

Educated Agnostic

This is the ninth in an intermittent series of personal stories which first appeared at the back of the first and second editions of the Big Book, **Alcoholics Anonymous**, but were later dropped from the third edition.

By presenting this story from the first edition, the Grapevine is happy to offer newcomers a chance to meet — in print — some of the Fellowship's early members.



Why go into the drinking pattern that is so much the same with all of us? Three times I had left the hospital with hope that I was saying goodbye forever. And here I was again.

The first day there I told the kindly doctor that I was a thoroughly hopeless case and would probably continue to return as long as I could beg, borrow, or steal the money to get in. On the second day he told me that he knew of something that would keep me off liquor for life. I laughed at him. Yes, indeed, I would do anything or take anything that would

produce such results, but there wasn't anything. On the third day a man came to talk with me. He was an alcoholic who had stopped! He talked about alcoholism and a spiritual way of life. I was deeply impressed by his seriousness but nothing that he said made sense to me. He spoke about God, and a power greater than oneself. I remember being very careful not to say anything that might shake his faith in whatever it was he believed! I was deeply grateful to him for taking the trouble to talk with me, but what he had was not for me. I had thought much about religion and had come to rather definite conclusions. There was no God. The universe was an inexplicable phenomenon. In spite of my sorry state and outlook, there

were many beautiful things in life, but no beauty. There were truths discoverable about life, but no truth. There were people who were good, kind, considerate, but no such thing as goodness. I had read rather extensively, but when people began to talk in such ultimates I was lost. I could find in life no eternal purpose nor anything that might be labeled "divine guidance." War, illness, cruelty, stupidity, poverty, and greed were not and could not be the product of any purposeful creation. The whole thing simply didn't make sense.

About this I felt no deep emotion. I had struggled with the problem during late adolescence, but had long since ceased to give it anxious thought. Many people believe in a god of some sort and worship him in various ways. That was excellent. I thought it nice that so many people, poor misguided souls, could find so simple a solution to their problems. If this world proved too hopelessly disillusioning they could always seek comfort in a more pleasant existence promised in a world to come, where wrongs would be righted and justice tempered with tender mercy would prevail. But none of that was for me. I had enough courage and intellectual honesty to face life as I saw it without recourse to a self-erected deity.

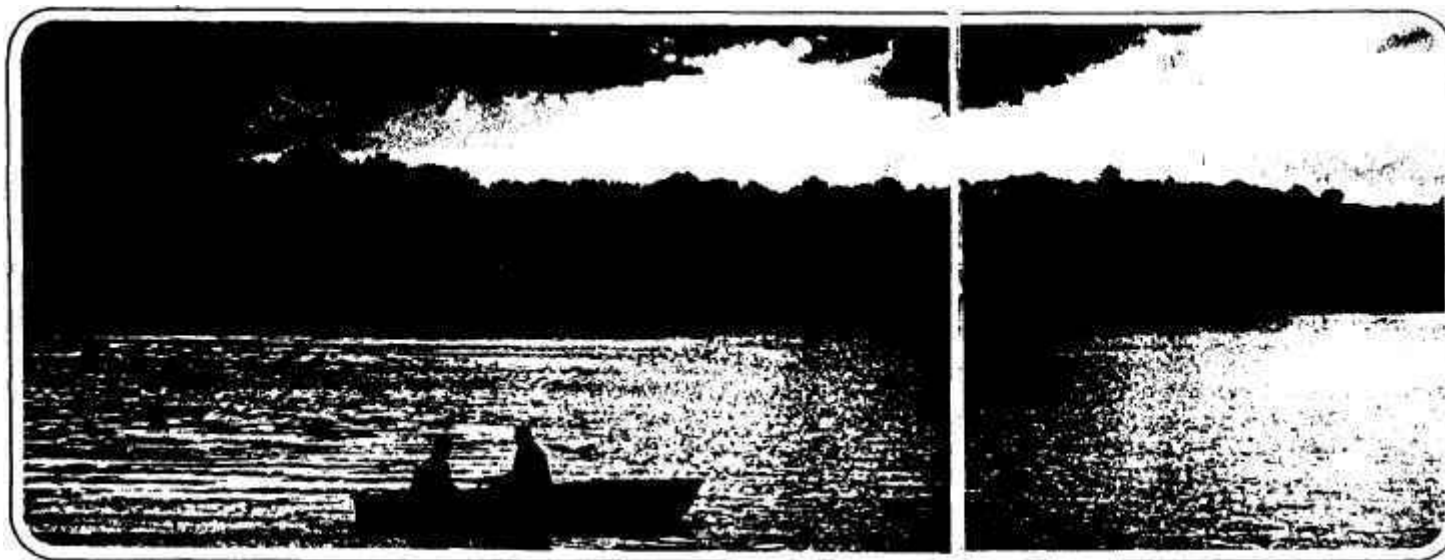
The next day another man visited me. He, too, had been an alcoholic and stopped drinking. He pointed out that I had found myself unable to handle my liquor problem by myself. He had been in the same position, yet

