

Sobriety Sentinel

OCTOBER 2021 - SERVING DISTRICTS 14, 19 and 20 of AREA 38 - TRICOUNTYAA.ORG

Send Me a Sign

A quick fiction piece about literal language and profound defeat

by ANDREW H
Group 968

"Please God," prayed the desperate alcoholic, "send me a sign."

He was hung over, as he was most mornings. He marched through life in a haze of physical and emotional pain. He couldn't quit drinking, but he couldn't keep going on like this either, could he?

That song from the '60s about "sign, sign, everywhere a sign" rattled around in his head, landed there, then just wouldn't leave. That same snatch of chorus repeated on a loop.

He staggered out to the kitchen. On the table, there it was. A sign, or at least a piece of paper announcing itself as such. Another sign said the same.

"This is a Sign," read the signs. He could remember now, vaguely. Last night, after dinner, after seven or eight vodkas. His son Silas, 9 years old, had pulled a paper from his backpack. Talked about a back-to-school hallway parade the fifth graders had put on. The rest of the kids had been told to make signs to wave from the sidelines. Silas's sign simply announced its existence.

Dad thought that was laugh-out-loud hilarious. Brought the whole family in. Made a big deal out of it. Over-explained the joke. Made his own sign to pretty up his kid's handwriting. Spent an hour trying to turn it into calligraphy. Thinking he would take it to work and show everyone how clever—

Shit. Work. He just realized he was supposed to have been at work a half-hour ago. That was

not going to be a fun phone call.

He tried to remember what next. His daughter needing help with her homework. *Sorry, working on calligraphy.* His wife wanting to talk about something serious. *Get lost, woman! Working on calligraphy!*

Then... who knows. Blackout. Whatever it was, it wasn't good.

The kids were at school now, he guessed. His wife at work. No angry notes from her, so probably no divorce. Yet. But work? What to tell work?

"Hello?" He said into the phone. "I'm not going to be in today." *Excuse. Come up with an excuse.* "Why not? Um..."

He had asked for a sign. He had woken up to two signs—actually, quite a few signs.

"I'm an alcoholic, and I'm going to AA."



Silas H and Josh B/Sobriety Sentinel

Steps provide path to repair parenting mistakes

by MISSY R
Group 632

Human relationships can be so complex. Mother-daughter relationships are no exception.

Take the case study of the mother who started out as an 18-year-old know-it-all, thumbing her nose at all the stupid, wrong adults who tried to tell her what to do.

This teen mom didn't just ignore the adults' advice. She also was not shy to tell them exactly where they could stick it. The adults told her she was not capable of being a good parent at her age.

The teen mom kept her baby, setting out to prove them wrong. Sheer spite is never the best reason to become a parent, but there you go.

The baby daughter was the most beautiful child ever born, and to this day she is a stunningly beautiful, smart, talented, outspoken, confident, stubborn and—thank God—forgiving woman.

How did you guess the teen mom was me?

It really is no mystery that I became a meek and pitiful alcoholic, although I would have fist-fought anyone who dared suggest so back then.

By the time I finally thought it might be a good idea to get sober, my daughter had suffered through something close to 20 years of living with a very active alcoholic. I never wanted to do that to her.

At the beginning, I didn't think I had a problem. Eventually, I was shoving her off on her friends or leaving her home by herself because I didn't want her to see me drink. I told myself she was happier when she wasn't around me.

She continued to grow up, and I continued to miss it. I made several empty promises to quit drinking, but I didn't really mean it and I didn't know how. To a certain degree, I didn't want to quit because I was so ashamed and afraid to face her. I thought if I was sober, I would have to sit with all the guilt and regret I had for turning into the crappy parent everyone had said I would be.

Thankfully, AA gives me—and others like me—a way to work through all of that. The steps, specifically Steps Four through Nine, are simple instructions to help us face up to our shortcomings and make amends to people we have hurt.

I can only speak for myself, but without these steps, I would never have known where and how to start. I'll admit, before I worked the steps, I doubted it would be possible for me to repair my relationship with my daughter. I had really shortchanged her.

There is no way I can go back and fix it. If I could go back, I would probably be a drunk again. I'm always going to be an alcoholic.

To my delight, after completing Steps Four through Nine and making the most sincere, thorough amends I could to my daughter, we have a great relationship. It's not perfect, and I still do or say things that hurt her feelings and even piss her off sometimes. It's never intentional, though, and now I can make immediate amends as I'm taught in Step Ten.

I never have to let a thoughtless incident or misunderstood statement keep any distance whether geographic or emotional between me and my beautiful daughter again. She knows I am different now, and she doesn't have to protect her feelings from me.

I sometimes still wish I had acted differently and proved those stupid adults wrong. But I'm finally proud of who I am, flaws and all. I plan to give my daughter the absolute best of me, as I am now, just like she has always deserved.

