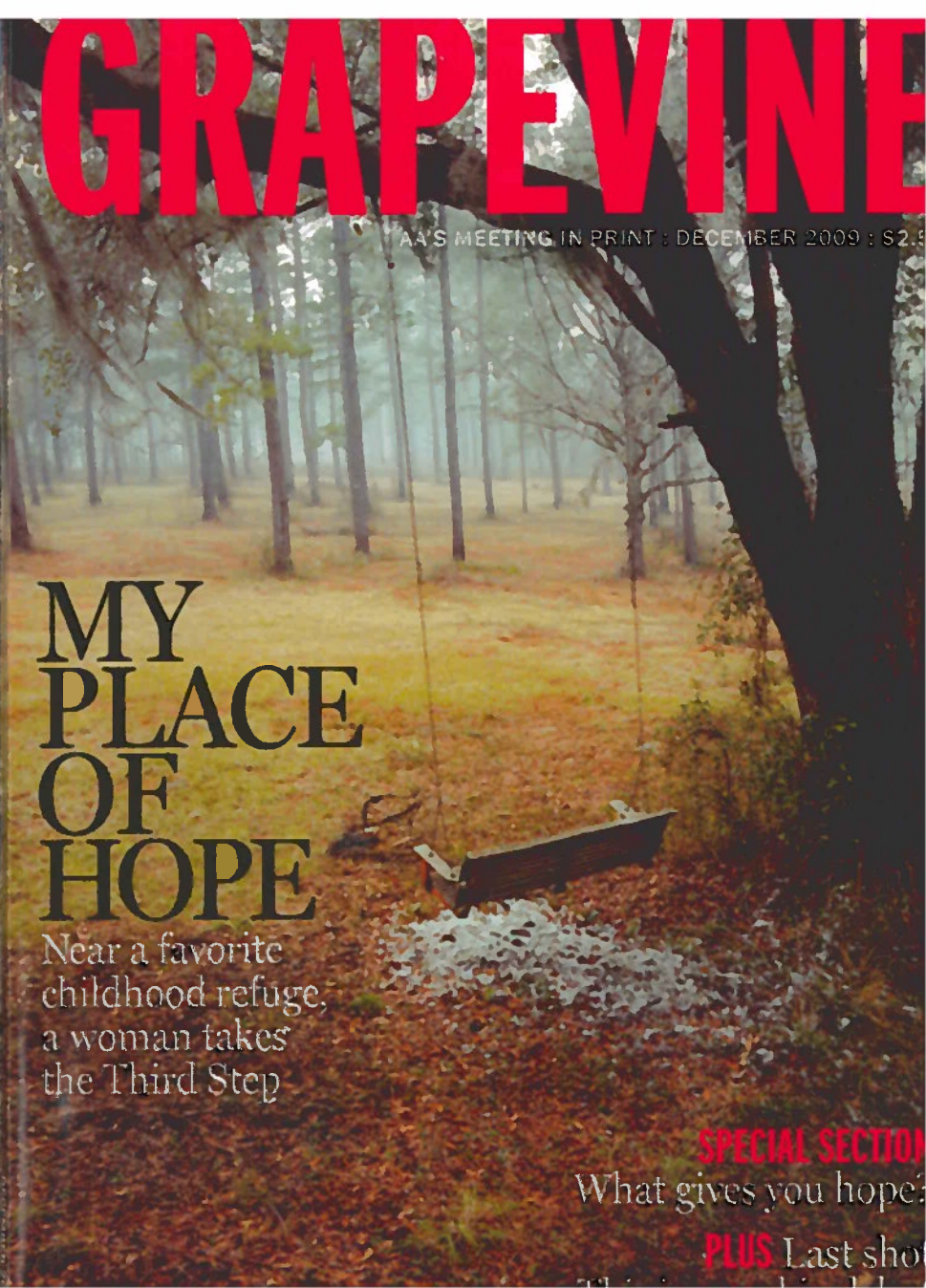




God grant me the
serenity to accept the
things I cannot change,
courage to change
the things I can, and
wisdom to know the

GRAPEVINE

AA'S MEETING IN PRINT : DECEMBER 2009 : \$2.95



MY PLACE OF HOPE

Near a favorite
childhood refuge,
a woman takes
the Third Step

SPECIAL SECTION

What gives you hope?

PLUS Last shot



Overhaul?

Can our literature be as cutting edge today
as it was seven decades ago?

