

## **The Front Steps**

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"Familiar", that was Mike's spelling word. Write a sentence using the word familiar.  
Mike wrote: "My mother thought I looked familiar"

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Ten years ago I visited my mother. Nearing the end of her life, she retained every bit of her dignity, but had lost access to the names of her family members.

I remember entering her room at the nursing home and of her fixing me immediately with that look, the look she used to give me when she assumed that the first words out of my mouth would be a lie.

"So, what are you calling yourself these days?"

He

My mother thought I looked familiar.

My career had been involved in teaching, learning and remembering and now my mother, my own first teacher, was facing an emptying black board.

How, in my own life, could I keep that which is valuable to me **alive and indelible**?

I read a lot about brain health, creating new pathways in the brain and I decided that regardless of the ultimate destiny, nursing home or no, I was committed to improving my brain's infrastructure. This commitment has had positive implication for the health of my recovery as well.

Shake things up!

That is what the neuroscientists recommended.

Creativity enlivens the brain by having it look at old material in new ways. Think of the big picture rather than its parts.

Shake things up!

Why not think of **recovery** in a new way, **sponsoring** in a new way, the **twelve steps** in a new way? Why be tied to a lock- step approach to **doing** the program or to **teaching** the program? Think holistically.

Shake things up!

**Life** does not proceed in numerical order, why should recovery?

**Life** shakes things up for us, why not cooperate with life's order, rather than insist on our own?

**Consider:** life happens out-of-sequence: first you have a kid or two and then, maybe, you learn to parent. One usually earns money first and eventually learns how to spend and save.

Or the 10 Commandments!

Can one say, "I don't think I could have murdered anyone. I am just learning how to honor my father and my mother. I am sorry you are so upset, Officer."

Similarly, I think recovery comes at us in a no sequential order and we do best to be prepared for that.

We do not have to learn or to teach the steps in strict order. It may be a disservice to do so. Life in recovery **dictates that we use steps** way **before** our mastery of the steps numbered before them. **We need to be prepared for life's earthquakes.**

**For example, sponsors:** if you have someone new in recovery who is going through a divorce, have them read about step ten, rather than to wait until they get to that number.

Working the 12 steps is like playing the piano. listen to the notes, yes, but, **More Importantly**, listen for the music.

The **number** assigned to a step is less important than how it functions in your recovery.

**Might** we **not** become generalists in all steps before specialists in each?

The idea of the twelve steps working together and flowing together is quite simple, really. It is like moving from one room to the next and back again, depending on what the situation calls for.

To illustrate this I would like to have you daydream with me a little.

Relax.

Meditate. **Later** we can share our visualization

Picture a house--your present house, an imaginary house or one from your past.

\*Read step one

**Step one is like the doorway to your house.**

A doorway, out of the cold. A welcoming. An opening. A safe haven.

Spiritual awakening begins here. The newcomer carries a message to those in the room about addiction, the rest of the members carry a message of kinship. One of the principles demonstrated is that of acceptance: **acceptance** of self, **acceptance** of the addict next to you and **acceptance** of your situation.

Finally, we see how our experiences can benefit others, so we are told.

We all return to this doorway of step one **not just** with challenges about abstinence, **but also** whenever you find yourself overwhelmed by life-- whenever life has you in that Willie E. Coyote pose in life, over a canyon, no ground underfoot, paddling air.

Parents of teenagers spend a lot of time at the threshold of this front door.

### \*Read step two

## **Step two is your REST room.**

When it comes to cleaning our **bodies**, water is a power greater than will power.  
When it comes to **detoxifying our system** our kidneys and our digestive tract are superior to our intellect.

Step two is about cleaning, detoxifying, relying on sources other than our mind and will.

Our purpose is to get rid of what we don't need in order to function better

Principles of hope and optimism in step two remind us that sanity is innate. We do not go out and buy it. We uncover it. We started life fresh.  
We can be reFRESHED.

