Paul M.

Paul Martin of Riverside, Illinois, sober from August 15, 1947 until he died in 2009 at eighty-seven: three of his Grapevine pieces on working all the Steps again, whole; the other fourteen in his own lines; and thirteen of his talks on the tapes.

The man · Riverside, Illinois

Paul W. Martin was born in 1922 and came to AA at twenty-five. In the war he flew single-engine seaplanes for the Navy, catapulted off cruisers and battleships; in the summer of 1945 a Navy hospital had him four weeks with pneumonia, he went into DTs there, and he got drunk nine of his last ten nights in it. Out of the service that December, he drank on, "gradually coming to the realization that I couldn't handle it, but I didn't know how to stop." On a steamy Saturday morning in August 1947 he called the Chicago AA office, met a man from Oak Park that afternoon who was sober five years, and the next morning went with him to the Sunday breakfast meeting on the west side of Chicago. "When we walked out, nothing seemed different, but apparently something was different because I never took another drink." The date was August 15, 1947, and he kept it for sixty-two years.

What he did with the years is in the obituary his family placed: a journalist (the Chicago Sunday Tribune Magazine, the Christian Century, the Lions' magazine and two histories of the Lions Clubs), a health and science writer with a television show of his own, a professional wrestler and boxer, fluent in Spanish and much travelled in Mexico, South America and Russia. In the 1950s he worked construction on the DEW Line radar stations at Thule in Greenland, Keflavik in Iceland and Point Barrow in Alaska, and "during most of that time, my AA came out of the Big Book." He was a guest in Bill and Lois's home three times from the spring of 1951, when Lois, who watched the wrestling from the Rainbo Arena on television, asked him whether the matches were fixed. Back in Chicago from 1959, he carried the message into the Cook County Jail and the penitentiary at Joliet. He lived in Riverside for forty-two years.

The turn his sobriety took is the subject of nearly everything he wrote. Where he came in, the custom was to work the first nine Steps once and live on Ten, Eleven and Twelve; he did, for sixteen years, and calls it "rocking-chair sobriety." In 1963 he went back to Step One, wrote a new Fourth Step and took a new Fifth, and found "a vast difference between a periodic written inventory and a Tenth Step spot check." From then on he belonged to working Step groups: a Tuesday night group in Chicago's western suburbs that met in members' homes and took a Step a week, One to Twelve and round again, and, by 2007, Wednesday evening and Saturday morning meetings whose members "are committed to working and reworking the Steps." Gary B., who chaired the celebrations of his fiftieth and sixtieth years, remembers it as the LaGrange group, its members swapping Fifth Steps with several others each time through and "extremely diligent in making all the amends to remain current." The man who posted the news of his death wrote that his sponsor had been Tom Powers, who helped Bill W. edit and publish the Twelve and Twelve.

He wrote for the Grapevine from March 1973, twenty-five years sober, to September 2007, sixty years sober: seventeen pieces that say one thing. Going to meetings and not drinking do not treat alcoholism; the Twelve Steps do, all of them, again and again; and depression, anxiety, fear, apathy and boredom in a sober alcoholic are the symptoms of the untreated kind. Readers answered. In January 1982 a member in Fort Worth wrote of the October piece, "I strongly object to what I consider a dogmatic, judgmental, and all-inclusive attitude in this article" PO Box 1980, January 1982, and the next month one in San Antonio wrote that he had "thoroughly enjoyed" it PO Box 1980, February 1982. Gary B. asked Matt A., a sponsee of fifty years, whether he had ever heard Paul change his mind about any part of the program: "Matt said he never heard Paul change his mind about a damn thing."

He died in November 2009, at eighty-seven, sixty-two years sober, in a nursing home in LaGrange Park. That August a young man touring it with his parents heard the guide say "Hi Paul Martin" to a resident, came back to ask whether he was the one who had known Bill Wilson, and said he was three years sober and not getting along with his parents. Paul asked, "Do you have your amends list in your pocket?", showed him how to write an inventory, gave him a week, heard his Fifth Step with a few friends, and on September 10th the young man came back to say the amends were made and things were better.

Joe McF. quotes him by name: "We quote Paul Martin. He's gone now." Joe McF., Sober Speak 262, 30:13 The lines Joe reads next, on the worst advice he ever got in AA, are from *It Works For Me*, nearly word for word Joe McF. 31:39, and Sandy Beach, Joe says, called him his favorite member of AA. The study of Bill W.'s letter and Tom B.'s questions, Emotional sobriety, has his road back through the Steps as its fifth section; this page has the pieces themselves.

One note before them. His page numbers are his editions' (the second and third). The first 164 pages have not moved. The stories have: Earl T.'s, which the 1973 piece puts at page 292, is *He Sold Himself Short* at BB pp. 258–267 in the fourth edition.

