

SUICIDE
ANONYMOUS

The Little Book

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Preface

“God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can,
and the wisdom to know the difference.”
– Reinhold Niebuhr

Suicide is a dark topic. The church sees it as sin. Starting in the Middle Ages the law made it a crime. Then suicide passed to the mental health profession. So, what is suicide? Sin? Crime? Mental Illness? All three?

Many of us who have contemplated suicide say that suicide is an attempt to escape the pain – a longing for death because life looks impossibly difficult and hurtful. This poignant longing is hardly a new thing.

Never weather-beaten sail
More willing bent to shore;
Never tired pilgrim’s limbs
Affected slumber more
Than my weary sprite now longs
To fly out of my troubled breast.
O come quickly, sweetest Lord,
And take my soul to rest.

(Thomas Campion, 16th century English poet)

In this book, we of Suicide Anonymous discuss one form of suicide: suicide addiction. Suicide addiction goes against all common sense. Suicide is among the last things that one would expect to be addictive. But for us, it is the best answer. If you believe, as we do, that suicide is complicated, and if you want to see inside the hearts and minds of those of us who have struggled with suicide addiction, read on.

To the problem of suicide addiction the Twelve Steps of recovery bring an elegant simplicity. The principles are simple enough: admission of the problem; reliance upon God or some other source of power beyond one's own resources; willingness to inventory one's own character defects; a readiness to come to grips with basic character flaws and make restitution to others; and commitment to these principles as a way of life, including a commitment to share it with others.

Alcoholics Anonymous grew from the principle that one alcoholic could maintain recovery by reaching out to help another one. History has shown that the message of hope and the guidelines to recovery can be shared in book form as well as through personal contact. That "carrying the message" principle of the Twelfth Step of recovery insures that lonely suicide addicts, desperate for recovery and armed only with a copy of this book, will – like alcoholics – have the same opportunity to find that special friendship and fellowship with others which is so vital – so life giving.

Now there is *this* fellowship, Suicide Anonymous, and *this* book, based on the experiences of those of us who have found a common solution to our problem with suicide. To show other suicide addicts precisely how we have recovered is the main purpose of this book. Those who are helped by it will measure

the merit of our message. We offer it in deep gratitude for the gift of *recovery*, for the experience of personal dignity, which has come to us through the fellowship of Suicide Anonymous, bestowed by a Power greater than ourselves.

Chapter 1

The Problem

“There are also others ... for whom the mere idea of suicide is enough; they ... function efficiently provided they have their own ... means of escape always ready: a hidden cache of sleeping pills, a gun at the back of the drawer ...”.

A. Alvarez¹

For us suicide addicts, suicide is *not* what it appears to be. It is a totally different experience. For us, suicide became the drug we used to cope, a fix as powerful as crack to cocaine addicts, an escape from pain.

We came from a variety of backgrounds. Most of us had experienced a crippling depression. We felt inadequate, unworthy, alone and afraid. Our insides never matched what we saw on the outsides of others. As our feelings of helplessness and worthlessness grew, dying seemed our only relief. Suicide became our option.

At first fleeting, thoughts of suicide began to grow until, as our mental state deteriorated, they filled our days. Some felt trapped by intensely painful circumstances. We tuned out with suicidal fantasy and preoccupation. Many of us became true addicts. Others were survivors of suicide. The problem we

¹ A. Alvarez, *The Savage God* (New York: Norton, 1971), 154.

faced was the same. The pursuit of the perfect suicide, the trance-like effect induced by ruminating about death became the drug we used to cope with our unbearable pain. We lost the sense that suicide was taboo or forbidden and began to view it as an acceptable alternative, a personal privilege.

Many times we came to the brink of action, retreating with hearts pounding, exhilarated by the illusion that we were God-like in the power we held over our own lives. Some of us retreated from that decision, hoping it was not our sole choice, only to tire and decide we could no longer endure the pain.

Many of us made an attempt or attempts to end our life, only to awaken sickened by the realization that our best efforts had failed. This increased our guilt, self-hatred, remorse, emptiness, and pain. Morning after promises to stop these fantasies of death were made to our desperate families and friends. But suicidal fantasies killed any chance for true life.

Soon the seduction of suicide again overtook us and before long we were caught up in the fantasy of death, believing this would give us the eternal peace we craved. Instead we were victimized by internal turmoil and overwhelming humiliation. Alone we were powerless and our most sincere promises to stop this deadly preoccupation had become fantasies themselves.

Our stories describe the progression of this problem. For us, suicide is our drug, as powerful as alcohol, or sex – always there, a secret lover, *the* way out when we have no other way out.

Onset

Our suicidal thoughts often started in childhood or early teen years, sometimes later. Most of us remember a precipitating event, usually painful. Whatever it was, we thought to ourselves,

“If it gets bad enough, I can always kill myself.” For us, this was a comforting thought, but the start of the problem.

Such thoughts were not harmless and did not pass with the moment. Instead, they were a “fix”. We tucked them away in the back of our minds.

What made such thoughts a fix? We don’t know. We assumed that others had similar experiences. We kept the thoughts to ourselves—often in shame, since suicide is a disgrace. Some of us played with the thoughts, running them through our minds, tucking them away for a later time, hugging them all to ourselves.

Looking back, we knew that something in us changed. We were not finished with the thoughts. Somehow they had become part of us.

Fantasy

Next time we encountered a painful situation, felt trapped or scared, we pulled out our thoughts of suicide and felt their comfort. This time, however, we ran the thoughts around in our minds, tasting them. We started to fantasize about suicide. That felt even better – less pain.

Fantasy is a complicated business. For us, fantasy is dangerous – a way to escape the challenges of life. Spending longer and longer periods in suicidal fantasies, we were lost – trapped in fantasy, avoiding our lives. We used the fantasies to evade pain – not to cope with reality.

Over time we expanded our fantasies. We fantasized about ways of killing ourselves – overdoses, hangings, shootings, car accidents. We replayed the scenes in our heads, varying the details, trying new ways. We controlled everyone in the scene, in

the most powerful way – living and dying. We changed the scenes to suit ourselves. In our fantasies we played God. Such illusion of power and control was intoxicating, the pain less intense.

Secrecy fueled fantasy by keeping reality at bay. The more secretive the fantasies, the greater their power, the stronger the fix. We rarely told people about our suicidal thoughts and fantasies until we hit bottom and began to recover. We kept them to ourselves, hugging the secrets close, ducking into a private, unchallenged world where no one and nothing could get us.

Sharing our suicidal thoughts and fantasies with someone could have stripped them of their power – forced us out of fantasy into world reality. Exposing our obsessions could have brought us face to face with our buried pain, exactly what we didn't want. So we kept them secret, minimizing or denying them when others caught on. We even rationalized our thoughts to ourselves. After all, everyone thinks of suicide now and again. Besides, we weren't planning to *do* anything.....

We didn't realize how often we thought of suicide. Like alcoholics, who fail to notice how much they drink, we were unaware of how different we were from others, assumed that others thought of suicide like we did.

Fantasy, secrecy – now power. Power fueled fantasy. The more powerful the fantasies, the stronger the fix. Surprisingly, we took charge of our lives by taking charge of our deaths – at least in our fantasies. Nothing was more exhilarating than playing with life and death. “Taking it to the edge,” “daring God to take us,” “seeing how far we could go.” These were deadly games. Confused about “who is creation” and “who is Creator”,

we maintained illusions of control over our lives and deaths. Playing God was powerful stuff, and numbed reality.

We lived double lives. Outwardly successful, we appeared to be in control. Inwardly, we were out of control, desperate, longing to master life while giving in to fantasies of suicide. Adults on the outside, trapped children on the inside, we could not share our secrets. Within our suicidal world, we set the scenes, visualized behaviors, rolled out scenarios, and ended the stories to our *own* satisfaction. Nobody could do a thing to stop us. *We* were in control. Nobody knew what we were doing. Nobody could interfere. Such control was even more intoxicating and further numbed our pain.

Later we acted out these fantasies of control with our family. Refusing to disclose the fantasies, we dared them to guess our secrets, piece together the puzzle, uncover our obsessions. We played this deadly control game with those who loved us most, challenging them to discover the truth. The “game” enhanced our fix and further buried our pain.

When anyone or anything exposed our secret world – we responded in rage. With our secrets discovered, we lashed out fiercely at those who loved us most. Then, immediately, we sealed over the vent and retreated to our addictive world – the world of secrecy, power, control, and hidden rage.

Tolerance

The problem with addiction is addicts need a bigger fix. At first, thinking “I can always kill myself” was enough. We thought of suicide in secret, without apparent consequences. Nobody got hurt. No one knew. It wasn’t a problem, just a little

something to make life's problems easier to bear. With that little something, we could go on.

But over time "I can always kill myself" wasn't enough. It failed to numb painful moments, failed to lessen trapped feelings, failed to give us our fix. So we thought about suicide more often, extended the fantasies. We discovered new scenarios, new possibilities. We looked for suicides in newspapers, novels or biographies, in family histories. Increasingly curious, we studied people who had killed themselves to discover methods. Slowly but surely, we identified with suicide, convinced it was the answer. We were curious about what lies on the other side of death – even death by suicide.

Risk-taking got the adrenaline pumping, created the fix we needed. We explored new ways of suicide – painless ways, fast ways, clean ways, hidden ways. The scarier the way, the greater the fix. We were moving into dangerous territory.

