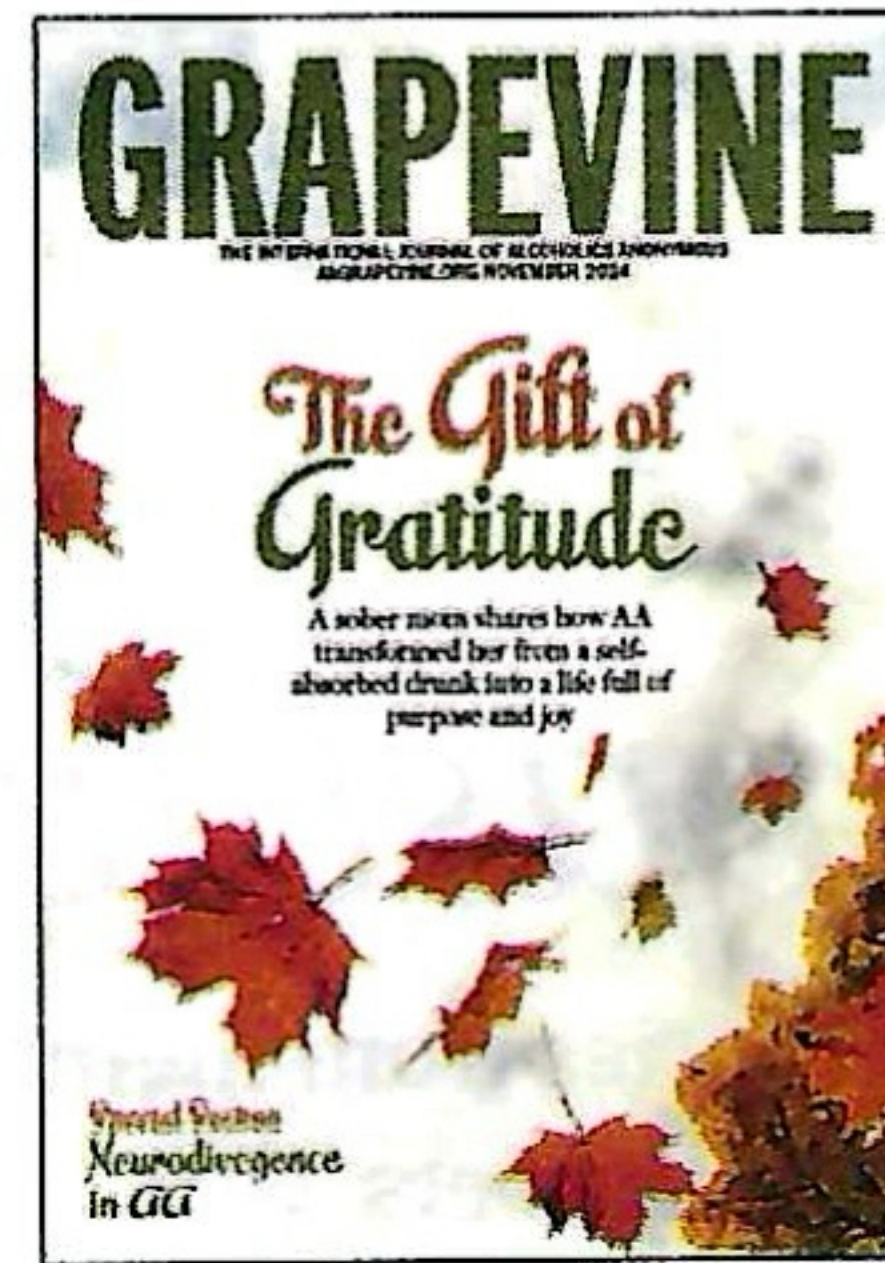


November 2024

“How do we meet the problems we face? How do we best learn from them and transmit what we have learned to others?”

—Bill W.

