I work the Twelve Steps to reduce it and then become so proud of my efforts that my ego is once again busy crowing. So it's back to the program for another trip through the Steps.

My life goes best when I follow the Steps and try to pass this message on to others. How soon should a new-

comer start on the Steps? When we read Bill's story in the Big Book, we see that Ebby had Bill work the essence of the first eight Steps (not yet written) in the first week Bill was sober. Dr. Bob did the same with alcoholics he worked with. Our early members carried the message specifically and carried it early in their work with other drunks.

In Chapter Seven in the Big Book, on page 94, we're told to tell the new man precisely what the Steps demand. That's on *the first* visit. On page 96, we're told that on the second visit, the new member has read the Big Book "and says he is prepared to go through with the Twelve Steps of the program of recovery. Having had the experience yourself, you can give him much practical advice."

There's an immediacy in the Big Book's emphasis on following the directions and working the program as it is outlined. That's what we try to do in the Step group I attend. We believe that for us, and for the new members, the time is now.

When I went through the treatment center in 1975, "doing your own thing" was one of the catchwords. Naturally, I found it appealing, because I'd been trying to do that all my life. Today, it's clear to me that freedom doesn't come from doing my own thing but simply from working the Twelve Steps and letting them change me into what I should become.

S.M., Joliet, Ill.