Ritual

It was just a matter of time before tolerance drove us from fantasy to ritual, from thought to behavior. It is one thing to think about suicide. It is another to plan it. Now, there was no turning back. Our rituals were limited only by our creativity. Secretly we planned our deaths oh-so-carefully.

Rituals centered around how to kill ourselves: hanging, cutting, shooting, overdosing, jumping, faking an accident. We spread all possibilities on the table, considered them carefully, picked each one up, examined it closely, put it down – for the moment. Obsessive fantasies became obsessive planning. Like cat burglars planning the perfect heist, we devoted more and more time to the perfect plan. Working through each detail, we

weighed every option carefully, in total secrecy. Lost in obsession, we became disconnected from the world.

Rituals brought a bigger “fix”. The first trip to the hardware store to buy “*the perfect rope*” was like a first venture for a compulsive shoplifter. The rush from the danger was terrific. Completing the purchase in secrecy, no one knowing - gave us power, triumph, and satisfaction. We were hooked! No more pain.

After that fix, rituals progressed rapidly. We tried on new suicide plans like shoppers trying on new clothes, each one more elaborate, more dangerous, more fantastic – and more mood altering. Not wanting to get *hurt*, we obsessed about the perfect, painless suicide. What a rush! We believed we were powerful over life and death itself. No more pain. Talk about playing God.

Each method of suicide was painstakingly reviewed. Does hanging hurt? Where’s the best place to put a bullet? Does carbon monoxide make a person cough or choke? What about pills? These questions consumed us, over-shadowed the rest of our lives.

Perfection demanded opportunity – nothing to spoil the plan, nothing to betray the secret. Timing was everything. How long does it take to fill a car with carbon monoxide? How quickly do pills take effect? What if I throw up?

We rehearsed our windows of opportunity. Painstakingly, we tracked behaviors of those who could foil our perfect plan. Hiding and watching, studying who came and went, checking times, establishing patterns – these consumed us.

Exploring the perfect suicide left us free to take action, to ritualize each obsession. Having crossed the boundary from thought to behavior, we began to experiment: shop for a gun,

buy it, hold it, caress it, finger the trigger, feel the squeeze, visualize the act – all frightening, yet exhilarating.

Rituals grew over time, ever more elaborate. We fine-tuned them, made them more personal, more perfect. Each step had its own emotional charge. We kept our rituals secret, shielded them from the light of day.

Moving deeper into addiction, our double lives grew more polarized: living in the “real world”, yet consumed by suicide in our “secret world.”

We were obsessed with the *where* of suicide: the perfect method, the perfect time, and now the perfect place. A safe place was important. Lacking safe places and safe people in our lives, nowhere and no one felt safe anymore. Our search for *where*, was a search for shelter from an unsafe world, away from people. Places other people found lonely or frightening we found serene and safe. Cemeteries, secluded spots, private offices after hours filled the bill.

Attempts

Attempts end in death or recovery. Often we hid our suicide attempts from others, disclosing them later, when we were ready to recover. After a suicide attempt we usually went into shock then went “on the wagon.” . We swore off suicide. “It won’t happen again,” we said. “That was a big mistake” or “I’m working too hard” or “Maybe I’m depressed?” or “I’d better stop playing with fire” – we rationalized. Avoiding help, we busied ourself with work, church, or friends. We had no idea of the true extent of our addiction.

But the knowledge that we had just attempted suicide ate at us. We had crossed a sacred boundary. The shame was tremendous, and shame refueled the problem.

Driven ever inward by shame, with a label (“attempter”) that separated us from the rest of the world, we feared something was horribly wrong. We convinced ourselves by bad behavior that we were, in fact, bad people. The worse the behavior the deeper the shame, and what behavior could be worse than murder – murder of the self? Consumed by a sense of “badness”, we lost sight of our “sickness.”

Soon we returned to old patterns. We needed our drug. Nothing had changed. We were in deep denial. We fell back into a cycle of fantasy, ritual, and suicide attempts. Repeating this cycle over and over, we slipped into hopelessness and desperation. Nothing seemed to help.

Bottom

The crash to the bottom was nightmarish. Suicidal thoughts and fantasies flooded us, more powerful than ever, often followed by further suicide attempts. Fearing nothing could help us, we hoped for magical solutions. We were doomed. Some of us drifted into other addictions – anything to numb the pain. They only added to our sense of shame as we spiraled toward destruction.

In hell, we faced death or recovery.

Chapter 2

The Solution

Like alcoholics, most of us were unwilling to admit we were real suicide addicts. None of us like to think we are different from our fellows. Therefore, it is not surprising that our suicidal careers were characterized by countless vain attempts to prove we could be like other people. The idea that somehow, someday we will control our suicidal thoughts and behaviors is the great obsession of every suicide addict. The persistence of this illusion is astonishing. Many pursue it into the gates of insanity or death.²

We learned that we had to fully concede to our innermost selves that we were suicide addicts. This is the first step in recovery. The delusion that we are like other people, or presently may be, has to be smashed.³

We are men and women who have lost the ability to control our suicidal thoughts and behaviors. We know that no real suicide addict recovers control. All of us felt at times that we were regaining control, but such intervals – usually brief – were inevitably followed by still less control, which led in time to pitiful and incomprehensible demoralization. We are convinced that suicide addicts of our type are in the grip of a progressive illness. Over any considerable period we get worse, never better.⁴

Despite all we can say, many who are real suicide addicts are not going to believe they are in this class. By every form of

² The above paragraphs were adapted from the *Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous* (New York: AA World Services, 1976) 30.

³ *Ibid*

⁴ *Ibid*

self-deception and experimentation, they will try to prove themselves exceptions to the rule.⁵ But actual suicide addicts, with hardly an exception, will be *absolutely unable to stop on the basis of self-knowledge*. This is a point we wish to reemphasize, to smash home what has been revealed to us out of bitter experience.⁶

We suicide addicts at certain times have no effective mental defense against suicide. Except in a few rare cases, neither we nor any other human being can provide such a defense. Our defense must come from a Higher Power.

Spiritual Awakening

We of Suicide Anonymous describe our recovery as a spiritual experience. Some of us underwent a dramatic change, including awareness that God is in charge of our lives and deaths.

The first step of recovery is spiritual. Cognitive and emotional work comes later. Looking for mental and emotional healing first did not work. No matter how hard we worked or how sincere our efforts, they hadn't budged the problem. Doomed as we were, no human intervention could have helped us.

After a last bout with suicide many of us experienced a sense of "coming to", as if we'd been roused from a trance. We realized that our best efforts had failed. We came face to face with the stark reality that we were powerless over our suicidal fantasies, rituals, and behaviors. We could do nothing to fix ourselves. It was over. We had to surrender, without reservation.

What a frightening moment. Up to that point, we were consumed by our craving for control and power. They were what

⁵ *Ibid*, 31

⁶ *Ibid*, 39

we believed in. Convinced we were the center of the universe, no one but us mattered. Now we stood exposed, shivering in the light of truth. Had our spiritual experience stopped there, most of us would have fled back to suicide.

But for many of us, this moment of truth also included another revelation: that God saved our lives for God's own purposes. A childlike calm came over us.

The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous says, " And God could and would if He were sought."⁷ That's all it took: seeking. All that mattered was that we started to look for something outside ourselves. Minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day, we willingly stayed *alive* by conscious contact with our new awareness of surrender and our seeking Someone outside ourselves who loves and protects us. It didn't matter that we didn't know who or what we were seeking. Seeking's all it took.

We had to hand over our lives to God: *here, you look after this, I can't*. Our wills had been turned toward death, like moths to a flame. That impulse could come back at any time. Our only hope was to open our will to God's gentle care – no secrets, no holdouts, no reservations, no games – just surrender.

Nothing works better for surrender than the Twelve Steps, and Suicide Anonymous meetings provided us a safe place for healing through the Twelve Steps.

Turning our will over to the care of God was like turning a battleship: it can't be done on a dime. We were, after all, very strong-willed people. Look at the devotion and energy we had put into our addiction. We teetered on the brink of death and survived; we spent years obsessed with suicide. We weren't

⁷ *Ibid*, 60

going to change overnight. In early recovery, we continued to be plagued by fantasies, thoughts, and impulses toward suicide, often strong enough to pull us back into the old cycle. It was essential to “share our secrets” – to take the power out of our thoughts of suicide by talking about them with others.

Sharing the Secret

The most effective tool for stopping the power of the addiction was sharing our thoughts and fantasies of suicide with another person. We chose to “tell on ourselves”, to be honest about our suicidal thoughts and impulses as they occurred. Previously, we hugged our secret thoughts to ourselves, savoring the sense of power they gave us. Now we gave them up. Then, and only then, did the power diminish.

Time and again, we chose to turn away from the seduction of the suicide cycle by exposing our fantasies to the light of day. And each time we did, we took one step further into recovery. Such work was difficult. We were, after all, running directly counter to years and years of past practice. Our addiction feeds on secrecy and silence. It won't die all at once. We have to starve it to death.

“Reaching out” had to be immediate, honest, and without expectations from the listener.

“Immediate” meant telling the suicidal thoughts when they happened. A fellow Twelve Stepper or a trusted friend worked as long as that person didn't shame us or over-react. Family members usually didn't work because they were too emotionally caught up in the problem and shamed or frightened us. Therapists worked as long as they understood the addiction.

In the mean time we had to stay in touch with God until we could find a person. It didn't work to tell God without telling a person. The power of the suicidal thoughts usually did not diminish until we disclosed them to another person.