The line he loved from the last half of the last paragraph of the last story, page 562 to him, now closes *Freedom From Bondage*, two stories from the end: "I get everything I need in Alcoholics Anonymous—and everything I need I get." BB p. 552 ¶3

I’ve Done the Twelve Steps—now What?

March 1973 · I’ve Done the Twelve Steps—now What?

There are no endings in AA, only new beginnings.

It wasn’t until sixteen years after I sobered up on the AA program that I discovered the benefits of working all the Steps, again and again. Until that time, I had rocking-chair sobriety: a great deal of motion, without going anywhere; a lot of activity, but not much action.

I can’t expect to live on the food I ate ten years ago, or on last year’s water or last month’s air. I need to eat, drink water, and breathe regularly in order to live. The exercise I took five years ago doesn’t make me healthy today. The same holds true for the Steps.

The Twelve Steps are a direct route to increasing freedom, sanity, and usefulness. Essentially, I drank to be free—free from the painful constrictions and limitations of my ego. I work the AA program for the same reason. The Steps give me the freedom legitimately that booze provided spuriously.

If I continue to work all the Steps, they continue to change me. This looks simple today, even though it took me years to arrive at this realization. In the area where I entered AA, the feeling was that you worked the first nine Steps once and from there on used only the last three Steps for the rest of your life.

I sobered up and entered AA in August 1947 and spent the first sixteen years of my AA life suffering from this unfortunate misconception. In the first two or three years, I did as thorough a job as possible with One through Nine and then attempted to subsist on Ten, Eleven, and Twelve. In 1963, I ran into the view that there was continuing benefit in persistent work with all the Twelve Steps. On the theory that it couldn’t hurt to try, I went back to the first Steps and started over. I wrote out a new Fourth Step and followed it with another Fifth Step.

It turned out that there was a vast difference between a periodic written inventory and a Tenth Step spot check. While the results of a renewed Fifth Step were not as dramatic as those of the first one, years before, it swiftly became apparent that it was extremely helpful to keep opening up completely with other human beings. In my experience, the most helpful Fifth Steps have always been those taken with another AA who’s working hard at this part of the program. He’s helpful because he speaks from fresh, growing experience.

Our late friend Dr. Harry Tiebout, with his unique talent for clearly delineating the problem of the ego, emphasized that a reduced ego had marvelous recuperative powers and that surrender was an essential disciplinary function and experience. Tiebout pointed out that it took persistent work to keep the ego checked and that part of this lay in “repeated inventories, not just one.”

I wrote out a new Eighth Step and found a number of names that belonged on it. Some had been added since my joining AA; some just had not occurred to me the first time around. I made amends to these people and found increasing freedom within myself. It gradually became clear that the Twelve Steps, all of them, will speak to my condition wherever I am in sobriety. Whether I’ve been sober a year, ten years, twenty years, or longer, they’ll provide a springboard for change and growth.

Today, I work regularly and frequently with thorough written inventories and Fifth Steps. The Fourth and Fifth, along with the other Steps, open a door to growing awareness of truth. It begins, I believe, with knowing the truth about myself. Someone has defined the ego as “the sum total of false ideas about myself.” Persistent reworking of the Steps gradually strips away my false ideas of myself. This permits gradual, nearly imperceptible growth in my understanding of the truth about myself, and this, in turn, leads to growing understanding of God and other human beings.

The late Father Edward J. Dowling was one of AA’s earliest friends among the clergy. A man of compassion and vision, the St. Louis Jesuit was impressed by what he felt were striking similarities between the Twelve Steps and the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. While some might see differences in content and structure between the two, few could quarrel with the view that spiritual growth, like good physical condition, requires continuing work. It doesn’t just happen. It demands unremitting effort.

I've Done the Twelve Steps—now What?, continued

I've read the Big Book many times and am constantly amazed at discovering something in there I have never seen before. Not until eight years ago did I notice the paragraph on page 63 that suggests taking Step Three aloud with another person, and I noticed it only because someone else pointed it out to me. Since then, I've tried this a number of times and find it a compelling and effective way of trying to turn my will and life over to God. There's evidently a stronger commitment when we make it aloud in the presence of another.

A few years ago, I read the story of Chicago's first AA, Earl T., for what had to be the thirtieth or fortieth time, and that's no exaggeration. He sobered up in Akron under the guidance of Dr. Bob and took the equivalent of the first eight Steps in his first few weeks. When they got to what are now Steps Six and Seven, Earl took Step Seven aloud with the help of Dr. Bob. I've tried taking Step Seven aloud with friends of mine after completing a Fifth Step and invariably found it helpful. For anyone who's interested: Earl's experience is on page 292, and the second paragraph on page 76 suggests a prayer to use when asking God to remove our defects.

