

Preface

In August 1989, my mother came to visit me in the psychiatric ward of a hospital in New York City, where I was confined following a fifteen-year struggle against alcohol and other drugs. She brought with her bottles of spring water, peanuts and crackers, and a three-subject Mead notebook with a \$1.79 price tag stuck on the blue cover.

“Maybe you’ll want to put down your thoughts and experiences,” she offered, trying to sound resolute and hopeful, but I could hear the pain in her voice. It’s a harsh reality for any mother to accept that her first-born son is an alcoholic and a drug addict. “You’ve always had a talent for expressing yourself. I hope this notebook will help you through the challenges you face,” she said.

At first I didn’t know what to do with the notebook. Sitting in that psych ward, I was emerging from the fog of an addiction that had numbed me to the real world for too long. My perceptions were raw, confused, and tangled up in the shock that my entire world had collapsed on top of me. I was numb with shame.

The notebook sat unopened for a few days. When I wasn’t in group therapy, all I could do was stare out the barred window and try to figure out what had happened to me. And then one day, suddenly, I picked up the notebook and began to write:

One week has passed since I crawled into this prison, one week filled with despair, frustration, anger, fear, uncertainty, and a sense of having failed everyone I know, including myself. It wasn’t easy coming here. It was even tougher to admit that my disease was drug addiction. But a week later, I am still intact and alive. I am sober, and that is good. Physically my body is healing. I feel good.

Soon I was scribbling down my experiences with the new people, places, and things that were part of my day-to-day existence in the psych ward. I described the unfamiliar thoughts, ideas, and concepts about my illness and my recent recovery from it. For fifteen years, alcohol and other drugs had defined my life. Once I was free from their grip, a roller coaster of emotions washed over me. Every day I wrote in my journal, sometimes just a paragraph or two, and other times page after page. Even when I was drained, emotionally or physically, I usually found time to jot down a couple of key phrases or a short “to do” list:

*Heal—my body must live and grow without drugs
Choose another rehab vs. outpatient treatment
Find a job I do well or feel comfortable with*

Renew my ties with my family
Decide who I love
Find my friends
Find my religion
Write all the time

The old blue-covered journal from the psych ward is a record of that part of my journey. I've been writing in a journal ever since.

I wrote my way from the psych ward through four treatments in the next five years—through the utter despair of multiple relapses and fleeting “maybe this time” aspirations to stay sober. I recorded the tidbits of wisdom that my sponsors told me, and my own words about what I heard a newcomer say in a Twelve Step meeting. Later on, years into my sobriety, I put my pen to paper to describe and record the joy I felt when each of my three children was born, and my sadness when my grandmother Mimi died. In dismay, I wrote about my fear and anger after being diagnosed with cancer. A year later, my journal reflected the unguarded gratitude of being declared cancer-free. Subtle moments of glory—the exuberant awe of seeing a bald eagle soar in the summer sky, or the inner sense of serenity when watching snow fall—made their way into my journal.

Ten years sober in 2004, those journal entries became the touchstones that helped to guide me in writing my memoir, *Broken: My Story of Addiction and Redemption*. Without an accurate “real time” recording of what I had experienced during the long and often arduous journey on the road of recovery, I'm certain the book could never have been written. Certainly my story would not have resonated with thousands of other readers whose experiences are so similar to mine.

But more than anything, those thousands of words and sentences and paragraphs and pages remain a potent and heartfelt reminder to me of what it was like, what happened, and what it's like now, which the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous reminds all of us are the crucial ingredients of recovery. Looking back over my own recovery that began in the psych ward in 1989, I marvel at how far I've come and how far I've still got to go, one journal entry and one day at a time.

I hope that you, too, will take the same perspective on your journey in recovery. That first year free from alcohol or other drugs may seem daunting, in part because it is! “Life on life's terms” is never easy. But by following the clear guidance offered in this journal, along with your own words of insight and experience, I'm confident your steps on the road of your recovery will lead in the direction of help and healing. The rest of your life is ahead of you. Trust the process. And stay the course.

Introduction

If you are reading this, it's likely that you have decided to create a healthy, rewarding life—and that alcohol and other drugs are undermining your best efforts at achieving this goal. If so, you are not alone. Millions of people have already faced the disease of alcohol and drug addiction and have learned the “secret steps” to recovery. Worldwide, people are using these steps every day to improve the quality of their lives. The secret is that these steps are not a secret at all. Until 1935, there was no known addiction treatment that worked. But in that year, Bill W. and Dr. Bob started a group called Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and eventually wrote the Twelve Steps to offer simple, straightforward principles—or basic steps—that any person could follow to transform his or her life, to achieve the spiritual fitness needed to keep the disease of addiction at bay.