**When** do we use step two's rest room?

We use the Step two rest room, **when** we need rest, **when** we need hope, **when** we feel stuck, feel emotionally constipated, shameful, **when** we fear letting go, **when** we feel slimed or disrespected **when** we are pissed off or pissed on.

At such times, turn on the Higher Shower.

There is an ingredient of step twelve in each of the steps. Spiritual awakening starts at the front door and continuous throughout the house. The hope and optimism of step two are attitude changes and early signs of waking up to a new life. Beginning with Step two we will comprehend the word serenity and we will know peace.

That is a promise.

### \*Read step three

## **Step three is the pillow and security blanket in the bedroom of your house.**

When do you give yourself over to sleep? When you have no other choice. Why do you give yourself over to sleep? Because you have no other choice.

Many of us have God boxes. They are the place we put situations beyond or outside of our control. So often our solution comes from a change in our attitude brought on by the very **absence** of our concentration, rather than **from** our concentration. Willingness and surrender allow us to be creative.

Creativity is trying something new, **even** when old, futile willfulness is so much easier and dead-end Pride is so familiar.

(My Higher Power **thought** my pride looked familiar.)

**When do you use step three? Again, when you have no other choice.**

Step three gives solace to those in chronic pain, to those in grief, and to those in limbo --step three for those times when the jury is out regarding an outcome important to us.

Spiritual awakening nudges us in step three, even if we choose to hit the snooze and wake up later.

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In the early women's group we used to call steps one, two and three the "Waltz steps", because we kept returning to them and returning to them and returning to them.

Then there is a condition I call spiritual flu. At such time in recovery, as in life, we are so drained that there are only three areas in our house we desire: want to go through our own front door, leaving the world behind, we want to use the restroom facilities and we need to find our pillow and not much else. Well, these rooms are to be found by using the first three steps as a unit. 123, 123, 123..., we repeat those steps until the symptoms of our spiritual flu have subsided.

**How** will we know step three is working?

When step three is working for us we will find that fear of people and of economic insecurity have left us. Promise.

\*\*Read steps four and five.

**Step four is all of the systems in the house: plumbing, electrical, Windows, walls, heating, AC, etc.**  
**Step five is your neighbor**

Step four and step five represent an opportunity to protect our investment.

We have for years been derelict in caring for our lives. A time for assessment is at hand.

Your property is either about to be condemned or is in need of a major repair.  
Re modeling starts here.

The principles of openness and diligence in self-examination signify our commitment to live differently.

*A quote attributed to Jesus in the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas found scrolls discover in 1947:*

***If you bring forth that which is within you, that which is within you will save you.***

***If you do not bring forth that which is within you, that which is within you will destroy you.***

Bringing forth that which is within you is the business of step four.

Fear is natural, but loneliness in doing this step is optional.  
Sponsors can help Sponsees break down the fourth step into do-able pieces.

Organizational Skills learned in doing a four and fifth step make doing steps six, seven, eight and nine easier.

If open to it, the parties participating in step five are witnesses not only to a **confession** but also to a **profession**, a profession of the core values violated by our misdeeds.

Just as one cannot have **heart break** without having a **heart**, one can have no **twinge of conscience** without having a **conscience**. Unburdening ourselves of the negatives in our inventory, make the positives in our inventory visible.

We dislodge the rubble of the past in order to reveal the integrity beneath. The integrity designed to sustain us for a lifetime. Integrity is the life's blood of recovery.

By **confessing** to incidents of disrespect for others, we **profess** the value that we know how people need to be treated and realign ourselves to that value. We dislodge that which blocks our love from flowing.

In terms of your house, you remove the sludge, you don't do away with your plumbing. Removing sludge allows flow.

Again and again, the twelve steps asks of us to rid ourselves of what we no longer need in order to retain that which is essential.

The principle of trust in step five is **not only** a trust in our neighbor, **but also** trust in both the neighbor and ourselves in the process of recovery.

In addition, Step five is a teaching experience for both the giver and for the listener.

