

# THE O.A.S. I. S.

*Our Area Serving in Sobriety*

**September 2009**

## **Statement of purpose for Area 52 Newsletter**

The newsletter will carry the message of recovery, unity, and service of Area 52 to AA members across North Dakota. The newsletter will be used to keep Area 52 informed of upcoming events, decisions, and activities that occur at the state level. The news letter will be published following each assembly meeting and distributed with the area minutes.

## **The guidelines for submitting articles:**

1. They should relate to your experience, strength, and hope in AA
2. Upcoming events in area, districts, and groups.
3. Articles containing profanity or sexually explicit materials will not be published.
4. Last names are to be omitted as it will be published on the web.
5. Any questions on a submission will be sent to the Area Delegate by the editor for review and final decision.

## **From the Editor**

I am constantly amazed at the undying commitment of people in this Fellowship, our trusted servants, who discuss Assembly after Assembly how we can help the sufferers of this disease we call alcoholism. Our founders...Bill and Bob...under the guidance of Carl Jung, William James, Dr Silkworth and many others keep it very simple. Our Big Book, first published in 1939, still rings true today, about the physical craving coupled with the mental obsession. We of Alcoholics Anonymous know this to be true. The second truth our founders knew was the power of one Alcoholic sharing their Experience/Strength/Hope with the one who is still suffering. We believe, communally, that we survive for the soul purpose of helping others, in this disease, and in this world, to know a better way...a peaceful way...a way of love and tolerance...lives of servitude to our brothers and sisters. Our celebration of life is expressed in experience/strength /hope. With coffee pots and meeting formats- mile after mile...we carry...we carry the message of faith...the message of survival,...the test of time and experience...one day at a time and we HOPE...that one, maybe more will find serenity and peace...quiet from a disease that never sleeps.

As the new Editor of the OASIS, I must first thank the past editors, especially Mary, who carried the AA message for many years. She served Area 52 with diligence and humility and I thank her for the lead she has given me. Next I want to thank all of the contributors to the September 2009 edition of the OASIS. I feel assured that your voices and your message will be heard throughout the state and beyond, to carry the message as our 5<sup>th</sup> tradition directs us. It was an honor to read all your stories and to be able to share them with others. Please continue to share with all of us and those of you who were not able to submit at this time, please consider doing so. Submissions can be sent to me through the Area 52 website [area52oasis@yahoo.com](mailto:area52oasis@yahoo.com).

**In Service-Anne G**

## **Celebrating Sobriety**

I love Alcoholics Anonymous, I'm sure you do too. Every year about Labor Day weekend, God Willing, I get to show it by contributing to **my Birthday plan**. The Birthday plan helps me to gain new perspective of the many AA freedoms I enjoy on a *one day at a time* basis. How is **your Birthday plan** working?

Have you ever caught yourself glancing to see what others put in the basket? Have you ever wondered if others glance to see what you are putting in the basket? I must admit that while I try not to, I am guilty on both charges. Our Seventh Tradition states that:

“Every AA Group ought to be fully self supporting declining outside contributions”. So through this we have established that this Tradition applies mainly to the Group, right? None of us, including me, like to shake an empty piggy bank at others while groaning something about our beloved Seventh Tradition, although the offended parties seem to think we derive some type of strange pleasure out of it. That is probably why I look so happy when I get to give a talk about this under appreciated topic. Although we are sure to hear more about how our talk has belittled the audience.

None of us would ever have to do this if we would only have better participation in **our Birthday plans**. Yet hand someone a Birthday envelope and they will probably be offended again. I can remember a talk with my sponsor early in my sobriety where he told me that if I could work these Traditions into my life they would help to keep me sober. I want to tell you that he was right. While I am no example of perfection I can tell you that these Traditions when worked on an individual basis hold great rewards.

I heard about the Birthday plan early in my sobriety and have participated in the GSO Birthday plan from my first Birthday. Later, at an assembly, I decided to start sending the same amount to Area 52 and my home District. I know that during my time as Area 52 Treasurer there were only about four individuals participating in the Birthday plan at the Area 52 level. I have no idea about GSO or the Districts. While I realize there are those who simply cannot afford it, I do have a hard time believing that such a small percentage of members are today overcoming the fear mentioned on page 84 of our Big Book.

You probably noticed some bold print in these lines. This was to help emphasize the individuality of the possibilities. There is no right or wrong way to do it. You may choose to give a dollar for each sober year or a penny for each sober day; or you may have your own idea about what is appropriate, it's up to you! The important thing is that you try it. I think you will find it to be very rewarding as I previously stated. In this manner I am able to direct my contributions to the places I feel need them most. Please try not to read something into this that isn't there. Your home group still needs your contributions in the basket. All I am saying is that being self supporting feels good and being in control is not always a bad thing. **My Birthday plan** allows me to accomplish this without ruffling any feathers or feeling like I've been drug through a knot hole. An expression my Mother would use when I sat there in a stupor as I often did toward the end of a spree. That is how I sometimes feel after pleading for contributions. I have never enjoyed it. My hope is that some of you will try to experiment with **your Birthday plan** because I know you do not enjoy listening to pleas for contributions either. Self support works!