Working the Twelve Steps will help you preserve your recovery and your life during this first critical year. No matter what your age, whether you have been through addiction treatment or not—this journal will provide the information and inspiration that will prepare you for many of the uncertainties and challenges you will encounter each day of your new life in recovery.

This 365-day journal starts with a five-day introduction to recovery, which presents ways you can make your living environment safe so that you can focus on working the Twelve Steps of recovery. The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous are quoted below.*

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—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.

*The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous are reprinted from *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 4th ed. (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.), 59–60.

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 alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

The remaining 360 days of the journal are broken into 30-day segments. The first 30-day segment covers Step One, the second 30-day segment covers Step Two, and so on. Each day of this journal includes a message of guidance, questions for you to contemplate and write about, and also a recovery saying or a quote, many of which come from anonymous recovering people. This journal is organized to direct you through the challenges you will face at different points in recovery. If you are not connecting with the topic of the day, you can skip to another point in the journal to find another topic. But keep in mind that this journal progresses just as recovery progresses, so it's best to follow it just as it's organized: day by day.

In the back of this journal is a video with inspirational guidance from others on their own personal journey of recovery from addiction. Also included are video discussion questions for you to think about and share with others. You might want to watch this video before you begin working through the journal. Revisit the video anytime you feel confused or alone, or when you need guidance or encouraging words.

Why Should You Listen to the Wisdom Offered in This Journal?

Each day of this journal is written with specific strategies in mind—including adult learning, relapse prevention, and long-term recovery models—which represent the latest evidence-based practices that are proven to help people recover from addiction.

The educational messages in this journal are based on current brain research, which now shows that addiction is not a matter of any person's strength, moral character, willpower, or weakness. Addiction has to do with brain chemistry and the way an addict's brain is "wired."

Does the following story sound familiar? When you first started using, you quickly discovered that when it comes to alcohol and other drugs, if a little feels good, then more must feel even better. Your friends could go out and have "just one drink," but you drank until you couldn't remember how you got home. Others drank socially, but the first time you got drunk or used drugs, you suddenly felt like you fit into the world. For others it was just a small high, but for you it was the best feeling you'd ever experienced. After repeated use of alcohol or other drugs, you quickly built up a tolerance and needed more to get high. Soon you had to use just

to feel “normal.” This happened because your brain had stopped producing neurotransmitters, such as dopamine and endorphins, on its own. All of a sudden, the normal things in life—a smile from a friend, a funny movie, your favorite sport, a great dinner—didn’t make you happy anymore. Your brain was conditioned to rely on the substance to feel good.

If you are an addict, you have experienced this progression of the disease of addiction. It’s likely that your life has become impossible and that you have risked losing everything that you value.

Working the Twelve Steps will allow you to get your life back. It will help you improve your relationships with yourself, with others, and with life on this planet. As you grow stronger in recovery throughout this first year, your capacity for introspection and your ability to reach out to others will heighten. This is the path of the Twelve Steps: Steps One through Three prepare you for change. Steps Four through Nine move you to action. And Steps Ten through Twelve focus on your ongoing recovery and service to others.

Why Should You Take the Time to Write in This Journal?

In early Twelve Step recovery, people are encouraged to tell their story as a way to openly and honestly acknowledge their powerlessness over their addiction. As they work the Steps, this story unfolds further when they take stock of themselves and their behavior. A journal can be a valuable tool in this reflective and introspective process because it helps you acknowledge and accept these truths, without judgment. Recording your history in a journal better prepares you to interact honestly with others in peer recovery groups, and with your family and friends.

Keeping a journal makes particular sense for those who participate in Twelve Step recovery programs. Letting go, “turning over” what you cannot change, changing what you can, acknowledging your weaknesses, and celebrating your strengths are all important aspects of Twelve Step recovery. A journal is a safe place where you can record those changes, let go of your fears, and express confusion, anger, doubt, remorse, and joy. A journal is a constant friend that accepts your negative and positive feelings unconditionally. It is also a place where you can describe and track your emotional and spiritual progress. When you look back, you will be able to see patterns in the way you react to life’s challenges.