Five methods for taking ongoing inventory

by ANDREW H
Group 968

Step Ten, Section A instructs us to take regular personal inventory to chart our progress and identify opportunities for further growth. This is a crucial part of my program, and most of my work on this is typically done in the early hours of the day, before I go about my obligations.

These are some methods I adopt:

1. Day in Review

This is the most frequently talked-about process for self-examination, outlined on Page 86 of the Big Book. It is recommended that we do this just before bed, by asking ourselves the following seven questions about our day:

"Were we selfish, dishonest or

afraid? Do we owe an apology? Have we kept something to ourselves which should be discussed with another person at once? Were we kind and loving toward all? What could we have done better? Were we thinking of ourselves most of the time? Or were we thinking of what we could do for others, of what we could pack into the stream of life?"

The Big Book reminds us not to "drift into worry, remorse or morbid reflection, for that would diminish our usefulness to others." After reflecting on these questions, we are instructed to ask for the forgiveness of our Higher Power and "inquire what corrective measures should be taken."

2. In-the-Moment Review

The *12 Steps and 12 Traditions*

essay on Step 10 calls these spot-check inventories. These are helpful in moments and situations in which we find ourselves emotionally disturbed. I think of these as "pause, pray, proceed" moments.

The Narcotics Anonymous basic text lays out an eight-question process for identifying the reality of our reactions:

"What is my motive? Am I making an unreasonable demand to another person? Do I feel trapped? Am I setting myself up for trouble? Am I too hungry, angry, lonely or tired? Am I taking myself too seriously? Am I judging my insides by the outward appearance of others? Do I suffer from a physical problem?"

A realistic appraisal of these questions can guide some very productive prayer. And, often, the

mental and emotional situation we find ourselves in does not require an immediate response. This is the gift of "pause." If I can take time to run my mind-state by a trusted friend, spouse or sponsor, the "proceed" portion typically emerges with clarity and confidence.

3. The Day-Planner Account

This method is similar to the Day in Review approach from the Big Book and logs both the mundane and the memorable. My wife started me on this in mid-2013. My instructions were, at the end of the current day, write down the day's activities, your interactions, anything you'd want to remember down the road.

For more, please see **INVENTORY, Page 2**

Fall Area Assembly registration is open, will be held on Zoom

Registration is open for the Fall Area Assembly. Register online at <https://eamo.org/fall2021>.

Please spread the word to your groups!

Assembly will be held on Zoom Saturday, October 23, from 8:30 am-4 pm, and Sunday, October 24, starting at 9 am. Committee meetings will be Saturday afternoon, and the business meeting will be Sunday morning.

District 2 is also hosting a special speaker meeting that Saturday at 7:30 pm. A detailed agenda will be sent out closer to the event.

Zoom links will be sent two days prior to the event, to all who registered.

Thanks for your service, and we hope to see you at Assembly!

RESPONSIBILITY STATEMENT

When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there. And for that: I am responsible.

BIRTHDAYS

GROUP	Name	Date	Age
GROUP 77	Darren B	9/11	1 year
	Jim L	7/15	8 years
	Carol P	9/7	34 years
GROUP 1122	Pat S	8/24	45 years
	Jacquie W	9/1	36 years
	Greg K	9/9	36 years
GROUP 484	Michelle F	9/11	16 years
	Phil D	9/5	11 years
	Tommi K	8/21	4 years
GROUP 4094	Anthony A		2 years
	Nick C		9 years
GROUP 228	Ted K		18 years
	Terry A	9/8	39 years

DECLARATION OF UNITY

This we owe to AA's future: to place our common welfare first; to keep our fellowship united. For on AA unity depends our lives, and the lives of those to come.

Pray for Kristina M!

Going to any lengths...



Brenda F/Sobriety Sentinel

There's a quote somewhere in the Big Book about going to any lengths to maintain our sobriety. I have put this into action many times when traveling.

After a year of being stuck inside, many of us are exploring ways to travel safely and still stay connected to our programs of recovery.

On a recent trip to Santa Fe, I logged into a Zoom meeting back home. I also attended an in-person meeting at a recovery club house called The Friendship Club.

I often look up meetings before I travel. When doing this, just Google the name of any city and "AA." There's usually a district office or a number for AA information. Meetings are not hard to find in almost any US city or major city overseas.

In my case, when I looked up the address of the clubhouse, after I had arrived and my conference was finished, the place was literally three blocks away from my Airbnb. That was unbelievable.

Then, upon attending the morning meeting, I shared that I was visiting from St. Louis. A man in a red Cardinals hat came over to speak with me. He said he had been a bartender in our area. I told him I got sober in Denver and didn't do any of my drinking in Missouri. The details didn't matter, as we had an automatic connection through AA.