"Honesty" was essential – no half measures, no window-dressing, and no holding back. The most difficult part of getting honest was staying in the present, in this particular moment, as we were reaching out. It was tempting to say, "I was thinking about killing myself, but that's over and now I'm okay." That didn't work. Pushing the thoughts into the past suggested that the addiction was in the past tense, and that is denial. We had to remember, "I *am* powerless over suicide," not "I used to be powerless over suicide." We had to be very specific, to the point – no hinting around, being vague, hoping the listener would fill in the blanks and let us off the hook. Healing required rigorous honesty.

We could have "no expectations" of the listener except listening. The purpose of our disclosure wasn't to get the other person to rescue us; it was to make ourselves accountable for our thoughts and actions. The person listening was only a listener, nothing more – a link to reality, not a person with magical powers to fix us. The sole purpose of reaching out was disclosure, nothing else.

Sharing in Suicide Anonymous meetings was important to reduce our shame. Nothing is more shameful than suicide. Facing a group took courage because it increased our vulnerability and exposed our shame. But hard as it was, it helped us unload our secret life of addiction. Each disclosure released another piece of shame. Little by little, we learned to be

honest with others and ourselves about our addiction. The group listened, identified with us, and accepted us.

For most of us the knowledge that others shared our obsession with suicidal thoughts and actions was both surprising and a relief. We had struggled and made promises to stop, but could not. As we heard the stories and shared the pain of our fellows, we began to understand that we were not alone. We began to feel safe in sharing our own stories of pain and helplessness in our addiction. We came to believe that there was hope and we began to trust the guidance we were offered.

Our spiritual bankruptcy left us desperate to learn how to fill the hole in our soul. We learned that there were steps we could take to heal, and that these steps would teach us how to live our lives with serenity and peace.

Through our pain, we became willing to surrender. We came to believe. We turned our will and lives over to the care of God, as we understood him.

These steps led us from the soul-sickness of the past, into the promised freedom of today. One day at a time, sometimes one minute at a time, we learned to lean on the guidance of our Higher Power. Our life is not ours, but His. By working the steps, we learned to live and not just endure each day.

The process of sharing at meetings healed us in ways that defy explanation. Acceptance as suicide addicts by a group of suicide addicts allowed us to accept parts of ourselves that we had hated and hidden. As we brought our darkness into light, it lost its power. Moreover, the group provided support. We were *not alone*. As we spoke the truth about our struggles with suicide, we provided hope for each other. We weren't the only people in the world with these thoughts, fantasies, and behaviors.

Withdrawal

Nobody said that recovery was easy. With tools in place, we plunged into withdrawal. The experience, while painful, was absolutely necessary for emotional and spiritual growth and recovery. Denial gave way to waves of feelings as we slowly came back to life, as though from a deep sleep or nightmare. For the first time, we saw our addiction for what it really was: a horrible illness, a big hoax.

What looked like the solution, was actually the problem. Suicide always seemed so alluring, so attractive and soothing – a permanent, peaceful relief. Now as our sanity started to return, we saw that suicide only masked deep pain. The real damage lay deep inside us.

Little by little, one bit of awareness at a time, we delved into our past. Pieces fell into place. Freed from the web that caught and held us, we saw for the first time, that we were not bad people, but sick people – very sick, for a very long time.

Denial gave way to more feelings, anger gave way to grief. For some of us, it was like opening a floodgate of tears as years of bottled-up sadness surfaced.

Facing our suicide addiction head on, we broke through layer after layer of denial. We saw the damage to ourselves and others. We fought our way back to sanity inch-by-inch, meeting by meeting.

Often the work was discouraging. We wondered if we would every stop hurting. What helped was validation from others, especially fellow members of Suicide Anonymous. We needed to hear we were making progress, especially since we often couldn't see our progress.

Suicide Anonymous meetings offered mutual support. They let us be flexible, taking part actively or passively, talking or listening, sharing or supporting, helping or being helped. Meetings also helped us overcome our sense of shame and stigma, the forces that could drive us deeper into secrecy, denial and relapse.

Many of us were shocked to learn that our suicide addiction started much earlier in life than we first realized, consumed far more energy than we realized, and “hooked” us more powerfully than we first admitted to ourselves and others. Some of us attended numerous Suicide Anonymous meetings before denial lifted and our full stories emerged. At first, many of us could only see our recent struggle with suicide, not the years of addiction. In time, as fragments of memory became a whole story in our minds, we realized that we were truly addicted to suicide.

Reconnection

Through the Twelve Steps we slowly began to challenge old beliefs, old relationships and develop new faith, new connections. We started to engage in the world. Like Rip Van Winkle facing the wonder and uncertainty of a new world, we felt like children facing life for the first time as whole people. Aware of our vulnerability, we chose to engage with life, with all our fears, rather than hold back. We challenged ourselves, reconnected with people. Each time we mastered a situation, we took another step toward healing.

Most of us learned that helping others in Suicide Anonymous helped *us* even more. At first we were “takers”, desperately trying to grab any lifeline we could. Over time, however, we began to watch others, to see their needs and to

reach out to them. At first we doubted that we had anything to offer, but in time we discovered that we had our own experiences to share as well as ears to listen. And the more we shared ourselves and listened, the more we healed.

A Daily Reprieve

Like all addictions, suicide addiction is a progressive illness, leaving tracks in our brains that cannot be fully undone. We are given a “daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition”,⁸ and that is enough.

Working through the Twelve Steps made sobriety easier and more comfortable, made us aware of relapse issues and triggers. More aware of these triggers, we could take precautions against slips, in turn helping us maintain recovery.

Slowly, we restored our sense of self-esteem. Spiritually, we began at last to reconnect to family, friends, and co-workers. Previously trapped in our web of addiction, we now had the energy to give and receive love.

This didn't happen overnight. Family members were slow to trust. How could we blame them? At first, they held themselves apart, waiting for the next attempt. But as they sensed a real change in us, they came to believe in our recovery. Little by little, they learned to trust us again, and our relationships began to heal.

We truly were given a second chance. Thank God.

⁸ Ibid, 85

Chapter 3

Working the Twelve Steps*

“It works if you work it”
-Slogan of Alcoholics Anonymous

The Twelve Steps were originally formulated in 1938 by Bill W, the co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous. They grew out of the principles of the Oxford Groups, a religious fellowship that sponsored the first AA meetings in Akron, Ohio. The steps were first published in Bill W's *Alcoholics Anonymous* (1939) and received a more detailed treatment in his *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* (1953).

The Twelve Steps provide a comprehensive and thorough approach to the problem of addiction. Without them, recovering from suicide addiction may be impossible. Our debt to the pioneers of AA is incalculable.

These are the Twelve Steps: ⁹

* Adapted in part from *Alcoholics Anonymous* (1939), *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* (1953), and *Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous* (1986).

⁹ Reprinted with permission from Suicide Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous. The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions are reprinted with permission of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. Permission to reprint and adapt the Twelve steps and Twelve Traditions does not mean that A.A. is in any way affiliated with this program. A.A. is a program of recovery from alcoholism only-use of the Steps and Traditions in connection with programs and activities which are patterned after A.A., but which address other problems, or in any other non-A.A. context, does not imply otherwise.

1. We admitted we were powerless over our suicidal preoccupation - that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to those who still suffer and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Step 1 : We admitted we were powerless over our suicidal preoccupation -- that our lives had become unmanageable.

No one wants to admit defeat. Every instinct rebels against the idea of powerlessness. It is truly awful to admit that we have become so obsessed by the idea of suicide that only an act of Grace can set us right.

The word “powerlessness” sums up for us several ideas. It means that we ourselves lack the power to make sound choices for our own lives. We are enslaved to suicide. The fact that we became captive to suicide shows that there was something important and powerful in our suicidal patterns which gave us some kind of “payoff”. Many of us were seeking, by consuming ourselves with suicidal activity, to shut off the world with all of its demands. Or we masked our fear of commitment to life by thinking of death. We made use of our suicidal preoccupations to lessen our pain.

Soon our obsession became an addiction which destroyed our ability to concentrate on important things. One by one, all the things that make life worthwhile -- satisfaction at work, family, friends, and social activities -- dropped away as suicide absorbed all our time and attention. Some of us were caught up in the hypnotic intensity of suicidal trances. Such experiences, calming at first, became overwhelmingly compelling, carrying us along with them into prolonged bondage to our thoughts of suicide. The original quest for distraction from life’s tensions now led us off into oblivion. Control over our lives no longer resided within us. We had lost control, whether we admitted it to ourselves or not.

Each of us, in his or her own time, finally experienced a sense of real desperation. We began to realize that living with our addictive patterns and being controlled by them meant that we risked losing our sanity. We stood on the edge of an abyss, and if

we slipped into it, we would lose all possibility of stability or health, forever. We decided we had to stop.

Now we began to confront a paradox: accepting that we couldn't control our addiction to suicide is the first step towards recovery. Most of us had tried all sorts of strategies to control our behavior. These strategies, no matter how strong, were futile. If we had some initial success in controlling our addictive behavior, we would become smug and conclude that we could now manage things. This only lowered our defenses, so that we gave in to old patterns again, often within days or hours.

Our loss of control had become an established fact. Therefore we could approach the prospect of surrendering our suicide addiction with true humility, for we had no way of knowing if surrender was even possible. True surrender of our suicide addiction meant not only being willing to take ourselves out of the painful situation at hand; it also meant being ready to be free of the whole obsession with suicide. The resolve only to be rid of a *specific* painful situation, without the readiness to break the whole addictive pattern, amounted to "going on the wagon" without truly giving up the addiction.