As Bill Sees It. Letter, 1950



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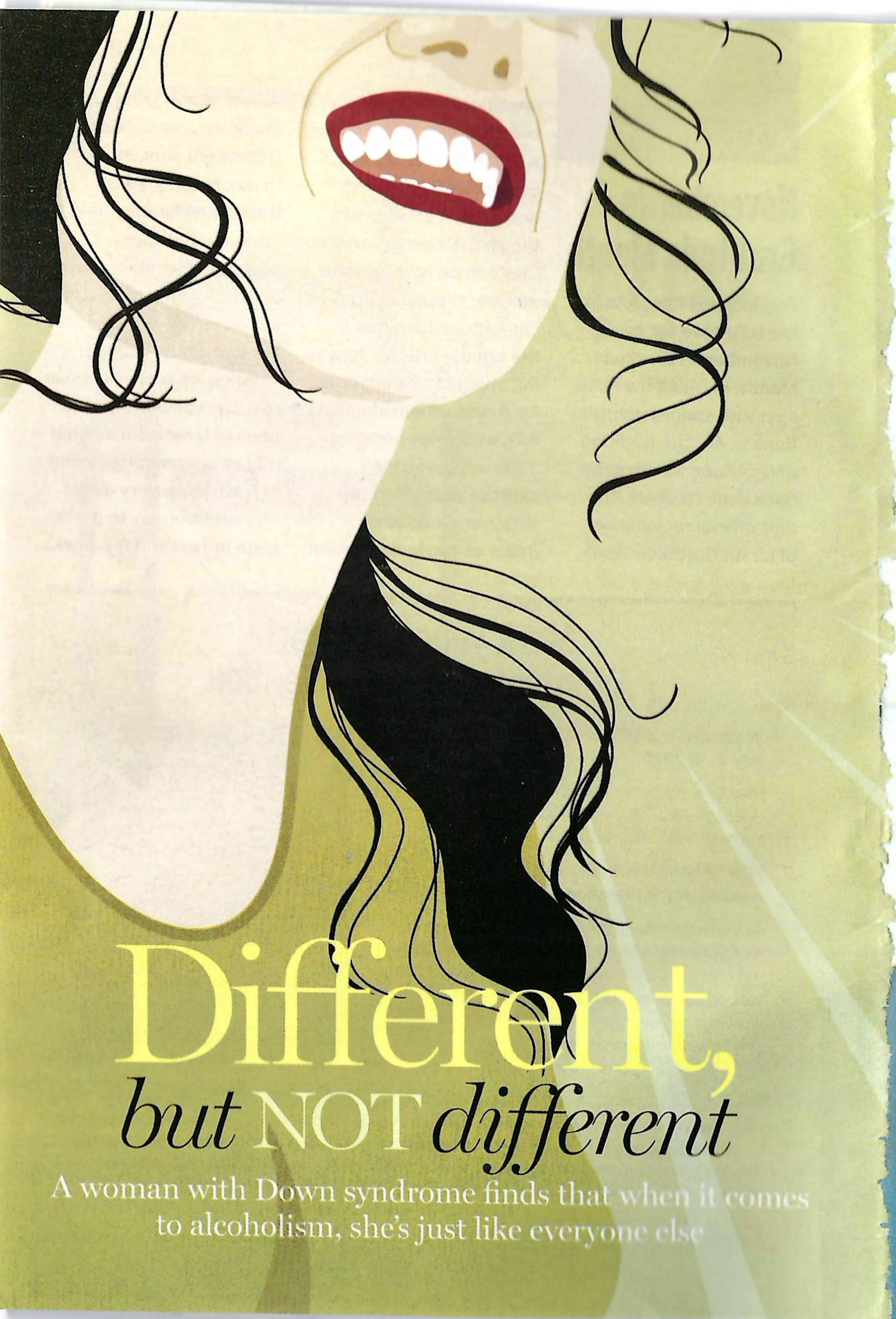
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Different, but NOT different

A woman with Down syndrome finds that when it comes to alcoholism, she's just like everyone else

NEURODIVERGENCE IN AA

WHEN I was brought into this world, I was diagnosed with Down syndrome, and I spent a lot of my childhood in hospitals. My parents taught me sign language until I developed muscles in my mouth. The nurses and doctors taught me how to walk and talk. I learned much more slowly than other children, and I began to talk later too. I also had open-heart surgery.