It's sometimes said, and not simply in jest, that if you want to hide something from an AA member, the best place to put it is in the Big Book. Why is it that we'll carefully read everything else, searching for answers, and overlook the transforming truths in the Big Book? What's the powerful attraction in these other books and ideas? Possibly it's because we can discuss them and sound witty, intelligent, and excruciatingly smart. Perhaps we sometimes sell our program short because it's hard to believe that anything that simple can have complete answers. I've tried the full range of "expanded approaches" and today realize that, time after time, my search for spiritual answers in these other areas has been nothing but an egotistical blind alley.

The last half of the last paragraph of the last story in the Big Book tells it straight. It's on page 562. "I get everything I need in Alcoholics Anonymous—everything I need I get—and when I get what I need I invariably find that it was just what I wanted all the time."

Apparently, the mind is "the slayer of the real." We don't find God through reading, discussing, thinking, studying, arguing, and philosophizing. We find Him through specific actions which free us from the ignorance created by our self-will. We can't do it alone. Our actions are met by God's grace, but certainly we can work as hard as we're able with the program He has given us. I find that these Steps are circular and provide fresh understanding and benefits each time around. They give me room within myself to live as a free human being.

A substantial percentage of the alcoholics I work with today have been sober for ten or fifteen years or more. They are in misery and struggling with painful conditions within themselves despite their long periods of sobriety. Just about 100 percent of the time, it turns out that these AAs either have not continued working all the Steps or never worked them to begin with. Either they have gone through the Steps once and then tried to get by on just Ten, Eleven, and Twelve, or they have managed to stay sober for years without ever thoroughly following the directions in Chapters Five and Six.

Invariably, when they start back at Step One and carefully work each of the succeeding Steps, they report dramatic improvements in themselves. They begin to experience the freedom and joy that are integral parts of our spiritual awakening promised in Step Twelve. It happens consistently. The only members I've ever heard question this approach have never tried it enough to understand it.

Among the many benefits emerging from my reuse of all the Steps is a heightened ability to practice prayer and meditation. Persistent removal of the debris blocking me from God opens up a better contact with Him. It becomes increasingly evident, too, that prayer is not a device for getting my own way, but rather a means to become what I should be.

Continuing, fresh, growing experience in periodically working all Twelve Steps is quickly translated into specific help for others. It's axiomatic that I can help another only to the degree that I've been helped myself. The more work I do on myself, the more I have to pass on to another. Today, I'm not talking about the Fourth Step I took in 1948 or the amends I made in 1949. I'm sharing the work I'm doing right now in our recovery program.

I’ve Done the Twelve Steps—now What?, continued

Another benefit has been a noticeable increase in vitality. I came into AA at the age of twenty-five. In 1972, I celebrated my fiftieth birthday and twenty-fifth year of sobriety. Although this is older than I intended to be, I’ve noticed that I’m now able to work better and function better as a result of using all the Steps regularly.

If there are events in my past which haven’t been dealt with or relationships that haven’t been repaired, it takes energy to keep this material tamped down so I don’t have to look at it. When I can deal with such a condition consciously and clear it out, I don’t have to spend the rest of my life reacting to it unconsciously, with a consequent reduction in energy and effectiveness.

The program is a road, not a resting place. Before AA, and many times after, I looked for answers to my living problems in fields where you’d expect to find them: religion, philosophy, psychology, self-help groups. These disciplines invariably described a goal that was precisely what I wanted. It was a place of freedom, calm, confidence, and joy. There was one major problem: They never gave me a workable method of getting there. They never told me how to get from where I was to where I was supposed to be.

That’s the big difference I find in our program. It takes me toward the goal: “a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps.” It doesn’t take me there as fast as I’d like to go, because God’s timetable is always slower than mine. However, as I follow the directions and work my way from Step One to Step Twelve regularly, my spiritual awakening deepens and strengthens. I find everything I need and really want through these Twelve Steps. They provide the goal and the way to reach it. It’s all here and it always was, from the beginning of my AA life.

— *Paul M., Riverside, Illinois.* AA Grapevine, March 1973 (Vol. 29 No. 10): the magazine’s page.

A Time-tested Program of Recovery

October 1981 · A Time-tested Program of Recovery

The Twelve Steps are the best treatment for our disease.

Going to meetings and not drinking do not treat my alcoholism. Working the Twelve Steps treats my alcoholism. If all I do is go to meetings and not drink, eventually I'll suffer from untreated alcoholism. Untreated alcoholism comes out as depression, anxiety, fear, hostility, apathy, boredom, despair, and other unpleasant symptoms.