Doing step four and five with a Sponsee helps that Sponsee learn what is required as they themselves become sponsors down the line.

The neighbor in step five is there to lend, not a cup of sugar, but a cup of kindness.

Both of you will be amazed before you are .... halfway through.

We return to steps four and five as needed throughout recovery, perhaps on a thematic basis. One can do steps four and five on such things as resentments, parenting, job history, and other topics. One need not return to childhood each time. One could do a fourth and fifth step on "My life since SAA".

\*Read step six

## **Step six is your attic**

The time that best describes being entirely ready is the present time.

Step six is something we do in the present, for a given situation, a given day.

It is exercised in the present.

The slogan "a day at a time" is designed as much for step six as it is for step one.

We are either honest about our change by behaving differently or we miss the mark.

For example, am I honest about changing my road rage or is my commitment today just wishful. We change one traffic jam at a time... Or don't. Step six and step ten relate closely to one another. We continue to monitor our commitment to change. And to adjust our course accordingly.

The attic might aptly be named the manyana room. "I will take care of it tomorrow".

**Why** do we delay? In truth we hold onto defect fearing they might be useful for us later.

**Or is it that we** are afraid of surprises-- the surprise that That weakness we thought belonged to others is perhaps truly our very own weakness?

Ownership of defects happens at a **deeper** level at step six, because **we are** deepening.

One covers a lot of ground in step five. In six and seven are for slowing down to see what repairs are needed.

A Sponsee of mine gave me permission to use her as an example in talking about step six.

She had a particular rage she indulged in whenever she encountered a bully. She would lock horns and take them on, as if by reflex.

Therapy is an adjunct to the 12 steps and in therapy she learned WHY she did that, but not how to do anything differently.

In step six she confronted her rationalization and allowed herself to see how embarrassed she was in her blatant disrespect of virtual strangers. Moreover, her participation in counter-bullying made her environment less safe for bystanders.

She saw also that her bullying reflected a form of loyalty to her mother. She had left her abusive family, but from time to time embodied the most abusive members from her family, her mother.

My friend worked step six on this. Now, in the senior high rise in which she lives, she watches bullies, without joining in. She out-foxes them foiling them in their attempts to dominate the community. She shows others how to defend themselves from victimization. She is a champion, I believe, because, she uses her understanding of being a bully to humanely deal with bullying.

In so doing she transcends her past.

### \*Read step seven

## **Step seven is the workshop in your basement**

Some people's basements could be described as a dungeon of abandoned projects. It takes humility to get started back working there.

The goal-setting learned in step four helps us with step seven. The steps help us take on giants

Not unlike Michaelangelo:

Michelangelo was given a block of marble out of which he would sculpt the statue of David. The challenge was that the marble contained a series of flaws that could destroy any masterpiece, despite the skill of the artist. Michaelangelo worked with the flaws, and, as he put it, removed everything that was **not** David.

The Artist Hand guiding us, we work with our imperfection and remove all that is not recovery to achieve our own unique masterpiece.

## **What are the signs we need to do steps six and seven?**

**When** we are stuck, plateauing, **when** we see progress in others, but not ourselves

**When** we are continuously plagued by our "red buttons", which keep bringing us back to the same type of problems.

Discontent **directs** us to do step six and step seven, **not once and for all**, but for this situation, or for this 24 hours only.

I visit the sixth and seventh step most often.

I discovered long ago that my co-addiction and my sex addiction were not twins, but were litter mates with my defects.

The most troublesome defect for me is shame, specifically body shame.

Therapy and recovery have me understanding where this defect came from and how it supported my addiction, but it has not released it from my life.

Body shame and depression suppress my recovery and bring me back to six and seven. I deal with that shame successfully when I employ gentleness, self care, outer circle enjoyment so and most importantly, a day at a time.

What is the gentlest thing I can do for myself between now and bedtime gets me through the toughest part of steps six and seven. Enjoyment of the moment tells me the seventh step is working. Steps six and step seventh live or languish a day at a time.

Steps six and seven are alchemy.