In elementary school, I learned how to write and do math. I was able to join the school drill team, and I even tried out for cheerleading and dancing and music. I did presentations and I got used to speaking in front of people. But I was teased and laughed at because of my disability. I was constantly picked on because I was different. I also wore glasses and had a big perm. My mom and dad started groups with parents who had children that were born with Down syndrome.

When I turned 13, I had my very first crush on boys. I began smoking in the girls' bathroom and cutting classes. Later on in high school, I got involved with an older guy and started having sex and drinking a lot. That's when I moved out to live with him. We were even engaged for a while until I cheated on him with a younger guy. My drinking became a real problem. Alcohol became my

best friend. I used to say that I would only drink at holidays, weddings and birthday parties. My life was totally going downhill. I was lying to my family; I was out of control. I put my parents and my brother through a lot of heartache and misery—as well as myself. My family was really worried about me.

I got into two really bad relationships. One guy used me for sex, and the younger one pushed me out of my bedroom window and shattered my ankle. For the rest of my life, I will have to live with a limp. I missed work for six months while my ankle healed. My mom and my brother waited on me day and night and brought me food and juice. I had to keep my leg elevated and sleep on the couch. But as soon as I got better, I went out and got drunk. I was a mess. One day, my mom and brother held an intervention. They told me to get help. I had to decide if I wanted to live or die. I chose to live. So I went to AA.

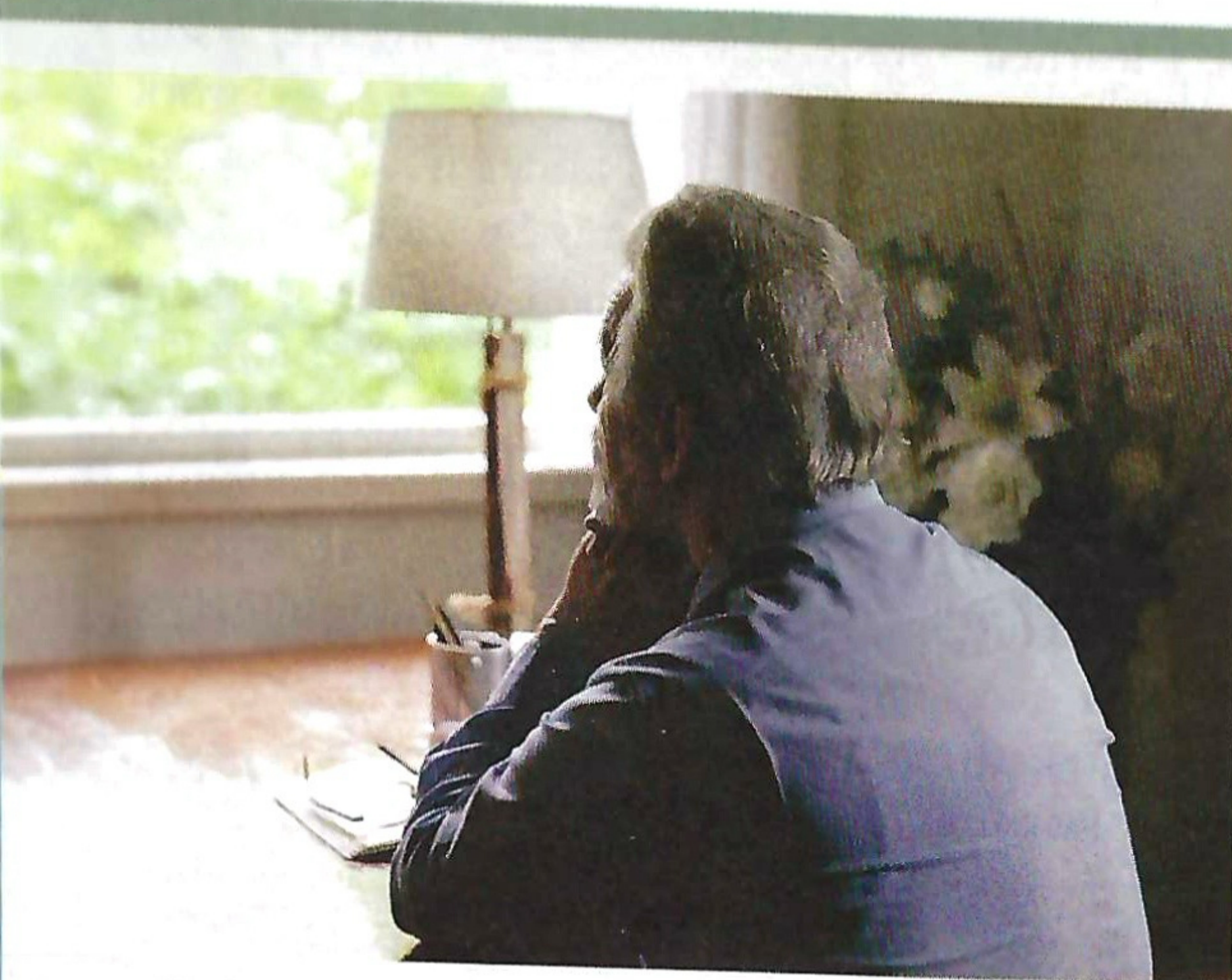
I started going to a lot of meetings. I soon became very active in service work. First I became the special needs and events cochair for the Wisconsin bid for ICYPAA. Then I was the Grapevine rep for the Well Group in Wales. I was also an alternate DCM for District 27 and worked with special needs. I've developed a lot of friendships with people in this program. Currently my home group is the Badger Group that meets on Thursdays at 8 P.M. I want