With unfortunate frequency, I've seen men and women with varying amounts of sobriety beset by those crippling conditions. Some of them have had ten, fifteen, twenty, or more years of going to meetings and not drinking. Some wind up drunk. Others end up in the hospital with "nervous breakdowns." Some kill themselves. Many try to solve their problems with mood-changing drugs provided by doctors who should know better but obviously don't.

In the foreword to Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, we read: "AA's Twelve Steps are a group of principles, spiritual in their nature, which, if practiced as a way of life, can expel the obsession to drink and enable the sufferer to become happily and usefully whole."

In my experience, that is 100 percent true. Precise, specific, and definite, the Steps offer a path to growing mental, emotional, and spiritual health. They provide direction for lives of expanded joy and usefulness. Anytime I take a drug to treat my depression, anxiety, fear, or inability to sleep, I'm wrong. Those symptoms are signs that there's something within me that's not right. I've seen enough AAs led back to drinking by the prescription pad to be sure the answer is not to try masking the symptom with a mood-changing drug. The answer is to look within myself and then do what's necessary to correct the problem.

Perhaps, my sleeplessness is caused by something as simple as too much coffee. Possibly, my anxiety or uneasiness can be relieved by a program of exercise designed to drain off tensions accumulated during the day. On the other hand, my symptoms may be the inevitable result of untreated alcoholism. Once again, going to meetings and not drinking do not treat my alcoholism. The Twelve Steps treat it. Meetings and sobriety create a climate where my alcoholism can be treated by working the Steps. If I don't use the Steps, I'm eventually going to develop all those painful and unhappy symptoms because of my failure to do enough with the program to get what AA offers.

Six years ago, an AA I knew was deep in depression and riddled with fears from untreated alcoholism. He put himself into a treatment facility. He had been sober eleven years and had never worked the Steps. That's right! Eleven years of sobriety—and suffering so severely from untreated alcoholism that he put himself in an alcoholic treatment hospital. He went through the three-week program for a few thousand dollars, got out, entered another treatment facility, and went through its three-week program, taking part in psychodrama, group therapy, individual therapy, counseling, testing, evaluation, etc.

Both of those facilities speak highly of AA and describe its important role in their treatment approach. However, no one in either place told this man that if he worked the Twelve Steps, he'd get rid of his depression and fears. Although the facilities employ AA members as counselors, no one seemed to understand that the answers for a drunk at any stage of sobriety are to be found in the Big Book. Not surprisingly, when the man began to take Fourth and Fifth Steps and make amends, he found freedom from his symptoms.

Another man I know was sober sixteen years and had been acutely depressed and afraid during the last six years of that period. Then, he ran into some people who explained to him that, while sober sixteen years, he had managed to miss most of the AA program. He had never worked the Steps. Now, he began. He, too, found his fears disappearing and his depression lifting.

"When you've been sober for years, it's hard to believe that your answers still lie in the Big Book," explained a man who had a similar experience after a number of years without drinking. "I started to think I needed psychotherapy or hospitalization. I suffered from untreated alcoholism, because I hadn't done enough with the Steps. When I got busy with them, it was like walking into a large room with only one small light. As I continued to take inventories and Fifth Steps and made more amends, the light gradually became brighter.

A Time-tested Program of Recovery, continued

"One of the problems of getting fouled up with a substantial amount of sobriety is that a person finds it almost impossible to understand that his answers still lie in working the Twelve Steps. I didn't drink during this time, but ultimately would have without the freedom that came from using the Steps. This is the point where pills become attractive; we're willing to do almost anything to get rid of the psychic pain within us."

Both the Big Book and Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions point out with powerful clarity that the AA program is not just for staying sober. Sobriety is the beginning, not the end. The AA program is a transforming prescription for a life of growing health, usefulness, and joy. By working and reworking all of the Twelve Steps on a continuing, lifetime commitment, we experience the promises spelled out on pages 83 and 84 in the Big Book and the guarantee quoted earlier from the foreword of Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions.

Those guarantees, telling what you and I may expect as a result of working the Steps, speak of wholeness. They don't describe alcoholics who traded drunkenness for sober terror or dry despair. The Big Book and the "Twelve and Twelve" promise us the capacity to live soberly, confidently, usefully, and joyously—if we treat our alcoholism by working the Twelve Steps. If I haven't experienced the program's promises, it is because I haven't fulfilled the program's conditions.

— *P. M., Riverside, Illinois.* AA Grapevine, October 1981 (Vol. 38 No. 5): the magazine's page.

It Works For Me

September 2007 · It Works For Me

Sober sixty years, a member reflects on AA's principles.