For my friend, her lifelong rage was converted into the gold of advocacy for others.

For me, depression and self-loathing shifted focus from self to others, making me an empathic listener.

*"We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows."*

\*Read step eight

## **Step eight is our file cabinet of bills to pay**

Marley's ghost declares "I wear the chains I made in life. I forged them link by link and yard by yard"

Scrooge tries to placate Marley, stating that, after all, in life Marley had done so well in business

Marley's ghost silences Scrooge, booming out: **"Mankind was my Business!"**

Step eight is the time **for us** to make mankind our business, to **break** the chains **we** made in our lives which **we ourselves** have forged, link by link and yard by yard.



The program makes us able to make an accounting.

We have an opportunity like Scrooge was given. We can exorcise our own Marley's ghost. We need no longer regret the past, nor wish to shut the door on it.

\*Read step nine

## Step nine is the car

Step nine suggests that direct amends be done with courage mitigated by consideration, neither of these qualities are prominent when our recovery was young.

The twelve steps do not ready the people on our list, they ready us to **be believed** by the people on our list.

Abstinence counts, but not more than that they are more convinced by a change in the caliber of our character.

I thought about the image of the car, literally an embodiment of drive, definitely a power greater than ourselves, a car carries us out of our comfort zone so that we can work.

Previously, we ran people down with our drive, broke laws, left the scene of accidents.

The twelve steps are behind -the -wheel training so that we can be of service to ourselves and to others.

Ninth step events can happen out of sequence, I did one inadvertently, with my older sister before I joined AA and when I did join, she was there as my champion.

Ninth steps can look as if they were directed more by Rod Serling than by HP.

For example, in an anonymous program you may go for years and not know your best friend's maiden name, let alone her grandmother's maiden name. I had known my friend Jean 20 years when her grandmother's maiden name came up.

I grew up in an area of St. Paul euphoniously named Frog Town.

I asked my friend " did you have any relatives who lived in Frog Town?"

"Oh, yes. My great uncle Leo lived there. My mother warned us about him and told us never to go near him or even sit on his lap".

I was stunned. Her great uncle was the man who had abused me from the time I was a toddler until he died, when I was 7.

She had given me the validation of the abuse my parents could not give and HP had given

me a best friend from the family tree of the abuser.

She and I got to know a new freedom and a new happiness and a new appreciation for Rod Serling.

Steps four, five, six, seven eight and nine are where the heavy lifting happens.

The burden we are lifting is the burden of our past. No wonder we need a neighbor's help.

**All six of these steps**, taken collectively, help us separate what we **need** from what is **no longer** needed.

We take grain into our hands and separate the wheat from its chaff.

A poetic image from the Koran captures the essence of the middle six steps.

*Oh the comfort, the inexpressible comfort, of feeling safe with a person. Of never having to weigh thoughts nor measure words, but being able to pour things out, just as they are, chaff and grain together; certain that a friendly hand will take and sift thing, keep what is worth keeping and, with a breath of kindness, blow the rest away.*

\*Read step 10

## **Step 10 is the roof to your house**

Step ten helps us protect our harvest.

What is more,

Step ten carries beyond adolescent self serving and into maturity.

It is the short hand form of all twelve steps, the core of its wisdom.

Simply: it holds down your fort.

The importance of step ten is profound and it is simple.

The tenth step happens all around us.

One application happened under my own roof. Another Rod Serling moment. A few years back, I got a kitten, who had the alpha charisma of a rock star. This kitten had outgrown its given name and earned the nickname "Ta Dah!"

My friend traveled in the company of her therapy dog, Nicholas, a Maltese Poodle mix regularly visits me from Duluth. She and Nicholas were down to meet Ta Dah for the first time.

On this particular visit, Nicholas, usually well-mannered burst into the house barking in frenzy at the sight of the kitten. The kitten sat fully self-contained in Sphinx pose, lifting not so much as an whisker towards the canine histrionics.

I removed Nicholas once and then again to the kitchen to settle down before

re-introducing him to the kitten.

