Chapter 9

THE FAMILY AFTERWARD

Our women folk have suggested certain attitudes a wife may take with the husband who is recovering. Perhaps they created the impression that he is to be wrapped in cotton wool and placed on a pedestal. Successful readjustment means the opposite. All members of the family should meet upon the common ground of tolerance, understanding and love. This involves a process of deflation. The alcoholic, his wife, his children, his "in-laws," each one is likely to have fixed ideas about the family's attitude towards himself or herself. Each is interested in having his or her wishes respected. We find the more one member of the family demands that the others concede to him, the more resentful they become. This makes for discord and unhappiness.

Some partners of alcoholics have offered advice about how to treat a loved one who is recovering. They don't believe someone who is recovering should be treated as if they were very delicate. And they also shouldn't be treated like a hero. Helping a partner get used to life without alcohol means doing the opposite of this.

All family members should meet on common ground, and act with tolerance, understanding, and love. This can be hard. The alcoholic, their partner, children, and other family members will each have their own ideas about how everyone should act. Each person believes their ideas are the

right ones. But if one family member makes the rules and everyone else follows them, this leads to resentment. Soon everyone is unhappy.

And why? Is it not because each wants to play the lead? Is not each trying to arrange the family show to his liking? Is he not unconsciously trying to see what he can take from the family life rather than give?

Why? Is it because each person wants to be the decision-maker? Or because each person is trying to control the entire family? Or because—without realizing it—each person is trying to take from the family instead of giving to the family?

Cessation of drinking is but the first step away from a highly strained, abnormal condition. A doctor said to us, "Years of living with an alcoholic is almost sure to make any wife or child neurotic. The entire family is, to some extent, ill." Let families realize, as they start their journey, that all will not be fair weather. Each in his turn may be footsore and may straggle.

There will be alluring shortcuts and by-paths down which they may wander and lose their way.

> When an alcoholic stops drinking, this is just the first step. They are just beginning to move away from a stressful, unusual, and unhealthy way of behaving. It is hard, but families must try to be patient with the process.
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> A doctor once told us, "Years spent living with an alcoholic will probably make their partners and children feel anxious and unstable. In a way, the whole family is sick."
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> We want families to realize that the journey they're taking won't always have smooth roads or good weather. At times, each of them will feel exhausted or fall behind the others. They will take shortcuts, wander off, and lose their way.

Suppose we tell you some of the obstacles a family will meet; suppose we suggest how they may be avoided—even converted to good use for others. The family of an alcoholic longs for the return of happiness and security. They remember when father was romantic, thoughtful and successful. Today's life is measured against that of other years and, when it falls short, the family may be unhappy.

> Because we've seen this happen, we want to tell families what to expect. We will tell you about the obstacles you'll find, and how to avoid them. We'll even tell you how to use those obstacles to learn important lessons. We know you want to feel happy and secure again. You remember when your

alcoholic family member was loving, thoughtful and successful.

You compare your life today with your life many years ago, and feel unhappy in the present.

Here's what your situation might look like:

Family confidence in dad is rising high. The good old days will soon be back, they think. Sometimes they demand that dad bring them back instantly! God, they believe, almost owes this recompense on a long overdue account. But the head of the house has spent years in pulling down the structures of business, romance, friendship, health—these things are now ruined or damaged. It will take time to clear away the wreck. Though old buildings will eventually be replaced by finer ones, the new structures will take years to complete.

Some common family reactions

The family feels more and more confident about dad's recovery. The good old days will be back soon, they think. Sometimes they try to force dad to be his old self. They feel God owes them this. They are due for some good, easy times again. But dad has spent years acting in ways that damaged his career, marriage, friendships, and health. These things are all ruined. It will take time to clear away the rubble. The process is like rebuilding a city. Old buildings will eventually be replaced by beautiful new ones … but those new buildings will take years to complete.

Father knows he is to blame; it may take him many seasons of hard work to be restored financially, but he

shouldn't be reproached. Perhaps he will never have much money again. But the wise family will admire him for what he is trying to be, rather than for what he is trying to get.

> Dad knows this is his fault. It may take him many months of hard work to change his financial situation. But no one should criticize or blame him. He may never have much money again. But a wise family will admire him for trying, rather than focusing on what he is trying to fix.

