

**Powerfully Recovered!**



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*A Confirmed 12 Stepper Challenges the Movement*

Anne Wayman

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**A**s always, to my daughter Linda, and my two sons, Michael (and Mike's wife, Gloria) and Stephen – each has been more supportive than they know.

To my grandchildren, Emily Rose and her brother Ben. They've taught me love at a whole new level.

To the readers of the First Edition, and to the many who sent me supportive notes.

And, of course, to the God/Goddess/Source of my understanding – such as it is.



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## Introduction

**M**y name is Anne Wayman. I've been sober and clean in Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) and Narcotics Anonymous (N.A.) over 25 years. I have participated in Al-Anon, Debtors Anonymous (D.A.), Co-Dependents Anonymous (CODA), Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACoA) and have even gone to a few Artists Anonymous (Art-Anon) meetings.

Today, I have no interest in drinking alcohol or using drugs. This has been so for many years. This doesn't mean I'm 'cured' or invulnerable to a slip, for neither is true. But the Program has given me the promised freedom from practicing my addiction to alcohol and other drugs.

Adding Al-Anon, CODA, and ACoA to my basic A.A. and N.A. taught me not only that I can't control others, but gave me the inner resources I need, so control – of myself or others – is rarely an issue. As a result my relationships with friends, lovers and business associates are much better.

Time in D.A. means I now handle my money well. My brief attendance at Artists Anonymous meetings showed me how the Steps apply to my professional life and helped me realize I'm not the only writer who gets stuck or has trouble explaining my wacko work schedule to non-writers.

In other words, the practice of the 12 Steps has worked well for me as it has for literally millions of others.

Like most, the changes in my life happened slowly. During my first year of sobriety, for instance, I attended over 400 meetings and followed most of my sponsor's

suggestions. I came close to drinking and using a number of times, worked the Steps, and generally hung on.

Gradually, after several years, I was able to reduce my meetings to two or three a week, which meant I could spend more time with my children. I was also able to do 12 Step work, and act in various 12 Step service capacities. My work became less erratic. I fell in and out of love without falling completely apart. My life, and my response to it, became more balanced.

## A Sense Of Constriction

For years, A.A. and the other 12 Step groups were my way of life. But there came a time when I began to feel constricted in the Fellowship. The way of life I had struggled to adopt and which had, without question, saved my life, started to feel stifling and limiting.

Unsure of what was happening to me, I went to more meetings, and then to different meetings. I got more involved with service. I led a meeting in a mental hospital and volunteered to make coffee as often as I could. I took on more speaking opportunities and wrote more inventories and sponsored more people, all to no avail. My restlessness and discontent grew.

Slowly it dawned on me that this restlessness did not include a desire to drink alcohol, use drugs or practice my other dysfunctions. Gradually I dropped my 12 Step commitments and began to gently explore the world beyond the recovery Fellowship.

To my surprise I found that less involvement in recovery and more involvement in the world left me feeling more serene. New experiences meant new opportunities to grow, and the 12 Steps worked outside the Fellowship as well as they did inside.

Something else important happened too. By allowing my world to enlarge, I was able to view myself from a

different perspective. In time I came to know that I am much more than an alcoholic/drug addict with a co-dependency problem.

Today I know that I am not powerless; I know that I am not sick. In fact, I am powerfully recovered, just as the 12 Steps promise.

## Claim Of Power

To find and claim my empowerment, to become willing to accept that I am recovered, I had first to look beyond recovery, and then return to a deeper understanding of the 12 Steps. For to claim that I am powerfully recovered might appear to fly in the face of conventional 12 Step thought.

Typically, 12 Steppers convince themselves and each other that they are perpetually powerless and that their recovery is never-ending. These ideas, in spite of their popularity, are not part of the 12 Step Program.

Instead, they are myths that have grown up over time – myths that stem from fear and a misunderstanding of the original 12 Step literature.

The 12 Step Program, as it was originally conceived, is a program of empowerment, aimed at becoming recovered. Unfortunately, few understand this today, and as a result 12 Steppers are prevented from reaching their full potential.

## Failure In The Ghetto

As if that weren't bad enough, the myths of never-ending recovery and perpetual powerlessness make a significant contribution to the relative failure of the 12 Step movement to make a real impact on some who need it most – those in the inner cities and ghettos.

Telling people who have little, if any, experience with success, that they can never successfully recover guarantees that many of them will never even try. Insisting that people who already feel powerless must adopt an attitude of

perpetual powerlessness in order to let go of their addiction means many of them will refuse to even attempt to work the Program.