I'll leave you with this. In order for every AA Group to be self supporting it must receive enough of **our** contributions. Self support works, *if you work it!*

Yours in Service,  
**Neil F. -Area 52 Chair**

### **Hitting Bottom and a Rebirth...**

September of 1983 I got a call, my mother was going into the hospital, yet again, for another surgery. This would be another futile attempt to correct damages done as a result of an unsuccessful suicide attempt 10 years earlier. She wanted to see her grandchildren. I packed up the kids in our unreliable Toyota truck and drove 6 hours, needed to arrive before her scheduled surgery. I was a mess inside and out by the time we arrived, hadn't slept or eaten in nearly 24 hours but of course was not worried. I had everything needed to make it thru the day, it was safely tucked away in my pocket.

At six years old my younger sister and I had been placed in an orphanage, the state had decided we lived with an unfit mother. I located her years earlier and then in 1976 finally contacted her. We had a little over eight years together. I grew up with a BIG resentment toward her. The words 'be careful what you pray for' would come to mind many, many times over those eight years. Her current medical condition and its causes, fed those flames of resentment. *She* became an unwanted intrusion in my life. Without my being aware of it she was reminding me daily of myself, that the apple didn't fall far from the tree. Some sense inside me demanded that I treat her with "respect...undeserved thou it be" and "kindness," which I would later come to understand was nothing more than arrogant judgementalism, forgiveness was not in me, though I did my best to cover my resentment, at least I had thought so. I was doing her a great favor by allowing her in my life.

At the hospital, as we waited for surgery her mantra became, "Jeaniel please forgive me, Jeaniel please forgive me"...I suggested ( more like demanded in that chastising way a parent tells a child) that she not focus on what she had 'done to me' (her words) but to get right with her god because she may not come out of this surgery. I was there, wasn't that evidence enough that I'd forgive. I would come to understand many years later that she understood so much more of the truth.

She survived the surgery and as I stood waiting for her to wake up I felt 'really sorry for her', what a sad, totally wasted life she'd had. Finally she opened her eyes, took one look at me and said, "...Jeaniel, please forgive me." I remember feeling furious at hearing those words. Now, many years later, I can identify some of those feelings: terror, bewilderment, frustration, despair, regret, sadness, shame, powerlessness. I turned from her bed and walked (probably

stomped) to the window of that hospital room, looked up at the most beautiful, clear, star studded night and in my silent loudest voice yelled at God..."Please, please, take this women out of her misery."

I returned to her bedside, looked down and saw my face, my eyes looking up at me, it took the breath right of me, in that moment I had a totally epiphany. I recognized what the future would hold for me. There at that moment, in that hospital room, my mother gave me birth a second time. God used her to show me what was to be, like Charles Dickenson's 'A Christmas Carol,' the past, present and future flashed before my eyes, the insanity that I was living in. I saw my children standing at my bedside, if they came at all, listening to their remorseful, self-centered mother continue to rationalize all her actions during their lifetime, while begging for their forgiveness.

On October 23, 1983 I took my last drink. It has been nearly 26 years since that fateful visit to my mother's bedside. It did, in fact, turn out to be her last hospital visit; she slowly died of starvation over the following year, her heroic choice. I spent as much time with her as possible. I nursed her, kept her company, and would stay up at night while she tried to sleep. She could take care of herself a little during the day. I watched, listened and assisted as she planned her funeral, what she would wear, what prayers she wanted at her funeral, what she wanted to give to her children. I listened during the many visits with her parish priest. When he would say that she was one of the bravest people he'd ever met, I'd scoff inside...you see I still had this huge resentment, but I "acted as if." I had just begun to pick up the tools of the program and was still a very sick little newcomer.

I wish I could say that my life changed overnight, but of course it didn't. What I can report is that I was able to share a little over a year of sobriety with my birth mother before she died in December 1984. I have her 'little black' meditation book, the one we can't use anymore. It took many years for me to recognize that my mother 12th stepped me during the few adult years we had together. She must have prayed awfully hard for that hospital miracle. I believe today that she partnered with my Higher Power in what may have very well been a last ditch effort to get me to recognize the truth. How can one thank another for a new birth...well as they say in the program... pass it on.

The words I will forever hear in my head? "Jeaniel, remember don't become too arrogant in your sobriety, we only have a daily reprieve. One day at a time" Ahhh, she knew me well. I have absolutely no resentment toward my mother today and hope in some way this little story will honor her memory. She did the best job she could with what she had and in the end died sober and with more courage and humility then I could possibly recognize or match.

