**A. I. R.**

**The “Adults In Recovery”**

**Daily Handbook of Lessons**

**By T.W. Gilbert**

**January 1**: We come together in this “Adults in Recovery” meeting as individuals who share a very common history. Society has labeled us as developmentally disabled, intellectually disabled, mentally retarded, and basically unacceptably different. Regardless of the labels and the derogatory remarks from school mates, neighbors, and passersby, we are children of God and aware of our permanent divinity. This meeting allows us to share our experiences, our pasts, our hopes, and our dreams: our passions, both positive and negative, which we have learned to bottle up inside ourselves for far too long. What we share here stays here, and when each of us speaks, the rest of us are completely silent, listening, respecting, understanding, while not commenting. Each of us, if we choose, can share briefly what we are going through or have gone through. We are all here to uncover buried memories, while learning to grow beyond them, forgiving others and ourselves for the pains we’ve caused and endured. We are all blessed survivors, wishing to support each other and heal in this time of sacred community. Let us all be grateful for this opportunity to grow and learn from ourselves and each other.

**January 2**: ‘The first comments I have are either, “How did you know so much about me?” Or “This is not me. I’m not like this at all!” Then again, why am I so confused, agitated, and uncomfortable with all that I have just heard? Do the rest of you feel like I do? Will all of this advice really help me know myself better? Will I be able to really express what I’m truly feeling? I don’t need to be ridiculed any more than I have been all my life. Is this really a safe place to be in? Maybe it’s time to have some faith in myself and my fellow friends and believe in a healing process to take me forward. I will re-read our Serenity Prayer. I will re-read The Problem. I will re-read The Laundry List. I will re-read The Solution. I will re-read The A.I.R. Twelve Steps. I will re-read The A.I.R. Twelve Traditions. I will work and pray and try as hard as I am able to mend the divisions in myself, my family, my friends, and my community, by beginning the work on myself.’

**January 3**: This is a time of personal awareness and awakening. One of the first things I discover about myself (that has been true my entire life) is that I have no control (zero) over what other people say or do or think, and I never will. Oddly enough, what is required with this realization is that I thoroughly surrender to it, and just let it go. By letting go I mean not ever reacting to what anyone else ever says or does. My responsibility from now on is only to what I can do and say. And all of my attempts should be based on being good and thinking good thoughts, along with practicing forgiveness, and positivity going forward.

**January 4**: Because the world has been especially cruel to me over and over again, I have learned how to hide inside a mask that I’ve made for myself. My mask is not really me. It’s who I pretend to be when I feel threatened and alone and unprotected. I’ve learned how to seem invisible a lot. It’s how I’ve been able to survive in a very mean world. As we learn more and more about this mask we’ve constructed in order to survive, we become gradually equipped to take it off and be who we really are, without shame, and fears, and hiding behind false images of our selves. Today I will make every effort to be the real me, friendly but not scared, helpful, but not defensive, encouraging, but not aggressive, loving, and not hateful, and forgiving of me, myself, and I, first and foremost.

**January 5**: As we daily practice the 12 steps, moving forward and upward spiritually, we are naturally experiencing normally happening tests, trials, difficulties, and unusual circumstances. If we endure these troubles by remaining calm and focusing inwards on the light we possess in our hearts, we will grow and weather these storms that tempt us to react with anger, hate, and distrust. The meetings help; conversations with fellow A.I.R. friends will help; reading and re-reading the 12-step packets will help. Focusing on God and love helps. And troubles (remember this) are always temporary.

**January 6**: Human Beings are creatures of habit, and we are human; therefore, we do what we do because of our childhood training, our societal training, and what has now become very comfortable for us, even if it is very bad for us in the short or long term. This may be because we are simply used to the things we do, say, and feel, and the things that are done to us, said to us, and expected from us, even when these things do not do us any good. It can be very hard at first to look at ourselves objectively (that means critically, and wisely, and almost separately), like looking in a mirror at how we think, act, feel, behave, and react. This is the very hard work we must do to peel away the useless baggage of our pasts that cling to our present selves that we no longer need for our health and survival. In other words, we are no longer attached to these past problems we allow in our present levels of recovery.

**January 7**: All of this takes time. Relax, pause, breathe, and slow down. Learn and practice being comfortable with this process. Recovery and transformation take time. The process requires being steadily observant, practical, while making mistakes, as well as making progress. Stop beating yourself up, if and when things don’t go perfectly. Self-education is trial and error, and better realization than before. Reading and re-reading, listening and witnessing, sharing and silence and meditation: all are means for uncovering, remembering, and discovering. And profound teaching moments can come or arise at unexpected times.

**January 8**: You are minding your own business happily walking down some path in life and a side-door opens abruptly with “SURPRISE!!” Here’s a sensory experience confronting you with a saying or event or happening that instantly reminds you of a painful past memory that is ugly, embarrassing, hurtful, bone-shivering, and practically inescapable. You want to run and hide. It throws you into an old place of reacting the way you used to: yelling, screaming, throwing things, stomping, sweating, etc.; It’s a memory moment. It’s not real. It’s simply a “trigger” trying to take you back in time to an unpleasant place. Stop, relax, take a few deep breaths, you are no longer that captive person trying to escape horrible unmeetable values and expectations. Pretend you are a visitor in a museum. These bizarre ancient history exhibits into your past are stuffed dead creatures enclosed in glass cases. Look at them all very closely to see what they really are, and then just move on. You are free of them.

**January 9**: “I can’t make mistakes! If I make any mistakes it just confirms what everyone else has been saying about me for years!” Stop it! Others’ perceptions of you are not your perceptions of you. You are fine exactly who and what you are. You always have been fine. You are a perfect spiritual Being, residing in a temporary and disposable physical body. Bodies die; souls don’t. Life is a classroom of infinite lessons, tailored especially for you. Mistakes (as you would call them) are part of the Divine curriculum. Even mistakes teach us valuable lessons. Start enjoying the process. We are all in the same boat called Earth, even if we have different oars and row at different speeds.

**January 10**: Although a great deal of recovery seems to center around talk and talking, the more important “stuff” involves “the doing” and practicing of the lessons learned, the actual application of meaningful changes in behavior, thought, speech, and intent. The marvelous biblical line, “By their deeds you will know them,” fits almost perfectly into the results column of the recovery process. “Talking the talk” is not the same as “Walking the walk.” The old familiar process of self-deception, in order to survive abusive and neglectful situations, must be constantly reigned in and checked to make sure it does not rear its ugly head as we weed out bad habits and begin to employ healthy honest-with-ourselves decision making initiatives, regardless of how painful these first attempts require of us. The benefits are immediate.

**January 11**: There is a serious question as to whether or not to use the word “Recovery” at all. For generally, “recovery” implies getting back to a safe and secure and whole place before an accident or an illness. If we were labeled defective at birth, there is no recovering to a safe and whole place. We never knew that place. God would know it. Our souls would know it. Our destinies would know it. But maybe in all likelihood we don’t know it, having never experienced it. So we may, through this program and through prayer and steadfastness and awareness and tolerance, be all led by the help of Divinity and this Group to that place of peace and stillness and success and personal acceptance that we wish to somehow achieve. Work and practice and faith and trust will get us there, God willing, which means, as in God’s time.

**January 12**: For reasons maybe even Society does not know, we are forced into endless agreements with individuals and figures and institutions of “authority.” We have grown over time to fear them, to watch out for them, to conform to them, to behave for them, and to “dance” for them. As we are who we are, there’s really no completely escaping authority and its control. They all wish for us to be and become as “normal” as possible, which will not, nor cannot, ever happen. But they tell us in their mandatory meetings about their hopes for our independence and self-empowerment, while quietly discouraging willfulness and protesting on our parts incessantly. So our lives are walking a high-top tight-rope, balancing act, with our wondered-at independence on one end and their powerful uncompromising authority on the other. The good thing is that our recovery program is the failsafe safety net protecting all of us should we misstep and fall from the high wire. So that we can all pick ourselves back up, dust ourselves off, and climb back on for another try, over and over and over again.

**January 13**: Is it risky to attend an Adults in Recovery program? Yes. Is it a choice? Yes. Is it then a risky choice? Of course! Is it difficult trusting in people who don’t yet know our inmost secrets which we are about to share openly? Yes. Will they also be sharing difficult memories from their problem pasts? Hopefully, yes! Will their and our support come from intently listening in silence while we are sharing? Yes. Will we support their sharing in the same way? Yes. Here we do not judge. We allow for all sharing without comment, questioning, interruption, and/or criticism. All our fellow contributors have complete validity in their opinions, which are absolutely real to them. Our collective understanding is supporting in silence.

**January 14**: When life in this lowest of material plains turns out to be not quite ideal, or nice, or pleasant, or fun… and difficulties upon trials within complexities iced with chaos….you get the picture…then we all try resorting to finding unusual creative diversions upon which to focus all of our remaining attention. It’s called keeping busy while trying desperately to stay out of trouble. But in this crazy side-stepping, those of us preoccupied with staying safe and under the radar are perhaps missing opportunities to wake up, shedding the nonsense, and beginning real recovery work towards an awareness that will transcend all of the past pains and traumas and delusions through this communal 12-step program and activity of triumph and expanding heart. Let’s do it.

**January 15**: FALSE SELF: 1.) You are different. 2.) Because you are different “We” need to test you. 3.) Because “We” are not different, “We” have created the test. 4.) We make up the rules of the test because getting the right score on the test proves either you are still different or achieving enough to be the same as us who are not different 5.) Here is our test. We are starting the clock now. When the clock dings, put down your pencil. You will be done then. 6.) We will now score the test you have taken. 7.) From your answers to our test, it shows you have not been able to answer enough questions appropriately to determine you are the same as us. 8.) Therefore: 1.) You are different 2.)  Because you are different “We” need to test you. 3.)…

**January 16**: REAL SELF: My test. 1.) Am I a human being? Yes. 2.) Are all human beings exactly the same? No. Even twins are not exactly the same. 3.) Are all human beings completely resourceful and independent? Of course not; we are not all Daniel Boone or Amish. 4.) Are all human beings interdependent creatures? Yes. We do not make from scratch our own clothes, build our own houses, build or repair our own cars, grow our own food, or protect ourselves when disasters happen like when we need police, firemen, or doctors. 5.) Can all human beings solve a Rubic’s Cube in less than 10 seconds, or run a Marathon under 3 hours, or perform heart surgery successfully, or climb Mount Everest, or Solve Reimann’s Hypothesis, or fill out a Federal annual Income Tax form correctly, or perform the lead role on Broadway of Shakespeare’s Othello? No! But does any of this truly matter? No.  6.) Is it even humanely logical to try to separate (for competitive reasons) human beings into different and unjust categories? No. 7.) Therefore, I am declaring that I am free, and right, and OK, and A Divine Incarnation of God, like everyone else in the world (no exceptions). I breathe, sleep, eat, think, feel, do, and try in my own very unique way, but just like everyone else in the world. 8.) And I just passed my own test with flying colors!

**January 17**: I forgive the world for trying to make me believe I’m always at “rock bottom.” I will always be available to help my fellow citizens when they are feeling sad, blue, down and out, lonely, afraid, neglected, or heart broken, because I’ve been there. We have these A. I. R. meetings to share who we are, why we try so hard, why we persevere, why we struggle, and how we look for and lead by examples, being real lights for ourselves and others in this apparent “outer darkness.” This beautiful community of fellow travelers is a blessing and a wonder, a safe place where we can all share freely who we are, both inside and out, being very different and unique in our own ways, but we are the same in the peace and love we are all seeking for ourselves and everyone else. And if we are ever feeling alone or depressed or sad we can use a phone to call or text or email or reach out for a helping hand from a fellow traveler who simply understands.

**January 18**: Because we are all in this process together, there may come a time when others in this group would like to “chair” a particular meeting. This is great and right and empowering. It might not be for everyone, then again it might. It is always a free choice and not at all mandatory. The format is pretty much set. It’s the reading and the direction and the awareness of the real “give-and-take” that we in essence all know and understand anyway. And as this community is really and truly in God’s hands, we are simply providing a perfect and glorious service that fits ours and God’s needs. And if there are times of confusion, disagreement, or uncertainly regarding the process or its methods, we can all take a moment to be quiet and meditate on what can be done, and ask of ourselves, by looking at our Serenity Prayer, the Promise, the Twelve Steps, the Solution, the Problem, and the Twelve Traditions to seek out the answers, asking our “higher power” to direct us always towards a peaceful resolution.

**January 19**: Guess what! My feelings matter. So do my thoughts. I don’t have to push them on anybody else, ever, but they are good for me. They have value. They do. And they may not be the same feelings or thoughts or values that “Society” (or my family or my neighbors or my friends) try to get me to believe are mine. That’s ok. But it is ok for me to carefully examine the thoughts and feelings and values and ideas that I claim as my own, to see if they are really helpful to me and my community, or not. This is a time and place for such exploration. “Do no harm!” are our watch words, not to ourselves, and also not to anyone else.

**January 20**: Probably, many of our past friendships ended in arguments, jealousies, name calling, separations, and falling apart, due to misunderstandings, rivalries, broken promises, conflicts of interest, doubts, miscommunications, and/or erroneous attempts at trying to influence or change others to be more like us. Our very newly acquired awareness through these A. I. R. meetings of accepting who we are, and fully accepting others as to who they really are, may possibly bring about times and terms of reconciliation with old lost friendships. Our growing and increasing love and acceptance of ourselves may teach us a growing acceptance of others for being exactly who they are and who they are trying to become. Learning what abandonment has felt like for us may provide us with what it truly feels like for others. Helping myself first is the way; loving and respecting others, wherever they may be, is what’s next.

**January 21**: We can all write in a journal or on paper about passed experiences or circumstances where we knew loss, grief, shame, blame, and failure, etc., or we can speak about them in the sharing times of our meetings. As these feelings are things that we have become so accustomed to in our lifetimes, it may be quite difficult for any of us to imagine a lifetime without them. How many of us have heard the following, “It’s all your fault!” “How can you be so stupid?” “I wish you’d never been born!” “How many times do I have to tell you?” “Do you think just once you could do it right!” “Give it to me; I’ll do it correctly.” “What’s your problem!” “If I’ve told you once, I’ve told you a thousand times!” “What did I tell you?” You may all add to this unending list of horrible questions and comments, and then laugh about them! Hopefully they are all in our pasts, and no longer of any significance.

**January 22**: Friendships and relationships can be risky. Our reactions to insults, abuse, and name calling throughout our lives have resulted in carefully practiced survival skills which we use to go to for protection: favorite games, pets, toys, rooms, fantasies, TV shows, music, etc. Getting involved in new friendships or relationships can be very unexpected or fearful, because there are no rules, no simple means for communication or engagement. We are all in new territory, and that can be very frightening, given our past experiences with failures, embarrassments, teasing, and bullying. But our work with learning how to share and accept in the A. I. R. program is making and getting and having friendships and relationships that become much easier. Learning how to trust now takes a lot of practice and encouragement from our supporters in Adults in Recovery.

**January 23**: In a way, “abandonment” and “giving up” are very closely linked. If we experienced abandonment years ago or even recently (sometimes in the form of not being believed when we tell the truth, or when we are asked to make a choice, and then our choice is denied, or when we make a legitimate request for something and are told “No”, or “Later”, but later never comes). So, then, with this history of negative experiences, we are inclined to simply quit and give up. And the giving up can become a very real and dangerous habit, which often happens if we expect or anticipate the worst in a relationship without even trying to see if something positive can come from it. How many of us have said or thought the following? “I just knew what was going to happen beforehand, so I never even bothered to try!” Work on this hard recovery path provides us with the opportunity to change our thinking and behavior for the better. And really listening to and respecting what others say and do breaks their chains of abandonment and giving up also. Love and relationships are always a two-way street of mutuality and grace.

**January 24**: We have all probably spent our entire lives apologizing for things we’ve never said or done, thinking that every bad experience was most likely our fault. By guessing that the easiest way out of any bad situation was to purposefully blame ourselves, we were actually doing more harm than good. By accepting any blame, when we shouldn’t have accepted it, actually makes it easier to then falsely blame others when they didn’t deserve it either. Getting habitual or comfortable with wrong decisions or determinations on ourselves makes it easier to continue doing the same on or for others. Talking about experiences like this in our group sharing time can bring to light what we have done and sometimes continue to do. With practice we can all overcome some of these bad habits.

**January 25**: How many of us too often quickly jump into the middle of a private conversation with our best opinions or learned wisdom because: “We Know Better?” Or, Because others “should have known better?” Or, because others in authority told us too many times “You do it like this or else!” or, “How many times have I told you?” or, Are you trying to get us both killed?” And your real reason for interrupting this private conversation had more to do with your learned responses and learned interactions (what was drilled into your defenseless timid childhood) than your own heart-felt opinions or real wisdom. We walk a fine line trying to be ourselves when our experienced critical upbringing is what we generally use when interacting with others. That type of communicating is called reacting, and we communicate like our parents, or teachers, or others in authority, and not with our own minds and hearts, where we could be the actors and not like other reactors.

**January 26**: Have we been traumatized in our lives, a little bit, somewhat, a whole lot, or always? Have we become numb to it if we have?  Hard to tell? Well, maybe, we have some symptoms that would reveal trauma as a significant cause. Trauma can be due to things done to us, or said to us, or even not done to us, or not said to us. Are we obsessed with certain things or activities or thoughts, which have acted as survival diversions for us? Are we addicted to certain toys or events or foods or shopping or music? Do we collect things or hoard things or refuse to bathe or never change clothes regularly or buy things we don’t need or want? Are we addicted to caffeinated beverages? Or candy, or junk foods? Do we force ourselves into the exact same daily routines (hour by hour or minute by minute) to preserve what little sanity we’ve been able to hold onto for emotional security? Do we overindulge in certain activities, like eating or drinking or dieting or shopping or collecting or talking or pretending or texting or phoning or video gaming? Utilizing obsessions as diversions due to internal pains and hurts that we are unable to confront without help may be symptoms of overwhelming trauma experienced in our lives. Slowly learning how to confront these past experiences through program sharing and listening and accepting will help uncover the hidden mysteries and memories of past traumas making them harmless. They are long gone in the past and no longer seriously affecting who we are now. Like nightmares and past dreams they are gone.

**January 27**: When anyone grows up in a society that quite regularly offers little else but abuse, neglect, bullying, harassment, and a general uncaring attitude, one then sees that terrible circumstance as normal, expected, and to be put up with. It becomes almost a lifelong pattern. The difficulty is attempting to break that chain of repetition, forcing us as victims in this horrible condition either to continue as victims or (because we have never experienced or seldom experienced anything positive) to then become victimizers and bullies of others ourselves (because that’s what we were raised with: not knowing how to do or how to behave properly. It’s crazy and tragic and totally unwholesome. However, we now have an opportunity to change, for the better, and practice lovingkindness, a very different approach from what we grew up with: being calm, quiet, respectful of ourselves and others, correcting any and all mistakes we may make (and we will assuredly make them; it’s OK) towards ourselves and others. We will use the A. I. R. 12-steps, the Solution, and our friends, who know and understand us, the meetings, the sharings, all to learn how to focus and heal and love.