When we were first challenged to admit total defeat, most of us revolted. We had approached Suicide Anonymous expecting to be taught the self-confidence to conquer our own suicide addiction. Then we were told that, so far as suicide was concerned, self-confidence was a liability. We were the victims of a mental obsession so powerful that no amount of human willpower could break it. There was no such thing as personal conquest of this addiction.

Finally, we reached a point of unconditional surrender. The proof of this surrender was that we refrained, one day at a time,

from every form of behavior we saw as part of our addiction. We recognized that these were no-win situations. Each of us was now willing to go to any length, a day at a time, to stay sober. We were willing to be available to whatever might happen within ourselves. Paradoxically, this was not willingness coming from strength, but from the certainty of the consequences of continuing our addiction.

We were driven to Suicide Anonymous, and there we discovered the fatal nature of our situation. Then, and only then, did we become open-minded, to listen as only the dying can.

Step 2 : Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

As we came to appreciate the magnitude and mind-altering nature of suicide addiction, we had to admit that we could not reshape our whole identity unaided. We felt the need for a Someone greater than ourselves, a Something at least one step ahead of our disease, to give us the guidance we could not provide for ourselves. But what might that Someone or Something be?

We found the best answer to this question of faith through other Suicide Anonymous members, people who had found faith themselves. As we listened to their stories, we could identify with their patterns of addiction. And we could see that they were now leading healthier lives. As living examples, they offered us the hope that the same Power who had helped them might be available to us as well.

Contact with other recovering suicide addicts also helped us sustain our day-to-day sobriety. As we realized how helpful this

network of support was, we sensed that we didn't necessarily need organized religion. What we needed was the spiritual guidance we could receive from other Suicide Anonymous members. They helped us lay the foundation for building our own faith. We could even, if we wished, make Suicide Anonymous itself our "higher power". This was, after all, a group of people who together could solve their problem with suicide. In this respect they were certainly a power greater than we were. We could have faith in them. Many members crossed the threshold into faith this way. They told us that, once across, their faith grew wider and deeper. Relieved of the obsession with suicide, their lives transformed, their belief in a Higher Power grew stronger and more certain. And most of them began to call it God.

We found that true humility and an open mind will lead us to faith. Every Suicide Anonymous meeting was a fresh assurance that God would restore us to sanity.

Step 3 : Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him.*

Like all the remaining steps, Step 3 called for affirmative action to cut away the self-will which blocked us from God. The question, as always, is "how?" There is only one answer: willingness.

Every man and woman who joins Suicide Anonymous has, without realizing it, made a beginning on Step 3. Wasn't it true that in matters relating to suicide, each of us had decided to turn his or her life over to the care and protection of Suicide Anonymous? Each newcomer felt sure Suicide Anonymous was the only safe harbor for the sinking vessel that he or she had

become. If this was not turning one's will and life over to a newfound Higher Power , then what was it?

What would it be like, if we were really to empty ourselves of diseases and refrain from refilling ourselves again with anything other than God's grace? We had no idea. All we knew was that we did not want to go back into active suicide addiction. We came to understand that if we were unable to prescribe our own treatment for suicide addiction, then we would be better off turning "our will and our lives over" to the God of our understanding even if we did not know what might happen.

Having made this decision, how could we now begin our new relationship with God? The answer was simple; what we added was prayer. We now began each day in communion with the God of our understanding, asking for help to stay free, for that one day, of addictive behavior. And if we were successful in not acting out by day's end, we thanked God for helping us live another day free from bottom-line suicide addiction.

And in all times of emotional disturbance we paused, asked for quiet and simply said: "Thy will, not mine, be done."

Step 4 : Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

To our surprise we found that there came a point where we approached the task of Step 4 without fear because we had come to terms with Step 3. If God was helping us to manage our external lives, it was easier to be open to the idea of clearing up the debris.

But how were we to accomplish such an inventory? No two people did it exactly alike; there was no single "right way". What

we needed was to achieve some understanding of ourselves without fear, pride or secret reservations. Furthermore, we needed to understand the payoffs we had derived from our addictions.

Most of us found that writing down our inventory was helpful. Looking at what we had done in black and white was an invaluable aid to honesty and objectivity. As we read our version of what happened, we could see through our excuses and our need to blame others.

In writing down our inventory, some of us used the guidelines in the *Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous: resentments, fears and sex*.

“Resentment is the ‘number one’ offender.” So says the *Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous*.¹⁰ We also found this to be true for us suicide addicts. In order to deal with our resentments, we set them down on paper, listing people, institutions or principles with which we were angry. When we took a hard look at why we were angry, we found that we had seen threats to our self-esteem, our pocketbooks, our ambitions, or our personal relationships.

We saw clearly, for the first time, how these resentments led only to unhappiness and shut us off from the very contact with a Higher Power that we desperately needed for our daily reprieve from suicide addiction. Therefore, putting aside what others might have done wrong, we looked at our own mistakes, asking ourselves where we had been selfish, dishonest, self-seeking and frightened. When we saw our faults, we listed them in black and white.

¹⁰ *Alcoholics Anonymous*, (New York: AA World Services, 1976), 64

Next, we reviewed our fears. We put them on paper, asking ourselves honestly why we had them. Wasn't it because our own self-reliance had failed us so badly? We realized there is a better way: put our trust in God, not ourselves. We are in the world to play the role God assigns. To the extent that we do this, God will match calamity with serenity. We asked God to remove our fears and direct our attention to what God would have us be or do.

Sex! We reviewed our conduct carefully. Where had we been selfish? Dishonest? Did we arouse jealousy, suspicion or anger? Who had we hurt? We put it all on paper and looked at it. We found the acid test for each relationship: was it selfish or not? We earnestly prayed for the right ideal and the strength to do the right thing. If sex was particularly troublesome, we threw ourselves into helping others, taking us out of ourselves.

If we were thorough in our inventory, we began to learn tolerance and good-will toward all, even our enemies. We were ready for Step 5.

Step 5 : Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

More than most people, suicide addicts lead a double life. To the world, we present a stage character. We take pride in our ability to keep a secret, to keep our stories straight, to keep our feelings hidden. Such a strategy had a major payoff; we never had to deal with the consequences of our actions. We could even deny to ourselves that there *were* consequences. If ever anyone had a strong incentive to remain closed off from others, to hide the self from view, it was us.

Step 5 was our way to become open. If we didn't share with another person what we learned in Step 4, our sobriety was in

danger. Our profound aloneness -- both the root of our disease and its consequence -- could be eased only by reaching out to another human being.

Many of us felt we needed to find just one person with whom to be totally honest. Most of us had tried being partially honest with different people. Total honesty with one human being was essential for humility. It was also necessary for breaking the isolation that had blocked us from the unconditional acceptance we so desperately needed.

So we pocketed our pride and went for it, illuminating every dark part of our past. Once done, we were relieved and excited. We could look people in the eye and begin to have a spiritual experience. Many of us actually felt the presence of God for the first time.

Step 6 : Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

In the first five steps we were moving away from the active disease. Now, at Step 6, we needed to make our first step toward re-building. To attribute all of our troubles to suicide addiction would have been a serious error, for our character defects affected our lives too. In becoming ready to give up our character defects, we were ready to give up that part of us capable of "the con".

Our old habits had subtle payoffs which were difficult to surrender. Often victims of emotional deprivation in childhood, we had learned to survive on anger and resentment. Because of our inner blocks, we had become incapable of intimacy with anyone.

Slowly our attitude toward our defects started to change. We began to move from surrender of our suicide addiction, toward surrender to a process which would prepare us for God's work. We understood that Step 6 only asks us to get out of God's way.

Step 7 : Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

The whole emphasis of Step 7 is humility, and the basic ingredient of humility is a desire to seek and do God's will. But as long as we placed self-reliance first, reliance on a Higher Power was still impossible.

Although we had come a long way, we were still unable to shape our own lives in a consistently positive manner without a Power to continue to do for us what we could not do for ourselves.

So we called upon God to remove our shortcomings. When we were finally ready to do this, many of us chose the Step 7 prayer of the *Big Book*: "My Creator, I am now willing that you should have all of me, good and bad. I pray that you now remove from me every single defect of character which stands in the way of my usefulness to you and to my fellows. Grant me strength, as I go out from here, to do your bidding. Amen."¹¹

Step 8 : Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

Learning to live in harmony with all men and women is a fascinating adventure. It is a task we may never finish. To

¹¹ Ibid., 76.

accomplish it, we had to repair the damage done in the past to the best of our ability.

Using our Step 4 inventory, we made a list of all persons we had harmed, subjecting ourselves to drastic self-appraisal. Our list was often a long one, since we realized that our character defects -- especially our selfishness and anger -- had affected most of our relationships.

The problem now was to determine exactly what harm we had done others. A sort of generalized apologetic air was nowhere near enough: we had to see exactly how we had harmed others and how we could set that wrong to rights.

First, we stopped looking at the harm done to us. Regardless of what damage we'd suffered, we could not change another person. The only sins we could deal with were our own. So we closed the books on "wrongs done to us" and set out on our journey.

The prospect of amends can be terribly frightening. We could not imagine finding the courage to tackle some of the things we had done to others. So we simply asked God for the willingness to do so. We realized that if fear or pride kept us from making amends, we would go through life avoiding those we had harmed. We knew intuitively that there would be no real freedom in the future without taking full responsibility for our destructive behavior in the past.