Thank you Mother Devota and know that in my heart and soul it is done

**Jeaniel R.**

### How to Relapse

The room is dark and I can't see. My vision is incredibly blurry and I am not moving but I feel spinning- like I'm on the Super-Charged, Nuclear-Powered, Tilt-A-Whirl. Vertigo. Still dreaming my nightmare. Shadows chasing me. And I can't move. My head is sledge-hammering, my heart is racing, my insides are clawing their way out of me. I fall out of the bed and lie on the floor. Crawl to the bathroom. Too slow. I puke. A lot. For a long time. Sometime during the vomiting I make it to the toilet. Thankfully the puking ends and I take a breath. Finally. Can breathe. My head spins and I shake and try to stand. Throw some towels on the vomit. On the bathroom counter is a box of Ritz crackers. I know why they're there. I put them there, knowing I would need to eat something eventually. I look at them and gag but I'll choke some down. I will. But I don't have the energy to open them up. And I finish throwing up bile and other yellow crap. Good get that poison out! Yeah.

I stagger to the room and the world suddenly comes into focus and suddenly everything is alright again because... There is a bottle of vodka. Quite a bit left. I must've gotten it recently. Desperate and quicker than a viper I take 2 sloppy chugs, 4, 6. I feel OK. I'm gonna make it. Awareness erupts. I am in a hotel somewhere and I have to be at a big meeting all day tomorrow, Friday. I can't make it. I don't think I can make it. I big pull. Think. OK. I'm gonna make it. Just need to set the alarm and sleep. A few more drinks, I'm feeling better again. Need to sleep. As I'm lying there, I remember I don't have any dress clothes for my meeting. I need to go to the store. What time is it? Clock is blurry. Hmm. I'll just relax, feeling a little funny. Few more drinks and then I'll sleep. Go to store later. Dozing, awareness comes and goes... I remember my cell phone. It's dead. Confusing little machine. I realize I haven't had the charger for awhile. I can't think well enough to solve that dilemma. Few more drinks. Better. And there is no more booze so now I can sleep. No MORE?!?!? Panic. I need to go. I need to find my keys. I need to turn a light on. I need to get more bottles this time so this doesn't happen again.

4 days later after 1 ambulance, 1 emergency room, 2 detox rooms, and 1 very angry booking at a jail I sit and wonder what the hell happened. I'm very confused, very disoriented and the cell block is all orange-ish and blurry and the men are asking me questions that I don't know answers to. Taking my food, which I don't care, and looking at me like they want something and I have it. I want to yell, "I don't have shit and I wouldn't know where to start looking for it if I did!" Time crawls and I am trying to think how to get something, something to calm me down, something to feel better, no booze but maybe drugs. Worth a shot.

I lay awake at night in lockdown. Can't sleep and I wonder what happened? I am able to read a book and as I'm reading it dawns on me. I have just relapsed from a long-term sobriety and peace and freedom and all sorts of happiness. I have destroyed hard work of building trust with my loved ones and business and probably lost several clients and jobs and who knows when I'm getting out of this place. How did this happen? I won't know that answer for another few weeks.

The relapse, the decision to drink one drink just to see, led to 4 days of drunken stupor in a dark hotel room with no TV, no music, no light, and no contact with anyone, just me and my bottles. That led to 4 days of institutions. That began the trip through some real loss. Loss of 90 days of freedom; loss of thousands of dollars in bills, fines, fees; loss of work, income; loss of respect; loss of peace; loss of trust; loss of almost everything. 4 days, almost died, almost lost everything. But that's not How to Relapse it's just the beginning of the results, and what taught me what lead to my relapse and how. Here is what I learned.