**January 28**: Fear of abandonment is a strange motivator. (Remember those ideas of abandonment?: sometimes in the form of not being believed when we tell the truth, or when we are asked to make a choice, and then our choice is denied, or when we make a legitimate request for something and are told “No”, or “Later”, but “later” never comes) So, you can become either a serious helper, all the time, doing anything and everything expected from others, while sacrificing your own time and energy and wishes just to make others happy, or, on the other hand, running away from all responsibilities and duties because you know all of your efforts are considered worthless, useless, a failure, and an embarrassment. Because you’ve been labeled as different, your life has floundered in a constant sea of competition. Cooperation, unconditional understanding, and love were things you never fully experienced. With this new A. I. R. program, we now allow ourselves the opportunity to choose when we can help, when we can walk away, when we can engage in our own interests, and let others choose their own choices of life events. We can now realize that we will never be abandoned, as we are 1.) in God’s hands always, 2.) with friends and fellow travelers in Recovery from now on, and 3.) open to seeking out better ways to be engaged in life on a step-by-step, day-by-day basis. The possibilities of life becoming better and better are right in front of us.

**January 29**: Why are we declared to be so different? Whose idea was it to change the distance of the “goal posts?” I remember a fable about a goose and a gander, or was it a pot and a kettle? Anyway, we were all tested way beyond our merits, and described in ways we could never refute.  Here’s the perfect description of our dilemma in a poem by the poet Mayer Shevin:

Language of Us/Them

   by Mayer Shevin

We like things

  They fixate on objects

We try to make friends

They display attention seeking behavior

We take breaks

    They display off task behavior

We stand up for ourselves
    They are non-compliant

We have hobbies
    They self-stim

We choose our friends wisely
    They display poor peer socialization

We persevere
    They perseverate

We like people
    They have dependencies on people

We go for a walk
    They run away

We insist
    They tantrum

We change our minds
    They are disoriented and have short
attention spans

We have talents
    They have splinter skills

We are human
    They are . . . ?

but at least now we have an A. I. R. program that recognizes us, helps us, delivers us, persuades us, complements us, provides for us, and guides us.

**January 30**: Oh, the irony!!! We are blamed for thoughts, actions, deeds, and misdeeds that we would never have possibly been accused of in a court of law; yet, our being blamed and accused derives from a society of perfect dysfunction that is pervasively inherited and passed on unknowingly by complicit persons in authority who follow a destined trail of misinformation and mistaken duality. We who are blameless have no one to blame. But through our program of forgiveness and love, while ejecting the excess baggage of useless past pains, terrors, and abuses, we can all grow into a phase of light and peace and self-love overall.

**January 31**: The very nature of being an A. I. R. practitioner is one of protest: protest through individuality and its dire need for expression, stemming out of a history of enforced silence, expected conformity within an abusive and negligent social apparatus, and unmerciful retribution if the required conformity were recognized by us as being abandonment. So voices of protest likely abound within every meeting’s parameters, and are encouraged and righteously upheld as virtually sacrosanct. Yet the meetings are themselves designed to be structured to a degree such that unruly chaos and disorder do not reduce the principles of effort towards manageable and successful goals of self-discovery and peace which could fall into the very laps of insanity from which we, the seekers of the Divine, have emerged and escaped. The rules of the A. I. R. program, developed out of the A. A. (Alcoholics Anonymous) 12-Step system, have been painstakingly tested over decades to ensure that a fine balance between protest and progress is established and maintained. All sharing and participation requires a community of individuals dedicated to upholding the rights of all participants amid the rules of order within the A. I. R. Meeting Agenda.

**February 1**: We are grateful for increased self-awareness, for this shared opportunity to uncover our pasts, and for the wholesome welcoming from fellow travelers on this unusual path of shared disclosures. We have never been allowed, let alone encouraged, to dig deep into our memories to re-witness and re-examine experiences of verbal abuse, bullying, isolation, discrimination, segregation, and mean- spirited laughter. What is spoken in A. I. R. stays in A. I. R. This is a very safe place to let go and share long forgotten episodes in our lives. I hope to be able to forgive those who abused me in so many ways, over such a long period of time. I hope to also be able to let go my anger and fears and hatred and begin to feel lighter and less burdened by my carrying around the dead weight of my past uncomfortable and useless baggage of painful memories. The present is now. The past is no longer and has ceased to exist. The future is unknown but truly in God’s hands and not mine. I no longer pretend that I am in control of anything in my life, but this is a good surrender.

**February 2**: Imagine, if you will, that your entire life has been on a moving Merry-go-round in constant motion. While trying to get used to the constantly changing scenery, you try to also imagine what life would be like off of the Merry-go-round on solid ground. Yet there are no reference points on the moving ride that could possibly clue you in as to what that would be like. It’s like that right now. You’ve been declared different your entire life. Different from what? What is normal? No one has explained that to you.  But you’ve never felt privileged anywhere: Special education, special schools, special day at the amusement park, special prom night for you and the rest of the special people. Special day program. Special workshop. In my entire life I’ve been told by other people, other agencies, other organizations, what my identity is. Just for once I’d like to try and determine for myself what my own identity really is, and step off this moving Merry-go-round by myself on my own, to see what solid ground is really like. And today is February 2nd, Ground Hog Day, how appropriate!!!

**February 3**: Our 12-step program tells us that God (or our higher power) helps direct our lives and our lessons and our recovery. God is the mainstay, the source, the goal, the guide, and the will for each one of us to succeed every day moving forward. In the authorized King James Version of the Bible, Luke 17:21, Jesus states, “The Kingdom of God is within you.” This is not only terrific and wonderful, it is downright convenient. We don’t need to go or travel anywhere special to commune with our Creator, as our Creator resides in a very special place within each and everyone of us; and sitting quietly in meditation and prayer connects us with our Divine Source, always. And as God is eternally present and loving and understanding, our problems and difficulties and trials can be easily set down and let go of, as we are calmly provided the solutions for each, as time goes on.  Patience is required, and love, and tolerance, and seeking that greater understanding beyond words, all to benefit ourselves and others on this communal path of recovery. Is recovery hard? Yes, initially. But it gets increasingly easier as time goes on. Perseverance and faith help a lot!!! And never give up!!!

**February 4**: “I’d rather just take a quick-fix pill to remedy myself and be done with it!” Now isn’t that just like every cute TV commercial or every TV advertisement you’ve ever seen? “For only nineteen-ninety-five, we guarantee miraculous results within 10 days of daily use, or you get your money back.” Well, here’s a copy of a spiritual painting by the artist, Herman Rednick, that “genuinely” outlines your current and future spiritual uphill climb using this 12-step program, and what it is really and truly like:



So, get used to the hard, unceasing, difficult trek uphill that this program requires. There really are no short cuts! And, guess what, it’s not worse or harder than the crap you’ve already lived through and from which you’ve survived. So, yes, it’s not easy. But is it all worth it? Hell, Yes!

**February 5**: There really are others out there somewhere following this same or a similar path of hope and determination and the seeking of salvation, evolving through spiritual love and peace. We may at any time run into them and receive direction, encouragement, and solidarity. However, we may also be very alone in our resolve to achieve balance and peace. In a way we are all pioneers walking a path of solitude as strangers in a strange land. We may appear as the first ones to cross that threshold of internal enlightenment and awareness. Nevertheless, our higher power (God) is definitely leading and guiding us step-by-step in this unusual inner adventure. For that we are eternally grateful. It is exactly the true meaning of the 23rd Psalm we have come to recite and virtually memorize:

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.”

**February 6**: Many of us live lives of incessant service, like being a 24/7 short order chef, or a 24/7 waitress in a diner: “What can I get you? What do you want? What do you need? What can I do for you to make you happy or feel better about yourself?” Some of us fell into this roll of seeking approval by doing appreciated deeds rather than not simply being loved and appreciated for who we are! We inevitably sacrificed any hopes of being who we might want to be in favor of being a voluntary slave to family, friends, neighbors, school authorities, etc.: all of this continuous roll-playing simply to be liked and approved of. In most cases of forever doing for others, we’ve lost the ability to think for ourselves and even know what we would want in life that would make us feel good. Through our

A. I. R. work we will come to realize the difference between doing good deeds occasionally, because of course they are the right thing to do, and living our lives solely for the benefit of others, which is not healthy for us in the long run.

**February 7**: Growing up with labels of developmental or intellectual disabilities removed almost immediately any future possibilities of our ever graduating into independent adulthood through all of the requisite normal hoop jumping provided and afforded the general population. We were never going to be “in control” of our own lives. We may have play-acted while in pubescent or teenage years that we had some control by acting out or refusing to comply or sabotaging any and all programmatic recommendations for our prolonged menial subpar special needs day placement designations. But these bouts of clandestine shenanigans basically only fooled ourselves. However, as we have come to learn through our communal A. I. R. program that not only did we have no control of our lives but our loving and not so loving manipulative authorities never had any control either. Our higher power (God) always had the first and final say in any and every aspect of our lives; and we are now very much OK with that. Being led lovingly by a superior power who has our best intentions at heart provides us all with the means to calm down, relax, and take everything that comes, good and bad, one step at a time one day at a time as we learn about ourselves while proceeding forward into love and peace and balance.

**February 8**: There’s absolutely nothing funny about dysfunction when it happens to you. But of course when it happens to somebody else it’s freaking hilarious. That’s why Mel Brooks stated years ago, “Tragedy is when I cut my finger. Comedy is when you fall into an open sewer and die.” Tragedy and comedy in life are ironically so closely linked that the fine line between them can be found in the difference between subjective and objective analysis (or which side of the psychiatrist’s couch you may be looking at). Why is it that the line, “When it rains, it pours” is so often used to describe compounded events of a tragic nature that never seem to let up? Or the line: “I’ve seen bad situations like this turn right around and get worse!” And why is it that during the party buffet after a person’s funeral when the family and friends gather together, the main remembrances are always the funniest stories from the dead guy’s life? So, during these A. I. R. meetings we also share stories of our lives with others who implicitly understand the garbage we have lived through and relate now from a healthy distance regarding similar events. And we can all say, “It sure as heck wasn’t funny when it happened, but we can all laugh about it now.”

 

**February 9**: In trying to deal with or even figure out authority figures (teachers, parents, bosses, supervisors), we in this A. I. R. program are generally left hanging when it comes to unspoken expectations. We never “got the memo” about what to do, how to do it, how often to do it, and how soon to get it done. We are too often met with expressions of exasperation, frowns, hands in the air, walking away, and quiet yelling. A very nice saying of what we are attempting to deal with is found in the old adage: “An old crow sings no more like a nightingale just because it’s old.” In the real world very little sincere accommodation is provided, let alone toleration or practical mentoring (for as long as it’s necessary or required). And in trying to interact with or figure out or deal with authority figures, it seems that the patience required for interaction is dependent on our providing it. Ya gotta laugh. But A. I. R. lessons will help us achieve all that we need such that we will end up doing the accommodating, and demonstrating “the upper hand.”

**February 10**: Growing up in this very materialistic realm and age, it may be that a state of complete lack of love and respect and unconditional acceptance may in fact be a “universal,” a “mainstay,” an almost “natural occurrence” of and in everyday life. We who sought from our beginnings nurturance, comfort, hugs, and generosity everywhere may have discovered the opposite unfriendly happenings more often than not. If our beleaguered childhoods turned into our beleaguered adulthoods as our natural dreams of total acceptance drifted away into oblivion, we may have come to this A. I. R. program disillusioned and pessimistic and untrusting. But here we can begin to establish (maybe for the first time) an awareness of lost possibilities: where we can have idyllic dreams of love and peace and acceptance amongst those who have also traveled bleak paths of nonacceptance, discrimination, segregation, isolation, and intolerance; such that, now and here we are free from those unfortunate circumstances and labels.

**February 11**: By seeking whatever circus (praise, recognition, acceptance), due to what we think we ought to be rather than who we really are, from those outside of ourselves, we will never be happy, fulfilled, or resolved. All peace and love and fulfillment reside within us. It is already there, done, and completed. It just needs to be rediscovered, unburied, revealed from being overshadowed by false conceptions delivered to us and on us from a society and world that is constantly trying to manage us, deceive us, and confuse us. Our higher power, that eternal light of love and truth resides within us. If allowed to be listened to and followed it will lead us to be calm, and whole, and loving and peaceful, able to rise above all outward circumstances both positive and negative. Our twelve steps will assist us in this learning and becoming.

**February 12**: As children, and even now as adults, we live in a society and world which declares that we are all different and need to be always treated differently and separately, even when the laws state we should be included and integrated everywhere. However, the realities are far different from what the laws declare. The laws **only** apply to public institutions, not private businesses. Society not only determines separate places, events, admittances, and allowances in terms of physical spaces, but society also places special emphasis on diagnoses, descriptions, mental constructs, categories, and philosophies. We all went through special education with limited or altered educational opportunities, with an emphasis on basic daily living skills. We are allowed (by law) to try to fill out applications for residential placements, job possibilities, and leisure recreational memberships, but we are seldom granted entry into such privileged status. Such negative experiences of exclusion and deprivation drive home self-doubt, depression, and anxiety in those of us who feel that our lives are always (and will remain) “on the outside looking in,” and have been pre-determined; and that this level of cruelty is allowed and expected. Before becoming members of A. I. R., we all experienced failure in our social environments too regularly. But now in A. I. R. we learn that we must all begin to rely on our own perceptions of success and failure and stop relying on society’s opinions of who we are and what we can or cannot accomplish.

**February 13**: Why do we push ourselves in trying to assimilate into the same society (in hopes of full integration and inclusion) that has (and continues to do so) summarily reject us as defective, substandard, imbalanced, uncomplimentary, and disposable? Why do we try incessantly to join (in any way we can) society’s “fraternity” when we’ve been hazed to death continuously our entire lives? We’ve all paid our dues, and for nothing!! Why haven’t we just stopped and declared, “We are solely responsible for our own self-love; and we should be wholly confident and content in our own success (whatever that may be) in being exactly who we are and always have been?” We can turn the tables any time we want.

**February 14**: Listening to the perfect Silence within our own hearts is definitely not as easy or enticing as listening to all of the outward forms of distractions and entrapments that hint always that we are less than perfect, less than useful, less than tolerable. The choice has always been obvious, though not easy. We get no promises of good will from society and never have; or we can try to discover and uncover our higher power’s beautiful and perfect nature within all of us. What line do you want to be in? It’s always been our choice. Our A. I. R. program will help us in this delightful searching for as long as it takes. So hop on board the A. I. R. express to inner awareness and enlightenment. How perfect is it that this lesson on the path of the heart happens on Valentine’s Day?

**February 15:** From the Oxford English Dictionary:

“Definitions from [Oxford Languages](https://languages.oup.com/google-dictionary-en) *self-esteem, noun*

1. confidence in one's own worth or abilities; self-respect.”

And we should examine this very closely. Self-esteem and self-respect can only ever possibly come from ourselves, period! Fame and notoriety are very temporary and fleeting and especially mixed and indecisive. Self-esteem comes from within and from our higher power and is unrivaled and perfect and unchanging. The blame we use on ourselves comes from without. The embarrassment and degradation we put on ourselves comes from without. The perceptions of loss and grief and imperfection we allow to be placed on ourselves comes from without. As a dear friend of mine reminds all of us, “Isn’t it about time to stop carrying that dead corpse up the hill?” Our direction is entirely inward now; let’s not lose track of where we’ve come from and where and how we are going !!!!

**February 16**: We travel through life step by step amongst fellow A. I . R. program followers and travelers seeking a path to wholeness. This may be in fact not quite true. What if that wholeness we are seeking is already an undying and permanent resource residing within us that is buried beneath tons of false impressions and temporary illusions. Delving into ourselves in prayer and meditation may offer that serious inner path that will eventually reveal (with a lot of hard daily work) the light and love that has always resided at our very core. We may realize that other travelers alongside us are seeking the same inner peace and solace themselves that we are seeking in ourselves. That A. I. R. comradery from others will make the inner pathway seem not as difficult as it can be at times. The path of the heart can be very, very difficult, but intensely worthwhile.

**February 17**: “Who’s in charge here?” We aren’t, surely. We are not, and never have been, in control. But neither are they either. There’s a very funny social algorithm that few are willing to look at or critically view: “Those in power have and exercise 100% complete authority, while holding zero responsibility; and those having zero power hold zero authority, while exercising 100% responsibility.” It is a demonstration of perfect inequity, however true. But it seems to be a voluntary prescription and not legally mandated. We can always simply say, “NO!” Our federal constitution says we have rights, and that we have a moral responsibility to determine for ourselves what our rights and privileges are, as long as we are not infringing on others’ rights. The right to pursue happiness, in work, residential placements, and recreational environments is stated as God given. The roles we pursue by choice are ours to conceive of. We do not have to assume the roles that society, family, or the world wishes to choose for us. But that choice is always ours, whether following the easier or more difficult pathway available. Through this A. I. R. program we learn to not only set limits, but also to begin to exercise life on our own terms: what we decide is right and true and reasonable for us, while not simply continuing to fulfill roles established by others’ expectations of who and what we should be in their eyes.

**February 18**: When society determines through legal and medical definitions that we are categorically different from a pre-determined (yet undisclosed) “normal” and we must be placed in more “appropriate” positions in all aspects of our lives from those deemed “normal”, this is exactly what the true meaning of abandonment really means and implies! Cute, isn’t it? So, in many respects, further threats or intimidations or pronouncements of abandonment are simply redundant and basically pointless. We can all relax and calm down and smile, and awaken to the realities of who we all are. But in this marvelous A. I. R. program we can adjust to the realization that we rely on ourselves and our fellow travelers and our higher power and our written materials to be always available to us for security, and encouragement, and hope, and reassurance as we move forward in pursuit of inner peace and contentment with who we are!

**February 19**: We face the harshness of reality daily with few around us noticing our pain and grieving. Our hiding in plain sight through solitude is our display of avoidance to the harshness. The daily experiencing of the harshness discourages us from trusting, or reaching out, or pursuing any dreams of optimism or freedom from the terrors of our past and also from our present. It may take us some lengthy time to feel comfortable amongst others in this A. I. R. program who may initially seem as a threat to our ever retreating solitude. Sharing who we really are in front of strangers seems an impossibility. Our self-imposed isolation and solitude may keep us for a long time from delving deeply into our own acquired levels of dysfunction. And sharing those places of dysfunction is another level of discomfort.

**February 20**: “Because this is the way we’ve always done things, that’s why!” Habit and tradition and custom and conformity are all seen as stable. Change and unorthodoxy and variability and chaos not so much. Even though society’s world is an astounding mix of unexpected variability and stability, too often we who have been labeled different are required to always be the expected and anticipated selves we’ve been designated to be. We are not allowed to change or grow or break out of the roles we’ve been handed: servant, comic, fool, foot stool, scape goat, mascot, etc. Heaven help us if we decide to change on our own to becoming something we decide to be or become that is different from the roles chosen for us. However, many of us have grown very, very tired of society’s designations placed on us for their convenience. Back in the late 1800s the following “medically” authorized terms were used for describing us: moron, idiot, imbecile, defective, simpleton, cretin, feebleminded, etc. We’ve never simply been permitted to exist as normal, or human, or astoundingly perfect.  But when we determine to change in any way we determine for reasons that are imperative for our own health and welfare and survival, we inevitably experience an immediate s\*\*t storm of negative reactions from family, friends, neighbors, acquaintances, who have all collectively decided we must be and stay as we are and were for their own sense of stability. But change (if we’ve decided this is a must) leads to a social abandonment like being cast off, or left behind, or written off, or expelled. But… in reality… the abandonment happened a long time ago when we were all labeled different. Finding our own internal compass to steer by is what this A. I. R. program attempts to assist with. That internal compass is our higher power or God who reveals each daily step at a time in a direction of soul-searching purpose of new and very changed discovery and acceptance of who we really are.