And the message was clear. We are everywhere. The out-of-town meeting gave me a 24-hour desire chip and now serves as the best souvenir of my trip. It reminds me that wherever I go, the hand of AA is there to greet me.

What a comforting thought: I am never alone. We can do this together.

Brenda F
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Inventory: Self-appraisal pays dividends

From Page 1

I was still very much an active alcoholic in 2013, and a bit of a statistician, so part of my daily log included tallies of how many drinks I'd had and how many cigarettes. I low-balled the "drinks" category--a 32-ounce beer counted as a single drink--but even those purposefully deflated numbers told the story of a man in trouble with alcohol.

"I had 110 drinks last week?!" I remember asking myself, next drink already in hand. Within two months of starting the day planner log, I had gone dry from alcohol. I made it 100 days, then relapsed. Got into 2014, made it another 100 days, relapsed again. I go back in those planners now, and I see the questionable jokes scrawled in sloppy handwriting, and I also see someone who is nearly ready for sobriety. I see how far I've come since, and my family with me. It's easy to chart progress when you can look back at, say, every first Monday in October for the past eight years.

The act of reviewing my day in writing, after it just happened, sparks instant gratitude. Even if I approach from an attitude of having trudged through an unexciting day or not having gotten enough done, this day-planner method always helps me appreciate my accomplishments and identify highlights. Almost always, the top highlights involve my connections to other people. Looking at the day behind gives strength and di-

rection to look at the week ahead.

4. Savor the Graces

This is a personal sweep-through that was inspired by a book called *The Ignatian Experience*. It's a week-in-review tactic that also produces context and gratitude toward where life is taking you and how your Higher Power is working within it.

I use the day planner to quickly scan and review the "greatest hits" and most prominent trends of the past seven days. If it's 10 am on Thursday, I go back to 10 am the previous Thursday, and work my way forward until I reach the present. I write down the highlights on a separate sheet of paper, then tie these events together as they fit, reflect on who I spent my time with and what sort of ongoing connection it produced, and thank God for what's been happening.

The best practice here is a separate notebook with dates written out in the left margins. That way, you can go back and review any week or any month, or even read quickly through an entire year to bring the best memories back.

5. On the Beam/Off the Beam

Ah yes. This is the *pièce de résistance* of inventory methods for me. I was first introduced to this list of positive qualities and their corresponding negative qualities at the 212 Club in O'Fallon. My first couple years in the program, I attended the early morning meetings there quite regularly, and it seemed that no matter which seat I chose, partway through the meeting, I'd

always notice I was facing straight toward the On the Beam/Off the Beam poster.

I have a small version of this taped next to the chair where I do most of my spiritual reading, writing and thinking. I have another copy I carry around with my work materials, on which I wrote out the dictionary definitions of all these words.

When I list out the qualities of God as I understand Him, the components of spirituality in general, the principles I want to embody, it begins and ends with On the Beam. I have the disease of self--look at the cluster of items toward the bottom right: self-pity, self-justification, self-importance, self-condemnation--and the disease of more, and each one can easily take me off the beam. The vertical line separating the two columns to me is a crevasse, a barrier, anything blocking me from my Higher Power. I suffer when I'm on the wrong side of the chart.

I've found my easiest paths back in are through the top of the On the Beam chart, or through the bottom. Going in through the top, Honesty is Step One, leading to the Faith and Courage found in Step Two. With this foundation I can increasingly access a reasonable amount of the rest of God's qualities. Through the bottom, Action is what separates desperation from solution. Action, properly applied, balances my priorities back to a place where Moderation becomes attainable once again.

Are you
"ON THE BEAM"

ON THE BEAM	OFF THE BEAM
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HONESTY	DISHONEST
FAITH	FEAR
COURAGE	FRIGHTENED
CONSIDERATE	INCONSIDERATE
HUMILITY	PRIDE
GIVING	GREEDY
CALM	ANGER
GRATEFUL	ENVY
PATIENCE	IMPATIENT
TOLERANCE	INTOLERANT
FORGIVENESS	RESENTMENT
LOVE	HATE
SELF-FORGETFULNESS	SELF-PITY
HUMILITY	SELF-JUSTIFICATION
MODESTY	SELF-IMPORTANCE
SELF-FORGIVENESS	SELF-CONDEMNATION
TRUST	SUSPICION
MODERATION	GLUTTONY
ACTION	SLOTH

The Recovery Emporium - <http://recoveryemporium.com>

All opinions expressed are those of individuals and do not necessarily reflect the views of AA as a whole. To report Tri-County AA news or events, submit articles, recommend your homegroup for a feature piece, or just to share your experience, strength and hope with us, please email sentinel@tricountyaa.org