My sobriety date is August 15, 1947.

During World War II, I served as a naval aviator flying single-engine seaplanes that were catapulted off cruisers and battleships. The catapult shot didn't cure a hangover, but for a little while it really took your mind off it. In the summer of 1945, I ended up in a Navy hospital with pneumonia, and I went into DTs. I was in the hospital for four weeks. I got drunk nine of my last ten nights there, so obviously, I didn't learn a great deal. I got out of the service in December 1945, and continued to drink, gradually coming to the realization that I couldn't handle it, but I didn't know how to stop.

Finally, on a steamy Saturday morning in August 1947, I called the Chicago AA office, which put me in touch with an AA, and I met with him that afternoon. He lived in Oak Park, the Chicago suburb where I lived, and he'd been sober for five years. AA was only twelve years old at the time, so he had been sober nearly half as long as AA had been in existence. I was twenty-five years old.

I was brought up in a traditional Christian religion. Its followers declared that they had the only true way to God. At the time of my entrance into AA, I believed in nothing. Looking back, it seems to me that my problem was not an unwillingness to believe in God; I was simply unable to believe in that concept of God and I didn't know any other way to find him.

That first day, this man talked to me about "God as we understood him." The bewilderment and antagonism of years began to melt, thawed by this unheard-of approach to God. Nobody argued about whose Higher Power was higher.

The next day, he took me to the Sunday morning breakfast AA meeting on the west side of Chicago. There were sixty or seventy people there. I listened to the speaker and several comments afterward. When we walked out, nothing seemed different, but apparently something was different because I never took another drink and I began to experience the miracle and the power of AA.

In the spring of 1948, I heard Paul S. talk at that same meeting. He was one of the early Akron AAs. Over and over, he kept saying, "AA, in and of itself, is sufficient." I didn't know whether to believe him or not. But, today I believe it's true. AA, in and of itself, is sufficient if we work the Steps.

If I were drowning, I would want a life preserver, not a serving of cotton candy philosophy, theology, or positive thinking. In the Twelve Steps, AA gave me a life preserver. The people in AA told me: "Do these things and your life will change." That is precisely what happened.

Between 1951 and 1958, I worked construction jobs in Thule, Greenland; Keflavik, Iceland; and Point Barrow, Alaska. During most of that time, my AA came out of the Big Book. When the "Twelve and Twelve" was published in 1953, I started reading that. Every day, I read a chapter of the Big Book or the "Twelve and Twelve," and I went through them, over and over. When the Big Book was written, no AA member was sober more than a few years, and yet, its prescription for a sober, useful life remains as timely and powerful today as ever.

After returning to the Chicago area in 1959, I became involved with working in the Cook County Jail in Chicago and in the State Penitentiary in Joliet, Illinois. For years afterward, I'd run into somebody at a meeting who had met me, years before, at one of those meetings. At that time, we worked with wet drunks more frequently than we do now.

My first visit to Bill's home was in the spring of 1951, when I was nearing the end of a highly unsuccessful career as a professional wrestler. Television was still pretty new and our shows were just about the only ones on TV that were rehearsed. Sometimes I wrestled at the Rainbo Arena in Chicago. The matches were televised around the midwest and the east coast. It turned out that Bill's wife, Lois, was an avid wrestling fan and used to watch the matches from Rainbo. Immediately, she asked the question all wrestlers dread: "Are the matches fixed?" Well, of course they are, but I kept trying to avoid telling her the truth without actually lying. Finally, I admitted they were, and her face crumpled as disillusionment set in.

It Works For Me, continued

Another time, at Bill's home, I met Henk Krauweel, a nonalcoholic Dutch social worker who helped start AA in Holland. He said he used to take motion pictures of boozers when they were drunk, and he'd have them watch it after they sobered up. "I would say to them, 'See, you are behaving like little swines,' but they still wouldn't stop," he told me. But when AA started, they stopped.

In 1951, I heard Bill speak at the Medinah Temple in Chicago. He said, "Suppose each of us had not found AA until ten years after we did," and then he paused. There wasn't a sound in the packed auditorium as each of us remembered the despair that filled our souls at the time AA answered our cry and saved our lives.

Bill resisted all attempts by AAs to turn him into a guru or a spiritual leader and refused honors from outside organizations. Bill looked and acted like everybody else and in 1955, at the St. Louis Convention, he turned AA over to the members.

I was fortunate to be a guest in Bill W.'s home three times and to be in small groups with him on two other occasions. In retrospect, I'm increasingly amazed at his wisdom and spiritual insight. We don't appreciate him enough. Bill was sober only a few years when he wrote the Twelve Steps. These came to be the foundation of my life as I, very slowly, began to understand their wisdom. The Twelve Traditions are pure genius in steering AA away from the pitfalls that have impaired so many other spiritual movements.