Asking honestly what types of harm we had done, we considered the physical, mental, emotional or spiritual damage that we had done to ourselves or others. We had, for example, been abusive to our mates, blaming them for our own behavior, loading them with all the responsibility for our family life, and frequently taking out our anger on them. We had made their lives

hell, and they had suffered real and lasting damage. We had neglected our children, depriving them of our love and care -- and of course, they'd blamed themselves for our failure. And then there was the dreadful damage we'd done to ourselves, body and soul... Even if we could not imagine how we could possibly make amends for this sort of terrible injury, we wrote down what we had done, doing our best to be specific about the injury. Without precise knowledge of what we had done to ourselves and others, we realized that we had no chance to stop harming ourselves and other people in the future.

In time we found that our commitment to recovery had moved us beyond simple survival to a higher plane, one born of a sincere desire to right the wrongs we had done during our active addiction.

Step 9 : Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

Step 8 would be meaningless unless we put it into action; it is the preparation for Step 9 – a plan of action, but not the action itself. And the action had to be carried out, wherever possible.

In working Step 9 we cleaned up our past to the best of our ability. We did our honest best to make amends to people we had harmed. We prayed to be freed from the bondage of self, so we could free others in our lives from the pain our deception had caused.

The most important amends we made were those that were made face to face. As we looked at what we had done, it was clear that many on our list had gone on with their lives, burdened and twisted by the distortions of reality that we had inflicted on them.

What we had to do for them, then, was to relieve them of the guilt that we had loaded on them and that they had accepted. We'd convinced ourselves and them that the problems had somehow been their fault -- that they could have saved us from ourselves. We had to set the record straight, for their sakes, but also for ours.

It wasn't always simple. Some people had gone beyond our reach, either through death or disappearance. Others no longer wanted to hear from us under any circumstances. In some situations, full disclosure could only bring more harm, and we could make only partial restitution. In other cases, restitution had to be deferred till the time was right. And sometimes, we had to accept that we could never make direct amends.

While face-to-face was the best way, there were some people we could not meet directly. In such cases, we wrote letters laying out the past frankly and fully and asking for forgiveness. If we had no way to make amends directly, all we could do was to say an honest prayer, admitting our wrongs and asking God to set the old wrongs to right on our behalf – and then we had to let the past go, trusting in the knowledge that we would be willing to make amends if we could.

In time we found that page 83 of AA's *Big Book* expresses a great truth:

“If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be amazed before we are half-way through. We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness. We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it. We will comprehend the word serenity and we will know peace. No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience will benefit others. That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will

disappear. We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows. Self-seeking will slip away. Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change. Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us. We will instinctively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us. We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.”

Step 10 : Continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

Once we cleared away the old wreckage as best we could, we focused on clearing away the current mess, one day at a time. “It is a spiritual axiom that every time we are disturbed, no matter what the cause, there is something wrong with us.”¹² During such a disturbance, a quick spot check proved to be very helpful. When we felt flooded by anger or fear, checking our own spiritual condition gave us much-needed perspective. We hung onto the knowledge that our daily reprieve from suicide addiction was contingent on maintaining our spiritual lives. We learned that our character defects, outrageous in the past, continued in milder form, and that we had to recognize them, realize that they were part of us, and keep them in check. This required our making frequent appraisals of our shortcomings during the day and then doing our best to set them right as they happened.

Most of us found ourselves setting aside daily times for prayer and meditation to review the past 24 hours. Where had

¹² *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, (New York: AA World Services, 1981), 90.

we been selfish and self-centered? Had we harmed others, and if so, who, how, and when? But self-examination aside, most of us learned to spend prayer time simply thanking our Higher Power for the day, its gifts, our accomplishments -- even for our own failures.

In all of this we focused *only* on our own faults. We learned slowly that our own actions were the only ones that we could change -- that we had always been, and forever would be powerless over the deeds of others.

Step 11 : Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

By now we were convinced that spiritual reliance upon God was necessary for our relationships with others, at work and at home, and for all our daily endeavors. Therefore we found ourselves increasingly praying for God's guidance in all matters, big and little, spiritual and worldly.

We came to need prayer as much as we need food and water, for prayer sustains our very souls. Without it we suffer. The only requirements for our prayers were unselfishness and sincerity. We wanted to become channels of God's will, not our own will.

In order to become channels of God's will we had to keep our own wills out of the way. To this end we stopped praying for specific answers to specific problems. "Thy will, not mine, be done" became the basis for our prayers and conscious contact with God. Saying this prayer enabled us to clear a channel choked

up with selfishness, self-centeredness, anger or simple misunderstanding. Using it more and more frequently during each day, we learned the power of prayer in all situations and in all circumstances.

After prayer comes meditation. Once we talk to God, we must listen carefully for answers. Setting aside time each morning, we reflected upon the upcoming day, we read favorite meditation passages, and we made ourselves be still in God's presence, listening for His word. We found, curiously, the more we sensed God's guidance, the less we seemed to need to make demands upon God. Asking (or secretly desiring) for thus-and-such to happen, we learned, only served to distort God's message. Prayer isn't a matter of making requests or bargaining for specific outcomes, and the more we learned to pray, the more we came to rely on God's will, not on what we wanted to see happen.

But when we were clear and open channels, focused solely on knowledge of God's will for us, intuitions came to us during these times of meditation and throughout each day. A word from another person, a thought popping into our minds, an idea for action emerging as we worked on our problems - all were likely to be knowledge of His will for us. The more open our channels, the more frequent the answers.

In time, we realized that "we intuitively knew how to handle situations that used to baffle us." ¹³

¹³ *Alcoholics Anonymous*, (New York: AA World Services, 1976), 84.

Step 12: Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to those who still suffer and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

In Step 12 we reach out to fellow suicide addicts still in distress. In so doing we ask no reward for ourselves. Having worked all the steps, we found ourselves deeply involved in a new state of consciousness, an awareness that life is full of meaning after all, and that it is both a responsibility and a joy to spread that understanding to others.

We found ourselves fully, delightedly aware that we had been given a great gift: a second chance at life. Looking at newcomers who still doubted themselves, we could remember having been where they were and really saw the change in ourselves.

This brought us to the second part of Step 12: carrying the message. We learned that we had to give it away in order to keep it. And who better to give it away to than fellow suffering suicide addicts?

We attended Suicide Anonymous meetings and listened, providing support by our very presence. We talked when our turn came; we chaired meetings, organized eating meetings, and signed up for the phone list. When ready, we sponsored others in Suicide Anonymous. Here we experienced the kind of giving that asks no reward. Paradoxically, we found no greater satisfaction and no greater joy than that which we received in our selfless giving to others.

But could we actually carry the Suicide Anonymous spirit into our daily work? We discovered a wonderful feeling that we did not have to be seen as special or distinguished among our

fellows in order to be useful and happy. We no longer needed to dominate those around us in order to bolster our sense of self-importance. Our goal was to live usefully and walk humbly with God. As long as we practiced the principles of these steps, we attained our goal -- one day at a time.

We of Suicide Anonymous are extremely grateful for the principles embodied in these Twelve Steps, and, like the early members of Alcoholics Anonymous, offer these closing thoughts from the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous, page 164:

“Our book is meant to be suggestive only. We realize we know only a little. God will constantly disclose more to you and to us. Ask Him in your morning meditation what you can do each day for the man who is still sick. The answers will come, if your own house is in order. But, obviously you cannot transmit something you haven’t got. See to it that your relationship with Him is right, and great events will come to pass for you and countless others. This is the Great Fact for us.

Abandon yourself to God as you understand God. Admit your faults to Him and to your fellows. Clear away the wreckage of your past. Give freely of what you find and join us. We shall be with you in the Fellowship of the Spirit, and you will surely meet some of us as you trudge the Road of Happy Destiny.

May God bless you and keep you – until then.”¹⁴

¹⁴ *Alcoholics Anonymous*, (New York: AA World Services, 1976), 164.

Chapter 4

Personal Stories

Racquel's Story

I was born in the 1960s to alcoholic parents, the youngest of three children. Two of us are now alcoholics and addicts; my next oldest sister also has a problem with suicide. On my mother's side of the family, there is a long history of suicidal preoccupations and failed attempts.

One of my earliest memories is of incest; it started when I was 4 and stopped when I was in Grade 1. When I was in Grade 2, my mother had what the doctors called a "nervous breakdown." They treated her with drugs, and she turned into a zombie. My older sister became my caregiver. My father, an alcoholic, only created chaos during his short visits.

I was so scared that I obsessed every day at school: would my mother be alive or dead when I got home? Even though my sister had developed perfect mothering skills by the time she was 9, I could not understand what had happened to my mother. I loved her, and I missed her terribly. "Mental illness" was not one of the vocabulary words I learned in school. We went to a private Roman Catholic school. The nuns knew what was going on in our home. They gave us shoes, coats, and uniforms, and let us attend school for free.

At 11, I was a whopping 120 pounds, It was very hard for me to make friends, and I was severely teased. I did have one

girlfriend, and even got invited for a sleep over for her 12th birthday party. Her father and brother molested me that night. That was the first time I tried to kill myself - the start of my lifelong obsession with suicide, and also the onset of my addictions to drugs and alcohol.

Whenever I felt out of control, my fears became overwhelming. I felt trapped, and I rapidly spun into feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. These feelings triggered my suicide cycles - fantasizing, obsessing, planning, and actual attempts.

Fantasizing about suicide gave me a euphoria like that from a shot of morphine. It lifted my mood; I forgot my problems. I could do whatever I wanted, say what I pleased, because I knew I wouldn't be around to face the consequences. When my mood began to slip, I started to obsess about suicide. I felt impelled to prepare for my death. It had to be clean, neat, and pain-free. I'd wash all the bed linens and make up my bed in military or hospital style, all tight and precisely folded. Or I'd tidy and scrub the whole house, so that when they found me dead, it would be a perfectly clean place.