**February 21**: When we have all grown up with hearing comments like the following: “it’s all your fault!” “How can you be so stupid?” “I wish you’d never been born!” “How many times do I have to tell you?” “Do you think just once you could do it right!” “Give it to me; I’ll do it correctly.” “What’s your problem!” “If I’ve told you once, I’ve told you a thousand times!” “What did I tell you?” it can be very hard to escape the negativity when we catch ourselves stating very similar things to our friends, colleagues, and fellow travelers. These mental habits ingrained in us are so hard to stop. Trying seriously to change our quick negative responses from deliberately painful exclamations to either silence or calm or loving interactions takes a lot of self-analysis and in-depth critical examination. These means of changing may take years with a lot of mistakes in the process. But it is all very worth it: breaking the chains of ancestral negativity and learned aggression, by replacing it with love and toleration and acceptance is so worthwhile.

**February 22**: In life we are generally fixated on events that have an ending or a conclusion: days, weeks, months, years, household tasks, school terms, movies, TV shows, sporting contests, etc. It then seems a bit strange that this A. I. R. program has no set time limits, no sense of a graduation goal or a conclusion. A. I. R. may be considered a lifelong objective with a few ever-changing focal points for analysis, examination, and discussion. So when one begins in A. I. R., one may be in a glorified “honeymoon” period initially where progress is noted and enjoyed and reveled in, but after a while the meetings, the sharings, the self-discoveries begin to seem old and repetitious and less joyous. These less than fortuitous moments may require a more personally intense digging, searching, inner analysis based on longer periods of quiet and introspection and meditation. These continuing goals may appear to become greater peace, greater love, greater tolerance of self and others never before imagined. “One day at a time” may have no foreseeable ending. Let us be and become content with that.

**February 23**: If we are always judging ourselves as “less than”, or “inferior to”, or “not living up to”, because we’ve absorbed these degrading ideas from others who spoke ill of us or treated us unkindly, we may be also looking at others with envy due to their looks or accomplishments or successes or status or (heaven forbid) financial wealth. These unconscious trends (which are negative and potentially destructive) may be readily and easily resolved if we take a serious internal examination of the core of our being: we are! we breathe! we think! we feel! we learn! we love! we adjust! we know! we are capable of divine compassion and understanding and sensibility! Do we need anything else in life, besides being securely and selectively and positively social with our fellow A. I. R. seekers? Nope! There are just some rodeos we are done and finished with!

**February 24**: Dealing with pain (physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual; or any combination of these four) is a societal nightmare; but not because we have anthtropomorphised society into being able to dream….no no no no no no no! But because, in our cases, society has been responsible for fostering the pains but is absolutely unwilling to acknowledge them, apologize for them, or do anything whatsoever to remedy them. The pains do result from systematic abuse, name calling, segregation, discrimination, isolation, degradation, unjustified categorization, and total ignoring with a topping of abandonment. Most of our quite understandable reactions to the pains are considered to be anti-social (Duh!!), or self- abusive (must be psychiatric!), or attention seeking (there must be some appropriate meds for that, right?). Who would ever consider us as victims of inexcusable traumas who suffer from “present traumatic stress syndrome”? However, seeing as how there never was, nor is now, nor ever will be outside solutions providing necessary relief, we can, through our A. I. R. program, develop the means to understand what we’ve been through (and are going through) and transcend the pains (and the sources of the pains) with the help of our divine higher power’s assistance and our understanding and loving and tolerating group of fellow travelers.

**February 25**: Because we are all human brings, we all have (without exception) a genetic component that requires us to be social and seek social engagement. We all seek attention because we were all genetically designed that way. However, if our early childhood (or for us, our continuing life’s) interactions with those with whom we sought attention resulted in negative attention (or negative reinforcement), we would naturally accept that negativity as being normal (it’s all of what we knew!); and its continuous (or overriding) happening would set patterns of seeking out that negative attention or reinforcement almost permanently. Doing whatever it takes (maladaptive behaviors: lying cheating, stealing, acting out, etc.) to continue seeking attention we’ve continuously habitually known, provides us with the backdrop and template of our incessant “wrong doing.” Breaking these negative habits is a long haul, a difficult process, and an unending battle with ourselves; beginning in very unknown (and sometimes scary) territory of being positive, forgiving, loving, helpful, accommodating, trusting, and tolerant, not only of others, but especially of ourselves.

**February 26**: One of the first things we need to become aware of as functioning members of our A. I. R. program is that “blame,” for what we’ve been through, and are still going through, has no recipients. Literally, for thousands of years, individuals with disabilities have been treated with less than humane discretion. This unbroken immoral pattern is not likely to change any time soon. Though there’s no blame to hand out to anyone or anything (and it would not be productive anyway), the major problem left us, with our histories of the dysfunctional behaviors always handed to us, is our complete lack of how to think, talk, act, and behave appropriately, to instill positivity in whatever we are trying to do, let alone trying to learn what to do. If proper behaviors have never been consistently modeled to us ever, then we are understandably further disabled than we should be. It is through our A. I. R. program of creating, sharing, and discussing that we begin experimenting with interactive methods of love, tolerance, acceptance, and compassion. There will be errors and mistakes and fumbles along the way, but with humor and understanding of the tremendous difficulty this process will require, we will all progress slowly but wonderfully to acquire newfound skills of hope and betterment.

**February 27**: Truth, which is a very hard thing to determine, may always be a matter of opinion. “How are you doing?” “Well, do you really want my opinion? Or do you want me to recite from memory what it is you expect me to say?” The following seems to describe it perfectly:

“The optimist proclaims that we live in the best of all possible worlds; and the pessimist fears this is true.”

(James Branch Cabell, [The Silver Stallion](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/159809.The_Silver_Stallion))

So, do we remain living under circumstances and with people who beg us to always conform and never complain? Or do we rebel at the ignored chaotic insanity and cease putting up with it? We become so uncomfortably familiar with constant bickering and silent warfare that we’ve grown sick of it and wish it would end, but also we do not wish to fight any more which is what rebellion would seem to promulgate! However, when we look back at all we’ve been through and ask ourselves, “Do we really want all of this to continue as it is, or are we willing to stand up for what we believe that could be better and let the world know we are proud of who we are and our accomplishments and our resources and we refuse to accept the previous roles we’ve been handed? To become truly independent, included, integrated, and seriously recognized we need for all others to acknowledge our capacities to say “No!” and we must demand politely to be affirmed as sovereign human beings capable of making and upholding our own decisions. Our A. I. R. program and teammates will support us in these newly tracked and experienced adventures.

**February 28**: The whole idea of establishing a loving, open, positive, and all-encompassing safety net of an organization like A. I. R. is that this is supposed to be a wholesome refuge for people trying to escape from the elusive bondage of society’s unwholesome stances towards us. The last thing we need is for our A. I. R. program to evolve into a more subtle replication of what we are and have been trying to escape. That would not be honest, nor honorable, nor tolerable. Our Serenity Prayer, our Problem, our Laundry List, our Solution, our Twelve Steps, and our Twelve Traditions should be recognized as unlimited resources for helping all of us as individuals seeking our own connections to our higher power’s will and instructions, with the help of the groups’ caring and affirmations and acknowledgment. Our A. I. R. program must not ever proclaim to be an all-knowing authority replacement for the society that has produced so much negativity that has brought us all here. That would be wrong and counterproductive. We remain as seeking individuals, holding hands with all others looking within, to determine what we must do to become loving, positive, accommodating, and tolerant witnesses to our own and all other’s growth struggles for liberation, freedom, and peace, while doing it all gracefully.

**March 1**: Judgement, comparing, analyzing, determining, criticizing, validating, deciding, choosing: all words attempting to describe our lost path through the unknown regions of our lives. Do we have a map? Generally, no! Do we feel confident in what we are doing or where we are going? Hell no! We’re here, aren’t we? But judgment and all of its attending attributes must always be inwards and reflective, for us by us. If we judge others it is because we have learned that it is ok, because it was always done to us. But, it’s not ok. The Bible states emphatically, “Judge not, that ye be not judged.” It’s like the old adage, “When you point a finger at someone else, there are three fingers pointing back at you.” We are all in this A. I. R. “boat” together. Each of us having very different lives and different struggles. How can we know what is supposedly best for someone else, when we hardly know what is best for ourselves? Only God, our higher power truly knows that! Who are we kidding? So please, all of us, demonstrate at least as much patience, that we are providing to ourselves, for all others here. We don’t know what they’ve been through. We don’t know what they are currently going through. Accept them and their sharing unequivocally, unanimously, without questioning or judging. They need love, compassion, allowances, and calm understanding silence from all of us, as we would expect from them. Have a very nice and blessed day!

**March 2**: Angry people could always turn their anger on us, knowing we were completely defenseless. It happened. It happened a lot. It made us cry, run, hide, disappear, rock, shake, scream, hit ourselves, yell, throw things, kick, bite (have I left out, or forgotten, any other reactions? Just add them here). Anyway, these “shell shock” experiences happened so often that we now have an ingrained instinctive reaction that throws us back into “flight or fight” responses of terror. Talk about total lack of control! But, working out the crazy dynamics of these past situations may help resolve the anxiety. Whoever was angry towards us was actually reacting to something else in their lives they had no control over. We were never at fault for any of it, ever. We were all just innocently bystanding unsuspecting useful targets, that’s all. See it for what it is, for what it was. Feel sorry for ourselves, of course, but also for them. They did not know what they were doing, passing on inherited rage unknowingly. Yeah, horrible, but explainable! Through A. I. R. we can now stand somewhat apart from the horror of past angry experiences and look at them differently. We can find that still calm spot within us, go there, and realize it’s not their fault, and not at all our fault. Like going into a shelter inside to get out of a storm, we go inside ourselves to escape the fury of a storm of anger; just like in the case of rain and thunder and lightning, they will eventually pass and disappear.

**March 3**: Take a walk if you have the time and inclination: A park or shore or pond or lake or field with fences. Anywhere nature seems to abound. Sit and watch for a while. The things growing, or at rest, in the breeze, or the rain, or through snow, or in blazing sunlight. And look at the clouds, if there are some, and the colors of everything. As God, our higher power, creator of all of these things, loves and cares for them all, you, too, are no less a part of this perfect creation, an infinitesimally small but infinite spark of Divinity, inhabiting a body of earthly materials for a time and a time to witness and experience all of this heavenly glory. Tests and trials and difficulties are simply the backdrop here for learning and teaching the secrets of existence. Our souls are witness to all of it, but remain untouched by any of life’s problems, always in our higher power’s hands, eternally comforted, protected, and loved securely. We are always led by our higher power, through both good and bad times, to greater levels of understanding, self-acceptance, and self-assurance. We take each day one at a time, one step at a time, hand in hand with our fellow travelers of A. I. R., onward and upward.

**March 4**: There will come a time, eventually, when we will all be able to decidedly detach from “crazy.” When past dysfunction and chaos and the continuous unexpected irrationality of daily life will no longer suck us into its incessant whirlpool of constant fear and motion. We will, at that time, simply step aside from the madness and look on it all with dispassionate understanding, having achieved a state of inner peace that is above and beyond it all. Practicing the 12-steps, allowing our higher power to have full loving control of our lives, meditating, bringing forth our sharings and our insightful commentaries on our pasts, we will discover and uncover our real divine centers, our divine source, our possibilities of loving unconditionally. And we will have arrived at our new beginnings!

**March 5**: Where do twelve step programs come from? What is their inherent purpose and design? Who are they for? The online definition and basic commentary states: “What Is a 12-Step Program? A 12-step program is a peer-based mutual help program for alcoholism, drug abuse and other addictive and dysfunctional behaviors.” So who are we and do we fit this category, this definition, this objective? The original 12 steps embraced the following: 1.) Honesty, 2.) Faith, 3.) Surrender, 4.) Soul Searching, 5.) Integrity, 6.) Acceptance, 7.) Humility, 8.) Willingness, 9.) Forgiveness, 10.) Maintenance, 11.) Making Contact, and 12.) Service. It seems so obvious that we who have been summarily ostracized from mainstream society because of our differences, and have been too often subjected to embarrassment, isolation, abuse, categorization, segregation, discrimination, name calling, etc., seem to completely fit all of the categorical needs of a population destined for the peer offered benefits of a 12 step program, of course adapted to our special (excuse please the play on words) circumstances. We are all looking for better ways to personally evolve and grow and transcend the difficulties we’ve all been handed. Our A. I. R. template seems to fit nicely with our personal seeking and our collective goals.

**March 6**: Sometimes the traumas we’ve experienced early in life stay buried in our subconscious minds and remain hidden from our day-to-day conscious minds. Sometimes they stay that way, but sometimes through our 12 step work they re-surface and we remember them or get unexpected glimpses of them or get feelings that our pasts were not exactly as we remember them. If difficult memories do pop up through inner seeking and searching, it is ok to share them in the group which might reveal even more about them. Here you will not be judged or made fun of or disregarded. Your early trials will be understood and calmly accepted here. They happened in the past. Although still painful to recall, they are not hurting you now. Recovery often takes facing what we’ve all been through, accepting it, recognizing it, seeing it as a stepping stone to where we are now, and simply moving on. You’ve escaped it. You are stronger because of it. And again, “Thanks for sharing!”

**March 7**: Naturally, we are all in a sense “street wise,” survivors in the “trenches.” We know what abuse is, what isolation is; we know how to hide behind a mask we’ve created in order to protect ourselves from further abuse and negligent and traumatic behaviors, which we assume are coming (any moment now). Survival is a very basic human instinct. From very early in our lives we have learned to adapt to this unnatural condition, without knowing why or how. We learned the necessary survival skills of dodging the abuse and neglect instinctively through trial and error until the survival patterns were set and ingrained. It was a game we became very good at, almost accomplished. It’s why, when anyone asks what people in our “population’s” favorite holiday is, the overwhelming response is “Halloween!” We have all come to appreciate masks! However, delving into our pasts in the struggle to liberate ourselves from the incessant horrors of being labeled as different and basically unacceptable, removing our masks to attempt to realize where we’ve come from and also where we hope to be going is a basic first step at self-awareness and honesty, with ourselves and others. Facing the traumas of the past, acknowledging them, and accepting them, unburdens ourselves of the weight of past fears, horrors, abuses, traumas, and our disappearing act. Through A. I. R. we can begin to open up and live, freely, with the help of our fellow colleagues and our higher power. We can discover that our mask for survival is no longer necessary and can be permanently cast aside and forgotten. Of course, this path at redemption takes time; in some cases, a lot of time.

**March 8**: What are the dynamics of appropriate relationships with those who wish to know us for who we are, who wish to congratulate us for simply being, who understand where we’ve come from, without judging us? Too many of us have come from relationships of control: people in authority directing every movement we ever made (and we were the ones under their control); or, our relationships could be described as co-dependent, where we both (depending on which particular relationship is being analyzed or discussed) exercised manipulative and underhanded means to get what we wanted from each other. Neither relationship (control or co-dependency) is considered healthy; actually far from it. Although these forms of relationships can be somewhat described as “intimate” (a closeness of proximity), there is seldom any unconditional love, unbridled acceptance, or compassionate understanding. So here we are in A. I. R., beginning to reach out to others of like mind and spirit, while attempting to bridge sincere connectivity, but being somewhat unaware of how to go about doing that, when we’ve come from relationships of control and/or codependency. Needing and wanting trusting, loving, and accommodating relationships while not knowing how to do that is a very difficult concept, task, experiment: one of real trial and error; but with our A. I. R. format and the help of our fellows travelers, and our higher power, the initial bumpy roads of “testing the relationship waters” eventually smooths out and becomes naturally wholesome and healthy. Patience, humor, practice, and loving tolerance are necessary.

**March 9**: When someone is new to the A. I. R. meetings and remains quiet for an extended period of time, it may be that while listening to others sharing their life stories that they begin to see similar parallels in their own lives. This type of identification sometimes inspires the listener to begin sharing and revealing some of their inmost memories, feelings, thoughts, and perspectives. The perfect allowance and understanding and respect and silent approval is just what the listener needs from the rest of the survivors in A. I. R. as a solid foundation for beginning to develop confidence in themselves and their words and their experiences. It can be the unconditional love launching point of mutual participation never before experienced, but historically longed for.

**March 10**: OK, how many times in your life have you said to yourself, ‘I’m never going to be burned again like that by trusting someone to be a true friend of mine, only to be betrayed by this new person I thought I could trust?” And then, “I met this other new better person that I knew wouldn’t treat me bad, but they ended up being worse than the last one. You’d think I’d have learned my lesson by now, but no, I keep doing this blind trusting over and over and over again. Why is this happening to me? Is it me or is it them? I can’t figure it out.” Well, let’s see if we can figure this out! Again, as we’ve stated before: Human beings are creatures of habit: what we have experienced over and over again in our lives sets a pattern, not only one of familiarity but also of comfort, whether or not it is good or bad for us [read that again please until it soaks in]. If we have been treated like crap our entire lives, we will actually seek out people who resemble those that have treated us like crap in the past because these people with those familiar traits whom we bond to are people whom we are used to. This grand mistake is referred to as “repetition compulsion.” Get used to hearing those words, “repetition compulsion.” We who have been socially beat up forever again and again mistakenly choose the same types of people or circumstances where it will happen again and again and again until we recognize this pattern of OUR behavior, and then choose to stop it ourselves. It takes a great deal of bravery to look not only deeply into our own choices but also into the personalities of those whom we seem to be attracted to the most and WHY! With help from our A. I. R. colleagues and from our higher power we may come to recognize our repetitious mistakes and begin to seek out relationships with others who possess positive, loving, accepting, and non-manipulative personalities.

**March 11**: Our A. I. R. program is necessarily a very generic program. We are not in the business of doing individual counseling. Our program derives from the many almost overwhelmingly similar characteristics and experiences that all of our members have lived through. Our individual contributors are freely allowed to share their inmost thoughts, feelings, and personal experiences (of course never ever referring to other members in the assembly), to be able to voice with confidence their own unique perspectives on “their work” to become more aware and integrated and included and responsible human beings in society. These sharings often relate to the personal understandings and interpretations provided by the A. I. R. Serenity prayer, the Problem, the Laundry List, the Solution, the Twelve Steps, the Twelve Traditions, and/or the A. I. R. Daily Recovery lessons. It is understood that the recovery program has a few strict rules, such as “no cross talking” during the sharing times, but is very open in allowing and encouraging personal stories that have brought each individual to these sessions of seeking through a higher-power-directed group camaraderie. All are welcome! All are cherished!