Alcoholics Anonymous is for alcoholics; it is not for nonalcoholic drug addicts, food addicts, shopping addicts, sex addicts, or any other kind of nonalcoholic. That is critically important and Bill saw that many, many years ago. In fact, Bill explained why a nonalcoholic drug addict does not belong in closed AA meetings in a February 1958 article in the Grapevine titled "Problems Other than Alcohol."

That question has surfaced again and again as the treatment industry has sent nonalcoholics to closed AA meetings. Anybody is welcome in AA—provided he or she is an alcoholic. That's very simple, but very important for the survival of our Fellowship. If an alcoholic who also used drugs wants to go to AA meetings, that's fine, but, as Bill pointed out, he should keep his comments to his alcoholism. All addictions are not the same.

As a culture, we often worship change and think it's progress. But frequently, it isn't progress, it's simply different.

When Dr. Vincent Dole retired as Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee some years ago, he said, "My greatest concern for the future of AA is that the principle of personal service might be eroded by money and professionalism."

The AA message is a message from one amateur to another. By profession, Dr. Bob was a physician, but he helped alcoholics as an amateur. By profession, Bill W. was a stockbroker who helped alcoholics as an amateur.

I regularly attend working Step meetings on Wednesday evening and Saturday morning. In the working Step group, the members are committed to working and reworking the Steps. The worst advice I ever got in AA was to work the first nine Steps once and then attempt to exist on Steps Ten, Eleven and Twelve. In 1963, sober sixteen years, I heard a suggestion that there's great benefit in redoing all of the Steps. It turned out to be absolutely correct. In my experience, AAs who continue to work all of the Steps do not suffer from depression, anxiety, apathy, boredom, and similar symptoms.

Today, we have special interest meetings: women's meetings, men's meetings, gay and lesbian meetings, and even meetings for doctors, lawyers, and so forth. I've always felt that everybody should be welcome in any AA meeting, even though there may be some use for special interest meetings. I would not belong to an AA group that barred anyone.

My belief in God began as a very simple view of the Higher Power. Gradually, as I read everything I could find on the spiritual life, it became very complicated and, in my view, quite advanced. As years have passed, my belief has become simpler and simpler. My relationship with God is dependent on rigorous honesty and continuing work with the Twelve Steps because this gives me a continuing experience of God in my life.

The Twelve Steps are deceptively simple but provide limitless spiritual growth for anyone with the patience to stay the course. However, the timetable is generally far slower than we believe it should be. That's why so many members of Alcoholics Anonymous wander into various kinds of groups that promise spiritual enlightenment or psychological fixes on a fast track. It's a promise such groups rarely, if ever, keep.

It Works For Me, continued

I'm eighty-four years old today, and in all these years, AA has never deserted me, in spite of my frequent wanderings from the program.

The AA message is a "spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps." The foreword to the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions says "AA's Twelve Steps are a group of principles, spiritual in their nature, which, if practiced as a way of life, can expel the obsession to drink and enable the sufferer to become happily and usefully whole."

It works for me.

— *Paul M., Riverside, Illinois.* AA Grapevine, September 2007 (Vol. 64 No. 4): the magazine's page.

Fourteen more pieces

The rest · Fourteen more pieces

The other fourteen, 1973 to 1996, each in a few of its own lines, with the Grapevine's page for the piece, where the archive is sold by subscription. Most stand on a standfirst the magazine gave them. They say the one thing fourteen ways.

December 1973 · The Eleventh Step. . .It's One of the Twelve. *When worked in combination with the other Steps, Step Eleven can teach us to live by God's will.* He had read everything on prayer and mysticism and belonged to an Eleventh Step group where "everything but the refreshments became stale"; a boxer taught him more. Beau Jack, the lightweight champion, prayed before every bout, and when a sportswriter asked whether he prayed to win: "No. If I pray to win and the other boy pray to win, then what God gonna do?" His own last word: "There's no cheap grace. Reality is not given; it's mined, like gold." Grapevine, December 1973

July 1974 · Greed, Fear, and Ignorance. *We can have almost everything we want if we want it badly enough—but we have to pay the price.* A visit to Vilcabamba, the Ecuadorian valley of centenarians, who "have only a little, but they have enough." What their valley taught him: "Greed's three facets are love of things, love of fame, and love of pleasure. They can be attacked directly with three tools: frugality, anonymity, and moderation." And: "It turns out that too much is never enough." Grapevine, July 1974