What's On Your Mind?

Maybe our Fellowship is overdue for some neglected renovation. I arrived at the doors of AA in the mid-'70s, when the Fellowship had seen Journeyman duty through five decades. It became my refuge and now it's my home. Three decades later I wonder, more and more—if AA were a house, what kind of a house would it be? Would it be called a "fixer-upper" by real estate agents putting a positive spin on what might otherwise be termed "in need of meaningful overhaul"? Like a house, if we are to stay safe and inviting, periodic renovation is needed, as well as staying up to code. Is AA as effective and relevant today as it once was? Furthermore, will AA be relevant and effective when our children or grandchildren need help? If an ongoing legacy of service is important, what

do we have to do now to ensure AA is relevant to the next generation? Maybe some are already retorting, "We don't have to do anything—it is just fine the way it is!"

Around my home group, I often speak about how I think a lot of our literature could be better and open the hearts of more suffering alcoholics. Many young people today don't turn to formal religions for their spiritual answers, often because the formal practices and language seem too antiquated to be relevant. I wouldn't want future suffering alcoholics to forgo AA for the same reasons. Example: At meetings we emphatically read from Chapter Five as if to say, "Just yesterday, I was working with a newcomer who said to me, 'What an order—I can't go through with it.'" In 32 years, I have never literally heard anyone speak those words. What I have heard is, "Are you out of

your mind?" or "Whatever!" or "You've got to be kidding me!"

We are a decade into the 21st century and we still have a chapter called "To Wives." If our goal is to reach out to the still-suffering, wouldn't we reach more people and offend fewer if we rewrote it as a new chapter called "To Loved Ones?" Not every member who comes here is heterosexual. Not everyone comes from a nuclear family. Furthermore, even in traditional families, it's not always the male head of the household who is the problem drinker.

The line "every boy dreams of being our country's president" made sense for a fellowship from the middle of last century—male-dominated and not extending past the borders of the United States of America. But today, AA lives in many countries—many without presidents as the head of

states, not to mention the obvious patriarchy of the premise of this statement.

Personally, I identify as an agnostic member of AA. In my home group, friends joke that I used to be the apologetic agnostic, and now I am the obnoxious agnostic—always speaking up for the rights of non-believers. The chapter “We Agnostics” can feel patronizing. The sentiment is that atheism or agnosticism is a temporary hold-out for members who will eventually “see the light” and come in line with traditional AA belief.

That’s true for many people but not for everyone. Our book was written by the first members, with only a few years of AA history. Time has shown that there is room for any belief system in our Fellowship, as long as we do the work and keep an open mind. Wouldn’t it be refreshing if, in the next writing of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, this chapter were written by agnostics and not for agnostics?

I am not suggesting

we alter the foundation of our AA home—this is more like a paint job with some new energy-efficient windows. We all want AA to keep working, keep growing and be more inclusive. To do so,

If AA were a house, what kind of a house would it be?

we need to evolve.

Resistance to change in AA is understandable—why mess with success? The AA text and program as is are sufficient for anyone desperate enough to free himself or herself from a “seemingly hopeless state of mind and body.” But how can it be improved and expand its reach?

Our stagnation could mean seeing our Fellowship reduced in size and, worse, reduced in relevancy. AA has adapted and it must continue to. In the AA I was introduced to, we smoked during the meetings. In the ‘80s churches and community centers that housed AA

began to change their rules. In the city where I live, non-smoking meetings quickly transformed from a rarity to the norm.

This is one way AA changed to keep pace with the world around us. More and more I feel that it is time for us to change with the times. I love my program and Fellowship. I love the Big Book. But I don’t see our text as being above reproach. Its authors foreshadowed evolution: “We realize that we know only a little ... More will be revealed.”

I am not proposing changing the message, just keeping the medium relevant. I just want AA to be relevant when my children or grandchildren need it.

JOB C.
Toronto, Ontario

EDITOR: Over the years, AAs have hotly debated whether to update the books written by Bill W. The General Service Conference discussed changing the Big Book in 1995 and the “Twelve and Twelve” in 2002, both times voting to keep the basic text as is.

Y.E.S.

THE TWELVE STEPS

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.
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.

Willing to do the work

A very young AA applies the principles in his quest for a better education

I had no idea what was going to happen that day. It started off like any other day. I woke up and got loaded.

Stumbled into summer school and fell asleep. I couldn't wait to go to the party that was happening that night because my