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AA Grapevine
The Keys to the Kingdom -- Sylvia Kauffmann
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Don't Take Our Word For It

An early Chicago member wrote her sequel to her story "The Keys to the Kingdom."

The first ten years of AA in the Chicago area (1939 through 1949) were years filled with much activity. During the first four or five years, the activity was at times even feverish. Our numbers were small when AA received its first national publicity, so all of us were pressed into service in an effort to answer the flood of requests that poured in from all over the Midwest.

It would be nice to intimate that my part in all this amounted to some kind of noble, self-sacrificing contribution. Nothing could be further from the truth. This tremendous activity, by bringing me into almost constant contact with other members doing likewise, provided me with everything I most desperately needed to save my life -- quite literally. As I look back I realize this was the most excitingly beautiful period of my life, filled with great humor, incredible thrills, and revelatory happenings. Out of these were born human relationships the like of which I wouldn't have believed possible.

By 1955, when I wrote my story for the revised edition of Alcoholics Anonymous, our membership in the Chicago area alone had grown from six members to six thousand. Now, there were many to carry on the work. The group did not need us in the same degree as it had earlier. But our need for the group had not diminished. After we come to AA, after the fog is lifted from our thinking, then we begin to find ourselves. When we have had the time to complete that all-important, searching personal inventory, we must ask, "What is it I really want from life? Sobriety? Yes, of course, for there can be no future without this. But if I can maintain sobriety -- then what? What can I do with what remains of my life?"

The answers may vary somewhat, but I think there are certain fundamental desires that are much the same in all of us. We want, first of all, to be liberated from dependence on any human crutch. Next, we want to achieve dependability and trustworthiness, so that our self-respect is restored and we can earn the right of respect from others. Then we must find some reason for our existence, so that we may obtain purpose in our lives -- a purpose worth striving to achieve. We need to learn to laugh again, relax again, enjoy living again. We want to be capable of meeting the daily challenges as they come, with courage and good humor. Instead of running from life's problems, we'd like to find we can meet them head-on and handle them well.

It seems like a pretty big order, and it is. Yet all these wishes and many more can become realities if we just follow the AA blueprint for living.

The AA concept tends to simplify life. It teaches us how to keep ourselves straightened away by weeding out the crippling attitudes and replacing erroneous premises with true

values. It wisely counsels us to turn the inner searchlights on what underlies our motivations before we act, so that the chances for constructive action will be greater. Also, when we learn to take a good look before we leap, we can eliminate the purely emotional decisions we used to act upon, so often to our sorrow and destruction. The AA approach to life steers us along a maturing course. We become willing to accept the responsibility of our actions. We learn to improve the quality of our living by constantly striving to improve ourselves. Although we cannot change the world, we find that for us relative (yet miraculous) change does occur outside ourselves as we change inwardly. And after a while we begin to realize that we are developing a pretty sound philosophy to live by.

The very nature of this approach to life calls for a continuous striving toward the personal goals we have set for ourselves. We will never outgrow the program. Always, as new vistas open up for us, or when we reach a new plateau, we find the need to climb a little higher, or go a bit further.

"What is it I really want from life?" Now we can answer that question.

We want to mature. We want to be able to make a constructive contribution to our world. We want to develop well-integrated, whole personalities. We want to balance in our lives; we want to develop all the areas of our being equally. We want to improve our understanding of and appreciation for our fellowman, and thereby learn how we may serve him. We want to earn the privilege and the joy of being wanted, needed, and loved by those around us.

We find that the principles of honesty, purity (or motivation), unselfishness, and love (without ourselves at the center) do work, when we apply them to any and all departments of our living. It often takes courage to make the experiment of applying these principles to our daily affairs, in our personal relationships, or in our business contacts. But by gum these principles do work. They work because everything we have to do in this world involves other people, and people will and do respond to this kind of approach, no matter what the problem at hand. I can make this statement because I have had, not one, but many experiences with all kinds of people in all kinds of situations over the last twenty-nine years.

We never really know anything theoretically. We truly know only that which we have experienced. And this is why we say to the new person, "Don't take our word for it. Instead, try it for yourself. Only then can you be sure you have latched on to a design for living that can really work for you."

My faith in our program continues to increase through my personal experience with it. The last thirteen years have found me still striving toward the shining goals laid out for me long ago. I now live in Florida with my husband, and we will soon be celebrating, most happily, our eighteenth wedding anniversary. He is an alky, too, and our lives have been enriched by our mutual faith and perseverance in the AA way of life. Through it we have found a quality of happiness and serenity that, we believe, could not have been realized in any other way. Small wonder our gratitude knows no bounds.

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