

Friday, June 21st, 2019 at 5:00 pm. The panel you are participating in is, "Yesterday's World — Our Legacies Begin" Your topic is:
"Carrying the message using the 12 Steps, then and now"

When I sat down to write this piece, my 8-year-old son asked what I was doing after watching me struggle to get started. In big people important language, I shared how writing can be difficult sometimes and wondered if he ever had that experience. I like to start with a quote I shared with him as he looked on lovingly like he identified. Without missing a beat, he said, how about "The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched - they must be felt with the heart by Helen Keller." This saying was the favorite quote of his classmate William who left us way too early in March of this year. As I sit with this child who has poured deep wisdom onto me by sharing the love of what cannot be seen or even touched it was felt with the heart; so is carrying the message of AA's 12 Steps then and now.

Carrying the message using the 12 steps then and now is my topic. When I thought about this topic, I thought about people who carried the message to me. The first incident that comes to mind was a former boss, Art H. He came to me to talk after I stole my co-worker's car. It's really not stealing if they give you the key. Never-the-less, I borrowed my co-worker's car on a payday and did not return it. I went on a run and left the keys to the car and my infant daughter with a friend. My ex-husband picked up our child and returned the car after riding a child's bicycle several miles to retrieve it. It was a terrible mess, and I could not explain how it happened. When my boss asked to come over and talk, I thought for sure the police would be coming, and I would be getting fired and arrested. Instead, my boss and Mike, the man whose car I borrowed came to talk to me about alcoholism. They understood how I felt and shared they too used to drink and offered to pray for me and take me to church. Unbelievable. I did not get

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fired. I went to church and felt awkward, watching them praise and worship. It seemed to help them, but I was not convinced and was not looking for help.

My second example of someone carrying the message to help me stop drinking was when my mother, who took me to a lawyer. The lawyer threatened to take away my children and lock me in up in an institution if I did not promise to stop drinking. I told him to go ahead and do it. He lost his poker face, and I walked out thinking what a waste of my time.

Lastly, when I accidentally signed myself into a mental institution in November of 1993, it was highly suggested that I attend an AA meeting. People in AA brought a meeting into the hospital, and I only went to people please the counselor. When I participated in the meeting, something was read, shared, or said that made me stop cold in my tracks. The smallest mustard seed was planted, and I wondered if I could live a normal life. I wondered if I could keep money in my pocket or if I could be a mother to my children. The message was carried to me, and I was open to receive it whether I knew it or not.

One of the first insights Dr. Bob and Bill W. had about carrying the message was that all true communication must be founded on mutual need. The Twelve and Twelve describes this moment of need perfectly in the sixth step, pg.64: "When men and women pour so much alcohol into themselves that they destroy their lives, they commit a most unnatural act. Defying their instinctive desire for self-preservation, they seem bent upon self-destruction. They work against their own deepest instinct. As they are humbled by the terrific beating administered by alcohol, the grace of God can enter them and expel their obsession. Here their powerful instinct to live can cooperate fully with their creator's desire to give them new life." The sentence "As they are humbled by the terrific beating administered by alcohol, the grace of God can enter them and

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expel their obsession." True communication must be founded on mutual need. The person in need must want a solution, and the person carrying the message must want to share.

Bill Wilson writes in *Language of the Heart*, how he felt after having a spiritual experience himself. "With this illumination came the vision of a possible chain reaction, one alcoholic working with the next. I was convinced that I could give to fellow sufferers that which Ebby had given to me, and for months afterward, I tried to carry the message. But nobody sobered up, and a wonderful lesson came out of the experience: I was painfully learning how not to communicate. No matter how truthful the words of my message, there could be no deep communication if what I said and did was colored by pride, arrogance, intolerance, resentment, imprudence, and personal acclaim even though I was largely unconscious of these attitudes" (Bill W., 2002). Bill's reflection implies carrying the message requires dignity, modesty, tolerance, happiness, and sensibility. Aren't these attributes of working the steps and having a spiritual awakening? Bill went on to say that if ego gets in the way, true communication will be blocked.

The foundation of carrying the message is to live the steps out loud. When working the steps, I become the light, and people are attracted to light. The steps open me up to be my best self.

Dr. Silkworth gave Bill some suggestions in his approach to carrying the message: "Quit preaching, quit harping on your unique spiritual experience. Tell your own story. Then pour it into those drunks how medically hopeless alcoholism is. Soften them up enough first. Then maybe they will buy what you really have to say. You've got the cart before the horse."

When Bill did speak to Dr. Bob the first time, Bill reflected, Dr. Bob "did not need spiritual instruction. He already had more of that than I did. What he did need was the deflation

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at depth, and the understanding that only one drunk can give another. What I needed was the humility of self-forgetfulness and the kinship with another human being of my own kind. I thank God for providing it.

Bill also said, "never could we talk down to anyone, certainly not to a fellow alcoholic. We saw that each sponsor would have to humbly admit his own needs as clearly as those of his prospect. Here was the foundation for AA's Twelfth Step to recovery, the step in which we carry the message."

You can not carry something you do not have. The most compelling and compassionate thing we do is help one another. We have compassion and tolerance with one another. We are examples of diplomacy most of the time. None of this is possible in the way it was intended unless we work the steps and open up to our higher self. How does that look? Maybe like this. When I was new, I was sitting in the back of an Alano Club having a cup of coffee waiting in between AA meetings. A very drunk man was sitting in on a recliner in the same room. He was yelling out, and the AA members kept talking to him kindly and encouraging him. They told him he would be ok and stay seated in the recliner. The man tried to get up, and the recliner fell over taking him with it. He fell to the floor and peed his pants. I watched as the members picked him up like a newborn child and carefully righted the chair and placed him back in it. "The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched - they must be felt with the heart." Carrying the message has not changed it the same as it was at its inception. It is truly one way we love one another.