**March 12**: Growing up in a society that let us know every day that we were not in control and that authorities surrounding our every move were always in complete control probably eventuated in our struggling to comprehend how and why this was even possible or even allowed. Being independent and autonomous was always fostered upon and encouraged for our siblings, our neighbors, and for others not like us. Any resentments built up over this obvious inequity may have resulted in our sometimes becoming bossy over our peers, trying to exercise control over others when we had no control over ourselves. In A. I. R. it is our time to learn to take responsibility for ourselves and not for anyone else. Our own personal welfare and duties to examine our own dysfunctions for remedying is wholly enough work for each one of us. Besides, distracting ourselves by thinking we are responsible for the directing and controlling of others is clearly avoiding the work we need to do on ourselves. Uh uh uh!!! Don’t you do it!

**March 13**: There is something extremely comforting learning to know that there are others close by who relate to who you are, where you’ve come from, and what your future aspirations are. You come to these A. I. R. meetings feeling as if you’ve arrived home after a long stay away. The hard work of self-examination seems a lot easier when you get the support of all your fellow travelers on this steep path of superhuman discovery and liberation. Shared pains produce shared growth! There will be tears. There will be smiles. There will be acknowledged nods of the head in appreciation. Even wondrous sighs and widening eyes are affirmations and confirmations to be recognized for their uplifting energies. We are not alone in these struggles when we are all together moving in similar directions. It’s a party; it’s a dance, it’s a meeting of wayward souls, transcending tribulations and tumultuous troubles triumphantly.

**March 14**: The rule about “no cross talking” is so hard to follow, but so necessary to observe. By not cross-talking we are giving all of our sharing fellow A. I. R members complete 100% silent attention, which is something we seldom got growing up, when we had something important to say. So we are now learning what real listening and paying attention and respecting and acknowledging are really like by witnessing our fellows in spirited and appreciative silence. They will be doing exactly the same for us when we share. It then becomes a sacred privilege to be listening intently without reacting while others are baring their souls in our presence. It’s like being completely silent in a church pew while listening to a preacher sharing a profound and delightful story, something to be pondered and especially received; or like the silence of meditation where communing with our higher power in stillness and quiet receptivity produces such implicit and unexpected awareness.

**March 15**: If a fear of authority figures and a need to people-please end up in the same corner, a lot of very unfortunate negativity may result. It is presumed that authority figures should always be acting magnanimously and generously, even when following and employing rules with equanimity among those in their jurisdiction (in other words not having favorites nor imposing their own very personal needs and agenda on those beneath them). However, finding authority figures who are not unscrupulous and selfish and exerting shameful power in relative secret can be a rarity. Couple this with those of us who have grown up downtrodden, beleaguered, abused, and mistreated who have just wanted to people-please to get in the good graces of authority’s better sides, and you end up with a Cinderella and evil step-mother unendurable scenario of unreasonable consequences. We can never satisfy the whims of authority figures for whom we bend over backwards trying to please, regardless of the nature of their “conditional” demands. And this enduring template into adulthood continues to plague all of us who find security in these unjust patterns such that we never find out how to secure our own sense of equitability and mutuality of trust in any relationships. Our A. I. R. program which intends for us to take a critical view of our fears and predispositions will help us unravel where we’ve come from in relation to authority figures and provide us with the means and strategies to overcome our tendencies to unreasonably people-please.

**March 16**: The real unsolvable problem with all of us is not what we think or imagine! The problem is that our eyes and ears work! We have been witness (through seeing and hearing) to all sorts of inequities our entire lives, whether or not we ever voiced our reactions or complaints. We have all seen and heard forever how “normal” people are treated and excused and benefited, and how we haven’t been. Realities of this nature are really difficult to hide or excuse from us, because our eyes and ears work! So, we have all grown skeptical, though accepting, of all of those in authority and their words (which never are or were the same as their actions). If we have ever complained (as maybe the original whistleblowers), we’ve been met unmercifully with ungodly retribution for irrational complaining or nitpicking or childish behavior or purely selfish motivations. “Ya been there? Of course you have. Quit chur bitchin! Life’s been overall good to you!” Hahahaha. Anyway, it’s not so much fear of authority (although it can be, yes, and way out of control) but more a constant wariness of authority, because persons in authority have proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that they simply can’t be trusted. Our peers can be trusted. Our pets can be trusted. Our relatives for the most part can be trusted (hopefully). But too often the “lessons” that are imposed upon us from those in authority become the means by which we now know how and when we interact with others: the meanness we receive that we way too often pass on to others. And this is unfortunate and not right. Through our A. I. R. training and resources we can begin to see that reacting to whatever we’ve been through by passing it on has not been healthy for us nor healthy for our victims. Our behaviors are things we can change to get out of the dysfunctional ruts into which we’ve been placed or thrown. We can be better than that. We can do better than that!

**March 17**: Do I know how to step back a second, take a breath, sit still for a bit, before I act or speak? I’m not sure I’ve ever thought about that or done it. I can be so incredibly reactive and impulsive, because my thoughts and actions and feelings have been so often ignored or shut down or dispelled. If I don’t get it out, right the heck now, I may never get another chance! Well that’s how I feel anyways! Sometimes, though (actually, all the time, though), maybe I need to realize I’m not in control and never have been of what other people do or say, and I really don’t need to try to react or respond. The old saying, “These aren’t my monkeys!” may truly apply here! On the other hand, maybe I always run away inside, or hide, or refuse to comment because I feel and think my attitudes or feelings or opinions are completely irrelevant, and always have been. Through A. I. R., and studying myself with the help of the others here, I may be able to establish a better balance by acknowledging who I really am and need to be: more responsive to myself and my thoughts and feelings and more responsible respectfully to my fellows here and all of the acquaintances in my life.

**March 18**: Becoming a good listener, attentive, quiet, concentrating, and receptive is a skill (or series of skills) that takes some time and work to cultivate. Being in A. I. R., while paying attention to all of the others sharing their life histories, is a very good way to practice learning how to become responsibly attuned to others’ needs. Being silent fosters a respect for their ideas, their perspectives, their opinions, and their experiences, without judgment or comment or interrupting or interfering. Sitting in silence while others share is like being in a church pew while listening without speaking, as the preacher lectures on a sermon. This is our service to ourselves and the world. Listening in silence to others may actually help us listen in silence to ourselves.

**March 19**: “I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry!” I’m surprised I don’t wake up in the morning with these words out of my mouth into my ears on my pillow! I’ve gotten so used to knowing that everything in my life is my fault that when I’m not successfully being completely invisible I have to let everyone around me know that I’ll try harder next time: I’ll clean up the mess I made right away (even if I didn’t create it), I’ll sweep the floor, vacuum the carpet, dust the furniture, straighten the couch cushions, wash the dishes, feed the dog, take it for a walk, straighten out the garage, the basement, the attic, mow the lawn, rake the leaves, shovel the snow, get the mail, clean the fish tank, wash the clothes, clean my room, and I’m so sorry it didn’t all get done yesterday when you wanted it done (to perfection!). At A. I. R., I’m learning that trying to please anyone and everyone else is an endless unsuccessful task, but that learning how to do what are just my responsibilities to help myself is always enough and perfectly right. Real belonging may not be anywhere else in the world or in society, but right here in this A. I. R. program where others here know exactly what I’m thinking and feeling. This is a very welcome home for me, for us!

**March 20**: Oddly enough, a great many “self-aware” conundrums follow the same paradox: the key to finding the way to open a lock is somehow hidden within the lock itself. Many A. I. R. candidates or members thrive in a state of self-sufficiency. They have discovered through a lifetime of frustrating negative experiences that rejection (which results in intolerable hurt and pain and resistance) too often happens when simple meaningful requests for help, assistance, direction are summarily denied (due to who we are, how we need, how we’ve been conditioned and enabled, etc.). So, in order to forestall or avoid rejection, we gravitate to becoming self-sufficient in almost everything where help would be appreciated but where it is not absolutely necessary. This curious development into autonomous self-reliant isolated human beings creates a vacuum of healthy interactions and a distrust of interchanges. However, being able to love requires a certain level of vulnerability. This state of being able to love is buried under a fear of rejection. The fear of rejection is further buried under a state of self-sufficiency. So in order to unlock both of the restrictions inherent in self-sufficiency and the fear of rejection, we need the key of love and vulnerability to undo the restrictive closures. Through our A. I. R. work (allowing God and team members access to who we really are by asking for their help fearlessly), we do uncover the dynamics of our own behavioral locks and keys and happily solve this unusual conundrum.

**March 21**: Too many people in society blindly follow traditional medical and psychosocial theories (mythologies) regarding the theoretical limitations and ceilings that people like us will consistently experience in life: what we may be able to enjoy in life, and what we surely won’t be able to accomplish or even try to do in life. The hand-over-the-mouth quiet back-room comments, “It’s such a shame.” “What a burden!” “They didn’t deserve that.” “How are they going to cope?” are always way too prevalent. These overall misguided unwritten sensibilities result in paradigms of segregation, discrimination, disenfranchisement, and isolation, apart from the simple and abundant benefits available to those in the perceived “normal” population. It all stinks of a worse than below the bottom of the barrel: Plesy vs. Ferguson: Separate and Unequal. It’s no wonder we’ve buried our feelings, our dreams, our hopes in the “dark” of the “special” expectations we’ve been given. How could we not help but consider ourselves and our lives as “wrong” through and through? But in this courageous leap into A. I. R., we have an opportunity to revise how we think about ourselves, how we can choose to perceive ourselves in this world, how we can help each other overcome the stigmatization of society’s designations and not only survive but succeed and flourish.

**March 22**: What is it about getting used to the almost constant emotional turmoil: fears, excitement, shame, blame, targeting, anger, sadness, disruptions, clamor, hurt, envy, jealousy, bitterness, deceit, numbness, and uncaring, etc.? Does emotional chaos provide us with an unusual comfort because we can then forget about ever looking deeply into our own neglected feelings? Because our own neglected feelings hurt too much when we force ourselves to concentrate on them? Uncomfortable feelings, when dealt with immediately, tend to disappear quickly; but that means dealt with appropriately. However, if we suffer difficult feelings that remain unresolved over a very long period of time, we will naturally do whatever it takes (diversionary methods and means) to get away from them and their discomfort and pain. But being forced to tolerate them for extended periods of time (even years) produces an unnatural comfort with them that is thoroughly unhealthy and toxic. Through our A. I. R. program we can begin to see the immense differences between tolerating the madness and relieving ourselves from it. With our group help and our higher power’s help this is not only possible but inevitable!

**March 23**: If we didn’t deserve the pain and torment delivered upon us by a society that systematically relegated us to the proverbial trash heap, then how, where, and when do we get justice for what happened? Where’s the pay back? Who is guilty? If we are and were the undeserving victims, who gets blamed for the insensitive crimes? If we wait for answers to these questions while desperately holding onto our “grief” as a result, we may end up sitting and waiting for years in a nursing home launching pad to oblivion with no resolution or success. And all of our diversionary hobbies and selective interests that keep us from waking up to the realities of our PAST misfortunes prevent our simply tossing out all of our grief and letting it go (good-bye!). By examining our attempts at retribution and claims of victimhood, we may be (probably are) stuck in a very self-defeating mess that won’t go away until we end it by forgiving and forgetting and moving on. Our A. I. R. program will help us achieve this necessary awareness.

**March 24**: Being tormented unmercifully while alone is like being placed in solitary confinement, or in a sensory deprivation chamber. Human beings are essentially very social creatures and get all of their sense of wellbeing by the safe and secure modes of social interaction amongst peers and relatives who prosper their support and confidence. Being alone without the necessary social supports is downright terrifying. We who have been labeled categorically different are basically lost without functional communities of assistance. This new A. I. R. program intends on being such a supporting system of like-minded peers who share similar histories, traumas, aspirations, solidarity, and effective solutions. Finding or establishing a local A. I. R. program may appear daunting but not having one may on the short and long term be untenable. Although the work of recovery is solely an individual process (taking into account so many idiosyncratic human variables), it is made infinitely more possible and feasible with the assistance of fellow travelers on this path to liberation from stereotypes. And Our higher power leads the way for all of us.

**March 25**: Discrimination and segregation are societal diseases that have existed for thousands of years. The A. D. A. ruling in the early 1990’s, coupled with the Supreme Court’s Olmsted Decision of 1999, have helped considerably with changing the legal landscape within all public venues; but little has changed in the much larger private sector. For folks like us, this societal disease has created an entire population of nondescript but basically hidden victims of post and present traumatic stress disorder, most of whom are not able to begin to express what they are thinking or feeling about the brutal experiences that they’ve undergone: name calling, inexcusable categorization, “public” and legalized segregation, discrimination, and disenfranchisement (but the list goes on!). Many of the newer legislative attempts to “undo” the damage of social and societal inequities have resulted in “unfunded mandates” (laws in words only, without the very necessary funding to begin to enact them). Very few in history or even now in the present day of the USA or even anywhere in the world have acknowledged or recognized the historical or current levels of trauma and isolation all of us in this eclectic population have undergone. It is up to us to convene in these A. I. R. meetings and this very communal fellowship to provide our own directions and strengths moving forward. Our loving higher power will ensure that our efforts are positive, kind, magnanimous, beneficial, and long lasting.

**March 26**: So, we’re told by TV, radio, blogs, chats, face time, that everything is rush, rush, rush all the time. Hurry up you might miss it. And if you’re not feeling well or up to the challenge, take these pills designed specifically for it. You’ll be cured in a matter of days, maybe hours, so you can continue to rush, rush, rush, and keep up with the crowd, they know where they’re going!….. Just out of curiosity, do you really believe any of this? Fact is, time and change never stop. Evolution is continuous. And making accommodations for anything actually takes time, a lot of time. This A. I. R. process you’ve just begun is not a fast pill or a quick fix. Spiritual development (in God’s or our higher power’s time) may take a long while to accomplish. Forget the world and its constant screaming at you from every angle to hurry up! This inner journey of self-discovery is on your time, not theirs. Relax, seek some calm, find a lovely place in nature like a park or by a pond or a brook or a river. But maybe even a back porch or a balcony. Watch a Slow sunrise or sunset. Listen to the wind or the rain, and for God’s sake, turn off your phone. Re-read the Problem, the Laundry List, the Solution, the Twelve Steps, and the Twelve Traditions. Each new time you read these they will appear to change over time. If these documents were a person telling you these things, as if they were questions, try to answer them by yourself out loud when you are alone. Listen to your own answers as they flow out of your mouth and mind. See where you are now. Don’t care where the world is going. Care where you are going. Witness continuously the slow daily steps, one day at a time. Create your own speed, you have nothing to prove to anyone else, ever. You are perfect, just the way you are and always have been. Welcome to the perfect Silence of God’s speech!

**March 27**: “You can’t do that; let me do it for you! I did not mean that you weren’t allowed to do it (but that goes without question); no, I meant that you weren’t capable of doing it. Why? Well I just know better, trust me!” When all the messages you got from birth on started with this, it just means that no one ever bothered trying to teach you to do anything, assuming that you couldn’t have learned even if anyone had tried teaching you by a simpler more direct method (or it just wasn’t safe to try). It’s funny that you actually became accomplished at doing a lot of things independently by just secretly watching others be successful. Ya gotta laugh (well, sometimes). But now, a lot of times, because of our “learned helplessness,” we just flounder along having to wait until someone who knows how to do something we’ve been asked to do comes along and does it. Also, it is so crazy that now when the world is screaming that we are all expected to be and become fully integrated and included in all of society’s enterprises, while having neglected completely in allowing and offering us the means to do just that, that we have no instructions, nor maps, nor training to step into the adult roles we’ve been denied in acquiring! Someone or something “dropped the ball” on that one! We’ve been victimized, acquiring self-hate and self-disapproval, but let’s see you jump into the mainstream of work, housing, and recreation without having acquired any of the necessary skills for doing so! You’ve got to be kidding! If we continue to believe everything the world tells us about ourselves we will never begin taking responsibility for who we are and demanding to get what we never were allowed to have before. Our learning about ourselves and our innate capabilities begins here in A. I. R. Demanding the same respect and privileges our “normal” population always got seems now entirely reasonable, and long overdue. But if it never arrives, we have each other in this A. I. R. assembly; and through our group consciousness and solidarity we can finally accept who we are and learn about our true selves and our sacred existence. We no longer have to feel we have a need to be and remain self- destructive, helpless, and incapacitated.

**March 28**: “Three steps forward and two steps back,” is an old phrase which sometimes applies to the experiencing of the A. I. R. recovery program. We choose the hard work of the 12 steps because we want to become better human beings: more responsible, more loving, more independent, less critical, less self-effacing, less solitary, less isolated, more calm, more resourceful, and more introspective. However, this path is not at all easy; and as this path is quite difficult and not what we are typically used to, we all have a tendency to fall back into our old comfortable ways that are contrary to the introspective path of recovery at

A. I. R. But although our former lifestyle was considerably easier, it was never satisfactory, rewarding, or productive of good, for us or anyone else. So, we return to the hard work we have chosen moving onward and upward examining our connections with those we know and love and also with the connections we have with ourselves and our higher power.

**March 29**: Most of us are more numb than we are angry, so much so that there is much more acceptance of the societal abuse and neglect we have undergone than there is serious complaining or violent outrage because of it. The absolute complicity between all political, medical, educational, jurisdictional, religious, financial, and communication media organizations regarding our “accepted” permanent inferior status has made it virtually impossible for any of us to rally support for any positive changes towards our abilities to approach equality in this world. Who besides just us will initiate change for the better? Who will see our point of view? Who gets it? A. I. R. attendees get it! A. I R. formats present it all and accept us! We are going to be a successful island in a sea of indifference. So be it! We will triumph where we are and with whom we exemplify and cherish.

**March 30**: Are we all an eclectic bunch of misfits? Pretty much so, yes! Society has placed all of us with unusual forms and variably different diagnoses into the same classifications and qualifications thinking it perhaps best if we (the round pegs) fit into the same (square peg) holes. We all (though very different genetically, historically, mentally, emotionally, and physically, and also coming from amazingly different backgrounds) end up with the same systemic abuse, name calling, isolation, segregation, discrimination, and separate and unequal status. So our A. I. R. meetings are a marvelous mix of unusually terrific and iconic individuals, all seeking distance from the daily harassment we’ve all come to recognize and deplore. So, there are no exclusionary practices for who can join A. I. R. and who cannot. That would be so preposterous and ridiculous: us practicing what we so vehemently object to. We all meet at A. I. R. as recognized sufferers at the hands of a very dysfunctional society that has corralled all us together. And we are all blessed by each other’s presence, for we bring some unusual skills and strengths collectively.

**March 31**: We inherently get along very well with others who participate in our A. I. R. program because “they’ve been there, and done that.” They understand most of the similar travails we’ve all been through. Our successes in realizing we need this program, coupled with our repeated failures in living up to the unjustified degradations of the society in which we live, galvanize our intrepid camaraderie. Our singular individual struggles to realize our own inner lights as well as our ingrained societally placed demons directly mirror our fellow traveler’s efforts, who also gradually change for the better using the A. I. R. prescribed means. It is both an individual and a group effort, where encouragement and supports are needed, expected, and highly appreciated.

