



ComLINE

Fourth Quarter 2018

Experience, Strength, and Hope

In This Issue

Predatory Behavior 1

Live to Heal,
Then Heal to Live 2

Step 10: Hopping Off the
Shame Train 4

The Recovery Pool of Life . . . 5

A Critical Role:
Finding a Sponsor 6

Life Lessons With the
Last Three Steps 8

The Tornado of Denial 10

How Many Are We? 11

2017 European Committee
Annual Report 11

Amazon UK Storefront
for ACA Literature 11

European Committee
Monthly Meetings 11

About the ACA ComLINE

The ACA ComLine is published quarterly by Adult Children of Alcoholics® World Service Organization, with one free report of the Annual Business Conference (ABC). The ComLine is intended as a communication line from WSO to the fellowship of ACA around the world, and as a forum for the fellowship to share recovery. The ComLine slogan is “Experience, Strength, and Hope.” The opinions expressed are those of the individuals writing the articles and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the ACA fellowship or WSO.

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Addressing Predatory Behavior in Our Fellowship

by the APB Committee

One of the outcomes of the 2018 ACA Annual Business Conference (ABC) and the ACA World Conference (AWC) was the creation of a working group dedicated to Addressing Predatory Behavior (APB).

Types of behavior

The APB working group is looking at different types of predatory behavior. Predatory behavior, as we understand it, encompasses a variety of behavioral patterns. These patterns share the theme of exploiting someone’s vulnerabilities for different purposes.

These include self-gratification – often unacknowledged – such as romantic/sexual, financial, emotional, and/or psychological needs.

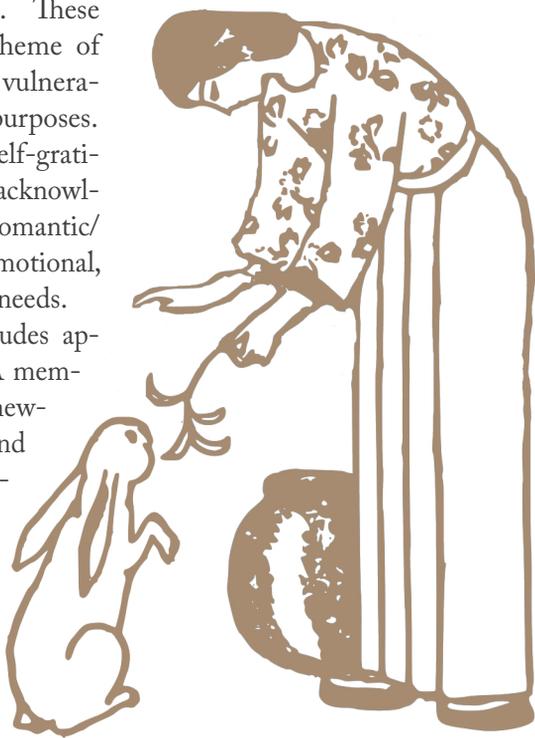
The behavior includes approaching other ACA members, particularly newcomers at or around meetings. This approach is often under the guise of “offering” or “requesting” support to establish a connection, and then the member is taken

advantage of for self-serving purposes.

Find out more

Look for more APB literature in the future, including a special ComLine issue devoted to this topic.

Developing information on predatory behavior can be found at <https://acaawso.org/category/apb/>. For more information, contact APB@acaawso.org.