Now and then the family will be plagued by spectres from the past, for the drinking career of almost every alcoholic has been marked by escapades, funny, humiliating, shameful or tragic. The first impulse will be to bury these skeletons in a dark closet and padlock the door. The family may be possessed by the idea

that future happiness can be based only upon forgetfulness of the past. We think that such a view is self-centered and in direct conflict with the new way of living.

> Sometimes the family will feel like ghosts from the past are haunting them. This is normal. Every alcoholic's drinking career includes memorable situations. Some of them are funny, embarrassing, shameful or tragic. It's tempting to bury these skeletons in a dark closet and lock the door. The family may think that future happiness can only exist if the past is forgotten. We think this is wrong. This belief is self-centered, and goes against dad's new way of living.

Henry Ford once made a wise remark to the effect that experience is the thing of supreme value in life. That is true only if one is willing to turn the past to good account. We grow by our willingness to face and rectify errors and convert them into assets. The alcoholic's past thus becomes the principal asset of the family and frequently it is almost the only one!

> Henry Ford, the founder of Ford Motors, once made a wise observation. He pointed out that experience is the most valuable thing in life. We think that's true, but only if we are willing to accept what we've done in the past. We only grow if we're willing to face and fix our mistakes, and transform them into strengths. Because of this, an alcoholic's past is one of the most valuable things they give to their family. Sometimes it's the *only* valuable thing they have to give!

This painful past may be of infinite value to other families still struggling with their problem. We think each family which has been relieved owes something to those who have not, and when the occasion requires, each member of it should be only too willing to bring former mistakes, no matter how grievous, out of their hiding places. Showing others who suffer how we were given help is the very thing which makes life seem so worth while to us now. Cling to the thought that, in God's hands, the dark past is the greatest possession you have—the key to life and happiness for others. With it you can avert death and misery for them.

> One alcoholic's painful past can even help the families of other alcoholics. We think that each family that has experienced relief owes something to the families still suffering. If the time comes, each family member must be willing to talk about mistakes openly and honestly. Showing others we were helped is what makes life seem worthwhile now. We remember that, with the help of our Higher Power, our dark past is the most valuable possession we have. It's the key to life and happiness for other people. With it, we can prevent misery for them. We may even prevent death for them with our stories.

It is possible to dig up past misdeeds so they become a blight, a veritable plague. For example, we know of situations in which the alcoholic or his wife have had love affairs. In the first flush of spiritual experience they forgave each other and drew closer together. The miracle of reconciliation was at hand. Then, under one provocation or another, the aggrieved one would unearth the old affair and angrily cast its ashes about.

It's possible to dig up past mistakes and turn them into present unhappiness. Some stories and experiences can become so painful they feel like a plague we cannot escape. For example, sometimes the alcoholic or their partner have had love affairs. In the first rush of spiritual experience, they may forgive each other. It feels like a miracle. But then, when some other argument or conflict comes up, one of them will bring up the affair. They use it as fuel or ammunition. They use it to hurt their partner as much as they can.

A few of us have had these growing pains and they

hurt a great deal. Husbands and wives have sometimes been obliged to separate for a time until new perspective, new victory over hurt pride could be rewon. In most cases, the alcoholic survived this ordeal without relapse, but not always. So we think that unless some good and useful purpose is to be served, past occurrences should not be discussed.

A few of us have had these experiences and they hurt us terribly. Partners have sometimes separated from each other until they felt able to forgive again. In most cases, the alcoholic partner makes it through these separations without relapsing. But not always. So we think that events of the past should only be discussed when talking about them serves a good and useful purpose.

We families of Alcoholics Anonymous keep few skeletons in the closet. Everyone knows about the others' alcoholic troubles. This is a condition which, in ordinary life, would produce untold grief; there might be scandalous gossip, laughter at the expense of other people, and a tendency to take advantage of intimate information. Among us, these are rare occurrences. We do talk about each other a great deal, but we almost invariably temper such talk by a spirit of love and tolerance.

Secrets and stressful times

The families of our members don't keep many skeletons in the closet. Everyone knows about each other's alcoholic troubles. In regular life, this

kind of sharing of secrets would create pain and chaos. It might create hurtful gossip, or cause people to laugh at the suffering of others. It might even cause someone to expose private information, for money or power. In A.A., these things don't happen very often. We talk about each other a lot, but we almost always do it in the spirit of love and tolerance.

