

Shoemaker, Stick to Thy Last

I Hope I Never Stray

I remember how it was when I was a child in the 1940s when there was only one doctor in the community where I lived. I was one of ten children in my family, and we had to deal with all the different physical ailments that kids went through in those days. We were poor and did not have the luxury to take our pick of doctors. Today I could liken it to what you see in many of the third world countries. Since then, as medical research has evolved, many of problems of that time have been eliminated and the medical profession is made up of an abundance of specialist that focus on specific fields that they have experience in and as a result become experts in that field. Not being distracted by the need to know the specifics of all the other specialists, they continue to dig deeper into the field that they are familiar with and new ideas about how to identify and cure those specific ailments.

If a person in AA attends a weekly step study meeting that also studies the 12 traditions they would know; by the stories in the book, the pains and struggles that those first hundred members, that put the twelve-step program together, suffered through. The 12 traditions came later when they realized that mixing outside issues with the AA program would probably end in disaster as it happened to the Oxford Group and The Washingtonians. The first printing of the 12X12 was in 1953 and those traditions were pounded out on anvils of steel and they have been the protective coating that has insulated Alcoholics Anonymous from getting affiliated with outside organizations.

Tradition Five *“Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.”* I have known many members of AA who have worked outside of AA itself in rehabilitation centers and such, and there is no conflict of interest so long as that person does not imply that he/she represents Alcoholics Anonymous. Some of those members are pillars of AA at their own group level but maintain a healthy separation when it comes to non-affiliation.

We learn in AA that we had to give it away to keep it. If carrying the message was not the primary purpose of the group how could AA sustain itself as far as new membership was concerned? My experience in the program has been one of appreciation for the wisdom of the founders who understood that carrying the message benefit's both the giver and the receiver. In the words of Shakespeare: The quality of mercy is not strained, it droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath: It is twice blest; it blesseth him that gives and him that takes.

I find that the AA program is the most successful approach to the disease of alcoholism. I hope we never stray from this tradition and that spirit of carrying the message to those who still suffer. I owe my life to it.