**April 1**: Will we make mistakes as we explore the inner workings of our thinking and feeling and our decision making: our choices that come up every day, hour, minute, second? Yes, of course. But will we take these mistakes as trials and lessons and as part of an unending process that is ok, and right, and proper? We should! Life is a classroom, a self-graded exploration of life, a marvelous process of ever expanding growth, understanding, and spiritual accomplishment. And there are no time limits. Our souls occupying these limited physical vehicles are immortal. We’ve always been; we are here now, we always will be. How odd that we can be so serious about something on a day like today: April Fools. Yet, our work in A. I. R. provides us with the much needed and required patience with ourselves that calms us, relaxes us, encourages us to continue, regardless of past, present, or future difficulties  which are inevitable, but eventually pass like rain storms that come and go. Being helped along by our peers and our higher power continually makes the journeying possible and profitable. We are all in our higher power’s hands, we always have been, we always will be. Awareness of this as children regarding the divine control and expertise will advance us along this path of recovery and discovery. We are not alone and never have been.

**April 2**: How could we ever know where we are supposed to be going to (from where we are now, from what we’ve been through, from this crucible of total dysfunction)? Does a caterpillar know as a caterpillar that its destiny is to become a butterfly? Does an acorn know it is to become a majestic oak tree? How can we ponder the future and think that this abused, street wise, reactive, demoralized, denegrated human being with zero self-esteem is going to somehow evolve into a loving, caring, forgiving, decent, wholesome, grateful, caretaking wonder? You have got to be kidding me!!! And faith and hope are going to be enough to hang onto (when all we’ve had for sometimes more than decades is fear and distrust and demoralizing failure)? Yuh, yuh, yuh, yuh, yuh, pretty much. But we do have our fellow seekers and our twelve steps and our trust in a loving higher power. We never said this path was going to be easy. Perhaps far from it! But sticking to it to see and witness gradual peaceful changes over time in ourselves and others will be worth the struggles and efforts.  And trust yourselves more than anything!

**April 3**: The things we have done to others, the things we’ve done to ourselves, the things done to others which we have turned a blind eye to, the things we have allowed to be done to ourselves: these are past things, but if they still hurt and embarrass and make us wince, we still hold onto them as if they were rare fortunes, priceless artifacts, and cherished memories, and not painful forgettable disasters.  Let us, though, try to examine why they happened. Were we conditioned to expect them? Were we taught that as these things were done to us it was then ok for us to do them to others? Were we made helpless by bullying to the point that the thought of defending others being mistreated was beyond our abilities and lowly station? Were we hurtful to ourselves knowing that mistreatment was eventually coming our way anyway? Were we invisible? Or punching bags? Or door mats? Or hopeless clowns? Or many of these things or rolls? Is this A. I. R. program a real light of salvation at the end of a tunnel, or just another oncoming train? Are we ready to share our pasts? Can we expose ourselves to ourselves, let alone these fellow travelers who seem at times to be strangers? The past is not happening now. This is something worth remembering and considering. We can always weigh our options, which are ours and no one else’s.

**April 4**: We criticize ourselves as we have been criticized: teachers, peers, acquaintances, relatives, strangers, sometimes verbally, and a lot non-verbally. Too often we get “the drift” of staring faces, cold, unfeeling, rude, discouraging, callous, unfriendly, uncomplimentary. Too often we are like creatures in a zoo, a museum, or a horror movie. Our only escape is shutting down, withdrawal, invisibly silent, forgetting ourselves in the moment, drifting away into fantasies and daydreams of irrelevance, ceasing to even wish for anything different. We are too used to the black and white of insults. We are so used to it all we tend to second-guess everything, and too often incorrectly, which furthers our blaming ourselves and beating ourselves up internally, with few seeing the internal warfare and constant defeats. In A. I. R. we begin to try to silence the internal negativity and the memorized critical authority, which has festered, and that society has imposed on us. It can be a daily struggle for a long time. But gradually, by focusing on the hows and the whys of it all we begin to dismantle the internalized chaos, substituting it with love, acceptance, tolerance, forgiveness, and happiness. You’ll notice it’s a long haul !!!

**April 5**: So many of the other innumerable 12-step programs talk about the necessity of splitting away permanently from the sources of the problems and then seeking alliances with all other safe havens existing separately within society away from the sources of those targeting problems. Well, guess what! We at A. I. R. exist within our own very secluded little island by ourselves, with no help from anyone else but us and our higher power. Somebody had to be that unicyclist in the parade. We drew the short straw! So, what shall it be? Do we strive to be the tragedies that no one is willing to notice or pay attention to? Or do we opt for being forever cute in our heartwarming roles as occasional feel-good stories? Or maybe we end up on the back pages of the Enquirer in a 21st century PT Barnum exhibit of “The Strange and Unusual”? Or maybe we just not make any headlines anywhere but simply discover our simple means of recovery, by helping each other in the quiet of our own

A. I. R. meetings, with the assistance of our members and our higher power, to reach for our own means of success and enlightenment, unobserved by all but ourselves! Yeah! That’s the ticket!!!!

**April 6**: With all of the resources we may be able to acquire along our paths to freedom and enlightenment and success with inner peace and understandings, our emotional and physical health (and how to foster them and restore them) may have been inadvertently ignored or not even considered. Too often when pain and depression and lack of confidence are holding the upper hand in our lives, concerns regarding our own health are completely forgotten and dispensed with. Surviving “in the trenches” too often results in making it in any way we can to a neutral port in a ceaseless storm; and the last thing we ever consider is how to actually take better care of ourselves in the process. But with A. I. R., maybe we can begin to also consider how to eat properly (junk food anyone?), how to sleep properly (any late, late night movies we’ve just got to watch?), and physically exercising beginning with very easy and moderate workouts gradually increasing with comfort to help restore a balanced metabolism (but what about the 48 hour online computer gaming marathon we were going to set our sights on?). Enough of the sarcasm! Everything in moderation. Too much or too little of anything and we upset the physical and emotional balancing we all need and require. Let’s not get crazy! A. I. R. work is not easy, but it should not be “Navy Seals” hard either. We can all help each other with pacing ourselves to become better in all areas of our lives!

**April 7**: So what of sexuality, and intimacy, and friendship, and love; and feeling wanted, needed, appreciated, and secure and safe? All choices are completely up to us, all of the time. We are not to be coerced into any experiences or relationships that we do not wholly consent to, regardless of how we have been treated in our pasts. If there have been mistakes, we are not obligated to repeat them. In A. I. R., we hold ourselves and our lives with dignity, even if it is completely new-found and strangely different from how we have behaved in the past or been treated in the past. And we respect all others (within, or even, without our group) with the same levels of respect that we require for ourselves. And if we need help with decisions in relationships, we can always ask for help and get it.

**April 8**: “Because you’re just different, Honey, that’s why. There’s no use complaining about those neighbor kids and what they’ve got, and that they show it off to everyone on the block. And just ignore what they say. You know it’s not nice, but you are better than that.” But the pains that arise almost daily from being labeled and treated as different haunts our every interaction and remembrance.  And how we treat and feel about ourselves is an exact reflection of the words and language and stares that followed us everywhere outside of our homes. The only reason now that we haven’t lost before we’ve even started is that we have this A. I. R. program that presents us all as being fine, and OK, and worthwhile, and precious, and dynamic, and not at all what society and the world proclaim us to be. We are here to seek our own validation, from ourselves and from our fellow travelers, ‘cause we ain’t got it from anywhere else.

**April 9**: Others in our group or in our vicinity, or anywhere around us, happen to experience, for reasons unknown to all of us, some form of “melt down,” and they experience this for reasons totally unrelated to us; but we get triggered by our hyper-vigilance and we “know” for certain that they are thinking of talking about us, and whatever it is that is bothering them must be our fault. So we over-react and start screaming, crying, yelling, pacing, talking to ourselves super loud which sets off everyone else nearby in a fusion, fission, domino-falling reaction, and all hell breaks loose, and it goes on for an unmercifully long time, and we’ve got tunnel vision and can’t think ‘cause we’re totally in flight and fright mode, and nothing helps but getting as far away from ground zero as possible, if we can, and sometimes we can’t leave, which makes it a million times worse. In A. I. R. we are reminded that days like this happen and we can try to become aware that our center of being is untouched by the madness and we can start to relax and deep breathe and sit down and try to be calm and say, “Whatever this problem is, it is not me. My soul is an eagle taking wing gently floating above all of this in a blue and sunny sky. I am far from this. I always have been. I’m OK. This is a minor inconvenience that will quickly pass. Better times are right around the corner.” Sometimes we just react because of what we’ve been through, but it’s all OK; it really is all OK.

**April 10**: Physical, emotional, and psychological abuse and mistreatment over years often results eventually in psychic shut down: a state of numbness and paralyzing disquiet that produces an almost zombie like withdrawal from any and all constructive and productive human interaction. It is a hidden going-through-the-motions routine, blindly and blankly moving through life with barely minimal involvement or direction towards goals of any kind. Becoming involved in an A. I. R. program to listen to fellow travelers share their histories of pain and disenfranchisement may strike similar chords in our own lives. Our silent participation may reveal similar patterns of isolation, withdrawal, shut down, and immobility. Recognizing and becoming aware of past pains and our own horrendous experiences sets the stage for the beginnings of our recovery. It is indeed a day-by-day, step-by-step process.

**April 11**: Maybe if we hear the line, “You look funny!” we should respond with, “My eyes work just fine, thank you very much!” Yeah, I know, it won’t help. Even though we often tried to brush off crap like this with humor, even if it was for our own benefit. But really, is it OK that a lot of people (friends, peers, acquaintances, strangers) have to wantonly say shit like this just to make them feel better about themselves? Does every day common social banter also have to be so damned competitive? What for? Adding insult to injury, kicking someone when they’re down? Cruelty for the sake of misery? It’s not funny folks! Nothing like trying to survive in a swamp filled with hungry alligators! Not only is bullying a learned behavior, but so is shame (as a pained result of). It now seems that only through A. I. R. are we able to fully dispense with the effects of ridicule by realizing we are perfectly fine in appearance just the way we are. It comes about through sharing and commiserating with like-minded and experienced peers who have gone through too many similar trials.

**April 12**: Most 12-Step programs talk about (and outline) the means and benefits of stepping out of childhood roles we’ve been given or that have been attached to us. For us in the realm of intellectual and developmental disabilities, attempting to shed the role of “retard,” “gimpy,” “slow,” etc. is basically impossible, unless we are Stephen Hawking, the smartest human being on the planet. Roles within families, churches, schools, associations, neighborhoods, too often come with the joke about that cautionary street sign:



But roles of “smart aleck”, “clown”, “door mat”, “whipping boy”, “gopher”, etc. are also extremely hard to get out of, as we age and move on to other stages of our lives. What has become “rut-like” accepted and predictable and habitual can be very hard to get out of and dismantle. We encounter old friends or acquaintances and they expect to see us and experience us as that same good old “whatever” they were always used to, and we fall into the same old behaviors that made them comfortable and happy. And too many roles were the result of survival skills and may have been entirely unconscious. In A. I. R., we may begin to recognize the hidden secretive roles we’ve been playing and continue to play. But it’s our choice whether or not to either abandon these social masks or roles or continue them. If abandoning them, they need to be replaced by more healthy, responsible, realistic, and overall loving practices, so as to avoid an uncomfortable vacuum where there might be no replacement. But working into a new unknown, but healthy, role takes time and effort, and trial and error. Mistakes may happen, but that’s all a natural part of real learning.

**April 13**: With actions speaking a lot stronger and louder than words, we in this community learn from very early on in life that broken promises are as patterned and anticipated as hurricane weather in Florida. Therefore, trust is a very difficult thing for all of us to try to establish and believe in. As mentioned before, one of our biggest “problems” is that our eyes and our ears work, too often too well; and we become very aware of the favoritism shown to others in society, and that too often promises are dropped or put on permanent hold. With trust forever shredded or non-existent, then trying to establish close friendships or alliances becomes very tenuous, as our fears of rejection, or failure, or being let down are further complicated by our second guessing everything we do. How can we trust others when we fail at trusting ourselves? In A. I. R. we begin to experiment with gradually letting down (easing down) our impenetrable wall like guard to allow others in our group to see into who we really are through our attempts at sharing. It takes time and patience and trusting, maybe for the first time. With our higher power’s assistance we can overcome our fears doing this and begin to really open up for some soulful connections.

**April 14**: “God, do we have to say, God?” Almighty, Savior, Higher Power, Higher Self, Divinity, Lord, Great Grandfather, Allah, Brahman, Buddha, Tao, Universe, Source, The Nameless One, Beingness, Loveingkindness, Jesus, Krishna, Moses, The Law Giver, Deity, The Big Kahuna… However it is that we wish to name our supreme benefactor, that one we need Who helps us when we are unable to provide for ourselves with that last ditch necessary boost, or lift up, or encouragement, does it really matter what we call “it” or anyone else calls “it”? Hang ups are just lack of toleration and tunnel vision based on some of our own past unpleasant histories that are useless baggage we still carry around with us that we mistakenly think is real important. It’s not. “The word for ‘Knife’ in French is ‘Couteau.’ What is a ‘Couteau?’ Damn it. It’s called a knife. The French people must be wrong!” See how silly that sounds and is? A God by any other name is a rose! How’s that for a mixed metaphor?

A. I. R. has an absolutely open door policy where all who need help and assistance and sanctuary from all of the world’s storms can find refuge here. All, regardless of backgrounds, races, religions, sexual preferences, cultures, identities, are welcome! WELCOME!!!

**April 15**: Those of us who have been hurt badly, have learned how to hide and disguise ourselves so that we won’t be hurt again. We have become buried treasure with no map showing any successful trails where “X” marks the spot. We have become unsolvable mazes with dead ends everywhere. We write, and like, surrealistic poetry that sounds like cerebral nonsense. We have perfected the arts of dodging and invisibility and withdrawal: All for survival and escape. But these methods do not really help in recovery. Rather than running away from the past horror and dysfunction, we need to do a complete 180 degree turn and head back to uncover, dismantle, learn about, and discover where we’ve come from to be able to grow beyond it and transcend it. By God, it’s not easy. It’s so much like returning into a burning building [in reality, DO NOT EVER DO THIS!!!]. Realize that the pains, trials, hurts you’ve experienced are 1.) not you, and 2.) are in the past. They are not and never were “Your fault!” In A. I. R. we share in order to unlock and change our perspectives on the events of the past so they no longer hurt. Here is a poem of seeking and solace:

“We go through life a wandering for ev-

er and a day, without a clue of me

and you or what we’d like to say. We nev-

er know where we’ve come from or

what our sea

will bring. We live alone, in flesh and bone,

and fears to which we cling. We strive to know

why we are here, on earth where we’ve been thrown,

while giving, taking, and mistaking, tow-

ing all we’ve sewn. We live with no direc-

tions, though we hope and dream and smile, and pray

we make it through to peace, beyond life’s wreck,

in style. If we could just hold hands this day,

perhaps to share what’s here, it would appear

we’ve found what’s real, before we disappear.”

**April 16**: Just because society doubts us does not mean that we have to believe society, or incorporate the voicings and words we so often hear: “You’re not good enough! You can’t succeed at anything! That 12-step program was never meant for you! You might as well quit and go home! You’re just kidding yourself and everyone else here! You don’t believe in this crap, and you don’t even believe in yourself, and no one else does either.” It is quite strange that we tend to absorb the worst social commentaries into our own quiet mental constructs that we hear inside our own heads way too often. And if we do alter ourselves to become successful through this recovery program and successfully change how we think and feel and talk, then the significant outcry from friends, family, and acquaintances often explodes with unrivaled drama, because we have wrecked others’ perceptions of us and they can’t handle it!!! And just when you thought change was going to be beautiful and uncomplicated! But it’s all still very worthwhile! You’re on your way to freedom from the past and all the dysfunction.

**April 17**: “I don’t seem to have any control over anything in my life!” Ok, good observation! Now let’s take a closer look at it. We’ve all heard about the concept of “Letting go, and letting God!” Yes, of course. But if you don’t really have any control over anything in your life, what is it that you seem to be holding onto? Any guesses? How about fear? Yes? How about painful memories? Yup? How about loses? Uh huh! How about indecision? Definitely! How about shame and blame? By the bucketful! How about embarrassment! Too much of it! How about sorrow and sadness? We’ve cried a river? How about wanting and needing total isolation? Hello! Anybody home in there? Hello? Well, now, please take a very close look at all these things we are holding onto. They seem to be all on the very negative side of the spectrum, just a tad! Then why are we holding onto all of these very negative things? Because we deserve them? Come on! Please! This is where we realize we can actually let go of these things which a healthy person does not need, anymore, now, ever! And it’s OK, because we still don’t have any control over anything, and that’s still Ok. Our higher power’s got us and we just witness our moving forward one step at a time day-by-day, as we relax and see the world through very different eyes.

**April 18**: The funny and crazy thing about feeling abandonment is that society, in labeling us “disabled,” incorrectly determines that we are forever dependent on government agencies for practically everything; and being dependent and enabled and unable to decide for ourselves, or delegate for ourselves, or plead for ourselves, we are therefore placed in a permanent state of being controlled by “officialdom.” All things will, from now on, be determined for you.  So whenever we really need anything beyond our immediate control or power, we then have to wait and get in line, and sometimes this takes days, weeks, months, even years for any bureaucratic response. “Please keep in mind that you may expect delays.” And having to wait for anything we need for too long creates an anxiety of abandonment. The abandonment issues then become routine and expected. So, just toss all love and feelings of nurturing and mutuality of feelings and commitments right out the window. Abandonment produces mistrust and caution and inadequacy and unbridled skepticism in all relationships, whether with governmental officials or people we would hope to become best friends with. Turning all this around through A. I. R. meetings and sharings will take time and assistance from all fellow seekers. It’s a long hard road, but worth it.

**April 19**: One of the things that should be highlighted during our A. I. R. recovery program is that there is a significant difference between being a recipient of the services of the A. I. R. program and being an organizer or a promoter of an A. I. R. program. Prolonged experience in the work and workings of the program are generally accepted as being somewhat necessary before attempting to step into a role of program initiator or even promoter of the messages of the program. A real and profound appreciation of how the program works while producing positive loving results is a basic prerequisite for championing the A. I. R. cause for others. Years of receiving service may be seriously required before attempting to navigate the understood ups and downs that do happen with recovery, so that optimum benefits are always provided and ensured.

**April 20**: The critical nature of the world tends to foster the critical nature within us all. However, the rule of “no cross talking” when thoroughly applied, enforced, and respected places each listener across from the one doing the sharing into an odd circumstance: becoming a quiet, restrained, contemplative, engaged, and thoughtful participant in a non-critical role, that is then forced onto him or her (consensually) repeatedly, remaining in that quiet state as long as sharing in the A. I. R. meeting lasts. If the one doing this quiet listening becomes a sharer of personal history, then the roles are reversed and the speaker then relates a heartfelt incidence or series of incidents into the quiet of the assembled A. I. R. listeners. The ensuing silence does nothing but bolster the authenticity of the remarks, lending confidence not only to the speaker during the sharing, but also to the speaker’s previous bouts of silence when others were speaking. The quiet itself, during both the sharing and the listening, is a profound teaching moment.