Another principle we observe carefully is that we do not relate intimate experiences of another person unless we are sure he would approve. We find it better, when possible, to stick to our own stories. A man may criticize or laugh at himself and it will affect others favorably, but criticism or ridicule coming from another often produces the contrary effect. Members of a family should watch such matters carefully, for one careless, inconsiderate remark has been known to raise the very devil. We alcoholics are sensitive people. It takes some of us a long time to outgrow that serious handicap.

Another principle we live by is this: We do not share the private or secret experiences of someone else unless we know they will feel okay about it. Usually, we just stick to our own stories. Any person may criticize or laugh at themselves, and other people may laugh along. But criticisms coming from another person create the opposite reaction. Family members should be especially careful about this. One careless, inconsiderate remark has been known to bring out the devil in their recovering loved one. We alcoholics are sensitive people. It takes some of us a long time to outgrow that troublesome trait.

Many alcoholics are enthusiasts. They run to extremes. At the beginning of recovery a man will take, as a rule, one of two directions. He may either plunge into a frantic attempt to get on his feet in business, or

he may be so enthralled by his new life that he talks or thinks of little else. In either case certain family problems will arise. With these we have had experience galore.

Many alcoholics are passionate and intense. They may go to extremes. At the beginning of recovery an alcoholic will usually do one of two things. They will either become obsessed with fixing their financial problems immediately, or become so happy with their new life that they talk about it constantly. Either of these things will cause family problems. We know this because we've experienced it ourselves.

We think it dangerous if he rushes headlong at his economic problem. The family will be affected also, pleasantly at first, as they feel their money troubles are about to be solved, then not so pleasantly as they find themselves neglected. Dad may be tired at night and preoccupied by day. He may take small interest in the children and may show irritation when reproved for his delinquencies. If not irritable, he may seem dull and boring, not gay and affectionate as the family would like him to be. Mother may complain of inattention. They are all disappointed, and often let him feel it. Beginning with such complaints, a barrier arises. He is straining every nerve to make up for lost time. He is striving to recover fortune and reputation and feels he is doing very well.

We think it can be dangerous for an alcoholic to focus only on money problems. At first, the family will feel relieved. It will seem like their money

troubles are about to be solved. Then the family will be upset when their alcoholic loved one ignores them to concentrate on work or business. Dad may be tired at night and distracted during the day. He may spend less time with the children, and get mad when anyone points this out. If he's not grouchy, he may seem quiet and boring. Not his usual happy and loving self. Everyone in the family feels disappointed, and tells dad how they feel.

When dad hears these complaints, he may put up an emotional wall. He is using every ounce of his energy to make things right. He is trying to recover his money and reputation, and thought he was doing well. But mom and the kids might not agree. They've been ignored and hurt by dad in the past. They feel they deserve more than he is giving them now.

Sometimes mother and children don't think so. Having been neglected and misused in the past, they think father owes them more than they are getting. They want him to make a fuss over them. They expect him to give them the nice times they used to have before he drank so much, and to show his contrition for what they suffered. But dad doesn't give freely of himself. Resentment grows. He becomes still less communicative. Sometimes he explodes over a trifle. The family is mystified. They criticize, pointing out how he is falling down on his spiritual program.

They may want dad to shower them with affection. They expect him to give them the nice times they used to have before he drank so much. They want to see how sorry he feels for making them suffer. But dad doesn't give them these things. He feels resentment. He starts to

communicate less and less. Sometimes he gets angry over the tiniest things. The family is so confused. They complain, and point out how he is failing at his spiritual program.

This sort of thing can be avoided. Both father and the family are mistaken, though each side may have some justification. It is of little use to argue and only

makes the impasse worse. The family must realize that dad, though marvelously improved, is still convalescing. They should be thankful he is sober and able to be of this world once more. Let them praise his progress. Let them remember that his drinking wrought all kinds of damage that may take long to repair. If they sense these things, they will not take so seriously his periods of crankiness, depression, or apathy, which will disappear when there is tolerance, love, and spiritual understanding.