Growth is what the first year of recovery is all about. As challenging as those first days, weeks, and months may be, the rewards are plentiful. You can expect to experience an acceptance of and release from a painful past, and a renewed sense of hope about a future free from the bondage of addiction. Along the way, you will find yourself move from selfishness and self-pity to compassion and a desire to help others. As you let go of fear and insecurity, you will discover the personal fulfillment that you have been seeking. If this sounds good, then turn to the next page and begin your journey in the first year of recovery.

INTRODUCTION
TO RECOVERY

Start Fresh

DAY 1 TO DAY 5



Create a Safe Space

Your first recovery action step is to “trash your stash”: clear your living environment of every last bit of alcohol or other drugs. Get rid of any materials (posters, music, shot glasses, phone numbers of using friends) that remind you of drinking or using. Don’t do this alone. Ask your spouse, partner, sober friend, or supportive family member for help.

You might be tempted to save part of your stash. Realize that this thinking will set you up for certain failure. Get rid of *all* your stash, and trust that you can let go of the need to control your life by using substances.

Write down the name of a sober person you can trust. Contact this person and schedule a time within the next twenty-four hours to meet to get rid of your stash. It’s hard, but you can do it.

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“I will take my recovery journey one Step at a time. The goal is to avoid taking the first drink or first hit and to stay sober one day at a time.”



Find a Sponsor

Twelve Step recovery is based on the idea that healing begins when you become willing to share your story with another person. In early recovery, the first person you share with is called a sponsor. When you find a sponsor, you will have a special person who can listen to your story with attentive ears and an understanding heart.

Your sponsor will support, challenge, and help you in times of crisis. He or she will guide you through your Twelve Step work. It is not a sponsor's job to keep you sober or take the place of a trained counselor; it is your sponsor's job to hold you accountable and assist you in building a healthy lifestyle.

When you attend your first Twelve Step meeting, make sure you don't leave without finding a temporary sponsor that is your same gender. A few people in your meeting will likely offer to be your temporary sponsor, but make sure you ask for help if you need it.

Your temporary sponsor will help guide you through the first few weeks or months of recovery. After you get to know people in your meeting better, you may choose a different sponsor who fits your needs better. But right now, make sure you find a temporary sponsor.

Write the name and phone number of that person here. Program his or her phone number into your cell phone or keep it in your wallet. Describe how you feel about having someone to help you with recovery.

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“When the student is ready, the teacher will appear.”

—Zen Proverb



Understand the Science of Addiction

Research has shown that addiction is not a matter of an individual's strength, moral character, willpower, or weakness. It has to do with brain chemistry and the way your brain is wired. When you use alcohol or other drugs, your bloodstream quickly carries powerful, feel-good chemicals called neurotransmitters to your brain, causing you to feel high. This feeling was so pleasurable that you wanted to repeat it again and again.

Eventually your body got used to the drug and needed more in order to feel high. Eventually your brain stopped producing feel-good neurotransmitters on its own. Ordinary things like good food, a sunny day, or making a friend laugh no longer made you happy. Your body had become a hostage to the drug, and you could not feel happy—or even normal—without it.

Your body was chemically out of balance, and your need to use was more powerful than your best intentions to quit. Because you couldn't quit, your drug use became progressively worse.

Can you relate to this description of how addiction progresses? Take a few minutes to reflect on your first use of alcohol or other drugs. How did your drug use progress? When did you notice that you needed the drug just to feel normal?

*“A little knowledge that acts is worth infinitely more
than much knowledge that is idle.”*

—Kahlil Gibran



Plan Your Day

In early recovery, you cannot be around any mood-altering substances. To stay safe, you will need to plan your day to avoid *all* people, places, and things that could cause you to use alcohol or other drugs. It's extremely important for you to stay away from bars or other places that remind you of using.

Don't fool yourself into thinking you can drink or use like your nonaddicted friends. You can't. Your brain is wired differently. Walking into a bar or meeting your using friends at a park is a "slippery slope" that will lead right back to drug use. Nonaddicts can have one drink and go home. For addicts, one drink can easily turn into ten.

Think about the slippery places where you previously used alcohol or other drugs. Did you use when you were home alone? With friends? First thing after waking up in the morning? At concerts? Before or during a date? After payday?

List these slippery places and make a commitment to avoid them at all costs. Instead of going to a bar or over to a using friend's house, write out a plan to go to a Twelve Step meeting, connect with a sober friend, or go to a coffee shop or a bookstore.

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"Planning my day is one big step I can take to remove the opportunity to drink or use other drugs."