December 1974 · Guilt. *There really is such a thing as guilt, and we have a specific program for dealing with it.* Against the guilt complex, with Mowrer and Menninger for witnesses: "A guilt complex has never caused me a single problem in my life. Guilt, on the other hand, has created substantial difficulties on those too-frequent occasions when I've failed to live up to the requirements of my conscience." The Steps never mention forgiveness, he notices; "Instead, they show us how to experience forgiveness." Grapevine, December 1974

March 1975 · Activity Addicts. *If we can keep ourselves busy enough we won't have time to face ourselves.* "I can be on the move in AA with a steady round of meetings, committees, conferences, banquets, board meetings—and be going absolutely nowhere in the program." The test he set himself: "Unless I'm sponsoring at least one alcoholic in my own area, I'm not adequately carrying the message, no matter what else I'm doing." Grapevine, March 1975

July 1975 · The Steps Are the Program. *Just as each of us is a totality, and not a collection of related parts, so each Step of the twelve is connected to every other Step.* Reductionism, from Barry Commoner's ecology to a program worked in pieces: "A fragmented program will leave me fragmented." The advice again: "One of the worst bits of advice I ever got was to work the first nine Steps once and then try to subsist on the last three for the rest of my life. That is simply another form of fragmentation." And: "AA works, but it does not work on my terms." Grapevine, July 1975

March 1976 · Working the Steps in a Group. The Tuesday night group described: members' homes, a Step a week, One through Twelve and round again, a quiet time and "How It Works" to open, done by nine. "We don't talk about the Fourth Steps we wrote years ago. We discuss inventories written recently and Fifth Steps we took not long ago." "Very possibly, the Twelve Steps may be the most commonly overlooked and underrated long-term therapy there is for the alcoholic." Grapevine, March 1976

January 1977 · Have We Forgotten Dr. Bob's Request?. *Beguiled by new therapies, some AA members fail to heed a co-founder's admonition to "keep it simple.* Dr. Bob's last talk, Cleveland, July 1950, as Paul heard it on tape days before the Denver convention: "Let's not louse it all up with Freudian complexes and things that are interesting to the scientific mind but have little to do with our actual AA work." Paul's own: "An AA member who suffers from such symptoms or can't stay sober needs a sponsor, not a therapist." And: "Let's not trade our spiritual birthright for a mess of psychiatric pottage." Grapevine, January 1977

April 1977 · Working Together Through the Twelve Steps. Bob, Martha and Bill, three members of the Tuesday night group, and what the Steps did for each. "It's a working group, not a discussion group." "Working the Steps slashes through the empty rhetoric of conversation about God and provides an experience of God. The gap between the two is measured in light years." Of the group: "It turns garbage into gold." Grapevine, April 1977

Fourteen more pieces, continued

August 1977 · Turning on the Power. *By "keeping it simple," the relaxed residents of Vilcabamba have found the secret of healthy serenity and longer life.* Vilcabamba again, Gene Krupa on playing with Louis Armstrong ("It felt like somebody turned on the power"), and the Book's "Lack of power, that was our dilemma." "By just becoming part of the AA community, drunks can become ex-drunks. However, without working the Steps drunks cannot get well—and there's an immense difference." "Do the work, and collect the benefits." Grapevine, August 1977

March 1978 · Don't Sell the Newcomer Short!. *Tell him that 'how it works' means working the Twelve Steps.* Jack, twelve years of meetings and drunkenness, and the day someone took him through the Steps: "I did more work with the Steps in twenty-four hours than I had done in twelve years around AA before that day." Then how Paul sponsors, Step by Step, with his Fourth Step headings (resentments, dishonesty, sex, selfishness, self-pity, fear, sarcasm, intolerance, jealousy, money) and Fifth Steps taken both ways at once: "I don't try to function as a counselor, therapist, or spiritual guide, but simply as one beggar showing another beggar where there is bread." Grapevine, March 1978

April 1980 · . . .As the Result of These Steps. . ... *He found that there are solid benefits in reworking all the Steps.* Jim, whose son's grades rose as his father got honest, and the shortest statement of the case: "Reading won't do it. Talking won't do it. Thinking won't do it. Arguing and philosophizing won't do it. For that matter, just going to meetings won't do it." "Working the Twelve Steps will." "There's no possible way to get by on the work I did in the Steps years ago." Grapevine, April 1980

October 1980 · Where Are the Old-timers?. Frank, Dennis, Bob, Gardner and a member sober more than thirty years on why the long-sober vanish. "What's an old-timer? One definition is: an alcoholic who has been sober so long, he's afraid the new man might throw up on him." The diagnosis: "Twenty years of sobriety that consists of one year's experience twenty times is boring." Grapevine, October 1980