> This kind of thing can be avoided. Both dad and the family are wrong, though both have good reasons for their feelings. Arguing will only make things worse. The family must accept that although dad has improved, he is still sick and still recovering. They should be thankful he is sober and able to be a part of regular life again. Let them praise his progress. Let them remember that his drinking did all kinds of damage that may take a long time to repair. If they sense these things, they will be more understanding about his periods of crankiness or depression. And those periods will disappear when there is tolerance, love, and spiritual understanding.

The head of the house ought to remember that he is mainly to blame for what befell his home. He can scarcely square the account in his lifetime. But he must see the danger of over-concentration on financial success. Although financial recovery is on the way for many of us, we found we could not place money first. For us, material well-being always followed spiritual

progress; it never preceded.

> Dad also needs to understand that he is mostly to blame for what has happened at home. He may not be able to make things right in his lifetime. But he needs to see the danger of getting obsessed with money. Many of us have recovered financially, but we could not make money our priority. For us, material well-being always followed spiritual progress; it never came first.

Since the home has suffered more than anything else, it is well that a man exert himself there. He is not likely to get far in any direction if he fails to show unselfishness and love under his own roof. We know there are difficult wives and families, but the man who is getting over alcoholism must remember he did much to make them so.

Avoiding resentment

> Since family life has suffered more than anything else, alcoholics are wise to work hard to fix things at home. They won't make progress elsewhere if they can't show unselfishness and love under their own roofs. We know there are difficult partners and families. But a person getting over alcoholism must remember they played a part in making their own families become difficult.

As each member of a resentful family begins to see his shortcomings and admits them to the others, he lays a basis for helpful discussion. These family talks will be constructive if they can be carried on without heated argument, self-pity, self-justification or resentful criticism. Little by little, mother and children will

see they ask too much, and father will see he gives too

little. Giving, rather than getting, will become the guiding principle.

When family members start to see their own mistakes and admit them to the others, they pave the way for helpful discussion. The most useful family talks will take place without angry arguments, self-pity, excuses, or resentful criticism. Little by little, mom and the children will realize they are asking for too much. Dad will see he is giving them too little. Giving, rather than getting, will become their shared goal.

Assume on the other hand that father has, at the outset, a stirring spiritual experience. Overnight, as it were, he is a different man. He becomes a religious enthusiast. He is unable to focus on anything else. As soon as his sobriety begins to be taken as a matter of course, the family may look at their strange new dad with apprehension, then with irritation. There is talk about spiritual matters morning, noon and night. He may demand that the family find God in a hurry, or exhibit amazing indifference to them and say he is above worldly considerations. He may tell mother, who has been religious all her life, that she doesn't know what it's all about, and that she had better get his brand of spirituality while there is yet time.

Now imagine that dad has had a life-changing spiritual experience at the beginning of his recovery. It may seem like he has changed overnight. He becomes very religious. He cannot focus on or talk about anything else. Once his sobriety becomes normal, the family may look at

their strange new dad nervously. Later, they may feel annoyed with him. He talks about spiritual matters morning, noon, and night. He may insist that everyone in the family find God for themselves, and fast. Or he may seem like he doesn't care about them at all, and act like he's better than everyone else. He may tell mom that she doesn't know what religion is all about, even if she's been religious all her life.

When father takes this tack, the family may react unfavorably. They may be jealous of a God who has stolen dad's affections. While grateful that he drinks no more, they may not like the idea that God has accomplished the miracle where they failed. They often forget father was beyond human aid. They may not see why their love and devotion did not straighten him out. Dad is not so spiritual after all, they say. If he means to right his past wrongs, why all this concern for everyone in the world but his family? What about his talk that God will take care of them? They suspect father is a bit balmy!

When dad acts this way, the family may react angrily. They may be jealous of a God who has stolen dad's attention and love. They feel grateful that he's stopped drinking, but they might not like that a Higher Power could heal dad when they could not. They forget that no human power could help him. They might not see why their love didn't save him.

Their jealousy might turn another way. Dad isn't so spiritual after all, they say. If he's going to right his past wrongs, why is he focused on everyone in the world except his family? Then he says that God

will take care of them. They start to think dad is losing his mind.