Finally, sitting close together, there was something of a silent dialogue seem to ensue between the two creatures. That is to say, Ta Dah lifted an eyebrow and looked down his very short nose at the dog. Nicholas sat, chin on his paws, working both eyebrows in turn. His eyes following a figure eight pattern on a space immediately past his paws. Both animals ears were swiveling listening to something beyond human hearing. Finally it was Nicholas who broke the silence, speaking in paragraphs that came ever so close to English.

(Imitate Nicholas)

Eyeing Nicholas who sat in play pose, my friend asked "Well, what's going on here?"

I said, " your dog is doing the tenth step with my cat!"

Nicholas' whole attitude and outlook on life and on cats had changed. Ta Dah remained the same.

On your handout for step ten I could have written, "roof, roof."

### \*Read step eleven

## **Step eleven is the aesthetics of your house, that which transports you be it water, fire, art, flowers, music**

Like Powdermilk Biscuits, step eleven affords us the knowledge and the power to get up and do what needs to be done.

A prayer I learned for step eleven is " I will to will your will".

The eleventh step is too rich to reserve for later recovery. Introduce it early on.

Daydreaming has a role to play in step eleven. Today, right now! As you listen, and follow with your imagination on a trip through your own imaginary house, you may be in the realm of step eleven, well, at least that is what I am telling myself.

Intuitively you know how to handle my humor which normally just baffles people... well, at least that is what I am telling myself.

**When** do you need step eleven? Whenever it hurts to be human.

**What** does Higher Power offer? To quote Paul Simon, HP might say:

*When you're down and out,*

*when you're on the streets,*

*When evening falls so hard, I will comfort you.*

*I 'll take your part when darkness falls and pain is all around.*

*Yes, like a bridge over troubled waters, I will lay me down.*

\*Read step twelve

## **Step twelve is your kitchen**

The principle is integrity, wholeness, doing the right thing even when no one is looking. I emphasized the grit in the word integrity. **Grit** is what it takes to stay the course.

SAA, as a group needs to practice step twelve with regard to women: straight, lesbian and transgender women.

Have we the grit to take on that challenge? Where are my sisters? My daughters? My granddaughters?

How do we telegraph to ANY newcomer, " you are safe here, you are welcome, we have a chair empty, please sit down."?

The kitchen is where we share our bounty with friends. **Some** friends are waiting to be invited in, as Bill W. was invited in by Dr. Bob. **Some** friends are waiting in the highways and the byways, **some** are already present, all share and are nourished by the crops first sown by Bill W and Dr. Bob in Akron Ohio in 1935.

Dr Bob and Bill W began not with an entire program, but with a sketch of a program. AA took off on the wings of step one and step twelve.

Step one and step twelve are like the two ends of a bracelet that close to form a circle.

Dr Bob and Bill W, made the program anonymous recognizing that God was doing for them what not they themselves could not have done for themselves.

For those on the journey to recovery, collectively the twelve steps work for **US** like Rick Steves works for the world traveler... Ever having us consider packing only the essentials, and leaving the rest behind.

The **selflessness** at the heart of the 12 steps led me to an alternate reading of the last phrase of the Promises. Rather than the promises working if we work to achieve them, might it also be true that the promises work if we work for **THEM**, meaning for the other addicts.

I represent the twelve traditions by the soil, the farm and the garden surrounding our house. Whatever service we give to the program as a whole, is our working the farm, planting things for those who come after us.

The farm was left to us. Work it and pass it on.

I have heard the twelve traditions called the rule book for the most successful counter culture movement in American history. Think about it: the culture in 1935 was a drinking man's culture and the alcoholic was a degenerate or a joke, at any rate, incurable. AA was the first successful peer support group. AA changed the American culture for the alcoholic. Might not SAA, work to change the culture towards a better understanding of sex addiction?

Reach out. Outreach. Join together for change.

There is a knock at the front door, answer it and invite whoever is there to sit down and share the plenty.