

October 1969

*This Is AA
Around the World . . .*



An AA Don Quixote on a Spanish Island

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JUST OVER a year ago, on a sunny Sunday morning, I stepped off a boat onto a Mediterranean isle.

Armed with AA literature in several languages and with the blessings of GSO in New York, I came here to begin a new segment of my life and to bring AA to the island. Now, a year later, there is still no AA group. The literature still sits quietly in my living-room bookcase. Life on the island continues as usual. The wonder of it all is that I am still sober. I really shouldn't say "the wonder of it all," because this year has proved to me that AA works, anywhere, any time, with or

without people — if *you* want it to.

Almost as soon as I arrived, I was warned by friends in residence that it would be difficult to start an AA group. This island is one of the few places in the world where you can retire and slowly drink yourself to death while still managing to live, after a fashion, on \$300 a month. Booze of all kinds sells for under \$1.00 a fifth, and the cost goes down further if you know the right people. Black-market cigarettes are available at \$2.50 a carton; food and rent are comparably cheap; the weather is glorious most of the year (except December through March).

No wonder there is a huge foreign colony here — mostly dedicated to supporting the local bars and liquor stores.

And so into this drinkers' paradise I came, a new life ahead of me, over ten years in AA behind me, full of zeal and energy to start that AA group.

Two weeks after I set foot on the island, I was flat on my back in a hospital, with my left arm encased in a wire-and-board contraption that resembled half of the Wright brothers' first airplane. In my enthusiasm to go native, I had bought a pair of the local rope-soled shoes

(50¢). Unfortunately, rope soles and highly polished marble stairs don't agree. As I left a friend's apartment to have lunch with the local Anglican minister, to talk about starting a group in his church, the shoes and the stairs clashed, and I wound up in the hospital.

When I got out of the hospital, wearing my struts and wires, I set out again to lunch with my priest friend. He was completely in agreement with my ideas and offered the use of his church as a meeting place, gratis. There was one small hitch, though. In this country, it is *technically* necessary to have police permission for a gathering of more than three or four people. My priest friend suggested we talk to the local bishop, tell him about AA, and get his permission to start a group. So we set off to make an appointment with the bishop, I with my struts, wires, books, and literature. Unfortunately, we learned, it was necessary to write the bishop a letter requesting an appointment. This we did, and weeks went by as we waited for a reply. It seemed the bishop was visiting the other islands in his diocese and was unavailable. Meanwhile, I fretted and fussed and worked with several Americans who were resident here and had been AA members at one time or another (mostly another).

Then I had to go to two other countries for therapy and checkups on my broken arm, and another month went by. "Oh well," I

thought, "things happen slowly here." May and June passed, and still no appointment with the bishop. I never have found out where he was all that time. By then, my priest friend had his hands full with the hordes of English-speaking tourists who descend here every summer, and I was left to my own devices. Friends arrived from the U.S.A. (good AA friends, and what a joy to see them), and I did some traveling around Europe during August with friends and relatives. Business also kept me away from the island for several periods of time. Soon it was fall, and I had to return to the U.S.A., again on business. I left books and literature with my priest friend and with the most likely prospect for the future group. Planning to be gone a month, I was delayed in the U.S.A., and nearly three months went by before I finally returned. By then, the priest had been transferred, the "likely prospect" was in a sanitarium, the books were neatly stored in her apartment, untouched by human hands, and I was right back where I had started.

Now it is more than a year later, and still we have no group, nor even the beginnings of one. In spite of it all, I find myself still sober. A bit discouraged, perhaps, but still sober. My sobriety insurance is a voluminous correspondence with AAs in my home state of California and at GSO in New York, plus my own Big Book and the daily reminders I see in the pubs and on the

streets of what I used to be like. The year has, if anything, strengthened my sobriety. I've seen so much unhappiness and misery in other people's lives here that it makes me deeply thankful to AA and my Higher Power that I'm sober today.

Now I don't fret about appointments with the bishop, a grand beginning for a huge group, or any of the things I envisioned when I first

arrived. Rather, I live my life here 24 hours at a time. Some day we may have a group; at this point, I don't know, and I don't worry about it so much any more. I've finally had it pounded into my head that these things aren't up to *me*, anyway. Apparently, a group here was not supposed to be, or we would have one by now. But then ... well, we'll see what happens tomorrow.