He is not so unbalanced as they might think. Many of us have experienced dad's elation. We have indulged in spiritual intoxication. Like a gaunt prospector, belt drawn in over the last ounce of food, our pick struck gold. Joy at our release from a lifetime of

frustration knew no bounds. Father feels he has struck something better than gold. For a time he may try to hug the new treasure to himself. He may not see at once that he has barely scratched a limitless lode which will pay dividends only if he mines it for the rest of his life and insists on giving away the entire product.

He's not as unbalanced as they might think. Many of us have experienced dad's joy and bliss. We have felt spiritual intoxication. Like a skinny, starving gold miner who has just struck gold. We feel unending joy once we are free from our frustrating lives. Dad feels like he has struck something better than gold. For a while, he may try to keep the treasure to himself. He doesn't see that he has access to an endless supply of riches. Riches that will only make him wealthy if he mines for the rest of his life and gives it all away.

If the family cooperates, dad will soon see that he is suffering from a distortion of values. He will perceive that his spiritual growth is lopsided, that for an average man like himself, a spiritual life which does not include his family obligations may not be so perfect after all. If the family will appreciate that dad's current behavior is but a phase of his development, all will be well. In the midst of an understanding and sympathetic family, these vagaries of dad's spiritual infancy will quickly disappear.

If the family is patient, dad will see that he is taking his new beliefs too far. He'll know that his spiritual growth cannot take over his life. A

spiritual life that doesn't include his family might not be so perfect after all. If the family can accept that dad's behavior is just a phase in his journey, it will pass. An understanding and sympathetic family will help dad grow beyond this stage.

The opposite may happen should the family condemn and criticize. Dad may feel that for years his drinking has placed him on the wrong side of every argument, but that now he has become a superior person with God on his side. If the family persists in criticism, this fallacy may take a still greater hold on father. Instead of treating the family as he should, he may retreat further into himself and feel he has spiritual justification for so doing.

The risk of continued family criticism

If the family criticizes too much, the opposite may happen. Dad may think that he was always on the losing side of arguments when he was drinking. Now he may act like he has become a superior person with God on his side. If the family continues to criticize, he may believe this even more strongly. Instead of healing with the family, dad may become more distant. He will believe he's got spiritual reasons for acting this way.

Though the family does not fully agree with dad's spiritual activities, they should let him have his head. Even if he displays a certain amount of neglect and irresponsibility towards the family, it is well to let him go as far as he likes in helping other alcoholics. During those first days of convalescence, this will do more to insure his sobriety than anything else. Though

some of his manifestations are alarming and disagreeable, we think dad will be on a firmer foundation than the man who is placing business or professional success ahead of spiritual development. He will be less likely to drink again, and anything is preferable to that.

Even if the family disagrees with dad's spiritual activities, they should let him do what he needs to do. Even if he pays less attention to the family, they should let him focus on helping other alcoholics as much as he wants. During the first days of recovery, this will do more to keep him sober than anything else. Some of his behavior may be worrying or annoying, but we think dad will be safer than an alcoholic who is focused on finances. He will be less likely to drink again, and anything is better than that.

Those of us who have spent much time in the world of spiritual make-believe have eventually seen the childishness of it. This dream world has been replaced by a great sense of purpose, accompanied by a growing consciousness of the power of God in our lives. We have come to believe He would like us to keep our heads in the clouds with Him, but that our feet ought to be firmly planted on earth. That is where our fellow travelers are, and that is where our work must be done. These are the realities for us. We have found nothing incompatible between a powerful spiritual experience and a life of sane and happy usefulness.

Many of us have spent time thinking that our spirituality makes us superior people. Eventually,

we see that this is childish. That attitude is replaced by a great sense of purpose, and a growing understanding of the power of God in our lives. We have come to believe we should keep our heads in the clouds with God, but our feet need to be firmly planted on earth. That is where other people are, and that is where our work must be done. These are the realities for us. And we know that we can have both a powerful spiritual experience and a life of sane and happy usefulness.

One more suggestion: Whether the family has spiritual convictions or not, they may do well to examine the principles by which the alcoholic member is trying to live. They can hardly fail to approve these simple principles, though the head of the house still fails somewhat in practicing them. Nothing will help the man who is off on a spiritual tangent so much as the wife who adopts a sane spiritual program, making a better practical use of it.