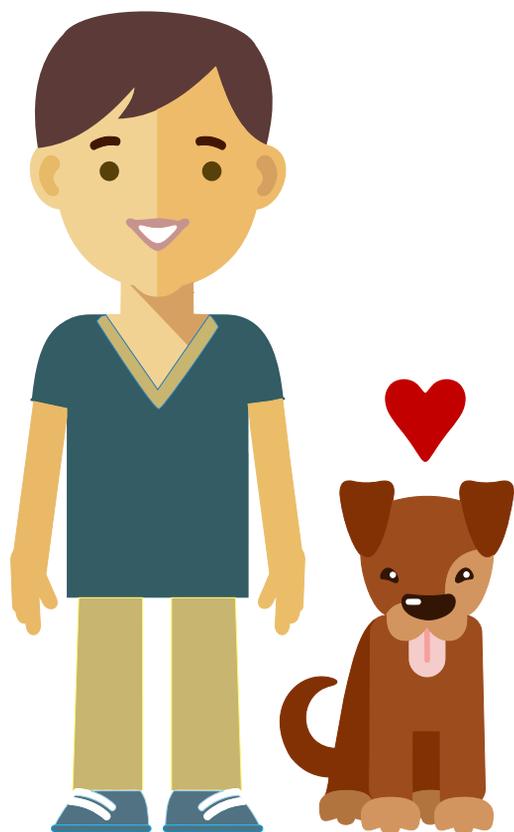
Live to Heal, Then Heal to Live

by Kurt G., Illinois

My childhood was pretty much the usual MACA stuff, with alcoholism, abuse of all kinds, emotional abandonment, instability, with volatility and hostility for all. We had one additional facet to our family life that I have not heard anyone else mention, and that was the fact that family members sometimes threatened each other with guns to stop the violence. Very effective, I must say...

The first traumatic loss

I was the youngest, and a very, very, shy, sensitive boy, both emotionally, and in the five senses. My dog was my best friend, and his eventual death was my first, and still one of the most traumatic, and damaging losses of my life. He was a toy collie mix, named Woody, and I can still cry over him as I am right now. I am grateful that he had a good life, when my



‘father’ wasn’t abusing him somehow, which was pretty rare.

Never challenged the way things were

Mostly, since I was the invisible, I just witnessed the festivities, as the lost kid who never made trouble, asked for anything, or challenged the way things were. Of course, I have heard many stories from others that were much worse than mine, but I was severely affected by my childhood because I was extremely sensitive; I had no ability to express what I went through, didn’t have anyone to express my torment and misery to and didn’t have anyone who had the skill to help me deal with any of it.

As of this writing, I am 61, and have given up on ever finding a suitable mate for myself, due to the constant friction and disappointments of *relationships*. I have always been comfortable being alone, and I am enjoying my time to myself, though I do stay busy with volunteer work, and a plethora of strange hobbies and projects. *No women, no pets, no problems*. I’m retired, I live alone, and I love it – and FYI – I love myself now, too!

The dam broke

Now, to tell you all how I got here. My wife died almost nine years ago, and about two months after her death, *the dam broke*. I went into a tailspin of epic proportions. I had no clue a human being could ever, or had ever, in the history of mankind, feel so bad, emotionally, for so long. There were times when I thought I might die, and alternately, times when I wished that I would. This continued for many months.

Layers of grief

What I didn’t realize in the beginning – I can’t believe how clueless I was – was that I was not only just grieving my wife, but also the childhood I should have had, plus no

relationships with my immediate family that I needed and longed for so much, that were always kept just out of reach.

The heavy price of buried emotions

I cried constantly for months, and never felt any better for it. I thought it was *just grief*. I have never been so completely wrong about anything, before or since. I was a poster child for buried emotions, and now, I was paying an extremely heavy price.

Could only sit and listen

Attending my first ACA meeting, the Old Timers went way over the normal meeting time, for my benefit, and all I could do was sit and listen. I cried non-stop for two hours, was barely able to squeak out my name and to say that I was really *messed up*. Throughout the whole meeting, as I listened and cried, I kept thinking how desperately I missed Woody.

Release of tearful emotions

The next day, after my first ACA meeting, the strangest thing happened. It was like the moment that you realize that your headache is gone. I realized that I actually felt better. A lot better. To put it in very simple terms, I knew then that it didn't help to cry unless I knew what I was crying about, and now I knew. I rarely cry anymore, but I've been crying this whole time writing this; the release of those

tearful emotions was the only thing that was going to heal me, and I was determined to make that happen. I spent a year in ACA with a great group, and ended up being a sponsor, which I absolutely loved doing.

I'm not much for giving people advice, (I'm not a control freak) but if I do, I try to frame situations in the form of question, trying to help the other person to see it for themselves. In the interest of brevity, here goes:

You can do it too

If I survived and healed from my emotional damage, then you can do it too. I say with great pride that I have never met anyone, either in a Grief Support Group, or in an ACA group that was a bigger mess than I was, and I came through it, to become a MUCH better person than I ever thought possible.

