

April 1997

## This is the Program

*From Moline, Illinois:*

I've never felt the need to write to the Grapevine until I read June L.'s article. I'd like to specifically address the statement, "After my long and mutually tolerant relationship with AA, I've been having increasing discomfort with a pervasive Christian influence and with Big Book fundamentalism."

Why do certain members within the Fellowship of AA continue to struggle with the fact that there's so much talk about God in AA? Why wouldn't there be? Of the Twelve Steps which are printed on pages 59 and 60 of my Big Book, God is mentioned in Steps Three, Five, Six, Seven, and Eleven. We're told that "we deal with alcohol — cunning, baffling, powerful! Without help it is too much for us. But there is One who has all power — that One is God. May you find Him now!" This is the message of Alcoholics Anonymous — not my opinion or anyone else's. In Step Twelve it's suggested that we carry "this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs."

I was an agnostic when I came to AA four and a half years ago. After two years of suffering and humiliation from my inability to stay sober I "made a decision" to try AA's pro-

gram instead of my interpretation of it. Now, two and a half years later, I know the meaning of happy, joyous, and free. And I believe that fact is due to God's Grace and the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. If that sounds like I'm testifying on salvation, so be it. That is *my* experience regarding alcoholism and recovery.

As to the concern that "in news articles about AA, the implication frequently is that AA is strongly religious," my response is simply, so what? Since when is AA concerned with the opinions of outsiders regarding our program of recovery? That was one of my main personal problems when I came to AA. I was so concerned with what others thought or said that I couldn't function in life. Yet when I came to AA I was told by my sponsor that I needed to learn to be rigorously honest with myself. It was one of my first steps in recovery.

Today, I welcome the atheist and agnostic to AA. They have a right to believe and feel whatever they choose. Yet I'd ask for the same consideration and tolerance from them. When I share about my God and what he has done in my life, please don't be offended. That's my experience, strength, and hope. It's all I have to offer — that, and the program of Alcoholics Anonymous

as outlined in the Big Book. And let us make no mistake on that issue. That is the program of Alcoholics Anonymous.

You are free to disagree or disregard any or all portions of this simple program. That's your choice. But if you cannot stay sober or have not found the happiness, joy, and freedom outlined on pages 83 and 84 of the Big Book, I offer this a suggestion: "Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path. Those who do not recover are people who cannot or will not completely give themselves to this simple program...."

*John J.*