One more suggestion: Whether other family members are spiritual or not, it can help them to examine the principles their loved one has adopted. They will probably find these simple principles interesting and valuable, even when dad struggles to practice them himself. When the partner of an alcoholic begins their own sane spiritual program, it is incredibly helpful to that alcoholic. They benefit from seeing someone they love using A.A. principles with wisdom and care.

There will be other profound changes in the household. Liquor incapacitated father for so many years that mother became head of the house. She met these responsibilities gallantly. By force of circumstances, she was often obliged to treat father as a sick or way-

ward child. Even when he wanted to assert himself

he could not, for his drinking placed him constantly in the wrong. Mother made all the plans and gave the directions. When sober, father usually obeyed. Thus mother, through no fault of her own, became accustomed to wearing the family trousers. Father, coming suddenly to life again, often begins to assert himself. This means trouble, unless the family watches for these tendencies in each other and comes to a friendly agreement about them.

Staying flexible

There will be other big changes in the household. Liquor changed dad so much and for so many years that mom had to take over his responsibilities. During this time, mom was forced to treat dad like a sick or misbehaving child. Even when she wanted to help out she couldn't. Drinking made everything so much harder. Mom made all the plans and gave the directions to the family. When sober, dad usually did as mom asked.

Now that dad is starting to feel like himself again, he may try to take back his old role. This will cause trouble. To prevent conflict, the whole family needs to watch for this change. Everyone should come to a friendly agreement about it.

Drinking isolates most homes from the outside world. Father may have laid aside for years all normal activities—clubs, civic duties, sports. When he renews interest in such things, a feeling of jealousy may arise. The family may feel they hold a mortgage on dad, so big that no equity should be left for outsiders. Instead

of developing new channels of activity for themselves, mother and children demand that he stay home and make up the deficiency.

> When one family member drinks, that keeps the whole family separate from the outside world. Dad may have stopped all his normal activities for years—clubs, sports, hobbies, and friendships. When he becomes interested in doing them again, the family may feel jealous. They may feel like they should own all of his time and energy now. Instead of finding new activities for themselves, mom and the children may demand that dad stay home with them. He has to make up for lost time.

At the very beginning, the couple ought to frankly face the fact that each will have to yield here and there if the family is going to play an effective part in the new life. Father will necessarily spend much time with other alcoholics, but this activity should be balanced. New acquaintances who know nothing of alcoholism might be made and thoughtful consideration given their needs. The problems of the community might engage attention. Though the family has no religious connections, they may wish to make con-tact with or take membership in a religious body.

> At the very beginning, both partners need to accept that they will each have to compromise. Doing this will involve the family in an alcoholic's new life. Dad will be spending lots of time with other alcoholics, but he will do other activities, too. He may make new friends who don't know about his alcoholism, and will need to consider their needs. He may help out in the local community. Even if the family is not religious, they may choose a spiritual path at this time.

Alcoholics who have derided religious people will be helped by such contacts. Being possessed of a spiritual experience, the alcoholic will find he has much in common with these people, though he may

differ with them on many matters. If he does not argue about religion, he will make new friends and is sure to find new avenues of usefulness and pleasure. He and his family can be a bright spot in such congregations. He may bring new hope and new courage to many a priest, minister, or rabbi, who gives his all to minister to our troubled world. We intend the foregoing as a helpful suggestion only. So far as we are concerned, there is nothing obligatory about it. As non-denominational people, we cannot make up others' minds for them. Each individual should consult his own conscience.

Alcoholics who have made fun of religious people will be helped by finding a faith community. Since a recovering alcoholic has had a spiritual experience, they have lots in common with religious people. They may not agree on everything, but they have some overlapping beliefs. If the alcoholic doesn't argue about religion, they can make new friends and find new ways to feel useful and happy. They may even bring new hope and new courage to faith leaders who do their best to help our troubled world.

This is just a suggestion. As far as we are concerned, no one should feel they have to join a faith community. As non-denominational people, we can't make up others' minds for them. Each person must decide on their own.