Working through fear

Working the steps through my past was the most horrific, frightening, and painful thing I have ever been through; I would do it again without a doubt. I got myself to a meeting and found one that suited me. Even did it online if I had to. I didn't let anyone talk me out of it!! It's not about living in the past, it's healing for the future. Back then, I was miserable and often said, "Please, just let me die!" Today, I'm forever grateful to ACA and life is good. 🌿

Step Ten

"Continued to take personal inventory and, when we were wrong, promptly admitted it."

Step Eleven

"Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understand God, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out."

Step Twelve

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

Step 10: Hopping Off the Shame Train

by Charlie H., Falls Church, Virginia

Of all the ugly legacies we struggle with as adult children, the ugliest may be shame.

In dysfunctional homes, very simple acts of healthy childhood – crying when we wake from a nap, asking for a glass of water, running to our mother for a hug – can meet angry words, cold rejection, or worse.

The treatment we receive

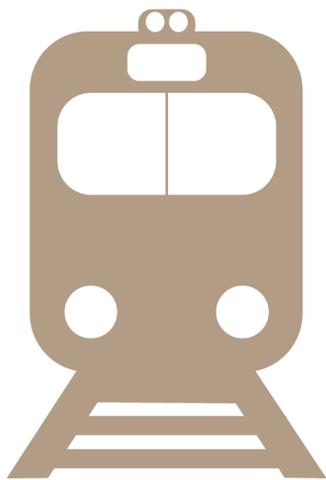
Our childhood brains have only one way to interpret these rejections: shame. In our little hearts, we believe we deserve the treatment we receive.

Without ACA's help, this mindset never leaves. Before recovery, I unconsciously blamed myself if anyone became unhappy. If I really did make a mistake, or treat someone thoughtlessly, the impact was excruciating. Outwardly, I'd isolate. Inwardly, I'd shrivel up and die.

A self-punishing illusion

In ACA, I learned that I was not alone in this self-punishing illusion. "Shame is the deep sense that our souls are inherently flawed," says BRB Page 10. "Adult children from all family types not only feel shame deeply, but we believe we are shame."

Step 10 helps me get off the shame train. We "continued to take personal inventory," Step 10 tells us, "and, when we were wrong, promptly admitted it."



At first glance, this sound like a masochist's step. In practice, it's my life line when I tumble into my personal pit of shame.

The urge to avoid grows stronger

When I make a mistake (Step 10 doesn't say "if"), or accidentally hurt

someone, I am quick to judge myself harshly. Left to my own devices, I will keep on judging myself. I will avoid anyone I might have offended. My shame gets worse, and my urge to avoid gets stronger. Sadly, I have killed valued friendships by getting swallowed by my own shame.

Healing wounds before they fester

When I use Step 10, I can heal wounds before they fester. But my amend must be sincere.

First, I ask myself what exactly did I do wrong, or, "If this happened again today, would I handle it differently?" Talking over possible mistakes with recovery friends gives me greater clarity, and helps me to emerge from hiding.

Second, I give the person I hurt more than an apology. I let them know what I did wrong, what I learned, and what I will do differently going forward. I let them know their well-being is important to me. Then I listen.

Three powerful gifts

When I work it with my heart, Step 10 gives me three powerful gifts:

- It helps me think of mistakes as something to learn from, not to agonize over.
- It helps me heal relationships that I might otherwise sabotage.
- Most importantly, it frees me from shame, by giving me and those in my life a fresh start – a start that begins with a sincere, "I was wrong."

I can't always say everyone accepts my amends joyously, but that's not the point. By looking someone in the eye, without evasion, I open my heart, and I invite them to open theirs. Instead of a life sentence of shame for what often is a minor offense, it helps us both to move forward.

A newfound freedom

And I gain the freedom to be me – sometimes right, sometimes wrong – but always human. And mostly, I get to be part of a loving, human family in recovery. 🌱

The Recovery Pool of Life

by Larry A., New York and Mardi M., Montana

Recently I've been enjoying life at the beach, and I find the water mesmerizing. There I've discovered a connection between the water and my journey of recovery.

A glimpse of the journey

In the beginning, I put my pinky toe in the inflatable kiddie pool and caught a glimpse of the long and painful journey that stretched out in front of me.

Wading into the deep end...