## Critics

There has recently been serious criticism of the 12 Step movement. Much of this comes from people outside the movement who see 12 Steppers as stuck in one way or another. While some of these complaints are ill founded, much is valid.

I believe that all these problems stem from 12 Steppers' insistence on hanging on to the myths of never-ending recovery and perpetual powerlessness.

My own experiences, and those shared with me by many others, both inside and outside the 12 Step movement, have compelled me to write this book. I am convinced we must examine, and let go of, the myths that damage us individually and hurt the movement as a whole.

Had A.A.'s founders stuck with the then established beliefs about alcoholism, they would have died drunk. It was their willingness to look beyond conventional wisdom that resulted in their success and the success of the millions of us that have followed in their footsteps.

## A Challenge

In the book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*,<sup>1</sup> the original source of the whole 12 Step movement, the statement is made, in Chapter 11:

We realize we know only a little. (p. 164)

This humble statement encourages us to explore, to learn, and to expand – just as A.A.'s founders did.

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations from the *Big Book* come from the third edition printed in paperback in 1966.

The second Appendix of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, titled *Spiritual Experience*, closes with the following quote from Herbert Spencer:

There is a principle which is a bar against all information, which is proof against all arguments and which cannot fail to keep a person in everlasting ignorance – that is the principle of contempt prior to investigation. (A.A. p. 570)

It is in this spirit that I challenge you to examine the myths of recovery.

Consider how believing in never-ending recovery and perpetual powerlessness limits you and others. Dare to imagine how accepting full recovery and true empowerment might be. Allow your mind to soar as you picture how this would affect not only you, but others.

As 12 Steppers we know the value of self-examination and have experienced the letting go of old ideas that prevent us from growing. We know how to separate fear and wishful thinking from courage and acceptance.

The myths of never-ending recovery and perpetual powerlessness are old ideas. We can turn and face them, and let them go – knowing we stand on firm ground.

We can move beyond the myths and continue on the road to full freedom, with the Program as our foundation

. We have the power to choose.



## Author's Notes

All sorts of things come up during the writing of a book. These notes will give you an idea about some of my thinking – particularly in areas where I'm not following the accepted wisdom.

### An Anonymity Break

Yes, Anne Wayman is my real name. Yes, I am breaking anonymity.

The primary reason is because I'm questioning the customary thinking found in 12 Step groups and I can't justify hiding who I am when making such a challenge. I believe you have a right to know who is speaking out.

You'll find more of my thinking on anonymity in Appendix 1 of this book.

### Sexist Language And 12 Step Literature

The books, *Alcoholics Anonymous* and *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, are the original source material for all 12 Step Programs. They were written in 1939 and 1955 respectively, and made use of what was then considered correct generics "he," "him," etc. when referring to people and to God. As yet there has been no updating of the sexist language in subsequent editions, although there has been some talk about creating special editions that would eliminate what are now recognized as sexist references.

Because I believe the way we use language reflects and influences our deepest beliefs, I have taken the liberty of

changing these generic, masculine references to gender neutral references in all quotes. I've used *The Handbook of Nonsexist Writing* by Casey Miller and Kate Swift, published by Barnes and Noble Books, 1980, as a definitive guide.

## About The First Edition

As a published writer, I first created a book proposal and submitted it through my agent. I received 19 positive rejections from major and minor publishing houses. That is, each sent a personal letter complimenting me on my grasp of the subject matter, my writing and the concept in general. However each of these letters also said “not for us.”

I determined to self-publish. This posed another problem – I lacked the cash! I put some of the text on the World Wide Web and sold a few home-printed copies to people who stumbled on to the site.

The project languished on the Web for a couple of years. I moved; I changed jobs more than once.

Always preferring to freelance, I became the San Diego Guide for About (<http://sandiego.about.com>), a content and portal site working to help people through the morass of information on the Web. Among the 700+ Guides to a variety of subjects is the Writer's Exchange (<http://writerexchange.about.com>) where I found a link to Upublish: <http://www.upublish.com>

Upublish is a leader in on-demand publishing. Here I could get my book published, for a reasonable price because it's printed only when someone buys it.

## About The Second Edition

This edition is a direct result of my experience with the first. Print-on-demand (POD) has proven to be a viable publishing method for many. Potential readers are willing to order from the net. Book distributions have opened up to include POD

books so brick and mortar bookstores can offer them. Ebooks have also enjoyed great success.

More importantly for me, readers like the book!

Reader acceptance has encouraged me to update the book and make it more acceptable for bookstores. That means the four-color cover, a redesign of the text presentation, and an expansion of the resources and the addition of the cartoons.