January 1981 · Getting Honest With Ourselves. Mike, Frank the Denver lawyer, and the two halves of honesty: "Honesty, openness, and responsibility involve dual concepts: (1) to do what I say, and (2) to say what I do." "Lying about anything corrodes my ability to see the truth about everything." Rabbi Zusya's dream, from Buber, and Wilson Mizner's: "The cuckoo who is on to himself is halfway out of the clock." Grapevine, January 1981

August 1996 · Amateurs Anonymous. The View from Here, on Tradition Eight, forty-nine years sober, on the treatment industry and the professional virus: "The AA message is a message from one amateur to another amateur." "The AA message is not the joy of therapy or the gospel according to Prozac, but a 'spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps.'" "The AA message is free. We don't buy it and we don't sell it because money corrupts the message." The one piece whose page the Grapevine's archive did not give up to its title; the issue is August 1996, Vol. 53 No. 3.

On the tapes

On the tapes · Thirteen talks, 1967–2007

Thirteen of his talks are on the tapes, from his twentieth year sober to his sixtieth. Twelve were kept by Stories of Recovery on its Big Book Awakening page, which dates them; the thirteenth the Sober Sunrise podcast put on YouTube. The podcast's other Paul M. talk, headed with the first line of the October 1981 piece, is the 14 May 2005 recording under another title — the two transcripts match word for word — so it is one talk here. Each is transcribed, so the player searches them, and **Hear him** at the top of this page opens it narrowed to his.

- **San Antonio, 9 June 1967** — not quite twenty years sober.
- **Durham, North Carolina, January 1968** — the Tarheel Midwinter Conference.
- **Denver, 4 July 1975** — the Friday night big meeting of AA's fortieth-anniversary International Convention; days before it, he wrote, he had listened to Dr. Bob's last talk on tape.
- **Charleston, Illinois, 19 August 1976.**
- **Albany, Georgia, 15 October 1982** — the Georgia State Convention.
- **Tyler, Texas, 8 April 1989** — the Circle 12 Group.
- **Crested Butte, Colorado, July 1994** — the mountain conference.
- **Nashville, 5 July 1997** — the Music City Roundup.
- **Diamondhead, Mississippi, 29 November 1997** — two talks at the Gratitude Roundup, the second on what AA was like.
- **Schaumburg, Illinois, 8 August 1998** — the Illinois State Conference.
- **Chicago, 14 May 2005** — his fifty-eighth year, to a working Step group at a YMCA.
- **Chicago, 26 August 2007** — sixty years, at the Last Chance House, six of his men speaking before him.

Gary B. first heard him thirty-six years before the wake, at the Wyatts meeting in Denver, sent by a man who, he says, looked up to no one: "I left the meeting knowing that I had just met a man who really believed that the 12 Step program of AA was indeed 'sufficient' for alcoholics and anyone else who might be motivated to go to the lengths we need."

Sources

Sources

- The AA Grapevine's archive, by subscription: https://www.aagrapevine.org/. Each piece above is linked to its page there, which shows the opening and asks for a subscription for the rest. The three printed whole are © AA Grapevine, Inc., March 1973, October 1981 and September 2007, reprinted here whole on this site's own judgment, the way the Grapevine's letter of January 1958 is on the Emotional sobriety sheet; the other fourteen are quoted at fair-use scale.
- A folder of twenty-one PDFs at justloveaudio.com, *Paul Martin AA Grapevine Articles* (https://justloveaudio.com/resources/Assorted/Paul_Martin_AA_Grapevine_Articles/): the seventeen; two pieces signed Paul M. of Oak Lawn, Illinois (*'Bye' to 'Hi'?*, May 2000, and *Unity or Uniformity?*, February 2008), whose writer "had been a salesman for seven years" before AA and came in "a rabid atheist," which the Navy pilot who came in at twenty-five was not, so this page does not count them; the post on his death of 6 November 2009, with the local paper's obituary and Gary B.'s note from the wake; and one stray, the Spanish acknowledgements of *Back to Basics*. The text here was taken from those PDFs by their layout and read against them.
- The talks: Stories of Recovery's Big Book Awakening page (https://storiesofrecovery.org/BBA.htm), the twelve with their dates; the Sober Sunrise AA Speaker Podcast on YouTube, the sixtieth-year evening (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ydt8rypLvvg); its YMCA Step group talk (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C0ruBzrMyJU) is the 14 May 2005 recording again.
- Joe McF., Sober Speak 262, *The Dark Side of Spiritual Growth* (2022), on the tapes: the quotation at 30:13.

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bigbook.it/paul-m · the three pieces printed whole are AA Grapevine's (© AA Grapevine, Inc.: March 1973, October 1981, September 2007) and the rest are quoted at fair-use scale · the talks are on the tapes