As I continued to work my program, my courage grew and I put my toes in the shallow end of the recovery pool. After a while, I carefully waded into the deep end, and bravely let go of my flotation device. When I was ready, my hands and feet started waving back and forth; I was treading water, and I felt safe.

... and diving deeper

At some point, I knew I needed to dive deep to uncover the dark and painful memories of the past; I knew I had to bring these memories to the surface. When I was ready, I took my Inner Child by the hand (assuring him I would be there always to protect him), and we began the descent into the winding caverns of darkness. We were not alone, as Fellow Travelers swam alongside us, assuring our safety.

Free from the bondage of the past

To dive deeply into the waters of your family of origin is not for the faint of heart. Some are afraid of drowning; some are terrified they may never return, and sometimes it's just too painful. But, we all deserve to be free from the bondage of the past and to wake up to our worthiness and value.

Our birthright

It is our birthright to love and be loved, to experience a wonderful life and to bask in the joy of sunshine. Fellow Travelers and Higher Power, I am forever grateful for the gifts you are and for the gifts you've given me.

Here we all are, gathered at the recovery pool of life. The water is fine regardless of where we happen to be.

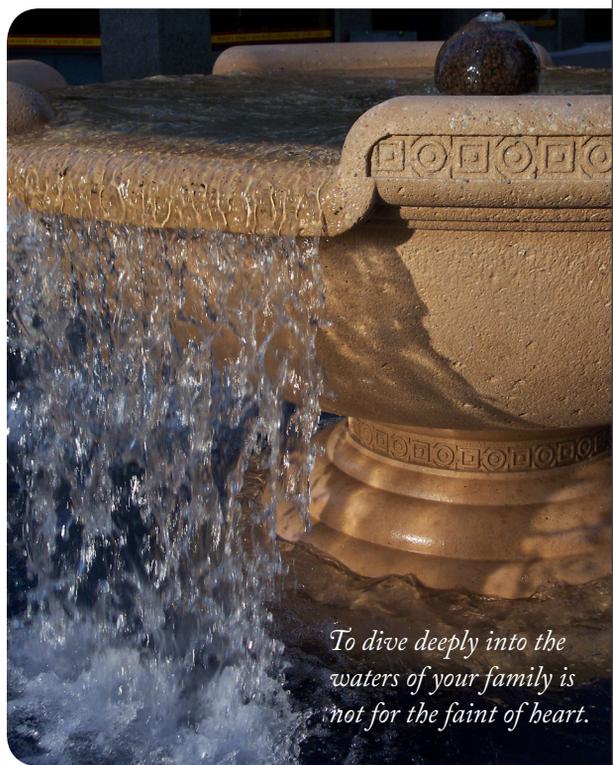
Submerging in this deep, subconscious exploration, I've discovered the work to be gratifying and frustrating, insightful and maddening, challenging and deliberate.

Higher Power is my trusted lifeguard

Higher Power, thank you for being my trusted Lifeguard, always keeping me safe. Thank you for consistently sending me wonderful Fellow Travelers who challenge me to do the next right thing. They always appear at the most perfect times, as a reminder for me to wake up from my sleepwalking.

Today I'm here at Robert Moses State Park, laying on the beach. It's 85 degrees and sunny.

Life is good. Waking up is hard. ✨



To dive deeply into the waters of your family is not for the faint of heart.

A Critical Role: Finding a Sponsor

by Erin D., Oaks, Pennsylvania

In most twelve-step fellowships, newcomers everywhere hear the same advice in their first few meetings: “Get a sponsor”, or “Find a trusted guide to ensure your long-term recovery.” It just doesn’t seem as easy for adult children to do.

Here we are, standing alone

As beginners, adult children often come into those first meetings traumatized, and are often re-traumatized as we hear each other’s stories, or as we begin to read ACA literature.

Our familiarity with trauma beckons us to isolate even further, making it extremely difficult for us to reach out for help. Here we are, standing alone at the threshold of recovery, trembling in fear.

The critical question

At the 2018 ACA World Convention (AWC), a workshop on sponsorship, Charlie H. and Majbrit M. both asked a critical question. “What is beneath the fear of having a sponsor or of being a sponsor?” We were asked to look at our fear as being at the root of our woundedness as Adult Children.