#### How to Relapse -By a real alcoholic

- 1) Don't go to AA Meetings. Isolate. Think you're different, better. Make excuses, find reasons. But whatever you do, don't go to AA Meetings. This way you can get through everyday not remembering you're an alcoholic-addicted.
- 2) Stop calling your friends, your sponsor(s), and further isolate. Take time to think of good reasons not to call them in case they call you. Ignore and this way you can get through everyday not remembering you're an alcoholic-addicted.
- 3) Seek out conflict. Find some people to argue, fight with. Blame them and others for bad situations in your life. Remember that you're better and that you can fix them if they only listen to you. Fixate your entire mind on these problems. Make them huge, almost insurmountable. Lament them often, constantly. Don't remember you're an alcoholic-addicted.
- 4) Don't practice rigorous honesty. If you're honest with everyone, all the time, it'll only hurt them and put undue pressure on you. You do not need that extra strain. And it's better for others if you don't tell them the truth. Also, don't really talk to anyone at all. It's a waste of time, they don't truly care and you're doing them a favor by not telling them squat. Keep your thoughts to yourself and digest them on your own. Spend a lot of time on them, by yourself. If something makes you angry, then remember that, keep it for later. But don't be honest. It's hurtful to be honest.
- 5) Stop working the 12 Steps of AA. It takes a lot of time and effort and you need to focus on your career and family and try to get some rest whenever possible. The 12 steps may have worked at first when you were curing yourself but now they just get in the way of advancing your life.
- 6) Sleep a lot. When you aren't absolutely needed, get some rest. You need it. No need to push yourself.
- 7) Take medicines to help you sleep if you need to. The more the better, obviously. Try some cough medicine. Try some cough medicine with alcohol in it. That'll really work well on a cough.
- 8) Forget about God. Stop doing anything related to God because it takes too much time and you really need to take better care of yourself. Prayer and meditation are only effective and necessary when you're struggling. When you're doing fine, just say thanks for now and get going. Or get some rest.
- 9) Find reasons to test yourself by going to bars and using parties. Don't use, you don't need to but, just go to these places and be around it. Smell it. Touch it if you want to. It's fine. You're fine. Don't admit you're an alcoholic-addicted. Just being around it and then not taking it proves you're not. And you're fine.
- 10) Take a bunch of trips for work where you'll be alone in a hotel room most of the night for a week or longer. This is worth it because it's work. It isn't dangerous. Just fun and sort of like a vacation. Sit with your business associates at the bar and watch them drink. Have fun with them and laugh and joke and enjoy yourself. Don't admit you're an alcoholic-addicted. Remember on these trips to bring plenty of sleeping pills and pain pills. You're probably going to need them for sleeping in an unknown bed. Using hasn't been a problem for so long, so it's perfectly fine, even necessary to have these handy. Don't go to AA Meetings on these trips. Your clients expect you to entertain and be with them and besides it's an enormous hassle to find AA meetings in a new town.
- 11) If you're around any of your old haunts, just take a drive by. Slow down to see if you can see anybody you know coming out. Maybe you can help them. If no one comes out, maybe go in and say hi. It's been a long time and they probably are worried about you.
- 12) While you're in there test yourself. Probably even order something really strong. It's not like you're going to actually take it. When you order whatever you order, don't think too long about it. It's basically harmless though. One isn't going to hurt. Remember that feeling? Yeah. Wow. Kinda like that cough medicine. You aren't an alcoholic-addict, you see? You haven't needed to be in AA this whole time and it was fine. God isn't intervening and He would if you truly needed Him to. So...You're sitting here and it's fine. Go ahead and just try it. If it is bad, just quit again. No problem. Take that double, triple, quad straight up you ordered for the test and throw the whole thing back. Then get out of here and get home. No one will know.

- 13) When that first drink comes roaring back out of you because your body doesn't want it. Let it come. Relax. Try again. Your test failed and now you've gone this far and you'll never know for sure. What was the point if you don't try it again?
- 14) If you ever wake up and if then someone tells you "you have the right to remain silent", Do that.

### **Anonymous**

#### **Religion- I have None....I have Spirituality!**

As a young child I was forced to go to Sunday School at the popular church in the city I grew up in. It was a church that "respected" and they all people sent their children to for classes. See, I grew up in a very dysfunctional alcoholic home so church was a great way to show how wonderful family life was on the "outside". When the doors were closed on our new house and fancy cars put in the garage, life was a completely different story. As I got older and started to rebel and "act out" I would skip Sunday school and go on and do my own thing. The years progressed, my family started getting crazier people started seeing the real way my family lived and so my dad left us. He picked me up from school one day, I was a 7th grader and was very surprised to see him there so I got in his pick-up truck and he told me, "I left your mother and you today, I moved out"! I was shocked and didn't know what I did to make him leave. Everything that happened in our house was always my fault. I knew it because I always heard my drunken mom say so!

I started to become a hellion of a child. The state took me away from my mother and placed me into foster homes, juvenile detention centers, Attendant Care and Treatment for alcohol and drugs. I had no idea what I was doing wrong because it was a normal state of mind to be in when I was drunk. This one foster home in particular, gives me chills to think about it to this day, FORCED me to go to "church" with them, follow their rules, read their literature and do all the things that they did. They told me that GOD would fix me. So, I did what I thought was best and I put my long beautiful blonde hair into about 30 ponytails and cut it all off at the rubber band. I did that because I had no outlet and did not trust a single person. I had absolutely no faith in anything but alcohol. I was so confused by the whole God thing that I had completely given up any hope for a power greater than myself.

So through out the years, I got into more trouble and went to more treatments and they all talked about a power greater than me. It always made me want to vomit. The last time I went to treatment, I went because everyone else (my friends) were dying of this disease, going to jail etc. I went to AA meetings and I had such a piss poor attitude and thought everyone was brain washed into thinking alcohol really was a problem. HA HA HA!! LOSERS!!! But there was something that kept me coming back, even after I finally graduated treatment on a positive note. I started talking to people that I really didn't even like but whatever the reason, I kept going back to AA. Eventually my attitude was a little bit more positive and good things started happening in my life. In my own time, I started to believe that there just might be something out there....a little bit more powerful than me.....or not. I heard once in a meeting "**I believe that you believe** in a power greater than you" and I really liked that. I had to take SERIOUS baby steps to get to where I am today.