**April 21**: The odd coin we seem to carry around with us perpetually has “disappointment” on one side and “hope” on the other. And regardless of the number of times we flip it and come up with “disappointment” face up, we still manage to move forward with “hope” for better times. Why is this? It sure doesn’t seem to arise from experience. That would clearly match or indicate that old saying, “I’ve seen bad times like this turn right around and get worse!” Is it fate, or destiny, or our imagination? Or is there something else “out there,” which rules or oversees this curious (and at times crazy) life we live, that we all travel in time? We get knocked down for some of the most outrageous things or circumstances, but we manage somehow to get back up, dust ourselves off, and continue. Where does this resilience come from, this encouragement? It would seem to take the strength of God at times to be able to time after time get up off of the mat, face down, stand up and continue. What if that old saying of Jesus, “The Kingdom of God is within you!” is actually true? That our creator, our source and destiny, actually resides in our hearts at our very center, providing us with the strength and power and motivation to always get up and continue? Considering the incessant pains and horrors and trials and difficulties we’ve always lived with, it sort of makes supreme sense, in a wryly mystical way. Think about it! We, who are the perpetually downtrodden in society, have the least levels of motivation externally to ever continue struggling with life. Nothing external is encouraging or consistently hopeful or helping in any way. Yet we survive, we exist, we struggle, we continue. The word “universe” means literally “one word” “uni-verse.” So, what if this universal infinite singularity resides within us? If it does, we can then certainly relax, calm down, smile, sit back, and enjoy the ride, regardless of the incessant difficulties and trials and hostilities we continually experience! We have “no worries” at our very center!!

**April 22**: Ever watch a tree grow? Neither have I. I imagine it takes quite a bit of patience! Anything worth growing and expanding takes time. A. I. R. work is a slow going process. How old is the earth? Approximately 4.543 billion years. How old is our current universe? 13.7 billion years? How long does recovery take (especially due to generational trauma)? Maybe a few lifetimes, is all! So, you looking for a quick fix, are ya? We here do believe in miracles, so it is entirely possible, but not very likely. Remember that old Irish prayer for a good potato crop? “Pick up a hoe!” Recovery takes work, patience, tolerance of self and others, and the time to put in the work to do it. Nothing happens overnight except for maybe a good night’s rest, if we’re lucky. You get here and wish already to have accomplished all of the steps and goals and quickly move on. As an old sage once yelled, “Not so fast; NOT SO FAST!!” Relax, calm down, breathe deep! The earth and the universe are not going away any time soon!

**April 23**: Sometimes buried grief quickly rises to the surface of consciousness unexpectedly by “triggers” of unwholesome experience, seemingly out of nowhere. And we are hammered by the re-experienced trauma, guilt, shame, blame, hurt, and embarrassment (maybe all of these together). Through our A. I. R. work we are able to more successfully deal with these resurfacing attacks. Practicing through our meeting involvement, we can more calmly share these startling moments that exhaust us and render us temporality helpless. Our fellow travelers in their silence will assist us and bolster us up. Do we have all of the answers? Nope! We’re all still here aren’t we?

**April 24**: Being “card carrying” members of this “disability” class of human beings, we were thrust into “connectedness” with all others of our chosen “special” sect. We’d all been labeled before we could even talk or voice any objections (not that that would have worked or fixed things). So our best friends, like us, are still wondering how any of this was even possible, logical, fair, or even ethical. Our trust and faith and love and reliability in others like ourselves was a natural consequence of our simply being who we are: “different!” Who the heck else can we honestly rely on? We rely on each other. We have all learned who not to rely on, though we still make occasional mistakes in this regard, over and over again, seemingly. Working the steps and the Serenity Prayer, the Laundry List, the Problem, and the Solution only deepens our connectedness with our fellow travelers. Learning how to also rely on our higher power lessens the anxiety of aloneness and solitude. Together we all make progress together.

**April 25**: A lot of the self-doubt, self-hatred, self- misperceptions came about because of how we (being different) were labeled and provided unfair expectations about our abilities, strengths, purpose, and directions. This almost cosmic scenario has been in existence in all societies since the beginning of time. We’re experiencing outside influential things where nothing has changed over millennia. But through these A. I. R. means and methods we discover that it is we who are responsible for how we feel and think and act and move forward. We do not have to accept society’s predisposed theories and their medical practices and their educational prognostications about us. We are who we are and potentially damned proud of ourselves and our accomplishments, our successes against overwhelming odds, and our joys and happinesses we have developed for ourselves without any outside help. We are strong and we believe in ourselves! Our work on ourselves comes from us! We rely on each other and our higher power. We can love and be loved, and transcend all hostilities, peacefully.

**April 26**: If we are on the road to recovery but decide to choose friends who are still caught up in doubt, self- hatred, and self-misperceptions, it may be somewhat difficult to explain or share our newfound delights in fellowship and our own redefinition of who we are and who we want to become. Our newfound friend or friends may criticize our work or feelings or sharings due to their imbedded reliance on society’s determinations of how folks like us should act and think and behave. Such interactions can be very stressful, confusing, and chaotic, as even fellow travelers who have not discovered a path to recovery seem perfectly fine to be relied on, even if it makes us uncomfortable. Continuing to study the steps, waiting in silence for the answers, and relying on our fellow travelers and our higher power may all provide us with much needed answers and solace during these questioning and questionable times and encounters. Prayer and love will always be available under such circumstances!

**April 27**: To become completely healed from past traumas done to us (and by us) requires that we do our part in making amends to those we have harmed, purposely or not. As we have no control over the other people (or agencies, or strangers, etc.) who have mistreated us, that is not up to us but to them (if ever). But being able to apologize in person or over the phone or through text or email to any and all in our past that we may have harmed (if it will not do further damage) is a great thing to unburden ourselves of the shame and blame and hurt that we carry around with us to this day, which is not healthy. Beginning the process of making amends involves using pen and paper to make as complete a list as possible of all those we may have harmed, even of those for whom we have projected negative thoughts about. If the process of actually getting in touch with those we’ve harmed seems too difficult for us we can use our list in a quiet place and recite the following for each name on our list: “With gratitude in my heart, I send a beam of love to my friend, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_” [just insert one name on the list. Reciting the whole phrase again and again with each new name included]. Do this recitation with each phrase and each name once a day for forty days. Then watch to see the positive results this produces. Healing can be a highly interactive process, even from a distance!

**April 28**: Ever heard the phrase, “Sometimes the cure seems worse than the disease!”? Well, in the A. I. R. program, it just may be that the process of healing (those methods for extracting and uprooting all of the past habitual pains), maybe as painful or even more painful than the past mistreatments that forced us to seek out this 12-step program in the first place. “Oh joy!” I can hear it now. Yes, recovery is not for the faint of heart. But the same inherent strengths that have given you the will to survive the hell you’ve already lived through will surely get you through every step of this recovery. And now you have understanding fellow travelers and a loving higher power to assist every new and unexpected calamity. Searching inside ourselves for the poisonous attachments we’ve allowed to inhabit our space (fears, obsessions, doubts, anger, jealousies, inhibitions, lies, etc.) takes time, incessant exploration, study, meditation, and serious self-examination. It can be a long slow process but extremely worthwhile. And there are friends to help along the way.

**April 29**: Every A. I. R. meeting that is established anywhere is autonomous and can determine through its own collective consensus how to conduct its own meetings (when, in terms of days and times, order of literature read, how long the sharings will be, and whether or not those are timed, who leads meetings, whether in person or zoomed or whatever, etc.).  As long as the basic format remains basically the same, then the process remains true to its initial intent. Some groups may want to have a lot of structure; others may choose to be much more laid back. A. I. R. cooperates with all other 12-step programs, although our focus is one primarily of realizing the unfortunate social and societal systemic far reaching effects and impacts placed upon those with labels of intellectual and developmental disabilities. Our meetings are for individual member recovery, discovery, and transcendence from the pains caused by forced isolation, discrimination, segregation, disenfranchisement, abuse, neglect, bullying, name calling, and unequal opportunities in terms of residential housing, employment, and recreational services.  We attempt to nurture self-awareness, self-reliance, and positive self-image, by uncovering and dealing with past societal indiscretions and mistreatments. Our focus is on group bonding and understanding of our higher power’s assistance in all efforts moving forward towards more loving, inclusion, integration, and acceptance as to exactly who and what we are, being able to contribute all of who we are to a more welcoming society at large.

**April 30**: “That’s just the way life is!” “I’ve got nothing to complain about.” “This is the hand I was dealt.” “I am the way I am because somehow I deserved it.” “I can’t change; I’m the way I am, and that’s the way I’ll always be.” But, even if you’ve always felt this way, or perhaps stated it a little differently, or maybe in your own words, here’s a thought for you (and for us) to consider: “Society is not the best mirror to be staring into every day.” And, “Society’s image of you is most probably highly inaccurate.” You don’t have to feel about yourself, think about yourself, imagine a life for yourself based on what other people or agencies or officials tell you what is best for you. Their agenda is not your agenda nor our agenda. A. I. R. is letting you know you have a voice and a heart and a soul and with much inner study and exploration you can determine for yourself what directions and changes you wish to follow. With your A. I. R. fellow travelers, and your higher power’s help and assistance, you can change (if you want to) your perspectives on yourself and the world.

**May 1**: Maybe we had dreams when we were little of becoming someone or something truly amazing or different when we grew up, but others who heard our dreams were so discouraging that the dreams were dropped when we were still young. But now in A. I. R. we may become so free and relaxed and confident with who we are and who we are becoming that those dreams when we were little come back and seem possible. The same may be said for innate talents that we don’t even know we possess, due to the intense discouragement that society throws at us daily and has for our entire lives. Through A. I. R. maybe we can begin to explore the natural gifts that we all have that have never been fostered or nurtured properly. Meeting and living with others who truly care about our lives and welfare may be the necessary soil in which our skills and talents will be able to grow and flourish. Why not? It could happen!!

**May 2**: If coming to A. I. R. has become a joy for you, then good! If it has been exciting noticing the effect it has had upon you, then good also. But try to realize that these positive discoveries have been because you were ready to receive them, not particularly in regards to anybody else. As human beings we generally like to share our joys and loves and new things with everyone we know and love and meet. But in the case of A. I. R., you might want to hold off running down the street with a huge placard sign screaming, “Hey everybody, look what I’ve just found. This program is the greatest thing since sliced bread.” If you do this people may think you are a complete lunatic!”

A. I. R. recovery may be good and great for a lot of people who simply discover it on their own, but it might not be for everyone you’ve ever met or known. If people stop you in your daily life and sincerely ask you what has happened in your life that has caused such monumental changes that they have noticed in your speech and actions and behaviors, then by all means explain the program to them. These people have noticed changes due to their “attraction” to you, not your “out-and-out” promotion of the program: there’s a big difference in delivery and the testifying of it. In a way, you’ll also simply know in your heart who would want to know about this program and who would not be close to being ready for it at that particular time. The world is a very complex place with a multitude of different peoples chasing after their own dreams. A. I. R. is great for a lot of people who chose to get involved with it, as it clearly fills their needs. For a lot of people it has zero meaning or purpose. Such is life.

**May 3**: Amazing, isn’t it? We’ve finally, after all these years, become aware that we’ve been living in a virtual war zone most of our lives: both as victims and victimizers (as we were perfectly trained to be both). We may have been more or less aware of either or both or neither. Maybe we never had the time or the inclination to reflect on any of it, being that most of our lives was dodging or ducking the hostilities simply to survive in a constant flight or fight mode. But here in A. I. R. we get a chance to stop, relax, rest, think, perceive deeply into ourselves, maybe for the first time, and imagine a life without premeditated offensive and defensive strategies for survival. We may even discover a need for apologizing to ourselves for our behavior and actions, and apologizing to others we have harmed or spoken ill of. We may even apologize to our higher power and ask for assistance right away, and always, especially for directions about where to, and how to go, from here: this new point of quiet rest and reflection. We certainly are not in a state of perfection: far from it, but that’s truly OK. We begin where we are, where we happen to be. This new stage in life is all about continuous self-awareness, self-love, self-dignity, and self-empowerment. Our fellow travelers are discovering very similar things about themselves; it’s all good.

**May 4**: On this day of all days we celebrate “Humor”, which we always need at times to help us with struggles of self-analysis, discussion, communication, and attempts at understanding. So, without further ado: “May the Fourth be with you!” Yes, it’s old, and overused, but it’s still funny! Being able to laugh and being able especially to laugh at ourselves, is a very necessary art and skill and tool for coping with the stresses of life. Laughing with others, but not at others, is a very important distinction when it comes to humor; for being laughed at is a horrible thing that all of us have experienced through being bullied a lot in life. Bring laughed at is cruel and brutal and unnecessary, like “being kicked when down and out.” It produces unneeded shame and embarrassment and stays long in the memory, and is very difficult to get over. So good humor, laughing with others, is healthy and fine; and laughing at oneself is definitely good and healthy and fine. While laughing at others is not OK. Sometimes it happens, unfortunately, but it’s still not OK.

**May 5**: A great many unanticipated human emotions happen as reactions to expectations we place upon ourselves and also from expectations that are placed upon us by others. Emotions also arise because of environmental experiences both internally and externally. The more we hold onto our own personal expectations and the expectations placed upon us by others the more we get tossed around by the vagaries of earthly chaos.  When we simply “roll” with the daily happenings (having fully “let go” of worrying about any and all outcomes), we live in a state of balance where no emotions can affect our deliberate state of equilibrium. “Letting go and letting God” is perhaps one of the hardest tasks in A. I. R. recovery to successfully manifest, as we have been so conditioned to want and want and want and respond to any and every desire that surges within us. The old line in the Bible, “Judge not that ye be not judged!” in fact directly applies here, for judging is metaphysically the same as wanting and desiring and expecting and anticipating. Surprise! Surprise! So, letting go and letting God literally means giving up on expecting or anticipating any and all outcomes. Holy clay, Batman! Loving ourselves is letting go. Witnessing life in calm and peace at our center is letting go. Sharing our past pains dispassionately is letting go. A. I. R. allows this to successfully happen. Do we make mistakes trying to accomplish this? Absolutely! But being aware and continuously trying makes things better and better as time goes on! As they say in every 12-step program, “This is a spiritual path.”

**May 6**: We have absolutely no control over societal dysfunction and have no control over the effects of it. Our attempts at uncovering the various levels of societal abuse and neglect and mistreatment may seem an unending Herculean task; but while we are at this A. I. R. program, we are determined to share our histories and feelings and understandings that have brought us to this communal assemblage. Listening intently to all others sharing their pains and hurts and difficulties helps emerge a pattern displaying a commonality amongst us that cannot be ignored or downplayed or cast aside. But living with the awareness of what we’ve been through and accepting it as real allows us to move on from it gradually, and successfully. The experiences are gone, in the past, and no longer are a part of us. We are here and have survived the worst of it. It is now a matter of perspective from a place of peaceful and calm detachment.

**May 7**: For folks like us, there is no worldwide fellowship….yet. We have all, regardless of our very distinctive diagnoses (autism, Aspergers, Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, Dyslexia, ADD, ADHD, traumatic brain Injury, etc.) been so systematically isolated and disenfranchised that our commonality and fraternity exists only in college textbooks and some academic journal articles about us. This very new A. I. R. program might give a few of us an opportunity for local fellowship and minimal cooperation and community, but worldwide fellowship is a very, very long way off, if now only a pipe dream. We may hope for understanding and support from our fellow travelers in our own communities and rely on those we know personally. We are aware of our higher power’s authority and divine assistance in our daily step- by-step struggles. But with our new A. I. R. program, it is good not to feel completely alone. Being battered by every aspect of society is so unforgiving in its continuous intent and harassment. Our differences, in regards to what is considered “normal”, haunt our every move, our every encounter, our every effort, our every attempt at approval for unconditional love. If there does exist a bottom to the proverbial social barrel, we are below it. But with prayer and hope and the support of our fellow travelers and our divine higher power, we will wait patiently for a better tomorrow.

**May 8**: In a society and world that behave entirely dysfunctionally towards members of our population, it is almost impossible to hide or find a secure place of refuge. We seem to be the quintessential sore thumbs, third wheels, short straws, or unknown quantities. We would not fit into any kitchen utility drawer with the rest of the miscellaneous junk. And our exposure to humiliation, disgrace, disregard, bullying, and reckless displacement lasts an entire lifetime: from hospital maternity nursery to last stage nursing home. No one really knows what to do with us, ever, as if it were ever necessary to find or discover that nonexistent place where we might fit into. We could all pray for that alien space craft to come back and take us all to where we’ve come from. Better than this? Right? So we naturally hide in our disabilities: every worst expectation we’ve ever been handed, because we can pretty much disappear into it; disability is our home, our shelter, our turtle shell. It came attached to us. We could be honorary Native Americans: they don’t fit anywhere either. At least in A. I. R. we encounter solidarity and love and acceptance. We share our labels and hurts and dreams. We experience the love and acceptance from our higher power, who knows what it’s truly like being invisible, but ever present! (Hey, that was funny! Even if completely dead on true!). When we come to A. I. R. meetings with the expectation of discovering the means to becoming whole, we may learn in time that we always were whole; and, there never has been anything ever wrong with any of us!

**May 9**: A lot of 12-step programs talk about, worry about, and warn about relapsing: reverting from successful seeking, or balancing, and/or “refraining from” type behaviors to indulging in various intoxicants or life altering experiences not considered especially healthy. For us in A. I. R., not so much. As we in the program have been historically targeted for who we are more than for what we do, relapsing is not considered a serious vice for us. But if our A. I. R. program is ever forsaken by those who have tried it and determined it’s really not a perfect fit for them, it could be that friends, family, or agency personnel connected with those certain individuals have suggested that the program interferes with their individual’s preferred status or direction in life and they have persuaded the individual in question that they should drop their attending. As the program is free and not a required or mandated vehicle for attendance, coming and going may be considered a perfectly natural occurring situation. There’s no pressure to attend or not to attend at A. I. R. Our program is just another tool in life’s toolbox. It’s always an individual’s choice for involvement and use, and not a required life course. There’s no pressure to attend or stay.

**May 10:** Where can we go to find relationships that are not toxic? Whom can we trust to be honest and fair and healthy with our feelings, our self-perceptions, our dreams, and our choices? Must we always be “street wise,” cautious, wary, on the defensive, practical, and skeptical? In A. I. R. we can relax, let our guards down, choose our times to share freely, open up among fellow travelers, and witness positive transformations with ourselves and others as we unburden ourselves of too often real and experienced mistreatments. In A. I. R. we search for our lost innocence, our natural vulnerability, our opening up and letting go. It is a safe place to explore our inner awareness and convalescence. However, outside of our A. I. R. meetings, in the real world that can be so unsafe and unpredictable, following the learned A. I. R. precepts of loving and trusting and positivity can be altogether dangerous and forbidding. Therefore, we must become aware of striking a definite and distinctive balance (depending on where we are at any moment in time) for when to be free and when to be reserved, when to be open and when to be cautious, when to be at ease and when to be continuously mindful. Discovery and recovery depend first and foremost on our personal safety, otherwise we sacrifice opportunities for progress and enrichment for the possibilities of further disasters which we need to righteously avoid.