Can a sponsor be trusted?

I know my low self-esteem made me too insecure to share in large groups, I didn’t believe I was equal, and my critical parent was running rampant. Could a sponsor be trusted and sincere, or were they just trying to “be important”? Were they going to be too pushy?

It takes courage

Besides, I already had a therapist, and I already knew a thing or two. Did I really need a sponsor? Did I have enough courage to become part of the group and follow through to find a sponsor?

Stepping out of isolation

I finally admitted I was tired of trying to do recovery alone; I found a sponsor. In my Fifth Step, I found the strength to step out of isolation, admit to another person, and receive non-judgmental feedback about my thoughts and behaviors. All of this coming from love, allowed me to remove the blinders and realize how I got in my own way and learned a gentleness with myself I’d never known before. Without a sponsor or a voice of loving guidance, I was destined to hear only the critical noise in my head, damning myself or someone else. Having a sponsor led me out of isolation, encouraged me to connect with others and was always there for me. Sponsorship gave me courage, strength and hope. This connection keeps me coming back.

Becoming a sponsor

Other group members echoed reoccurring obstacles getting in the way of becoming a sponsor: self-doubt, lack of clarity on guidance, fear of causing more harm than good, and basic insecurity of being a sponsor. Then there’s the old adage: our need to do sponsorship perfectly, compounded by the fear of being rejected if we don’t.

Promise Ten

“Fears of failure and success will leave us, as we intuitively make healthier choices.”

Promise Eleven

“With help from our ACA support group, we will slowly release our dysfunctional behaviors..”

Promise Twelve

“Gradually, with our Higher Power help, we will learn to expect the best and get it.”

On being ready

Several more considerations for sponsorship surfaced with Majbrit and Charlie:

1. Have I gone through the Steps, Traditions and Laundry List with my sponsor?
2. Do I know how to convey my own experiences through the Steps?
3. Can I come from a loving, non-judgmental place?
4. Can I make suggestions as a trusted guide, not an authority?
5. Do I realize that am not responsible for a sponsee's progress?
6. Do I understand that the initial goal is to help the newcomer start over with gentleness, love, and accountability and becoming healthy and self-sufficient?
7. When encountering conflict with a Fellow Traveler, do I ask myself: "What would a healthy family do?"
8. Do I know I am not a substitute for a professional therapist?
9. Do I realize that I am just a trusted guide, and not an authority on what a sponsee should do?
10. Do I realize I am NOT being a sponsor in order to stroke my ego?

Defining expectations

When asked to be a sponsor there are some questions you may want to ask:

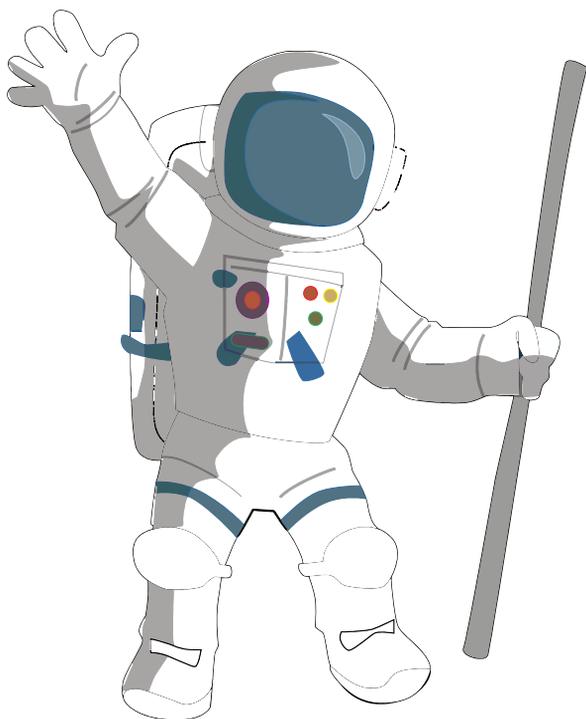
1. What is it you see in me that you want? How do you think you can get it from me?
2. What are your expectations of me?
3. How many meetings are you willing to attend?
4. What are you reading?

Ask yourself...

Finally, you may want to ask yourself these questions:

1. Are there least three other same gender friends in the program?
2. Are we encouraging and preparing sponsees to become sponsors?