We have been speaking to you of serious, sometimes tragic things. We have been dealing with alcohol in its worst aspect. But we aren't a glum lot. If newcomers

could see no joy or fun in our existence, they wouldn't want it. We absolutely insist on enjoying life. We try not to indulge in cynicism over the state of the nations, nor do we carry the world's troubles on our shoulders. When we see a man sinking into the mire that is alcoholism, we give him first aid and place what we have at his disposal. For his sake, we do recount and almost relive the horrors of our past. But those of us who have tried to shoulder the entire burden and trouble of others find we are soon overcome by them.

Finding joy in recovery

So far, we have been talking to you about serious, sometimes tragic things. We have been dealing with the worst parts of alcohol and alcoholism. But we aren't a bunch of sad, gloomy people. If newcomers saw that recovering alcoholics had no joy or fun in life, they wouldn't join us. We absolutely insist on enjoying life. We try not to be too serious about politics, and we don't carry the world's troubles on our shoulders. When we see someone sinking into the quicksand of alcoholism, we give them first aid and offer to help however we can. We don't force them to listen to all of the stories from our own terrible experiences. Those of us who try to take on the troubles of other people end up feeling overwhelmed.

So we think cheerfulness and laughter make for usefulness. Outsiders are sometimes shocked when we burst into merriment over a seemingly tragic experience out of the past. But why shouldn't we laugh? We have recovered, and have been given the power to help others.

So we think happiness and laughter are useful and important. Outsiders are sometimes shocked when we burst into laughter about some tragic experience from the past. But why shouldn't we laugh? We have recovered, and have been given the power to help others.

Everybody knows that those in bad health, and those who seldom play, do not laugh much. So let

each family play together or separately, as much as their circumstances warrant. We are sure God wants us to be happy, joyous, and free. We cannot subscribe to the belief that this life is a vale of tears, though it once was just that for many of us. But it is clear that we made our own misery. God didn't do it. Avoid then, the deliberate manufacture of misery, but if trouble comes, cheerfully capitalize it as an oppor-tunity to demonstrate His omnipotence.

> Everybody knows that sick people and people who don't allow themselves to play never laugh. So we think each family should play together or separately, as much as they like. We are sure God wants us to be happy, joyous, and free. We cannot believe that this life is meant to be full of sadness and tears, although it used to feel that way for many of us. Now we know that we made our own misery. God didn't do it. So we take care not to go on creating more misery. If trouble comes to us, we use it as a reason to think about the wisdom of our Higher Power.

Now about health: A body badly burned by alcohol does not often recover overnight nor do twisted thinking and depression vanish in a twinkling. We are convinced that a spiritual mode of living is a most powerful health restorative. We, who have recovered from serious drinking, are miracles of mental health. But we have seen remarkable transformations in our bodies. Hardly one of our crowd now shows any mark of dissipation.

> Now, a note about health. A body that's been

badly hurt by alcohol can't recover overnight. Twisted thinking and depression can't disappear in the blink of an eye. We believe that living in a spiritual way is the most powerful way for an alcoholic to improve their health. We have recovered from serious drinking ourselves. We think of ourselves as miracles of mental health. But we have seen improvements in our bodies, too. Very few of us still look damaged from our drinking.

But this does not mean that we disregard human health measures. God has abundantly supplied this world with fine doctors, psychologists, and practitioners of various kinds. Do not hesitate to take your health problems to such persons. Most of them give freely of themselves, that their fellows may enjoy sound minds and bodies. Try to remember that though God has wrought miracles among us, we should never belittle a good doctor or psychiatrist. Their services are often indispensable in treating a newcomer and in following his case afterward.

But this doesn't mean that we ignore our physical health. God has filled the world with smart doctors, psychologists, and other healthcare professionals. If you need their help, take your health problems to them. Remember that your Higher Power can do miraculous things, but you still sometimes need support from a good doctor or psychiatrist. Their help is often extremely important in treating a newcomer and helping that person continue to recover.

One of the many doctors who had the opportunity of reading this book in manuscript form told us that the use of sweets was often helpful, of course depend-

ing upon a doctor's advice. He thought all alcoholics

should constantly have chocolate available for its quick energy value at times of fatigue. He added that occasionally in the night a vague craving arose which would be satisfied by candy. Many of us have noticed a tendency to eat sweets and have found this practice beneficial.

