

Grapevine Online Exclusive

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Web Exclusive: Learning The Right Balance

A couple discover how to enjoy quality time together after their obligations to others.

In the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, we are told our common AA experiences can be an advantage in relationship building, but also gently admonished that "it is only when boy meets girl on AA campus, and love follows at first sight, that difficulties may develop." Furthermore, Step Twelve suggests as a spiritual necessity that "prospective partners need to be solid AAs, and long-enough acquainted to know their compatibility at spiritual, mental, and emotional levels is a fact and not wishful thinking." Recently, I was given the opportunity to test this spiritual axiom.



Taking the ride together.

Over lunch with a friend late this spring, I mentioned that my life, thanks to AA, was going really well and that there was only one piece missing. I told him I wanted to meet a woman who worked the program of Alcoholics Anonymous, was mature, and was capable of forming healthy relationships. Without hesitation, he said, "If that is what you want, you should call Sharon. The two of you are very much alike." He reminded me that I had seen her once at a meeting. I vaguely remembered, but we had different home groups and our paths didn't usually cross. I took his advice and asked her to have dinner with me.

A nice French restaurant was the venue for our first meeting. Talk on that first date ranged from working our programs to outside pursuits. We discovered each of us was a committed AA member who followed the principles as best we could, and that our outside interests dovetailed. Nothing on the surface seemed to advise against our dating. At the end of the night, it was agreed that things had gone well enough and we would like to see each other again.

The next few weeks brought another dinner, a concert, and also a wedding where we danced and she met some of my family and friends. I admit I was more taken with her than she with me. Still, we both believed the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual attractions were strong enough to continue seeing each other. It was important, we agreed, to keep our budding friendship "in the now," taking things one day at a time. It seemed the only way to know whether we were truly compatible was to take our time.

One Saturday morning, I had what can be described as a spiritual experience. A man I sponsor was leading a Big Book discussion meeting and asked me if I thought the story "Empty on the Inside" would be a good one for the group to read and discuss. I had read the story several times and was familiar with the woman who had written it. She was a local AA member who was very active and had helped many women in the program. It was an excellent choice and I told him so. It was even a better selection than I had originally thought. A lesson was embedded in it, waiting for me. As I had often been told by seasoned friends in the program, more was about to be revealed.

As we went around the room reading, toward the end of the story, a passage caught my attention. It was as if I were seeing this paragraph for the first time. The author related how she had met her husband in AA and how happy they were together after many years. Then she revealed the secret: She said the key to their successful marriage was that their priorities in life, in specific order, were God, AA, and each other. Moreover, she said they each sponsored several people; that love filled the house, and they shared the joy of a common solution. It was like seeing relationship building with a new pair of glasses!

Later, when the two of us were together, I mentioned what had happened that day and we discussed the ideas presented in the story. It is a design that can work for us. We have each previously established our own individual spiritual foundations by working the Steps with a sponsor, through service work, and by sponsoring people ourselves. It seems as if, when we were ready, a Higher Power had our paths cross. No major changes in our lives are

required for us to explore the possibilities of a meaningful relationship; to see if we are spiritually, mentally, and emotionally compatible in the ways described in *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*. The journey is ongoing. One day at a time, God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves. Our job is to simply watch for signs and follow directions.

Our careers fill our weekdays. Meetings with our sponsors and those we sponsor, AA meetings themselves, and service commitments fully occupy most of our weeknights. Even Saturday mornings revolve around AA. We lead busy, useful lives with purpose. Our programs are complementary, one strengthening the other. Time together is at a premium and we make the most of it. Dinners, with and without guests, ballets, concerts and movies, family visits and activities, as well as spending simple quiet time together. A lasting friendship is being built on a solid foundation that includes strengthening ties with our families, and building a circle of mutual friends who are active in the program.

We each have our own concept of God, and let that guide our service work and sponsorship duties. Quality time together comes after our obligations to others. I don't know what the future holds. It truly is an exciting journey with an, as yet, unknown destination. I'm told there are no coincidences, so I'll trust in the wise providence of a power greater than myself, one I found in the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous, to work quietly on my behalf.

-- Anonymous

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