I have been going to AA for a few years now and I have faith, real faith. I try to pray everyday but I still forget and well, I am not perfect. The days that I do truly believe in a power greater than myself are those days that make my life worth living. I love sobriety today and I do not use the past as an excuse to drink my life away. I use my past as a tool to help others. I use my yesterdays to guide my tomorrows and I know for a fact that I would be drunk today if I didn't believe than you can believe in something more powerful than you! Today I am grateful to be of service to others and to carry this message that this program really does work.

### **Denise J- Grand Forks**

#### **Road Trip**

I grew up in Nebraska, and that means becoming a college football fan early in life. The Big Red, the University of Nebraska Cornhuskers, it's a consuming madness, and my family is no exception. My grandparents starting going to the games in Lincoln in the 1920's, and my parents have had season tickets since the 1950's. I went to my first game in 1969, and as I got older, I made many road trips to away games in places like Lawrence and Manhattan, Kansas, Columbia, Missouri, Ames, Iowa, and Boulder, Colorado. All of these are college towns, of course, and a great place for a drunk like myself, with all of the bars and nightlife that go along with college football game day.

I found my way to AA finally in 1990 at nearly the age of 30. A really big concern for me at the beginning was what I was going to do about the sporting events that I'd loved so much for all of my life-ever since I was about 15, they'd

really become wall-to-wall drunk fests. Was my love of sports going to be enough? How would I deal with people who were drinking? What would happen on road trips to all of the places I knew with great familiarity? At the end of 1995, I had an opportunity for a blow-out of a road trip. My parents had come into tickets for the 1996 Fiesta Bowl in Tempe, Arizona. Not only was Nebraska playing in the game, it was for the National Championship of college football. This was to be a big event, and the entire "festive" atmosphere that would go along with a big venue game like this. Here was the other hitch- to save some money; I decided I would drive from Grand Forks to Tempe. The last road trip I'd made like this in the 80's had resulted in considerable drunkenness and hard drug use between Omaha and Santa Fe. Was I ready for this? Would I be able to handle it? What about when I got there to the actual game? My thought was to get somebody from the program to go with me for the New Years' ride.

The first guy I asked got a new job right before the holidays, so he was out. My next choice was somewhat of a fluke- I picked him not because I knew him well (I didn't), but because he worked seasonally, and he'd be certain to be able to go. As we headed out, something started happening after a few hundred miles. To pass the time, we started reading the Big Book. Before long, we'd done a big book study of the "first 164", and had done a 4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup>, through Nebraska and into Colorado in the mountain west. As we rolled into Santa Fe, NM on New Year's Eve day, 1995, we called the local AA office, and decided to hit a meeting. As it happened, the meeting we chose was an 11 PM meeting. As we walked out of the meeting on the crisp, cool, still night in this historic city, it was midnight. Fireworks were visible over the city and church bells clanged as they rang in the New Year, 1996. I can say that this was a true spiritual experience for both of us, and a very important moment for me as I rolled into my 6<sup>th</sup> year of sobriety.

The next day in Tempe, Nebraska won the game and the National Championship, and we celebrated sober with some old friends and family with my new found friend. The trip cemented our friendship, and before we got home, I was his sponsor. I'd set out on this trip as a test of survival in sobriety. What I got was one of the richest spiritual experiences I'd ever come to know, a big book study, and a new sponsee. Many, many things have happened in my life since that New Years' week, but we're both still sober, we're both still friends, and I'm still a fan of the Nebraska Cornhuskers.

## **Eric J. –Grand Forks**

### **Travels in Sobriety**

I first joined a home group in 1990 and that is where my first sponsor had showed me the importance of staying after the meeting to help clean up as this was a way to get out of myself and as a home group member I had a responsibility to take care of the meeting along with the other home group members. This was my first journey into feeling a part of something for the first time in my life. When I was around 2 years sober the group had elected me to be the secretary/treasurer and they had trusted me with the group funds. I was then elected GSR for the group and I still remember today how my sponsor shared with me that I was going to assemblies, etc. to serve the group, not myself. It is also my responsibility to make sure I have the time off to attend the assemblies and do know far in advance when each one is held and can plan accordingly. I enjoy the trips to assemblies as it gives me an opportunity to get out of myself and to meet other people, which is great! We got in the car early in our sobriety to attend forums, service conferences, and assemblies and didn't have a clue what was going on but it was a truly learning experience. I can honestly say we weren't thrilled to be there early in recovery!

The AA journey has allowed me to serve at the district level and the Area level and it's all been very rewarding and at times somewhat stressful, but I wouldn't give it up today. The travels will have some memories that I will always cherish and I always look forward to the next trip. Make your journey in service a positive experience and remember Service is Gratitude in Action! Thank you for the opportunity to serve!

