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'What I Don't Know About Life would Fill a Book'.

The Big Book

AN ENCOURAGING thought has been filtering through to me, in meetings and outside, the past six months or so. It is this: The emphasis that I put on certain parts of the Big Book may furnish me with a pretty good guide to my progress and current AA health. Briefly, here is how I see that this may have been working out for *this* alcoholic.

One of the first things — one of the few things — that I seem to remember from my first foggy days in the Fellowship is the frequent, earnest references by sponsors, by even the whole group, to the "stories in back" of the Big Book. They were supposed to give me "identification," to be more appealing and encouraging. They might get some AA nourishment into me when stronger fare in the front of the book was beyond me. And the "back of the book" *did* seem to do a job for me in this first stage of sobriety. The stories did help me to meet a great variety of other drunks, to keep in some kind of touch with

the Big Book until I could get into the *program*, and to get me ready for some habit of reading our literature.

In a second, faltering stage of growth as, much too slowly and hesitantly, I got into the front of the book and began to appreciate something of the program, I turned away from the "stories in back," almost in disgust. I thought at the time that I was getting enough of the drunkalogs. Many, if not most, of the stories seemed hardly appropriate for continued reading: old-fashioned, not too well-written, and blah, to say the least. (I *think* that I made an exception for "Dr. Bob's Nightmare.") Maybe my constant companion, pride, was making another comeback. But it now seems to me that this turning away from the stories could be a sign of growth, as principles began to mean something, and examples of them suffered by comparison.

Currently, the power working through my program has shifted things again, perhaps brought me

into the next stage. It really does *seem* to be better — like having the best of both worlds, the front *and* back, the *whole* Big Book. And it does seem to flow naturally from serious reading on the program and, I feel sure, some serious AA activity based on the reading. As I see it now, the "stories in back" flow naturally from the principles in front and, in turn, reinforce these principles, make them come alive, and take me, the student, to the front of my "textbook" again. (Of course, someone less thick might have seen right off that almost 400 pages of a 575-page book must have a fair amount of *continuing* importance.)

In any case, at this stage, I would like to share some current favorites.

"Dr. Bob's Nightmare" remains an incredible classic in my view, particularly telling as we remember trying to hide our insanity behind the mask of respectability.

"Alcoholics Anonymous Number Three" summarizes best for me Bill's and Bob's team approach in letting us hear, for instance, the actual laughter as Bill D. affirms: "Yes, Doc, I would like to quit, at least for five, six, or eight months."

In "He Had to be Shown," we are touched to find Dr. Bob and Bill D. working the program so hard with a drunk who just wasn't going to give up.

"It Might Have Been Worse" gives us a good, quick view of our road down through insane blindness, the matter of personal bottoms, and the

road back only through the Twelve Steps.

"A Flower of the South" shows us a "faded" flower blooming again through clinging to AA's simple program in a "career" of service.

Except for Dr. Bob's story, my current personal favorite is "Doctor, Alcoholic, Addict." My reactions to it perhaps summarize my changes. At first, this doctor seemed to me simply repulsive, a selfish braggart. But then, I was privileged to read into the man's real character. Yes, he *had* been such a person, through alcohol and drugs. And he had overcome all that with the program. He was still the same person, but with the indescribable difference that acceptance helped bring about.

There are still many "dead spots" — shadowed places in the now-shining hills of the "stories in back." Maybe that will be the next stage: to appreciate these stories, to see even further into the mystery of the program. What I don't know about life would fill a book. And it has — the Big Book.

Not strangely, for me, I realized while writing this that my deep thoughts were already in the preface to the Big Book: "We hope that you may pause in reading one of the forty-four personal stories and think: 'Yes, that happened to me'; or, more important, 'Yes, I've felt like that'; or, most important, 'Yes, I believe this program can work for me, too.' "

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