Planning never took much time: I kept a plan in my head at all times, in case of emergency. I started that at 16, on a date. The boy offered me drugs, and I accepted. I woke up the next morning out in the woods, my groin hurting badly. Even now, I am afraid of being alone or lost in woods.

After that, I started to carry a bottle of Aspirin or Tylenol to take immediately, if I needed it. As a nurse, I could find out the lethal dose of a drug, and I made sure to have an overdose available at all times - in my purse or pocket, in my car, and at home. Having these drugs around gave me a sense of safety that I

found intoxicating. Whenever I felt out of control at work, I could reach into my pocket and touch the two vials of heart medication that I thought would kill me instantly. I felt better at once. The sense of control I felt from being able to kill myself gave me the strength I needed to keep going.

The actual attempts were powerfully mood-altering. As I tried to kill myself, I would feel a sense of peace, contentment, and serenity filling my thoughts. I felt great power, as though I were laughing in the face of God, the world, and all those unbelievers who said, "she only does this for attention."

Having to wake up and face nurses, doctors, and my family - that was never part of my fantasy. It was hell on earth. Most people seem to think that if you try to kill yourself, your family members will cry over you and beg your forgiveness and try to keep you happy for the rest of your life. After I'd made several attempts, my family would simply call the hospital and ask which room I was in this time. They'd tell the nurse they might visit later, if they had time. I was left to the wolves.

The only thing my caregivers understood about my suicidal behavior was that I had to be crazy to try to take my own life. They had no sympathy. In most cases, in fact, they were pissed off because I'd given them more work. They were already overworked and underpaid, running around frantically trying to save the lives of people who wanted to live. And there I was, wanting to die. They resented it. I took a lot of abuse from health-care professionals, and I felt I deserved it. I was an ICU nurse; I should know better. The shame I felt started the suicide cycle all over again.

One time, I woke up to find I wasn't dead but very much alive and in the same ICU that I'd woken up in for the previous

six suicide attempts. And my anger exploded. God help the ICU nurses who were around at that moment! I was physically violent toward myself and others. I screamed like a madwoman for hours or days. They had to put me in every type of restraining device known to man, some with key, some without. I said and did things that I only vaguely remember.

Failure and shame came crashing down on me like a ton of bricks. When the nurse came with my family members I swore solemnly never to try suicide again. Whenever I said those words, I lied. My family was furious with me and wished I would die and get it over with - and that was exactly what I wanted. There they were, my mother, my husband, my children, staring at me with such pain and anger that, for a moment, I saw clearly how self-centered I really was. I felt deeply ashamed.

After each bout in the hospital, people were afraid of me. My family didn't trust me - why should they? I was watched and babysat at all times. My friends, co-workers, and family ridiculed me: "Why would a smart girl like you do a stupid thing like that?" or "You know better than that now, don't you." Back to shame and worthlessness, and the suicide cycle started up again.

Here is how it all ended:

I was sitting on the couch in late June, going over in my mind the events of the last few months. I had been released from a treatment center after a series of shock treatments for my depression and suicide problems. I had come home, to a small town in Alabama. My husband and children expected much more of me than I felt I had to give them. I knew in my heart that my marriage was over, and that devastated me. It was only a matter of time before I screwed up again. Along with my suicide addiction, I had problems with alcoholism, drug addiction, and

addictions to sex, love, food, and gambling. I had to repeat any action that altered my mood, whatever the consequence.

I walked off and left my family for a sexual relationship in another state. Nobody knew me there, and I thought I could start fresh. I didn't find out until too late how physically and mentally abusive he was. I started working in a hospital, as a critical care nurse. My home life was hell, and I missed my husband and children terribly. I drank and took a lot of Xanax, which I got from a local physician. I started to steal narcotics from work. I fantasized about suicide all the time. I even tried to see my children one last time, but my husband called the police and got them to take me away.

At work, the authorities intervened because I was stealing drugs. The man I lived with couldn't work - he had to know where I was at all times - so we were broke. The only thing I had left of any value was my wedding ring. It meant more to me than my life, but I sold it to pay for a divorce, so that I could see my children again.

That day, sitting on the couch, all I could think of was my losses. I had lost my husband, my children, my job, my home, my car; now my nursing license was in question. I was broke and stuck in an abusive relationship with a man I did not love. I had left the husband and children I loved so dearly. I was devastated.

As I upended a liter of 100-proof vodka and swallowed the last drops, I thought what the hell have I done with my life? I felt trapped, helpless and hopeless. My stash of narcotics had run out long since, but I found five 1-mg Xanax tablets. I crushed them, being very careful to leave them in large pieces, and mixed them with tap water. I had a large-gauge needle and

syringe, and I filled it with the Xanax mixture and injected it into an artery in my arm. The pain was intense.

I opened my eyes in an ambulance. I could hear a woman screaming and realized it was me. An EMT was looking down at me and saying, "Stay with us, girlfriend." I went under again. The next time I surfaced, there were doctors and nurses standing over me. I knew at once that I was in the same hospital where I'd been stealing drugs. They wanted to know what had happened, and why. I asked them to leave me alone because I had absolutely nothing left to live for. No more questions.

They worked passionately for 24 hours to save my arm. In the end, they had to take it off below the elbow.

After a few days, I really woke up. My doctor explained that because of my built-up tolerance for narcotics, they could not give me enough narcotics to ease the pain of my amputation. The doses needed to control the pain would kill me. Instead, he did a nerve block. I couldn't feel anything. I began to realize not only that I was going to have to go on living, but I would have to live with the loss of my arm - my own doing.

That night, the volcano erupted. I ripped out the catheter, tube, and IV line they had attached to me. I cursed and fought everyone who came near me. The nerve block wore off, and I was in excruciating pain. The staff gave me drugs and tied me down, and the doctor was called back to redo the nerve block. Everyone was pissed off, me included. They concluded that I was suffering DTs and put me on a continuous infusion of IV narcotics. Of course I didn't argue with that!

For days, I went on ripping things up and cursing people. All the nurses hated being assigned to me. I hated them right back.

One night, a nurse from another floor won the big prize - me. She was all in white, and she was quiet, understanding, and kind. I let her bathe me, but when she tried to talk to me about God, I asked her to leave. That night, I felt overwhelmed with sorrow and loneliness. I had not slept in days; I was angry, tired, and confused. I knew I could not leave the hospital and care for myself, but I had no one left to ask - no friends, and my family was sick of me. I was licked. My life was totally unmanageable. I surrendered.

The nurse in white heard my crying and came in. She took me in her arms, cradling me and talking to me about God for a long time. She read me passages from the Bible about others who had overcome horrible circumstances with God's help. I felt hope - something I hadn't known for such a long time. I prayed a simple prayer, asking God to take control of my life. I told God that I should have been dead already, and whatever He wanted me to do I would do without question. I asked forgiveness for my sins and told God that I had no idea what to do or where to turn. Then I closed my eyes, and I slept for a long time.

That was the turning point for me, the beginning of my recovery from all my addictions, including suicide. To get from that point to where I am today has been very difficult, but I've had help. Today, my worst day is much, much better than my best day in addiction. I go to Twelve Step meetings - Alcoholics Anonymous, Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous, and Suicide Anonymous - and do the things suggested. I read recovery literature. I have a great sponsor who I talk to daily. I pray to God morning, night, and as needed. If I have problems I can't do anything about, I give them to God, and He takes care of them.

I am trying hard to rebuild trust with my family. I tell my mother where I go and when I will return. I call my children every day that I don't see them. I see the pain in my ex-husband's eyes. I am kind and understanding with him and always do what I say I'm going to do. He knows that I love him, but his anger and distrust are bigger than he realizes.

I like myself today, and I am so grateful to be alive! Life is worth living, and my happiness is surely a gift. I do not regret the past, because it brought me to where I am today. And where I am today is a good place. I believe that it is only by God's grace that I have been given another chance to live happily, joyously, freely - one day at a time.

Remington's Story

I was born in a small town in Nebraska. My father was a fairly successful executive with a small company, and my mother was a housewife. Both of them were older; my father was almost 50 when I was born, and my mother was almost 40. I was her only child. My father had a son, my half-brother, who was 25 when I was born.

On the surface, we seemed like a good family. My father's picture was in the local paper a lot; he was involved in civic clubs and other activities. He always wore a suit. But he was also an active alcoholic. We had a whole different life at home. I've seen pictures of myself as a child, being held by different people, and you'd think I was a happy kid because there were always a lot of toys around. But if you look more closely at those pictures, you'll see that nobody is smiling. I remember how tense and quiet everything was. We never talked much about anything.

Fundamentally, my father used our home for drinking. There was a lot of tension, especially on weekends; lots of arguments, then long silences, then more arguments. I was frightened, angry, and very, very quiet.

My mother had no close friends, only acquaintances. Her sister and I were the people she was closest to. I turned into her surrogate spouse. She talked to me about my father, about her fears and anger. Gradually, the family became just the two of us, my mother and me, with my father on the outside.

My first exposure to suicide came when I couldn't have been much more than five. One Saturday night, my father was sitting and drinking, becoming more and more morose, talking about how everything would be better if he was dead. My mother took me aside and told me what we had to do. We searched the house, and we found my father's pistol. It was fully loaded. I remember the impact of seeing that revolver, and my mother taking it out of the house. We went to my aunt's house - we were there often.