**May 11**: Transformation is an unusual phenomenon. It explores the nature of beginnings and endings, of new possibilities and old worn-out coverings, clothings, apparel: not just physical, but also emotional and mental and indeed spiritual. It looks deeply at protection and inhibition, allowance and restriction, growth and temperance [**right here I suggest you look up:  King James Version: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8**]. We at A. I. R. are looking for means to grow and expand and approach new possibilities of self-motivation, self-reliance, and self- expression. However, change comes with cost: what you take on, what to leave behind! An analogy: birds which come from eggs demonstrate the essence of “transformation.” The shells which contain the living embryos begin as entirely protective structures for the benefit of the internal growth and development. However, when internal growth has reached its peak, the external shells cease being protective and become restrictive. They must be shattered by the emerging bird in order to survive and continue unfettered. So it is with growth for us through A. I. R. Old habits, old friendships, old patterns, once they have fulfilled their usefulness can be dropped or shed or dispensed with (but not always or necessarily). Sometimes friends and relations transform also and continue as growing compatriots. At other times we feel the adverse reactions from those we’ve known well who completely object to our newfound transformed selves. Births are always hard and difficult, in many, many ways!

**May 12**: Love happens when the divine self within us spontaneously recognizes that same divine self in others. It is unexpected, wonderful, awesome, healing, wordless, transcendent, timeless, and super real. It is an instant memory and a dynamic change of consciousness. A. I. R. work may help set up the conditions for it to happen. But surrendering wholly to our higher power is a major key for allowing it. It is heart generated. And let us hope that its frequency is permitted and extended beyond the confines of our group and meeting and time.

**May 13**: Practicing the steps in A. I. R. with a determined regularity eventually brings about a changing perspective: that troubles in life simply become smaller and smaller. They don’t go away. They just become less and less significant. We accept them with greater ease and traverse through them as if instead of their seeming to be a tangled impassable jungle they are slowly reduced to being no more than passable meadow grasses. Alongside this change is our outward appearance with passersby and strangers who are increasingly met with kindness, courtesy, compassion, and generosity. Difficulties are transformed into lessons or tests, with solutions to be studied and gained from. Our own discoveries lead to a shared compassion for all others traversing here on earth. Random acts of kindness can erase mountains worth of discouraging obstacles in life. And A. I. R. work displays this truth quite simply and matter-of-factly in our daily encounters.

**May 14**: Recovery is the beginning of becoming yourself. There may be no tangible end goal with a graduation and a diploma. This is not graded. It is not a competition. There are no degrees to be placed at the end of your name. Being in A. I. R. might not get you a promotion. And recovery is definitely not about perfection or quantifiable achievement. If you like betting on horses, A. I. R. might produce some temporary disappointments. Discovering that A. I. R. is a perpetual “work in progress,” maybe somewhat startling to newcomers looking for a quick fix pill of sorts, but it’s really the start of a wholesome unending vacation from all previous traumas, hurts, difficulties, and past pains and troubles. It is resetting our travel map of life. It is letting go of so much of our pasts that are and were useless baggage we carried around purposelessly. We might never obtain all of the answers we determined to get. But we might discover real contentment with where we are, who we’ve become, and where we are going.

**May 15**: The undeniable competitive nature of society might be the bizarre backdrop for all abandonment issues. For abandonment can only exist if there are groups maintaining exclusionary and inclusionary lists pertaining to who belongs and who doesn’t. We who are seeking real community and attachment through A. I. R., when society has in essence abandoned all of us through the labeling received with the ensuing isolation, segregation, discrimination, and “special” placements, now find a very secure landing spot in A. I. R. where we are thoroughly included, where competition does not exist, where abandonment is not ever considered a possibility of a threat, and where real inclusion through love and gracious participation is not only allowed but encouraged.

**May 16**: For all of us attending A. I. R. meetings, we may have experienced an unusual combination in our early years of both “dissociation” and “acceptance” regarding the societal dictates of who “they” have declared we were: “dissociation” from the constant bullying, harassment, name calling, rejection, and disenfranchisement, and “acceptance” of the dictates due to the overwhelming and pervasive nature of the unified declarations of our differences. “Dissociation” is the successful removal of all emotional and mental reactions caused by the continual societal harassment. It is a basic survival technique, so often unconscious, but necessary. The “acceptance” we simultaneously generated kept all of our personal hostility to the inhumane harassment at a minimum to avert any compounded but easily understood but anticipated retribution. Now in A. I. R. we need to discover the gentle means of reducing our dissociative and acceptance behaviors which are now self-abusive and defensive, which may prevent us from being free with ourselves and each other and inhibit the possibilities of becoming trusting friends with each other. Patience and time will work miracles with the shedding of old worn-out behaviors no longer needed.

**May 17**: For all of us who attend A. I. R. meeting sessions, anyone who is not us is (or can be) an authority figure. This we have brutally come to realize from an early age. We have all been encouraged to develop our own voices and speak our minds, but we are also supremely aware of how dangerous this advice towards us really is, at our own peril. As we have all pretty much been declared permanently dependent (and disabled), any real declarations from us regarding our self-determined “independence” can be so easily “back handed” until we “head-bowed” return to our designated and required places. In A. I. R. sessions we can (maybe) quietly express the aggravations and frustrations we feel when things we know and think are seldom heard or recognized outside of our meetings. Here we can all share what it has been truly like growing up and living in a society of authority figures who all say one thing and confusedly mean another, or, “better” still, the opposite. But with our fellow travelers’ encouragement and our higher power’s providence we can seek to become better than all of society’s authority figures who misrepresent us in their misguided opinions and declarations whenever we express our love and joy and courage in wanting to be more than anyone (but ourselves) ever dreamed of our becoming.

**May 18**: It is with a certain delicacy and humility that we join and participate in A. I. R. sessions and training. As much as we share joy and encouragement and fellowship with all of the others involved in the meetings, we become increasingly aware that our higher power provides the individual guidance and direction with introspection, meditation, prayer, and the enticements of when and what to share. The Serenity Prayer is a launching point into the Problem, the Laundry List, the Solution, the Twelve steps, and the Twelve Traditions. It lays the ground work for the necessary exploration into where we’ve all come from, how we got to where we are now, and how we can evolve into becoming more loving, generous, tolerant, forgiving, understanding, and purposeful human beings under the guidance of our higher power, through the adversities that are not unexpected, and through the miraculous advances that are the unusual blessings we experience by doggedly continuing our journeys. Our pathways are here and now. We have found a home and a steppingstone system to higher levels of consciousness and awareness.

**May 19**: Show me an American who does not have some form of disability and I’ll show you someone who can walk on water! Degrees, levels, passes, markers, visibilities, judgments, categories: society’s ever-changing fences, corrals, and partitions. We have come to know them so well, we can traverse their mazes blindfolded. “Disabilities” are just society’s trash can for the disposal of all inappropriate applications for inclusion into their secret social club. Remember? Our one major problem is that our eyes and ears work. We have this unfailing capacity to remember the various “hells” we’ve lived through. We were supposed to remain hidden; but unfortunately for them, society’s mercenaries fail to remain hidden from us! But we have to be so careful not to overly expose our anger, anxiety, and hypervigilance due to the necessary retribution (like the shock of that invisible fence) we invariably receive. Thank God and our welcoming cohorts in A. I. R. who totally understand our communal histories and tribulations. Thank God for this system of steps and teachings that demonstrate what we need to do to survive and continue to overcome.

**May 20**: So, we arrived at our first A. I. R. meeting not even realizing that society had handed us a double whammy. Not only had we been provided with labels, designations, isolation, discrimination, segregation, and partiality on the one hand, but our understandable reactions of pain, sorrow, humiliation, anger, self-hatred, and self-doubt to this unforgivable  “untouchable status” was the other hand. We therefore carry around with us 24/7 one ugly primary designation list and an added secondary baggage of reactions that over burden us all. A. I. R. emphasizes our “letting go and letting God” as a means of freeing ourselves from the traumas of our histories. So, we have to somehow unburden ourselves not only of society’s designations placed on us, but also of all of our reactions to those designations? Are you kidding me? We are in a swamp of alligators and we get to choose which one: getting rid of the swamp or the alligators first? It does seem crazy, but literally relinquishing everything to our higher power provides our higher power with all of the decisions on how to proceed one step at a time, one day at a time, looking at what will become the steady means of analysis on how to go about moving forward while attending and sharing and listening and meditating. First step? Let go!

**May 21**: The commonalities we all share at A. I. R. are seldom due to childhood dreams or interests, though we generally find these varied lifestyles and curiosities fascinating and educational and truly grand. However, our shared commonalities are mainly based on the tragedies and misperceptions we’ve all been graced with for our whole lives in the real and unforgiving world. So, the people we feel most comfortable with are those who’ve suffered the same fates as we have, been bullied unreasonably, been name-called because it made those doing it feel better about themselves, been excluded from all social events for “normal” people, been ostracized for failing to live up to unreasonable standards of participation, etc. One common reaction we may express upon meeting someone new for the first time is: “You, too?” And our shared histories, indelibly imprinted (tattooed) onto our brains preclude our trying to mingle with persons belonging to the “normal” crowd generally. Although we may not accept it at all amongst ourselves in A. I. R., in dealing with the outside world, we invariably accept the unspoken declaration that “we do not fit in!” It’s our badge of “dishonor and unwelcome” that precedes our every entrance into a room or building. Can’t you just hear the bicycle horn “Clarabell” the Clown fanfare?

**May 22**: Our waiting for the world to wake up and begin treating us with respect and “normal” courtesy is like watching a struggling fly in an abandoned spider web. There is no potentially positive or good outcome. The world (regardless of what is expressed or said) behaves “indifferently” to us. Officially speaking, we have parents, siblings, relatives, or paid caregivers continuously monitoring our existences. As friendly as these helping participants try to be, all interactions are on a basic “need-delivery” (almost contractual) basis, with role determinations laid out with every contact. Our real friends, whom we really rely on, are our designated soul mates in A. I. R., or elsewhere in our “special” population with whom we bowl, scout, dance, day program, and work shop attend. In A. I. R., we explore not only where we’ve come from, but how we are surviving still. We seek solace from our fellow travelers and our higher power as last resorts in an upside-down world, but that is supremely enough.

**May 23**: All of science is the visually (or cognitively) observed and recorded patterns or lack of patterns in existence. Patterns over time determine normality and abnormality. Degrees of deviation from normality determine severity of abnormality. You see, our classic responses to “GRIEF” (being catalogued at birth or shortly thereafter as being abnormal or different): denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance may have begun at a very early pre-verbal level in our childhoods. Our established differences were not bestowed upon us “all of a sudden”. We were born into a well-established pattern of abnormality that society has scientifically taken for granted for centuries. We don’t just miraculously step out of our predetermined roles within the multiverse of disability. We have to really work at it. It’s a matter of perception, and it is entirely left up to us. In A. I. R., if we dedicate a lifetime of discrete and intense introspection and perseverance, we just might be able to seriously transcend the societal labels that have been so rigorously and studiously placed upon us. It’s their opinion versus ours. Which line do you want to be in? The Serenity Prayer, the Problem, the Laundry  List, the Solution, the Twelve Steps, and the Twelve Traditions are a contiguous map we can all use and get used to. With that map we can all follow the “bread crumbs” to new beginnings, new hope, new strategies, new discoveries, and change our own histories to match where we want to go from here!

**May 24**: Before we came to A. I. R., we would spend a tremendous amount of leisure time either 1.) doing whatever we could to either help out wherever we were, doing menial tasks for whatever tidbits of praise we could gather, or 2.) occupying ourselves with every form of diversion we could concentrate on: toys, games, music, TV, movies, phones, and/or personal obsessions, or 3.) escaping and hiding and withdrawing from any and all social contact for as long as we could. These diversionary practices provided us with the means for never uncovering, discovering, or examining the deeply buried pains of our lives: the repeated levels of discrimination, segregation, bullying, hostilities, name-calling, abandonments, ignoring, and flagrant dismissals we all lived through. Now in A. I. R., we have the opportunity to really focus (if we choose to) on the dynamics of our grief and loss and missed opportunities due to a society that has determined the extent of our capabilities and our disabilities, the parameters of what we can do and can’t do, and what we’re allowed to do and what we are not allowed to do. It is hoped that we can grow emotionally and mentally and spiritually by taking on our own responsibilities for examining the causes of our societally predetermined attitudes, perspectives, and determinations and decide for ourselves if these are healthy for us or not. It is also hoped that we can act and behave positively, and mentor our fellow travelers in A. I. R. with encouragement, advice, direction, consoling, and acceptance as much as we have provided for ourselves. It is through this fellowship that we explore and pave our new beginnings.

**May 25**: “Good health significantly improves a person's quality of life. However, people with intellectual disabilities disproportionately have more health problems than the general population.”

(from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3004690/>) It is agonizingly true that we who have been labeled disabled (and therefore different) have a hugely increased incidence of illnesses and chronic maladies. These facts may be exacerbated by the facts that we have internalized so much of the abuse, maltreatment, hatred, hostility, branding, isolation, contempt, and ingrained displeasure from all facets of society. So much of self-concept determines our physical and emotional health: “Evidence is presented illustrating that self-esteem can lead to better health and social behavior, and that poor self-esteem is associated with a broad range of mental disorders and social problems, both internalizing problems (e.g. depression, suicidal tendencies, eating disorders and anxiety) and externalizing problems (e.g. violence and sub- stance abuse).” (From <https://watermark.silverchair.com/cyg041.pdf?token=AQECAHi208BE49Ooan9kkhW_Ercy7Dm3ZL_9Cf3qfKAc485ysgAAA0gwggNEBgkqhkiG9w0BBwagggM1MIIDMQIBADCCAyoGCSqGSIb3DQEHATAeBglghkgBZQMEAS4wEQQMnhdycZ51WV67SiGvAgEQgIIC-4CK09f3C9SnOHtsXG3ZjUiw14855dXH-kwgKo2aZ4QUsKfxy3R6EUbFkhuLq0E3PjymgHd5SWWff3_WOUTfxOq6uhzPPTs9a7M4kteSKofz1Oy4BVi8Jw6PPNcWG9bWa2yWhXgfTEwaei-5C3q9edfCOOryZZy_kR5b0BG0IwBpfXTjpX0BqgPFb-J6ICnOFvY08N_owuDAoWBJ_uGRlNH7pWDsM9LV8mQndgX1FWByrO1oFGDVBqHzru02olnobICX2-OHPeMRS5mUvQMMfVtH0ryD3TBdlJT4PE-kuob4e0fhVnOpFcX-G4dIM4ICnihVo6o07FMNRrpeJpjlEmkjEYRCPqktxcQLLI8c8AArMmnRciYEsjlQNzxGWj5l12YOjxwU_InWAjqMVHft17ykA4Bt6M5-D_4shlF0tVwEe5Khtrloxq-ExJyWGJui5o42-kABl7FyONTazaUB-tHs_c3be4isXwwMe351SaHVRViBj2AEJKia9NPW4_8YqQvEBq3MOnbpyw1mEYO0IgNYHdR31xbzeondJ52IImloYa7AqenjXLem9zAceKsmJvXWqDyp3vCYZaAPQi5TyuU02wMEL2COdBW5izdM1FOjf2bdRUf-mGP8GCZ5HzKw5ThEGdce5RVHVaeEEwp5T0AQxLDFhDyuVRp8seQTWPUEzA-XPlKJKhvSD5bVyZYwgDlYLGmQrxXAfx83CmgAVDjSCR17Y7_wRRd2Y7iJ2dNE9TFGx6BjPnz7uQPqnMIMTkBHnFLw9JutUZ3ylJj3eOntTTQNIdSxXvRIsHpPdKIBwFnuGUOyA1JFH45L5tMfmsXUlEHXYM6FtOcEdur9kQ6JD4I62zJ06UyI8jWp_wktForYIX6MNKGSy9F0hSObSFLt-rnjYdq6tCjP1WCxRNR21gV2F2ozUbwK7poiD9Qy0-HnnEYx3d3wiG7hYh97WZMOtEHZ56jYDHluuqJg6pHIwW7M5Dfn4TPFgqo59RkFyDaABAh-eDg4SLQ>). And from the ACA book, “Strengthening my Recovery” pg. 151 “We often got sick because we carried the trauma in our bodies.” Through our intense efforts in A. I. R., we will look at how we react and have reacted to the societal labeling and hurt we have received through it, and change our perspectives on ourselves and our fellow travelers. With the assistance of our higher power all of this will become very possible.

**May 26**: Fear happens when we think or feel we have something to lose, or maybe that we might miss something we think or feel we need. It can also happen if we think or feel we will be targeted physically, emotionally, or mentally. It may take some very profound changes in our perspectives to eradicate fears we’ve come to expect that seem all too familiar. Fears happen when we see “limitations” in our lives. Limitations are finite boundaries separating other finite occurrences or things. But these are simply perspectives. Our higher power is infinite and immortal and has no limitations. Our souls are immortal also and infinite in capacity. Yes, our vehicles (bodies, emotions, mentalities) in which we inhabit are temporary and very limited, but our true selves (souls) are not. The universe in which we live is a perfect infinite singularity. All that we have, all that we’ve been given, are part of a natural ordering from our higher power. In fact, we (our souls, our true selves) lack nothing. Our life’s destiny is playing out exactly as it was meant to evolve, as our souls simply witness everything going on around us. We therefore have nothing to fear, ever. As long as we remain centered, calm, at peace, surrounded by our higher power’s love and blessings and direction. It may take a lifetime or two to realize all of this, but again the realization may happen in a blinding flash of an instant! When fear rules we become lost in the tangled mess of indecision and loss and heartache. When we drop fear as we let go, and let God, everything becomes manageable, day-by- day, step-by-step.

**May 27**: “Letting go”also requires forgiving and loving: forgiving all others who may or may not have wronged us, including ourselves. And loving all others who may or may not have wronged us, including ourselves. A. I. R. will advance the idea that all human beings (without exception, and regardless of varied paths in life) really and truly believe that what they are doing is always the right thing or the best choice (hahaha, including you and me). And everyone is carrying a ton of learned and experienced baggage with them; so much so, that everyone out there needs assistance and blessings with love (because our higher power is also their higher power, whether or not they are aware of it). And loving and forgiving actually unburdens us of guilt and shame and blame (and a lot of unnecessary karmic [look it up!]) attachments. And one thing we may not have realized: The idea of connecting with our higher power is completely wrong. We were never unconnected with our higher power, even if we did not realize it. The silent deity within us was always there, always. We just need to get quiet and calm enough and receptive enough to become re-aware of it: to literally re-member.

**May 28**: Perhaps the most difficult thing we need to learn and accomplish working our A. I. R. steps is realizing that we do not have to behave the way we’ve been taught. What has been done to us is not a template for how we should respond. Society has bullied us. We don’t need to do that. Society has name called us. We don’t need to do that. Society has informed us we are not worth special or even “normal” privileges. We don’t have to believe that. Society has labeled us. We don’t need to do that back. Society has segregated us “for our own good.” We don’t need to believe that. Society has made special accommodations for our education, our work environments, our day program placements, our residential housing, and our recreational accommodations. We don’t have to go along with it. There’s little proof that society has regarded us or its decisions about us with love. But we can love anyway, regardless. There is little proof that society has regarded us or its decisions about us with compassion. But we can be compassionate anyway. Maybe we can be grateful to society for teaching all of us how “**not**” to behave and act and think and feel. Maybe our higher power is showing us (through our shared histories) that we can be and do better than that.