When someone reaches out to us, we may very well have something to offer; we may just not know it yet. Others may see some-



thing in us that gives them hope, and by sharing our experience, strength and hope we all grow on this incredible, spiritual journey to wholeness.

Getting to "yes"

If you are someone who came into a room and can't find someone who is ready to say *yes* to sponsoring, there are other options available. At www.adultchildren.org, you can go to **Resources** and click on **Sponsorship Fellow Traveler**. There you will find valuable information to locate a sponsor.

Humility and willingness

Humility and the willingness to receive, to trust, to give back what I've continually been given, opens me up to greater spiritual gifts.

Sponsorship is a relationship of equals, nurturing spiritual growth which paves a new way of living as actors, not reactors.

And that, my dear friend, rewards us with the promise of joy, peace and serenity! ✨

Life Lessons With the Last Three Steps

by Chris W.

I am an adult child, and both of my folks are alcoholics. They are both sober now, but it's been a long and nasty road filled with anger, fear, denial and abandonment.

Grief without bitterness

Two things I really needed to understand were my grief and how to accept it without the bitterness. I listened to my priests, pastors, and evangelists; I read books, kept a journal and talked with trusted friends. But I still lacked that ONE thing – the willingness to let go and give it all to God (my Higher Power).

I could not just surrender and *trust* God in my day-to-day living. By not trusting God, I relied on my own willpower to get me through my ordeals.

Oh, don't get me wrong. I would pray to God, but then I'd manipulate the people and situations to get them in-line with what I was sure was God's plan for my life. Pride and arrogance blinded me from the peace of humility.

A road of spiritual destruction

Blind to my addiction to excitement, financial irresponsibility and approval-seeking behavior, I was led down a road of spiritual destruction. I felt responsible for everyone's happiness and was hell-bent on fixing the world, even when the world wanted me to shut up and mind my own business.

Eventually, my character defects of bitterness, anger, envy and self-righteousness, eclipsed God. I thought I had become my own Higher Power.

My mind was on me and my problems all the time, and it left no room for worshipping God. I wasn't asking God for counsel; I was simply reacting to life in an erratic, unhealthy way.

In short, I sought my own counsel. I spent my waking hours murmuring and complaining about my job because I perceived I was not respected and promoted as "I deserved."

The dark place

I introduced strife into the office because I wanted revenge. I was blind to my own manipulative, destructive behavior. I finally hit bottom with a mental breakdown. I was diagnosed with depression and anxiety, and I took a leave of absence. Medicated, I laid on my sofa watching B-grade horror movies for a month. That's when I truly experienced *Sheol*, that dark place void of wisdom and God.

Numb to pain or pleasure

What I learned through my ACA program is that my critical parent kept me numb to my own grief and would not allow me to enjoy life. I assumed everything was my fault, that I was a bad person and unworthy of love. My family's mental strongholds of anger and blame were the only skills I had to defend myself.

My wounded and desolate child became an adult child acting out the shame and isolation of my childhood. I believed this little child had failed – that I was in fact a failure, not only to my parents, but also to God.

Grieving and reconnecting

Especially ashamed of my adult behaviors, I grieved severed relationships. If I ever hoped to be spiritually restored, I knew I needed God's guidance now.

Step 11 showed me how to reconnect to my God through prayer and meditation. I learned I could thank God for all I have, for all I am and all God is, and humbly make my requests for spiritual restoration known to God through prayer.

With a ready ear and humbled heart, I could invite God to counsel me. In meditation I could hear an answer. I learned I could meditate at any time, and in any place. In fact, I often pray and meditate during high-stress situations like traffic.

A growing awareness

I simply focus on a pleasant thought or scene, listen to soothing music and enter a

place of rest. I am amazed at the answers I receive – butterflies fluttering past my windshield, red cardinals singing loudly from high up in a tree, or a person showing mercy by allowing me to merge into a dense line of traffic.

Achieving wholeness and clarity

All of these signs let me know God is with me and loves and accepts me unconditionally. This conscious contact allows me to obtain the wholeness and clarity I seek. I now trust God as I pray to know only God's will for my life. Through God I have the confidence, courage, and power to carry out God's will.