About the same age, I remember going out on weekend nights with my mother to try to find my father. He led a double life: during the week, he was a well-dressed well-spoken successful executive, but on weekends, he would hit the lowest meanest bars he could find. We'd look for him there, my mother and I. I remember her saying, as we drove through the night, "Well, we need to find him so we can make sure he hasn't killed himself." That really frightened me. But I had to be good, I had to be quiet, because I was there to help my mother.

My salvation was my aunt. She was the person who really raised me. At her house, I could be a kid; I could play, and I had neighborhood friends. Friends could never come to my parents'

house, because it had to be quiet so that my father could do what he did. I didn't want people coming there. I was ashamed of our house. It was full of junk, old ratty couches covered with sheets. No one ever visited there. Home was where my father lived and drank. I remember the fear; I remember the gun. We had to keep it hidden where he couldn't find it.

When I was six or seven, my mother developed breast cancer. I became her helper and withdrew from other kids. I played war games by myself. I had an arsenal of toy guns. That's what I was happiest doing. I was a mamma's boy, unlike other boys. At first the other kids called me "sissy"; then they used worse words.

I was six when I first thought of suicide. It was after my mother's diagnosis; I was so scared and angry. Not having any friends and having to put up with other kids' tormenting made me feel deeply ashamed and angry. I didn't have a father; the only role my father could teach me was how to drink beer and be abusive. I turned inward, in my anger and shame.

I remember talking about suicide for the first time when I was seven. There had been a Cub Scouts meeting at my home, and the other boys were tormenting me. I ran up to my room and started to cry. They came to my door, yelling names and making fun of me. There was nothing I could do to stop them. After the meeting, I was in an absolute rage. I went to my mother in tears, yelling at her, "I might as well kill myself!" At that moment, I crossed the line. Those words gave me a sense of control over what went on around me. I didn't speak those words again for a long time, but I held on to that knowledge. I never really put it away.

My mother's cancer was treated with surgery and chemotherapy. It was very frightening. I was the little man of the house, living with other kids' abuse and with the strains of silences of our family. My fear and anger grew all the time. I had no friends; I couldn't play sports. All I had was my solitude and my toy gun collection.

I decided that the only thing I could do was be smart. I'd been told I was smart; I chose to be smarter. My school performance was the one thing that pleased even my father. So I threw myself into my schoolwork. I studied constantly. When I got into high school, I went all the time. I even went to summer school. That gave me a sense of being worth something.

My mother died when I was 14. It was terrifying being left with only my father. I could retreat to my aunt's house, but not all the time. I shut myself up in my room, reading or playing with my toy soldiers. I also found that I could satisfy myself and find escape from my fears through masturbation - something I found entirely by accident. It relieved my sense of stress and tension. I masturbated often.

I also learned how not to feel - or at least, how not to show feelings. That's what I did the day my mother died. She'd been in the hospital for about a week, and it was clear she was dying. The cancer had spread throughout her body. She died early one Wednesday morning in 1965. My father and my aunt came home from the hospital and told me she was dead. I cried a little, but then I did what I had to do. I wasn't supposed to miss school. So I went to school the day my mother died. I finished out the week without letting the kids around me know what was wrong. I knew how to behave: I was supposed to carry on and do what my mother would have wanted me to do.

But I still had to put up with the taunts, the pushing and shoving, and the snickering. So I learned how to fight, and that helped some. But you can't fight everybody. I think the flip side of my suicidal impulses was the fantasies I had of killing my tormentors - shooting, stabbing, maiming the kids who made my life miserable. Those fantasies made me feel better.

I finished high school when I was 16. I don't know if I was really all that smart, but I'd certainly worked hard. My father decided that he would be proud of me if I went to one of the military academies. That would make a man of me. It would be a prize for him, to talk about the fine school his son went to, to boast that his son was an outstanding military officer. I hated the idea. I begged not to go, telling my father I didn't belong there. I wanted to go to medical school. He wouldn't listen.

In 1969, I was enrolled as a freshman at one of those academies. It was horrible. I was hopeless at sports. I didn't know how to behave around other young men, and I was shut up with thousands of them. I remember being nose-to-nose with people who were screaming at me. I was frightened all the time.

During that first summer, a lot of students quit and several killed themselves. We had our own weapons; we maintained them and marched with them. One young man shot himself in the head with a blank cartridge; at very close range, the blank did exactly what he wanted it to. For months I obsessed about getting hold of a blank round, keeping it, and - if things got unbearable - using it on myself. That's how I kept going. I was doing well enough academically that I wasn't going to flunk out. If I had to, I could always use the blank round... Fortunately, I didn't act on that idea. Instead, I quit the academy and went home.

The day I got back was the worst in my life. My father had remarried, and he invited me to a welcome-home dinner at the country club. Midway through his second Tom Collins, out of the clear blue, he told me that I was a goddamn worthless coward and he didn't want anything to do with me. I'd learned not to respond, and I took it very quietly and with some dignity, but I have never been more shamed in my life. I thought I deserved to die. I had let my father down, and I had taken my one chance to be somebody and thrown it away. I was suicidal for quite some time after that evening.

I went off to the state college and threw myself into studying. I went to school twelve months a year. At college, I found something that helped for a while. I'd been active in church as a child, because that's what children were supposed to do. At college, I joined the church Student Union. I was a damn good churchgoer for a while, and that helped me. I started to think that just maybe, life was going to be okay.

I got accepted into a medical school when I was 19. I thought that was really cool - to be in med school as a teenager. That was going to fix me. I became a summer missionary and went to Mexico. I was pretty good with the young people at camp, and that, too, made me feel better.

I went back to Nebraska, to med school, and met the girl I later married. In fact, I was already engaged to someone else, a country girl, but I figured I needed to move up a level. That says something about who I was. I found several new diversions that year: sex with a partner, alcohol and marijuana.

Medical school wasn't what I thought it would be. For one thing, it was hard work. It was the first time I'd ever had to push myself academically. Because I wasn't perfect at it, I felt I wasn't

any good at all. This was what I'd been aiming for, all my life, and I wasn't the very best at it. I was in a state medical school, too; so even if I did well, what did it mean?

I got my first gun. The medical school was in a bad neighborhood, so I needed the gun for self-protection. That was great, having my own gun. I kept it with me. If I went out at night, I took it along in my car. With it, I felt that nothing could get to me - that I was safe. I kept it close by me when I studied, playing with it - as I did later, when I was drinking.

Later, after I was married, I started to think that it could take care of me in another way. I remember one night I was sitting in the closet where I studied. My wife was downstairs. I picked up my revolver, turning it over in my hands and studying it, rubbing it; and I thought *This can take care of me. I don't have to feel this shit anymore. I can take care of things.* From that moment on, I was never entirely free of suicidal thoughts. Suicide became both a way for me to pay for not being good enough *and* a way to protect myself. If the pain got too bad, I could find a way out.

During medical school, I obsessed about death all the time. I was so frightened. I found out that I had Medical Student Syndrome: everything I studied, I got. I got worked up for cancer, kidney disease, and other disorders, going through all sorts of invasive procedures, because I was convinced that I had some disease that was going to kill me. At the same time, I had this gun that I was going to use to kill myself. I gave up smoking marijuana because I had death fantasies that terrified me.

In medical school, I started drinking heavily. One of my classmates named me the Happy Drunk because drinking made me happy. After tests, before tests, I was steadily using alcohol.

My addiction to sex started about the same time. I had an affair with one of my classmates and broke it off the week before I got married. Later, I had affairs with nurses; they made me feel a little better.

My father died while I was in medical school. He died on New Year's Eve. I remember taking the call and saying, "Oh, well, happy New Year," as I hung up. That was that.

Medical school didn't fix me, so I went to North Carolina to do my ear-nose-and-throat residency. For a while, that went well. With more money, I started buying more guns. That was how I was going to kill myself. Guns gave me a sense of protection from whatever might threaten me.

As for addictions, I limited myself to guns, alcohol, and sex. As a young resident, I found it easy to find young women who wanted to be with young residents. None of these affairs ever lasted more than a month or so, but they came one after another. It was always unprotected sex, too - which, again, says something about my outlook on life.

I made it through residency and into practice. I went with a friend of mine to South Carolina. I thought perhaps making a lot of money would fix me. I didn't realize how frightened I was of going into practice. It was a multi-specialist practice, and I was the junior guy. I started drinking daily, drinking to go off to work, and having lots of sex. These affairs were more and more dangerous - sex in the woods, in a moving car. The ultimate was sex in a swimming pool during a thunderstorm, something I found immensely stimulating and dangerous as hell.

I had all the guns anyone could ever want. That's what I did with my money. I loved guns, lots of guns, and lots of ammunition. I was never a survivalist or militiaman. Guns were

my way of protecting myself. The world was over *there* and I was over *here*, and I needed to keep a killing zone between us. I needed to keep that space. Besides, guns were powerful, and I needed that as well. So I bought guns, I traded guns, I hung around with gun owners, and we shot guns together.

My wife and I had real problems. She was the adult child of an alcoholic, and her way of dealing with everything was to use anger and shame. She always tapped all the right buttons. I came home late one night, drunk, and my wife confronted me. She shamed and scared me, and I was really pissed off. In front of her, I grabbed my .44 hand-cannon and put it to my head. I felt a sense of power: *back off, or I shoot*. What was she going to do? Be spattered all over with pieces of my head? That was power. It was vicious, but at the time it felt good.

