

December 1983

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*Step Four*

# Inventory the Big Book Way

**M**Y SECOND sponsor was the first person to show me how to draw up a proper inventory of resentments precisely as it is outlined in the Big Book. I confessed to him that my first-year pink-cloud flight had ended, as I had been told it would, and that sobriety was drab and frightening at times, though I kept a lengthy inventory, checking off my one-to-ten ratings of pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy, and

many other such words on a beautifully printed sheet.

My sponsor laughed. "No wonder you have the early-morning blues. You're rating yourself on abstractions, instincts that even the holiest men are equipped with at birth. In AA, we don't deal in words — we deal in meanings." He glanced at a vivacious actress from London's West End and said, "If a good look at her doesn't blow all the ratings

you've given yourself right off the chart, then I would say you haven't yet taken Step One — or you're stone dead."

He continued, "You've been so busy fighting off so-called sin that you haven't had time to learn to love. To learn to love, you have to identify all your resentments precisely the way

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*Alcoholics Anonymous*

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it is described in the Big Book. From those resentments, you extract a list of defects of character. Then, by processing these through each of the succeeding Steps, you turn your weaknesses into a spiritual strength that will soon blow all those nameless fears and early-morning terrors out of your mind."

My reply was the same as that I later heard from the hundreds of newcomers I have taken through the Steps. I said, "But I don't have any resentments!"

To that, he said simply, "Nobody has — until they have been properly educated in the Big Book, and had a good sponsor identify the resentments, with a little help from the newcomers about the main events of their

lives. The average alcoholic has ongoing daily contacts with a lot of people. Surely, you don't mean to tell me there has been absolutely no conflict in any of those contacts? And remember, self-pity is ungrateful resentment against God."

"Why is it that the Big Book deals only in a list of people that I have grievances against, and an analysis of only those resentments?" I wanted to know. "Isn't it *my* defects, not the other man's, that should be listed?"

"There are many good reasons," he said, "and they're based on biblical truths and psychological insights, from the Sermon on the Mount — 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself and thy God with all thy heart' — to the statement by Dr. Carl G. Jung that the only way an alcoholic would recover was to know himself and find faith, hope, and love.

"The whole key to our recovery is to find a power greater than ourselves to depend upon by simply repeating the 'surrender prayer' on page 63 of the Big Book, and to learn to love our neighbor by simply listing our resentments against him and then eliminating them. We get rid of the grievances through prayer in Steps Six and Seven, and take care of the amends in Steps Eight and Nine."

At subsequent discussions, my sponsor taught me the techniques and strategies (simple set of tools) in the Steps described in chapters five, six, and seven of the Big Book.

"The whole success of your recovery stands or falls upon taking the in-

ventory correctly. If you don't, there is nothing to process through the succeeding Steps. Listen to these words on the inventory: 'people really dominated us'; 'the wrongdoing of others, fancied or real, had power to actually kill'; 'we saw that these resentments must be mastered'; 'resentment is the "number one" offender. It destroys more alcoholics than anything else. From it stem all forms of spiritual disease.' The Big Book tells us categorically that every neurosis stems from resentment, from not following the Golden Rule of love."

As we concluded these studies into resentments, with the Big Book, I came to see that no way would I ac-

cept responsibility for my own life until I had listed all my grievances against God and man, and eliminated them one by one. Only by coming to love my neighbor as myself and my Higher Power with all my heart could I develop a strong enough self-image to love myself and eliminate the excesses of my so-called inventory of deadly sins.

I thought our co-founder Dr. Bob oversimplified things when he said the AA program consists simply of love and service. But happiness and sobriety do come to us in direct proportion to the amount of love and service we can give to our fellowman.

*/R., Port Elizabeth, South Africa*