## **Lorna O. – Area 52 Delegate**

### **A Chance Meeting**

Hi, my name is Colleen and I am an alcoholic", is the most important statement I speak in my life of recovery. I need to hear these words, so I can integrate into my mind and own, the reality of my disease.

Over the years, I knew I possibly had some issues with alcohol, each episode vowing I would do it differently next time, but each time I drank I would black out, causing harm to myself or another. I remember putting on my make-up, praying not to black out and kill some poor innocent person. This sounds pretty crazy, but I had my palm read by a lady who had been a Catholic nun, named Sister Bea. She told me I had a very short life line, and if I didn't change the way I was living, my life would end much too soon. Out of the blue, she asked me if I was a heavy drinker. I told her absolutely not, I just like to party a lot. Her response to me was, 'to not deny the possibility of the disease of alcoholism'. As I left her office, I thanked her for the reading, and snickered as I walked out, "not this girl", I was 32 years old.

At the time I was having a lot of difficulty in my life, job troubles, couldn't get along with the people I worked with, (they just weren't very smart), and financially, couldn't make ends meet. Once Sister Bea planted the seed of "Alcoholism" in my mind, I couldn't shake it. Just to appease myself, I went to an AA meeting and all I heard were the differences. "Boy, I sure didn't have troubles like them, I'm only a heavy drinker. I went back out there, and periodically I would come back to a meeting when it seemed I had nowhere else to go.

The morning after my last drunk, I had reached the lowest point of my life, I just wanted to die, and not continue living this way. My sister, who had been in the program, suggested that I try AA one more time. She told me that all I needed for membership was a desire to stop drinking alcohol. We attended several meetings together, and she was my rock and sounding board. In time, the fog cleared, and started I opened my ears and my heart enough to hear what was being said around the tables. As I absorbed the sharing, I started hearing the similarities, and got in touch with how I had denied my disease. During a meeting someone said that the best place to sit is around the tables, the ones who sit around the edge are the ones that are picked off by "wolf" of alcoholism, from then on, I've been around the table.

My recovery has been an incredible journey. My sponsor has helped me to find a Higher Power, something greater than myself, I could turn my life over to each day. She has been there to show me a new way of living, to let go of the garbage that kept me drunk. Today I use the compass of recovery for direction in my daily living. The greatest gift I have been given is the opportunity to be of service to women in the program, my group, and my community. For this I am eternally grateful.

Sister Bea is still in my heart, and I thank her for the courage to ask the question about my possibly being an alcoholic so many years ago.

**Colleen R., Grand Forks**

#### 4" From Canada

"What have I done?" I watched a tumble weed skitter down the street as the smell of rotting sugar beets filled my nostrils in the 90 degree heat and 20 mph wind. I had arrived at the Halfway House the evening before (July 13<sup>th</sup>, 2007) with \$100, 4 or 5 changes of clothes in a plastic box, and a prepaid cell phone card. These were the only things I owned. The staff showed me to my room and after having settled in a bit I proceeded to the commons area. I found myself staring at a map. It had been a somewhat blind decision to come to this particular Halfway House and I really wasn't sure where Grand Forks was, other than the fact that it was 5 hours from the treatment center and that it was in North Dakota. I found Fargo on the map and I knew it was north of there. So I moved my finger up I-29 til I found it. "Oh my God, I am 4" from Canada!" I gulped at the realization, got a soda and went back to my room. This is how sobriety and a new life in AA began for me.

I had been more or less insanely drunk since my late teens. I knew by the time I was 18 that drinking was a problem, having already received 2 DUI's. One of which was a week after graduation (which I was too drunk to attend-my sister picked up my diploma for me the following year). The second came only one week after I got my license back from the first offense. I say I knew that alcohol was a problem but only in a vague sense. At this point a DUI or two was more of an inconvenience, drinking was still fun and was very much a solution to all life's ills. Things deteriorated over the years. I had a child, went through a messy breakup and estranged myself from my daughter. I lived off and on at my parents'; going off on binges 3,4,6 months at a time and eventually floating back. At some time in my late 20's I just gave up and stayed there (with my parents). Next thing I knew, 5 months had passed and except for sporadic bouts with employment, there was nothing to mark this passage of my life. My life became on long hazy day. I managed to keep a job as a manager of a pizza place in my small Minnesota town for a few years. This job offered me just enough responsibility to feed my ego and to continue to lie to myself, glass in hand. When I was 33, my father woke up to use the bathroom, collapsed in the hall and never moved again. I was very close to him and his death hit my pretty hard. The funeral went by in a blur and when the "Irish Wake" was over, I just kept drinking. I started to wake in the night and take shots causing me to be so buzzed up the next day, I would just have to continue drinking. I lost my managers job at the pizza place and was fired and rehired three times. During the last year or so of my drinking I was alone. My family, who at first did everything they could to help me, had to let me go. I would get sober for a bit, get a job, start drinking again and would lose the job. I was even rehired as a cook at the pizza place. The cycle continued.

