

December 1979

## 'How It Works'



FROM TIME to time, I used to hear members say at meetings: "I don't know how the program works. All I know is that it does work." Having been in AA for a couple of years at that time, with little success, I had to ask myself what was wrong, as I truly wanted sobriety.

Reading the Big Book and the "Twelve and Twelve," I began to

learn what I had to do. The Big Book says, in Chapter 5, "If you have decided you want what we have and are willing to go to any length to get it—then you are ready to take certain steps." I wanted what some of the members had, and I realized that I, too, would have to get into action. I had put too much physical activity into my program the first two years, running on Twelfth Step calls and acting on committees, which left little time for mental action on the Twelve Steps.

I came face to face with myself for the first time in my life in Step Four. It was then that I saw my life had been full of hostility as far back as I could remember. Before I ever started to drink, I had wanted things my way, and hate crept in when I didn't get it. My world was centered around me and what I wanted to do. However, even drinking did not allow me to have my own way, and in later years, when I wanted to get

sober and found I could not, I became even more hostile and resentful. In the last couple of years of my drinking, I developed an inferiority complex, which made me a very lonely and sick person. The only thing left for me to do was to try suicide, or so I thought. My life seemed one continual failure. Even after I came into AA, I had two slips in my first two years and wondered if failure was all I could expect.

But then came the turning point in my life. I had what I have since felt to be a very profound spiritual experience, which removed all doubt in my mind about whether God existed or whether He would help me when I asked.

I was not that familiar with the Big Book then, but I realize now that I could have saved myself a certain amount of misery if I had been, because, on page 60, there are three sentences that would have been a

great help to me if I had read them: "(a) That we were alcoholic and could not manage our own lives, (b) That probably no human power could have relieved our alcoholism, (c) That God could and would if He were sought."

I had to be in a state of desperation before I could call on God for help. One day in 1963, I had a mental obsession with booze once again, and I was convinced there was no way out except to have another round with liquor. I left my job with the idea that if I could control this craving for a drink until I got back to town and my group, the members could help me fight this thing, even though it seemed an impossibility to me. I went outdoors and threw my hands in the air and said aloud, "God, if there is a God, help me fight this one through." More than an hour went by before I realized that something had happened to me.

The obsession with liquor was gone, and it has never returned to this day, almost seventeen years later. I also felt a joy such as I had never felt before. But it wasn't until I told an older member about the experience, a few days later, that I understood what had happened.

After that, my interest in the program really increased, and it seemed I could not read enough or attend enough Step meetings.

As time moved on and my understanding of myself and the principles of this program grew, I saw that I was slowly overcoming my feelings of hostility. As my faith in God and myself and my fellow human beings increased, I found that I had more peace of mind and more happiness. I was able to think of other people, and help them in AA, which in turn helped me. At first, I could not believe that in helping others I could help myself. However, I had to open

my mind to the fact that all things are possible through this program.

To understand and experience real love was a long, hard road for me, but the more I worked at my defects of character, the more I could replace these defects with love and understanding. To have compassion and concern for others and a willingness to help others is, to me, what love is all about.

I pray that I will always be grateful for this new way of life the program of AA has given me. Now, if I should hear people say that they don't know how this program works, I can suggest that they study the Big Book and the "Twelve and Twelve." I don't wonder anymore how it works—I know. And I have found that if I am willing to learn, I can find the answer to all my problems, and live a life of love instead of a life of hostility.

*C.P., St. John, N.B.*