to thank my first sponsor from the Solutions Group for giving me a good foundation, and my second sponsor from the Well Group for getting me to the Ninth Step. She means a lot to me, because she came with me to my father's funeral.

Now I'm working the Steps again with my third sponsor from the Badger Group. She's a little hard, but I need that. She reminds me to watch my actions and to dress appropriately for meetings and conferences. She

helps me no matter what I'm going through and keeps reminding me to slow down whenever I'm in a hurry.

I'm getting strength back into my ankle so that I can actually walk the way I used to walk. I also am transitioning to move out on my own soon. I'm exploring my options about where I want to live, but it needs to be on the Milwaukee bus line because I don't want to keep depending on my mother and my brother to drive me around. (I will never be able to



passed out cold, I found some more whiskey and started drinking all over again.

Something else happened to me when I was 17—I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. I would get manic and would run around town all day long. My bipolar goes up and down—mania and depression. When I get depressed, I am tired and don't have any energy. In the summer I get more manic and can just go and go; then I would crash. It is hard to catch up on sleep after being manic. Bipolar makes me feel depressed, anxious, angry, paranoid, and have racing thoughts. Sometimes I have felt suicidal. My mind is not

and smoking cigarettes. Everyone was getting pretty drunk and although I was pretty far gone, I kept drinking that whiskey. When I came to the next morning and found my friends still

Darkness Visible

MY drinking started when I was 17 years old. Some friends and I got hold of some liquor and beer, which we drank in the back of my friend's truck bed. We sat drinking

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drive a car because of my disability.) My mom has been there for me her whole life. I put her through a lot of hell. She used to watch me throw up on myself. I would lie to her and not come home or call her. Now she can finally trust me again. I love my mom a whole lot.

I'm coming up on eight years of continuous sobriety now. My life is so much better. And even though it's been a really hard journey to not drink, I do know that I can't do it

alone. I still go to lots of meetings, so much so that my mom told me that I'm addicted to meetings and that I should be going to Meetings Anonymous! I stay close to the Fellowship, and I want to keep going to any lengths to stay sober. I want to become a better sister, daughter, cousin, lover and friend.