The day of my last drink, I was shirtless in my mother's garage with a few pulls left of a cheap bottle of vodka (quite a step up for me as I had become accustomed to Mouthwash purchased at the dollar store by this time). When I took the last pull of the 100 proof booze, I realized that it was not enough to perform its intended purpose and then began wandering around the garage reading warning labels on various chemicals. There was that familiar desperate need to blot out the shame and anger. I finally settled on a bottle of Windshield washer fluid that *may* not cause blindness. The realization of what I had done hit me full force and I made myself throw it up. There was a family friend who had taken me to a couple meetings in the past. She had been trying to get a hold of me the past few days because I had not been around. I called her because I knew I needed something other than myself...I needed help. She picked me up, took me to her place and she and her husband cleaned me up, clothed me and fed me. They told me I was a drunk and in desperate

shape. They got me set up for an evaluation at a treatment facility. It was the first time I had been honest with anyone, including myself about my drinking. The only question the social worker had for me was where I wanted to go. I went to treatment (fearfully) thinking that I needed three hots and a cot, someplace to rest and regroup another escape. Most of the staff were in recovery and through them I began to see that I could be happy and sober, a thought which had never occurred to me before. They suggested strongly that I go to a halfway house and I only knew that I didn't want to go to Minneapolis or to St. Cloud. I was told about a house in East Grand Forks, and although neither my counselor nor I had heard of the place, phone calls were made and there was a bed for me.

I have come to regard the last two years of my life as a journey and it started with those small steps on that garage floor. Impetuous decisions, totally against my nature were first made out of sheer desperation and then turned to blind faith because other AA's who had something I wanted told me to. Today these decisions have become rooted in a very tangible, practical faith. Yesterday I was sober and again today. Life isn't the paradise I thought it would be my first few months sober when I was on my "pink cloud". It is still life. But the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous and the faith I have found here have sustained me. I know feel "happily and usefully whole" (Although I still find myself thinking "Oh my God, 4" from Canada"...watching the tumble weed roll by...

## **Trent M- GSR District 13**

### **Keeping my First AA Meeting Fresh and Alive**

If I forget about my last drunk, it's very likely that I haven't had my last drunk yet. In similar fashion, to keep this beautiful life of sobriety, with which God has so lovingly blessed me, I must always keep my first AA meeting fresh and alive. I "traveled" alone (keeping with this Oasis issue's "travel" theme) down a long, quiet church hallway to arrive 25 minutes early for my first AA meeting. At the end of the hallway was a big room and one smiley guy beginning to set up chairs. I had no idea what to expect, but I certainly expected that "they" would be more prepared than this for "my arrival." When the man said hello, I retorted, "Where is everyone?" He kindly assured me they would be coming. As people began to bounce in, I felt increasingly alone in a crowd of so many people who seemed extremely happy to be there and entirely familiar and comfortable in the setting. They all knew what was going on and I had no clue! I remember sitting down sheepishly, feeling lost and unconnected to everyone else in the room. I didn't know anything about meetings how they were run. This was a call-up meeting; I think I'd see that kind of AA meeting on an episode of Law & Order once!! (That flicker of familiarity helped calm my nerves a tad.)

The first gentleman was called up, and there was an instant familiarity about him. As he told his story, his familiar voice, mannerisms and certainly his unmistakable humor grabbed me – I think I know this guy! But the guy I was thinking of didn't have a drinking problem when I knew him as a fellow freshman in college. Halfway through his story, there was no mistaking that this was the college classmate of mine from 12 years ago. I never would have imagined that alcohol had consumed his life like it had done mine! This man had been sober for several years, but I could relate to his stories of drunken foolishness. I thought to myself, "Perhaps there really is hope for me to find a newfound happiness and peace in sobriety with the help of the AA program, just like he had!" Ok, so maybe my thoughts were more accurately, "Hey – maybe I can be not so screwed up too – just like him!" After the meeting, many people shook my hand and welcomed me (as I munched on their yummy sweets, which solidified this as my favorite Minot meeting!). Turns out - that first man I met (the one setting up chairs) was the current Area 52 delegate. I didn't discover this until months later, and I was struck by the humility of folks like him who were "going to any lengths" doing service work in the AA program. I learned that service work puts into action two very important AA traditions: 1) Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon AA unity, and 5) Each group has but one primary purpose – to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers. Service work and reaching out to newcomers helps keep this alcoholic sober – one day at a time!

**Yours in service,  
Paula H. -District 12 DCM**

### **AA Service**

My life has taken many different paths that would never have developed had it not been for God, Alcoholics Anonymous, and good sponsors. Looking back on those sobering up years, I thought A.A. was just a meeting. In the beginning I had two sponsors that were very active in the program. They taught me so much about alcoholism and what we need to do for our recovery. Service work started almost immediately, greeting people that came to the meeting, making coffee, cleaning up after the meeting. Getting active in my Home Group was exciting, it gave me the feeling that I belonged somewhere.