God is everywhere

I keep my "ACA Essentials" literature with me so I have a quick "how-to" survival guide,

and I wait to hear from God before making decisions or reacting to life's challenges.

I recognize that God is always with me, even in those dark places.

The door to willingness

While forgiving others remains a challenge for me, I am opening the door to willingness. I remind myself that God forgives me and wants me to do the same with others. I have been to the void where God is not present.

The last three of the twelve steps, show me I don't ever have to go back there again: Step 10: taking a daily inventory, Step 11: talking and listening to God, and Step 12: carrying the ACA message to others who still suffer.

Step 12 also reminds me that I don't have to go back *there* again. Thank you, ACA! 🌿

God is with me, even in the dark places.



The Tornado of Denial

by Yvonne J.

Once I met a man who read the poetry of Rumi and practiced the art of “turning.” With care and precision he explained the turning practice of the Mevlevi as a spiritual ceremony – a ritual whirling as an act of love and faith. We know them as “dervishes.”

The fundamental condition

Their belief is that the fundamental condition of our existence is to revolve: as particles

revolve around atoms, as the moon revolves around the earth, as the earth revolves around the sun.

Union with God

Their ceremony represents spiritual journey of “turning” toward God and truth – of maturing through love.

This is how each transforms his self into a union with God, thus returning to life as the servant of creation.

Forces arising from nature

I have seen whirling dervishes arising from nature in the deserts of Utah and dancing across the sands. I have experienced the power of the intense turning force of tornadoes in Oklahoma.

Spiritual disruption

I imagine that the spiritual disruption in a dysfunctional home is a corruption of this positive energy. I imagine that this corruption is manifested as practiced deception.

Transformation through meditation

I am in my childhood, seeing and feeling the constant swirling of the dust of deception – the denial that is endured as the norm. Self-soothing is not possible in an atmosphere like this.

I hear my inner child, a healthy protesting infant: “This is not good for me!”

I imagine denial masking itself as a symbol of control, gyrating in an upward spiral, growing greater in its ascent.

In my meditation, this tornado of denial grows so large it can no longer support its own momentum.

Its power diminishes as it spirals back towards earth in ever tightening circles.

Faster, faster, faster – growing smaller and smaller with each gyration – until it vanishes into itself.

Inner peace is restored. 🌿





How Many Are We? Let's update our meetings and find out!

We currently have 2,080 registered meetings, 88 Intergroups, and one active region.

WSO does not make meetings inactive. We only ask groups to update their meetings once each year.

So that members do not show up to a meeting that is no longer being held, we plan to try to contact all groups to make sure that their meetings are active.

Details about updating meetings are on our website at <https://adultchildren.org/meeting/meeting-changes/>.

News from around the world

2017 European Committee Annual Report

2017 was another busy year for the European Committee. You can read the highlights of our main activities in the Annual Report we presented to the fellowship at the 2018 Annual Business Conference (ABC).

The conference was held on April 26-29 April in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

Even more was accomplished in 2017, and the pace seems set to be the same for 2018 as we continue to serve the European fellowship.

To read the annual report, visit http://acawsoec.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/ACA_WSO_Annual_EC_Report_2017-2.8.18-1.pdf.

Amazon UK Storefront for ACA Literature

ACA literature in English is now available on Amazon.co.uk and is sold directly by Adult Children of Alcoholics®/Dysfunctional Families World Service Organization (ACA WSO Inc.).

The main titles for sale are the Big Red Book, the Yellow Workbook, the Laundry List Workbook, and the Daily Meditations books (hard and soft cover). Proceeds from the sales support our fellowship. The European Committee completed the research necessary to launch this initiative back in 2016.

Here is a [link to the ACA WSO storefront](#).

European Committee Monthly Meetings

The European Committee's monthly Teleconference Call takes place on the first Saturday of every month at 14:00 Central European Time (CEST). To listen to the latest call or read the minutes from a previous meeting, [click here](#).

The next European Committee Teleconference Call is 6 October, 2018 at 14:00 CEST.

Dial in with your computer using the VoIP Dialer at <https://www.freeconference-callhd.com/dialer>.

The conference dial-in number is: (712) 775-7035.

The participant access code is: 751895#.

For global dial-in numbers, please visit <http://acawsoec.com/meetings/>.



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