Over time, I spent more and more time in my own inside place because life was starting to fall apart. Medicine was drudgery for me. People knew I was drinking, but they didn't want to confront me. When they did confront me, I denied the problem: "No, I haven't been drinking." I lost my job at the clinic and opened a solo practice, which my wife ran. It was pure hell, absolute misery. I couldn't get enough to drink, so I got more involved with the woman I'd been seeing. One night, I stayed with her and drank until two or three in the morning, then admitted a patient to the hospital. I finally sobered up, went to the hospital to follow up, and found myself in a whole lot of trouble. Sent to counseling, I covered up by telling the counselor that it was just stress, a lot of things going on. I thought that the most honorable thing I could do was to kill myself.

One night, my wife and I had a fight about my drinking, money, and a number of other things. In the middle of the night, I

started to sober up, and it felt awful. I pulled out my trusty .44. This time, I meant it. I waited for my wife to fall asleep. When I thought she'd nodded off, I cocked my gun and put my finger on the trigger. I rubbed the trigger lightly, with a sense of tingling anticipation. I can't describe it: it was a sense of *I'm going to get the hell out of here, and wherever I go it's going to be quiet and I will be at peace*. I don't know how long I sat there with my finger on the trigger - minutes or hours. I was trying to experience how it would feel, that last moment before I stepped out of life. I don't think I've had a feeling quite like that before or since. It was amazing. I *knew* that when I pulled that trigger. I'd be dead. I just wanted to savor the feeling before that moment. If that's not mood - and mind - altering, I don't know what is.

After dragging on for another year or so, I went to Colorado. I told myself that I wanted to go to the mountains and ski. What I really wanted was to go somewhere where *I* wouldn't be, and of course, when I got there, there *I* was. I went into practice with another surgeon. The same things started happening all over again: angry outbursts at patients and others; people picking up the smell of alcohol on my breath and not being sure what to do, not wanting to raise a stink about it. I did, however, get into skiing, which I loved.

I lived in the home town of John Browning, the inventor of the .45-caliber automatic pistol. Pure coincidence, I think. I even met Browning's 91-year-old son. I thought I was doing pretty well, but every time I had to come in from the slopes or from a ski trip, there *I* was, still drinking and playing with guns.

One afternoon, while my wife was still at the office, I got my trust .44 out. I kept it loaded with the heaviest rounds I could fit in it. A .44 magnum loaded with hunting rounds is a formidable

weapon. I sat in the bedroom, playing with it, really getting off on it. I suppose it was a form of masturbation. I was reasonably drunk at the time. I cocked the pistol. I don't remember the sound, but I do remember seeing an orange ball hanging in mid-air. It seemed to hang there for about 10 minutes. When it finally disappeared, there was a hole right through the bedroom wall about the size of a grapefruit, a hole in the far wall of the next room about the same size, and a crater on the other side of *that* wall. *Oh, shit. I'm not going to be able to hide this from my wife...Where'd the bullet go? If that hit anyone, the next round goes into me.* Fortunately, I was on the second floor of the house. I searched and found a chunk of plaster - covered metal.

You'd think I'd have learned something from that incident, especially after my wife got home and found the damage. How she lived through it, I don't know. We seemed to get past it. But I couldn't let go of the gun or the vodka. I couldn't put them down. My practice was doing poorly. I made some money, but getting up in the morning to go to work was hell. I decided I had to do *something*, so I went to counselors and psychologists. We'd talk about my problems, and they'd always come to the same question: "Do you have a drinking problem?" I always answered, "No, not really. I drink some because I'm really depressed." And I always got away with it. Of course, I could never tell them that I knew that as long as I had my guns, I would be okay.

I managed to quit drinking for a while. I didn't get sober by any means, but I didn't drink for about five years. I was miserable. I kept holding on to the thought, *If it gets bad enough, I can always...<click>*

In 1988, one of my colleagues - a general surgeon, who was my hero, who had money, position, respect, cars, and women -

took out his pistol, put the end of the barrel in his mouth, and blew off the back of his head. I grabbed hold of that suicide and couldn't let go of it. It was like the kid who'd shot himself with the blank in the military academy. I kept saying, "Poor Gene!" but I kept thinking, *That's really cool, that's great, that he could just step out of all this shit.* I was obsessing about the suicide to anyone who'd listen to me. I couldn't leave it alone. People started worrying about me again. I got calls from the hospital chief of staff asking if I was okay, and I told him I was just upset about Gene's death. But it wasn't grief or sorrow: I was using his death as a mood - altering drug. *If he can do it, I can do it. I wonder what it was like. I wonder how he felt, that last minute.*

Soon after that, I started drinking again, and my wife and I separated. We'd both had enough. I was alone. I had a few friends, but I couldn't keep them. I took another geographical cure, saying *to hell with this private practice; I'm going to join an HMO.* But being an HMO doc was even worse. It paid better, and the work was easier, but I was even more miserable.

I finally managed to put Gene's suicide down, but the drinking was causing problems. I started taking the barbiturate Fioricet because my headaches were so bad. *But that's not because of the alcohol,. Maybe I do have a problem with alcohol, but Fioricet will make it okay.* I was having lots of headaches and taking lots of Fioricet. I didn't kill myself because I just didn't have the energy - probably because of the barbiturate. I got incredibly depressed. I quit taking Fioricet not because it made me want to kill myself, but because it made me so damned tired that I couldn't get around to it.

That brought me back to alcohol, and to angry outbursts at patients, other physicians, and the HMO hierarchy. I lost my job

in January, 1993. They paid me off handsomely, so I could sit on the couch putting back the vodka, always with a gun close at hand. I had nothing else to do, and I had plenty of vodka. I just hung there for a while.

It was then, I think, that God came back into the picture. Something started pulling me back. I decided that I couldn't just sit there and drink myself to death. So I started looking for a medical job again. I also met my present wife, and that was good. I couldn't find a job in Colorado - probably something to do with my drinking! But I found work in Kentucky, at a clinic. My wife and I were married, but she stayed in Colorado for her health. I said to myself, *I'm going to work again, and this time when I get there, I won't be there.*

I took off across the western United States, my car loaded with my clothes, a bottle of vodka under the back seat and my .44 under the front seat. God's grace must have been with me, because I made it all the way through the desert - through Colorado, across New Mexico, driving through the night drinking vodka. God must have been at work.

I finally got to Kentucky and put the gun away for a little while, but I kept the vodka out. I started work in August, 1994. My bottoming-out was in sight. First, I carried the regular-sized bottle of vodka. Then I graduated to the big jug. Then I was keeping two jugs in my car and drinking whenever I could get out of the office. I lost my job. It was real scary now. Before I would drink when I needed to drink, but now there was no not-drinking.

My wife arrived from Colorado, and I don't know how I managed to hide my drinking from her. I kept the booze in my car and went out ten times a night for a drink. I started getting

sick; I was vomiting, bloating, and bruising. I snuck out at night to throw up blood behind the apartment. One night, in the rain, I was down on my knees in the mud, vomiting. *God, you've got to help me. I can't stand this. I can't take it anymore. I'm going to die, either from the bottle or from the barrel.*

Then I got myself a .45 pistol. I've always liked a .45 automatic, Mr. Browning's pistol from the West. I would sit at night just working the action and ejecting shells. My sex was with my weapon. Whenever my wife was out, I'd sit on the couch drinking vodka and playing with my gun.

God finally stepped in, through others like myself, who intervened with me. They didn't say, "Remington, have you been drinking?" They said, "Remington, you're drunk. Here's what you've got to do." I remember a sense of relief; but there's a lot more that I don't remember. It was on a Thursday, I heard them say, "Remington, you need to go to treatment and get some help." I went home instead.

I don't remember that weekend, except for little flashes of pain when I'd run into a wall. I remember sitting on the toilet, falling off, smashing into the wall, and urinating all over myself. My wife tells me I played a lot with that gun. I don't remember much of it. I do remember the taste of metal in my mouth.

I woke up Monday morning with a chipped front tooth and the gun beside me, cocked and with the safety off. It was very gently and gingerly lifted from my hand by a deputy sheriff. They put me on a stretcher and took me to the city ER. I stayed inpatient for a couple of days, and then I went to a treatment center for drug and alcohol addiction. It seemed like a lousy idea at the time. I remember saying, "Look, you've got to let me go home. My wife needs me." This, from a guy who'd been sitting on the

couch, less than 72 hours before, with a cocked gun, dead drunk. I promised to go back as an out-patient. That was just part of the insanity. This time, thank God, they didn't listen to me.

Treatment lasted a long, hard 16 weeks. I played it every way but the right way. There were some real hard times. But I came through it.

Today, I wouldn't trade what I've learned for anything. I'm learning more about what's wrong with me - about my alcohol and drug addictions, about my sex addiction. I was in love with suicide. I said that I was afraid of death, but in fact, I was in love with killing myself.

I am so thankful now to be alive, and to know and (for the first time) to believe that God does listen - that he was listening when I begged him for help. I still carry a .45-caliber pistol shell. By itself, it is absolutely harmless. In the proper vehicle, it could have kept me from having a wonderful life. That's amazing - that such a little chunk of metal might have kept me from having the life I have today.

Chapter 5

The Twelve Traditions¹⁵

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon SA unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority – a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for SA membership is a desire to stop living out a pattern of suicidal ideation and behavior.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or SA as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose – to carry its message to those who still suffer from suicidal ideation and behavior.
6. An SA group ought never endorse, finance or lend the SA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every SA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

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8. Suicide Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. SA, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Suicide Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the SA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.