Attending other meetings and going to District meetings was where my eyes opened up even more. I was about a year and half sober and the District was in need of a Public Information Chairperson. I was pretty new but when asked if I was interested I said yes! Pretty soon there were 2 more people willing. It came to a draw from the hat. I have been

so grateful for that position; it saved me so many times. I worked full time and went to a lot of meetings but there were times when my alcoholism kicked in and if I picked up the P.I. duties I was O.K. The P.I. Committee had previously been very active so there were many exciting things to do. We were invited to many different schools, visited with clergy, the Hot Line, PSA's, updating meeting and contact lists, literature spots. There was always something to do. I remember thinking how blessed I was to be able to help and also how this position allowed many others to do 12 step work.

## **Polly-Area 52 PICPC**

### **Journey of Gratitude**

My name is Cindy and I am an alcoholic. For the record, I am not a writer but when your best friend of 30 years becomes the OASIS editor; one is bound to get a call! Now, that being said, it is an honor to share my recovery journey with you.

My journeys in sobriety are so numerous that the challenge lies in where to begin my story. How about my first AA meeting? My friend (your editor) had to go to these AA meetings and she needed a ride. That particular ride, as insignificant as it seemed at the time, changed my life. I had a six pack in me, sat in the furthest corner I could find and thought "you people" were...how shall I put this...lying! Truly, I wanted nothing to do with you or your meetings. I could not be an alcoholic; I was too young!!

The following year brought my second DUI, my family had had enough of me, the judge was picking on me..."poor Cindy." So on April 14, 1983 at 2:30 a.m. my best friend (yep...guess who?) and a few other recovering alcoholics intervened. They took me to Detox. I was 19 years old and I have not found it necessary to pick up a drink since. My Higher Power got me sober and has kept me sober. My main journey this past 26 years is learning gratitude, the love my Higher Power has for me. If you are anything like me, feeling "lovable" or "worthy" was not my strong suit, yet I stuck around long enough for the miracle to happen. That is my challenge to the newcomer; I dare you to stick around!

My first 10 years of sobriety were full of 12 step calls, speaking when asked at treatment facilities and detox centers and as many AA meetings as I could get to. I found a sponsor and worked the steps then went on to sponsor others. My first 12 step call was remarkable. An old-timer named Stan grabbed me and my friend (ya know, your editor!!) and took us to Thief River Falls, MN. I was three months sober. We found this poor woman locked in her home. We could see her shriveled form hiding behind a sofa in the living room. We managed to find a way into her house and spoke with her for hours. We poured out her liquor (leaving her a 6-pack for the ride). Pouring the liquor out a few things occurred to me: I couldn't believe I was wasting this good booze and I had no desire to drink it!!! Right then and there I knew there must be a Power watching over me. Our prospect drank all the way to Grand Forks and left detox several hours later. Here was my next lesson- Letting Go and Letting God. I learned that I have no control over anyone or anything. I was elated sharing my new found hope with this woman. I thought she should just get it like I did. I was angry listening to the stories of old-timers' sharing about their 12 step calls to those who didn't want the program. They told me how they dealt with it. Sadly this woman died of alcoholism 6 months later. I will never forget her.

In my 20's I got married, had 2 beautiful children and got my dream job in a treatment facility. I learned a great deal about this disease and am grateful for the experience. In my 30's I got divorced and experienced a heartache that no one should know. I learned even more about God's Grace. I buried my third child right after her first birthday. As the casket closed for the last time I was gripped with such a paralyzing fear. I could not breath, think or feel. Then God took it away. I was left with a peace and warmth, a knowing that all would be OK and that I did not have to drink. Once again I experienced a sense of gratitude beyond words. The support and love from members of Alcoholics Anonymous was overwhelming. You amazing people (that I once wanted nothing to do with) did for me what I could not do for myself! I share this gratitude in action by attending meetings and shaking the hand/making time for the new women there, making coffee, and doing service work in my group and district.

I also want you to know that after years of my friend, Anne, pushing me, I went to college for the first time at 39 years old. I heard many times throughout my sobriety "I support you in walking through your fears..." I began my story telling you about the feelings of worthlessness and self hatred/self pity I came into this fellowship with. I also never felt smart enough; after all I was a high school dropout. My first day on campus I cried "What am I doing here...I can't do this..." I prayed and cried a great deal the first couple of months. I have to mention here the vital importance of a home group. My home group, Red River, supported me through all the things I have told you about. It was the first meeting I attended and is where I still go to this day. They have laughed with me, cried with me, guided me...they have endured this journey of recovery with me.

So here I am in my 40's and you all don't look so "old" anymore!!! I graduated from college with honors and now have my license as a counselor. I just chuckle today when the kids I work with say "I don't like AA, they all look so old!" Now I am an old-timer in more ways than one! Gratitude is the hearts journey...my heart is indeed full!

**Cindy M- Alt GSR, District 13**