One of the many doctors who read the first draft of this book told us that eating candy or sweets can be helpful. He thought all alcoholics should have chocolate available at all times, in case they needed a burst of energy. He added that sometimes cravings for alcohol could be made less powerful with candy. Many of us eat sweets regularly, and find this helps us in controlling our cravings.

A word about sex relations. Alcohol is so sexually stimulating to some men that they have over-indulged. Couples are occasionally dismayed to find that when drinking is stopped the man tends to be impotent. Unless the reason is understood, there may be an emotional upset. Some of us had this experience, only to enjoy, in a few months, a finer intimacy than ever. There should be no hesitancy in consulting a doctor or psychologist if the condition persists. We do not know of many cases where this difficulty lasted long.

A word about sexuality. Alcohol increases some people's sex drives. Couples may find that when one partner stops drinking, they are less interested in sex. If they don't understand the connection to alcohol, this change may hurt and confuse them. Some of us have had this experience. But just a few months later, we were having better

sex than ever before. Be sure to work with a doctor or psychologist if sexual troubles continue. But we don't know of many people who have had this problem for very long.

The alcoholic may find it hard to re-establish friendly relations with his children. Their young minds were impressionable while he was drinking. Without saying so, they may cordially hate him for what he has done to them and to their mother. The children are sometimes dominated by a pathetic hardness and cynicism. They cannot seem to forgive and forget. This may hang on for months, long after their mother has accepted dad's new way of living and thinking.

Alcoholics may find it hard to repair their relationships with their children. Back when they were drinking, the kids were young and sensitive to what was going on around them. They may be very angry at dad for his actions, and what he has done to mom. Children of alcoholics are sometimes slow to forgive their parents. They may stay angry for months, long after mom has accepted dad's new way of living and thinking.

In time they will see that he is a new man and in their own way they will let him know it. When this happens, they can be invited to join in morning meditation and then they can take part in the daily discussion without rancor or bias. From that point on, progress will be rapid. Marvelous results often follow such a reunion.

Over time, they will see that dad has changed. When they are ready, they will let him know they are ready to accept him, too. When this happens,

they can be invited to join in morning meditation. They can join family discussions without getting angry or upset. After this, positive changes will start to happen very quickly. Wonderful things often follow family reunions like this.

Whether the family goes on a spiritual basis or not, the alcoholic member has to if he would recover. The others must be convinced of his new status beyond the shadow of a doubt. Seeing is believing to most families who have lived with a drinker.

> Whether the family becomes spiritual together or not, the alcoholic member has to become spiritual to recover. The others must accept this without any doubt. Seeing is believing to most families who have lived with a drinker.

Here is a case in point: One of our friends is a heavy smoker and coffee drinker. There was no doubt he over-indulged. Seeing this, and meaning to be helpful, his wife commenced to admonish him about it. He admitted he was overdoing these things, but frankly said that he was not ready to stop. His wife is one of those persons who really feels there is something rather sinful about these commodities, so she nagged, and her intolerance finally threw him into a fit of anger. He got drunk.

> Here is an example: One of our friends was a heavy smoker and coffee drinker. There was no doubt he smoked too much and drank too much coffee. Seeing this and wanting to be helpful, his wife started nagging him to stop. He admitted he was overdoing these things, but told her that he was not ready to stop. His wife believed that cigarettes and coffee are somewhat sinful, so she kept telling him to quit. Finally, her behavior made him very angry. He got drunk.

Of course our friend was wrong—dead wrong. He had to painfully admit that and mend his spiritual fences. Though he is now a most effective member of Alcoholics Anonymous, he still smokes and drinks coffee, but neither his wife nor anyone else stands in judgment. She sees she was wrong to make a burning issue out of such a matter when his more serious ailments were being rapidly cured.

Of course our friend was wrong—dead wrong. He had to painfully admit that, and find ways to reconnect with his spirituality. He became a helpful member of Alcoholics Anonymous, but he still smoked and drank coffee. Neither his wife nor anyone else judged him. She saw she was wrong to criticize him about this when his more serious problems were being cured.

We have three little mottoes which are apropos. Here they are:

First Things First
Live and Let Live
Easy Does It.

We have three little mottoes that can be helpful to both alcoholics and their families. Here they are:

First Things First
Live and Let Live
Easy Does It.