NEALY R.
Milwaukee, Wis.
From Grapevine,
September 2013

always the best place to be. My thoughts come and go very quickly.

My alcoholism has led me to many dark and fearful places. I was married once and would hide my alcohol from my wife in the toilet tank or under the mattress and thought she would never look. I would go into the bathroom several times in the early morning hours to take several pulls of whiskey.

I remember thinking that this hell would never come to an end. My wife would yell at me constantly to stop drinking. I would always say, "Of course, I will." But as a good alcoholic, I just drank more. Needless to say, finally got divorced because of

my drinking. That hell I lived back then was not really a life at all, it was just an existence. I went from one

Being sober with this condition makes life easier. I don't get as angry. Not everyone in meetings understands me. But I know God will get me through.

blackout to another, from one drunk to the next.

I have been given a chance to start over and to have a better life. My sponsor always tells me to go to meetings. I take his advice to heart. I love going

to meetings because I always feel better afterward. I have many good friends in Alcoholics Anonymous. My doctor got me started on medication and I have to take many blood tests to make sure my medications are at the right levels.

I find that being sober with this condition makes life easier to live well. I don't get as angry. Still, my life can be hard. I get frustrated very easily. Not everyone in meetings understands me. Sometimes it's hard to move forward, but I know that the group and God will get me through.

TOBY M.
Estes Park, Colo.
Grapevine Online
Exclusive, May 2014

www.aagrapevine.org

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REBUILDING

When he realized he had dyslexia, he got outside help, shared about it and found his place in AA

MY three-piece business suit exuded success. In fact, my personal life and my business life were doing very, very well. But something was wrong.

Late in the third year of my sobriety, when I was visiting New York City and attending a meeting, a very charming woman asked me to read a chapter from the Big Book as part of the opening of that meeting. Suddenly I felt trapped.

I got through that reading slowly, painfully, with hesitations, corrections and repetitions. It appeared that the stress, so evident in my reading, was due to the depth and profundity of the Big Book passage. But the real stress was from my fear of being identified as a learning-disabled person who

could barely read at all.

The speaker who followed me was an experienced Broadway actor whose delivery was superb. The contrast was devastating. I got out of that meeting right away without talking to anyone. I was close to a slip.

I walked miles and miles through many Manhattan neighborhoods with my jaws locked, grinding my teeth. I kept searching for an answer.

Months later, through the fog, I began to tie the word dyslexia with what it meant. Yes, I reverse letters and numbers, flip suffixes and prefixes, miss whole words in sentences,



invert certain letters and need many repetitious readings to get the true meaning of the written word. But I am also an alcoholic. And just as with my alcoholism, I slowly began to realize there was something I could do about my dyslexia.

It took six months to get an appointment with a specialist on Long Island who works with a lot of dyslexics, and while waiting, I began to discuss my situation with other alcoholics. The more I shared about both my dyslexia and my alcoholism, the more comfortable I became with myself.

During my early years in the program, when so many things were going right for me, somehow I did not have the serenity I both saw and heard in other members. Friends in the program had repeatedly suggested taking a thorough and honest Fourth and Fifth Step. Yet how could I put something into a Fourth Step if I didn't know what it was? My sobriety had become like a balloon that had risen up to a very hard ceiling and was stuck there. That dyslexic ceiling kept

crashing down on me and nearly cost me my sobriety.

Gradually I realized that by sharing the real me—dyslexic, alcoholic—I had begun to take action on the very thing which caused so much of my

I realized that by sharing the real me—dyslexic, alcoholic—I had begun to take action on the very thing which caused so much of my confusion, terror and resentment.

confusion, terror and resentment. My balloon was now free to search the world for ways to build and rebuild—through diet, special exercises and learning systems designed to repair or replace those damaged or missing nerves and tissues.

Today when asked to read something at a meeting, I accept—without fear. My opening remarks identify me as an alcoholic with dyslexia—one who is a slow reader, prone to error—and then I thank the group for the opportunity to practice building compensating brain circuits among friends.

BEN B.
St. Paul, Minn.
From Grapevine, July 1988