Marketing through the net has meant international connections. The cartoons were drawn in Australia by Narcosis who has a site at: <http://fly.to/dragoncomix>. Kara and Ian created the cover in Canada: <http://www.time4somethingelse.com>. However, the English is American and I've drawn on America for research.

I've tried to become less provincial with this edition by expanding my own awareness and including some international resources.

The original eight chapters are the same – with some minor updating and correction.

Comments are appreciated. I can be reached via email at: [wayman@inetworld.net](mailto:wayman@inetworld.net) Web pages for this book are at: <http://www.powerfullyrecovered.com>

You'll find additional contact information in the back of the book.



## Chapter 1

### 12 Step Truth – 12 Step Myth

*Is (freedom from our addiction/dysfunction) all that we can expect ...No, (it) is only the first gift ...a new life of endless possibilities can be lived if we are willing ...(p. 8)<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> The quotes at the beginning of each chapter come from *As Bill Sees It*.

**T**oday, people entering a 12 Step program quickly adopt a series of ideas that, if summed up, would sound something like this:

I am a (name the condition). (Name the condition) is an incurable disease which means my recovery is never-ending. Because my recovery is never-ending, I am perpetually powerless.

Of course, no one ever puts it exactly this way. Instead, 12 Steppers talk a great deal about their past and current problems and successes with letting go of their addictive/dysfunctional behavior. If you listen closely, however, you'll find the emphasis is only on partial recovery. That is, they talk and act as if their recovery is endless instead of discussing how they might fulfill the potential of the Program.

Nonetheless, even with this limited view, there have been impressive results. Literally millions of alcoholics around the world have quit drinking through the original 12 Step group, Alcoholics Anonymous. More millions have stopped using other drugs, learned to handle food in a healthy way, mastered money, stopped compulsive gambling, and found new and productive ways to relate to themselves and others through one or more of the alphabet soup of 12 Step organizations.

## Something Is Wrong

Even with all these accomplishments, however, something is wrong with the 12 Step movement. Although 12 Step Programs have helped millions, they haven't come close to reaching their full promise – there are many more millions who could be helped.

### *Members Get Stuck*

Instead of using the 12 Step Programs to heal and get on with living life, 12 Steppers tend to get stuck in their program(s).

The most obvious example of this is the way so many members limit their friendships and experiences to those found within the confines of 12 Step culture. More than a few brag that their whole lives are built around meetings and the people they meet there.

Often this bragging is accompanied with disparaging remarks about those not involved in 12 Step work. 'Normies,' as these people are often called, are seen as incapable of understanding the recovering person and therefore difficult or impossible to get along with.

The symptoms of being stuck in this way can be more subtle. Some refuse to consider dating non-12 Steppers; others insist on going to meetings at the expense of their families even after such a sacrifice is no longer needed. Still others use the fact of their addiction/dysfunction as an excuse for taking responsibilities at work or at home.

The Program that is supposed to help people get back into the world they rejected through their addiction/dysfunction has, for many instead, become another reason to feel separate and isolated from the greater whole of life.

### An Important Distinction

On my sponsor's recommendation, I started my Fourth Step right around 60 days. I went around in a fog of confusion and fear for the better part of a week.

I thought I'd found salvation when, at the grocery store, I ran into a woman I knew from meetings. Marge had several years of sobriety, making her an expert in my eyes at the time.

She asked how I was doing and I stammered something about getting ready to start my inventory.

"You haven't been sober long enough," she exclaimed, obviously horrified.

I rushed home and called my sponsor. "Marge says it's too soon to do my inventory," I cried.

"Anne," he sighed, "you'll hear anything you want to hear from people in and around A.A. and you don't know the Program well enough to know if they are giving you good advice or not."

He went on to refer me to Dr. Bob's story – you know, where he does all six steps (there were only six then, but they encompassed everything our 12 do) in a long evening.

He then talked a bit about the difference between the Fellowship and the Program, pointing out that the fellowship is our experience, strength, hope and personal opinion. "The Program," he said, "is the *Big Book* and the *Twelve and Twelve*. Even conference approved literature falls more in the Fellowship category than pure Program."

Later we talked about it some more and he gave me some advice I've found to be good and true.

"If someone tells you to do or not to do something and you don't know if it squares with the Program," he said, "ask them to show you where it says that in the Big Book or the Twelve and Twelve.

"One of two things will happen. Either they will show you and you'll have to come to terms with it if you want to stay sober, or, if it's only their opinion, they will leave you alone."