he hadn't had a drink in over three years! He told me of other men who had found sobriety through the recognition of some power beyond themselves. If I cared to I was to consider myself invited to a gathering the following Tuesday where I would meet other alcoholics who had stopped.

With the knowledge I now have, it is hard for me to recall how screwy the whole thing sounded — the blind leading the blind, a union of drunks, all banded together in some kind of spiritual belief! What could be more idiotic! But.. these men were sober. Nuts!

I returned to my despairing wife with this incoherent story of a bunch of drunks who had found a cure for their alcoholism through some kind of spiritual exercise and who held regular meetings where, as far as I could figure out, they went through some kind of spiritual exercise! She was very nearly convinced that my mental balance had now been completely and probably permanently destroyed. The only rational support I could find for giving it a try was that it was vouched for by the kindly doctor whom she had met on several occasions at the hospital. That and the fact that nothing else worked.

May I stop at this point and address a few sentences directly to agnostic or atheistically inclined alcoholics: You can't take less stock in the references made to God in this book than I would have if this book had been available to me at that time. To you those references have no meaning. They have



simply used a name that people give to a fond delusion. All your life, except possibly in early childhood, when you conceived of an enormous figure with a flowing white beard somewhere beyond the clouds, it has meant nothing. You have now too much intelligence and honesty to allow of such delusions. Even if you could, you are too proud to affirm a belief, now that you are in desperate trouble, that you denied when things were rosy. Or, you might possibly persuade yourself to believe in some creative force, or algebraic "X," but what earthly good would an "X" be in solving such a problem as you face? And even admitting, from your knowledge of psychology, it is possible you might acquire such delusions, how could you possibly believe in them if you recognized them as

delusions? Some such thinking must have been going on in your mind as you have weighed these incredible experiences against your own ability to cope with a problem that is gradually destroying your personality. Rest assured that such questions were in my mind. I could see no satisfactory solution to any of them. But I kept hard to the only thing that seemed to hold out any hope, and gradually my difficulties were lessened. I have not given up my intellect for the sake of my soul, nor have I destroyed my integrity to preserve my health and sanity. *All I had feared to lose I have gained and all I feared to gain I have lost.*

But to conclude my story: The following Tuesday, hardly daring to hope and fearful of the worst, my wife and I attended our first gathering with

former alcoholic slaves who had been made free through the rediscovery of a power for good, found through a spiritual attitude toward life. I know that I have never before been so inspired. It was not anything that happened. Because nothing happened. Nor yet by anything that was said, but more by an atmosphere created by friendliness, sincerity, honesty, confidence, and good cheer. I couldn't believe that these men could have been drunks, and yet gradually I learned their stories, alcoholic every one!

That was, with me, the beginning of a new life. It would be difficult, if not impossible, for me to put into words the change that has taken place in me. I have since learned that with many members the change has been almost instantaneous. This was not the case with me. I was tremendously

inspired at first, but my basic thinking was not altered that evening nor did I expect any profound change. I felt that while the spiritual aspect of what these men had was not for me, I did believe strongly in the emphasis they put on the need to help others. I felt that if I could have the inspiration of these gatherings and if I could have an opportunity to try to help others that the two together would re-enforce my own willpower and thus be of tremendous assistance. But gradually, in a manner I cannot explain, I began to reexamine the beliefs I had thought beyond criticism. Almost imperceptibly my whole attitude toward life underwent a silent revolution. I lost many worries and gained confidence. I found myself saying and thinking things that a short time ago I would have condemned as platitudes! A belief in the basic spirituality of life has grown and with it belief in a supreme and guiding power for good.

In the process of this change I can recognize two immensely significant steps for me. The first step I took when I admitted to myself for the first time that all my previous thinking might be wrong. The second step came when I first consciously wished to believe. As a result of this experience I am convinced that to seek is to find, to ask is to be given. The day never passes that I do not silently cry out in thankfulness, not merely for my release from alcohol, but even more for a change that has given life new meaning, dignity, and beauty.