**May 29**: Sometimes the abuse and degradation have been so continuous and prevalent and unending for so long that there really appears to be no tunnel for a light to be shining at the end of it. And trying to find an escape from the pains of living was “given up on” a long time ago also. Skepticism and doubt now direct all choices of consequence and inconsequence. So stumbling onto a program like A. I. R. seems to be just another ruse or dead end with little to offer but inconsolable laughter and scoffing: Just another “been there done that” Ponzi scheme. And a decision to explore A. I. R. is like a razor’s edge choice, a “what have I got to lose?” jump off a cliff move. It couldn’t hurt any worse than anything else I’ve been slammed with. But its ideas are unusual, curiously different, a twist of crazy to match our levels of skepticism. And at once there’s a reaction of, “I don’t feel threatened here the way everywhere else in my past made me feel.” And by chance (for chance it truly seems) we stay for a bit to see “if the next shoe will drop,” or if something unexpectedly positive will arise out of this seeming madness of a program, so contrary to our brutal histories. And then A. I. R. continues extending its unrestricted open hand and understanding smile to all of us beaten up retreads, looking for that elusive undeserved blessing and a place to rest. Over time, for that’s what it takes, a never before feeling of calm gradually begins to emerge and descend and encompass us. Even though we never before knew that feeling before now, it feels like maybe we’re home, at last. Such are new beginnings unsought, unexpected, unrivaled. And here we are!

**May 30**: Living and leading by example is the subtlest messaging system, but the only one that truly works. For if you do know, you really and truly know; but if you don’t know, it’s then really and truly not your time to know. Such is life! The A. I. R. program might be right for a whole lot of people (beneficial for sure), but only a few find it while looking for it and then accept it. When and if people are ready for it, it’s there to be had. Old message here: “Horse-Water-Drink.” So we love, unconditionally, expecting nothing in return. We exude compassion for all and everything in this realm of materialization (in which we find ourselves) that could not resemble the seventh level of hell any better than it already really does.

[multiple choice test here:

1.) some of the time,

2.) a lot of the time,

3) most of the time,

4.) all of the time,

5.) all of the above.]

The entire world is in our higher power’s hands, so we gratefully accept with gratitude that we have found this source of good will, kindness, joy, comfort, and inner direction that A. I. R. affords. Everything is in our higher power’s time, we remind ourselves daily.

**May 31**: If we spend most of our time and energy trying to make those in society who control our lives feel good or better about themselves [it’s called “hoop jumping”], then we have lost our focus on ourselves and basically have ceased to exist. We may have spent most of our lives doing just that, maybe even expecting some praise or recognition or benefits that would make us feel temporarily like “normal.” We’ve all been given labels, so we have tried to conform to those labels. Don’t you get it? We’ve all been given categories marking us as different; so as long as we continue acting, thinking, and behaving differently we continue being just fine the way we’ve been designated. If we fit in doing everything we were supposed to have been doing, then maybe we wouldn’t have felt abandoned worse than we’d already been. Doesn’t that make sense? Well, No! Living up to the miserable expectations of a societal system that has continued with its historical segregation of us is ludicrous. We haven’t even been allowed the crumbs that fall off the banquet table the likes of which we have not been invited to attend [if you get a chance, listen to this: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=qTAV9cngmmY>] Then again, we are here in A. I. R. trying to realize that recognition, praise, and happiness are for us to deliver to ourselves from ourselves. We will get none of those things we seek from a society hell bent on our systemic removal. Our fellow travelers and our higher power will help us discover and uncover our own means for salvation and success by accepting and loving who we are and have always been.

**June 1**: Well, how about that? Disability is dependence and dependence is disability. As long as we remain thoroughly dependent, society will have been justified in labeling us disabled. How quaint! Unfortunately for the rule makers and justifiers of social destiny, we are all not only dependent, but now thoroughly “interdependent” [unless we are Amish, and thoroughly self-sufficient]. Because, as far as we know, we don’t make our own clothes, build our own houses, and grow our own food. We “depend” on others to do those sorts of things. So we are very essentially all “disabled.” Welcome to the club, all you “neuro-typicals” out there! But even all this theoretical nonsense is a matter of perception, and perhaps always has been. In A. I. R. we begin to uncover the dynamics of being (both unhealthy and healthy modes). We are all dependent and reliant, but we can also choose whom to follow for life choices.  Here we have our Serenity Prayer, our Problem, our Laundry List, our Solution, our Twelve Steps, and our Twelve Traditions, along with our trusty peers and our higher power. I think we’ll be doing just fine now, then, thank you very much!

**June 2**: Even with trying to follow this internal spiritual path and direction from our higher power, we are still living within an earthly soup that tugs at our every move and decision! The still voice of God within our hearts is so often drowned out by the noises both inside and outside our heads, telling us, warning us, convincing us there are alternatives. And yes, of course, the world is a carnival of diversions, desires, wants, specialities, confusions, delights, and chaos supreme. But we’ve all been there. Yes, at times it is all terribly enticing, but we have been the victims of its touch, its belittling, its betrayal, its unforgiving nature and its lack of fulfillment and joy. Can we be fooled once more? Driven crazy again? Shamed? Deceived? Yup! But just maybe we can resolve to work the steps through the trials and difficulties remembering (and not forgetting) where we’ve come from, seeing our own work as a self-fulfilling mystery of love and calm and peace ever centered, ever whole, ever accepting.

**June 3**: The hurts, slights, abuses, pains, insults, etc. that we received from all aspects of society for years were disposable trash we covered up and got rid of, or deflected, with our “trash can” defense mechanisms: obsessions, diversions, hiding, withdrawal, anger, acting out, tantruming, etc. But through A. I. R. we realize that the trash and the trash receptacles can all be gotten rid of. They’re all trash: the stuff that invariably hurt, and all of our defensive means for avoiding the hurt. They are no longer in any way necessary for our growth and prosperity. Unfortunately, we can always, when triggered (reminded of past hurts and humiliations etc), revert back into the old defensive patterns we’ve outgrown, but hopefully these minor setbacks are recognized quickly and they can be hurriedly dropped so we can continue positively and peacefully moving forward.

**June 4**: In recovery and discovery there really is no finish line, no end point in which all of the chaos of life comes to an end. In A. I. R. we realize that the journey of acquiring a healthy balance is a permanent way of life and being; that growing ever more responsible and perfected is a divine goal of stabilization and achievement that continues as long as we are here on this earth plane. We have within us the only goal which we have always sought. It has always been there. It will always be there. It silently awaits our realization that we are and always have been “One” with it: divine and whole and perfect. So regardless of the outside circumstances of life, ever changing, ever coming and going, we have at our very center the calm and peace and refuge we need to continue witnessing and observing and passing by the transitory nature of this world.

**June 5**: It might be that our very innocent natures did a great deal of the protecting of all of us from the hurts and insults and abuses that were systematically hurled at us from the time we were born. For those of us who felt too deeply the terrorization that society foisted upon us, our escaping into our imagination and fostering whatever diversionary means we were able to harness would have seemed or been sufficient to somewhat divert our awareness of the hurt and pain and anger and frustration. We may have carried with us or brought along into our present lives the diversionary means we accidentally discovered that protected us from the continual onslaughts. Somehow, retaliation on our parts never or hardly ever entered our minds, knowing full well that even complaining or negative behaviors, however slight, might have brought about even worse retaliations. Fearing, while respecting all authority figures, became absolute routine. And all we ever truly wanted, but soon gave up on, was being loved, recognized, nurtured, held occasionally, and not abandoned. Through our A. I. R. recovery we learn that everything we’ve ever wanted but sorely missed is now available in our group fellowship work with our recognizing our higher power’s ever present harmony and stability within us.

**June 6**: So much of who we dreamt we could be or become was trashed so early in our lives that memories of these aspirations may have become completely forgotten over the ensuing years. However, with growing changes through our A. I. R. work we may see some of these long-lost dreams emerge and perhaps even look possible or promising. Through A. I. R., we have developed some confidence, some independence, and a voice for expressing who we are and who we choose to be and become. We may have even been willing to try to express ourselves to those in our pasts who never considered our having any abilities to do so or to initiate plans for accomplishing anything. We and they might be significantly surprised by our newfound resilience and determination. With our group support and our higher power’s direction and assistance, we shall all make progress becoming what we were all meant to be, however small or grand. The sky’s not even the limit.

**June 7**: They all agreed. The tests showed it. The tests proved it. The doctors, psychologists, lawyers, and teachers. They all nodded their heads. Even the minister looked skyward. Society’s experts were as hard and as heavy as an anvil. They showed our parents what the tests proved. Their silent sad expressions and their nodding heads proved it. No one offered a, “Now, wait a gosh darned minute!” It was so conclusive. We were too young to say, “No.” So, we’ve listened now for years to the very quick explanations, the bottomless reasons, the closed-door comments, the “this is just the way it is for you,” placements. And what was so often repeated, “And we are so sorry that you have to accept this and have to put up with all the hurt and the trials you go through. It’s not fair.” And we lived daily as if we’d stepped in something smelly we couldn’t shake off: the laughter, the pointing fingers, the hands over the mouths of broken words, the always isolation. In our A. I. R. meetings we don’t just get back what we missed out on, we get for the first time what we never had: unconditional love, respect, our own voices, praise for who and what we are, smiles of approval, and distinct opportunities to change the narrative, the story of our lives. We belong, we exist, we are successful, we have connected with our peers and our higher power. We are moving forward into a better world than the one we’ve left behind.

**June 8**: “What the heck are we doing here? This is an organization! Every organization that’s ever been thrown at us just confirms what we’ve always been told! It’s no different! Look at all of these rules! Rules just told us who we were!: What we could do and what we couldn’t do! You say this A. I. R.  is really different? We’re different. That’s what we’ve been told. It’s the same different that we are? Prove it!”

“You are the centerpiece of this group! You are not questioned. You never will be. You are not tested. You never will be. You determine your own work here. No one else will. You are free to come or go. You are not ordered to be here. You have all of your direction from your own higher power already within you. We’re just telling you what you can discover on your own. All persons here have been allowed to know what we’ve just shared with you. All here share the same differences you’ve all been made aware of. This organization is as harmful as a butterfly, as strong and as self-reliant as an ant, as persistent as a dung beetle, and as courageous and determined as a web weaving spider in a hurricane. But the joy you will truly experience here is that YOU ARE NOT ALONE!”

**June 9**: From the ACA book, Strengthening My Recovery, pg. 167: “We must give away what we have to keep it.” This reminds us of taking a lit candle to light other candles. The flame from the first is not lost in the sharing of flames for other unlit candles. So, it is with others here who’ve discovered the lights of their spiritual centers while sharing their love and compassion and healthy sharings. We give away freely what sustains us, what promotes us, what propels us to provide direction through example! We are what we prove to allow for. A self-fulfilling prophecy: like a self-filling heart of infinite love and expansion. Love is a river that cannot stop. We partake and share and there’s always more than enough. And loving ourselves is actually loving our higher power (or selves) which dwells within us! Those who attend for the first time get the benefit of love and acceptance regardless of where they’ve come from or what they’ve been through. It is a smiling wake up call, and a blessing for whenever they are hungry for more of the previous gifts that have been provided, once they return, again and again and again.

**June 10**: We are, out of necessity, “creatures of habit.” Whatever we have been taught (through experience), what we have been exposed to (through experience), what has been done to us (through experience) too often dictates how we will behave and react to all others we come in contact with: friends, family, acquaintances, strangers, even pets. If violence, hate, mistrust, belittling, doubt, bullying, name calling, brutality, indifference, avoidance, and discrimination are what we’ve been handed and exposed to, chances are these negative dispositions will be shared by us with others more than regularly. It goes without saying: victims become victimizers. When we first come to A. I. R. meetings and discover and uncover where we’ve come from, it can be quite horrifying to learn that what we’ve tried to escape from we too have been guilty of: not always, but quite frequently. Forgiving ourselves for doing what we’ve done begins the process of forgiving others what they’ve done to us. Their generational unknowing was also our generational unknowing. It was not their fault. It was not our fault. We can begin to forgive and love and accept and move on providing room for change for ourselves and everyone else. The thoughts and intentions behind our A. I. R. program work if we work them.

**June 11**: Fears happen when we feel empty, insecure, not whole, alone, with unmet needs and wants, and not in control when we think that control will save us. Fears envelop us when we feel blocked, struggling with deadlines, bills we can’t pay, or being abandoned, without hope, without faith, with experiences of a lifetime that tell us we are worthless, unlovable, and unable to do anything for ourselves. As we shuffle from fear to fear we somehow miss that the bad things anticipated seemed to miss us this time, but what about the next? And the next? In A. I. R. we are presented with some new ideas about ourselves and the world. Inside all of ourselves dwells our higher power who is infinite, perfect, loving, and whole, and who provides our every need. We are therefore loved unconditionally. All our needs and wants will be forever met. We are not alone and never have been. Also, we have never been abandoned. One thing also, we never again have to worry about who is in control. We never had it, and we never needed it. That’s our higher power’s province. And we (our true selves, our souls) are immortal. Death, the ultimate fear, has no meaning when we realize we’ve always been, are here now, and forever will be. These body vehicles are temporary. We are not temporary, and never have been.

**June 12**: Nothing like the shaming voices of society to ship-wreck a young life, eh? Not good enough! Not talented enough! Lost before you started! Ugly! So pitifully “challenged”! Stupid, idiot, imbecile, moron, retard: we’ve heard and experienced them all, incessantly, from too many we never even expected them from. And in A. I. R. we’re expected to gather up whatever shreds of self-esteem we may have left and find joy in recovery. That’s like asking a bomb crater to find all the dirt removed by the explosion and put it back where it started. And denial of healthful possibilities is a very natural reaction from years of abuse and neglect. And doubts at every turn fill our hearts and minds from the perceived eons of brutality. We’d never expect any differences of a wholesome and positive nature? Please! But just sticking around A. I. R. meetings and listening and thinking and recognizing others with backgrounds identical to ours who have some-how picked up faith and hope and trust in the light of absolute hellish darkness? Well, it all keeps us returning to see if just maybe this program is real and possible and a dream come true? Maybe? Just maybe?

**June 13**: “I think I’d rather spend a few weeks trying to find “Waldo” than trying to find myself, or even sticking up for myself.” We’ve heard many remarks pretty much like this from people approaching A. I. R. with less than zero self-esteem and confidence. And the huge amounts of guilt exuded by those who begin to contemplate sticking up for themselves when they are assured of the negative consequences from everyone else in authority (and everyone not them is someone in authority) is excruciatingly painful to observe. “How much wronger can we be, when we’re always wrong?” It’s like Wilber’s attempt at analyzing the lamb’s statement in Charlotte’s Web that Wilbur means less than nothing to it. For, here we all are, symbolizing what is exactly and truly in the eye’s of society: being “less than nothing!” Can A. I. R. really and truly turn this uncompromised disaster around? Can the Wiley Coyote in all of us have a successful day, let alone a positive future? Let us hope so, let us pray so. Sticking around and applying the work in the program will tell if this is so!

**June 14**: So many 12 step programs advise participants to consider the two concepts of humility and anonymity with appreciation, discernment, and reasonableness while readily adopting them into their lives. From a spiritual, theoretical, and philosophical standpoint, these proposals make a great deal of sense. However, for individuals labeled developmentally and intellectually disabled, humility and anonymity as chosen or preferred ways of life might seem perfectly (and almost ridiculously) redundant, like casually rolling from one side of a bed, while sleeping, to a bit more to the other side of the bed in a monstrous, dynamic, and ground breaking change….unh, not so much. The life cycle of most individuals in this country labeled ID and DD occupies a status of lowliness somewhere between the bottom of the barrel and beneath the bottom of the barrel, while a level of anonymity is like that of Marley’s ghost (without the chains). Humility and anonymity might be considered appropriate strategies somewhere in the far distant future for folks with ID and DD in their spiritual evolution, but foisting that upon them right off the bat in A. I. R. might produce reactions of, “Hey, we’re already there. That’s nothing new. That’s the desert island we’ve been struggling to survive on for decades now that we’ve been hoping and praying to be rescued from.”

**June 15**: The world seems to operate under the delusion of dualities (functional opposites) and has always done so, for a myriad of reasons: high low, in out, hot cold, best worst, front back, up down, smart dumb, wealthy poor, have haven’t, patterned unpatterned, etc. Unfortunately for those of us categorized as intellectually and developmentally disabled, we tend to end up on the short end of the stick in most differentiations.  Society’s groupings may have arisen from a need or a justification for a more positive “group self” consciousness (how’s that for an oxymoron?). “In order for us to feel better about ourselves we must consider those who are not like us as being categorically different from us: ‘lesser.’ ”  But maybe the universe is a divine singularity, interactive and interdependent upon all of its multifarious parts making up a singular wholeness. If so, then dualities are a misperception. But, be that as it may, our attempts at functioning within society at any levels fall under the punch line of a bad joke. We are on the negative side of every supposed duality. And yet society in a rare attempt to hide the abnormalities of its incessant dichotomization is now referring to us as “special” and “exceptional.” Ya gotta laugh! So, here we are, not fitting in anywhere safe or secure or acknowledged or resourceful in society, so we develop our own niche in a 12 step program called A. I. R. which attempts to fulfill all of the needs we human beings would normally require if society were not forever trying to purge us from existence. Here we are whole, and fine, and best, and real, and loved, and loving, and perfect, and happy, and interdependent, and wise, and safe, and strong, and at peace. And we have a welcoming community, and are in touch with our higher power, the author of this wonderful singularity of a universe, and Who, just for kicks, resides inside all of us.

**June 16**: Grief work, for folks with intellectual and developmental disabilities, may just be a rare occasion, due to the fact that nothing of a loss and grief occurrence was ever reported in the news; there was no obituary; no fire, no car accident, no family get together for mourning or dressing up in black. No consoling provided by family or distant relatives, no casseroles brought over by the neighbors, no bouquets of flowers sent over by the local florists. No signs of a disaster having ever happened. And who in their right minds would begin to blame all of the colluding social networks in society for deliberately hurting permanently an innocent child with a destiny of irreparable failure for life? If there are no perpetrators brought before a judge, how can there be any crime or any victims? We were all screwed and maybe never even knew it. So, basically, after attending a few A. I. R. meetings, a new attendee may be quite startled with revelations of a need for grief and loss, or an awareness of injustices committed: acts of labeling, isolation, targeting, bullying, etc.; and would it be ok now to wonder how any of this happened without anyone ever explaining it or even revealing it? Through A. I. R., maybe real field work and discovery can commence and be possible for so many deliberately left out of the mainstream of life. Through A. I. R. the possibility exists for uncovering a lifetime of social prejudices that have led to zero dreams being realized or even attempted. And the commonalities shared by all who are members of A. I. R. will guide all who attend to become aware that no one attending is alone, or ever has been.

**June 17**: If it took an entire lifetime to really mess up your life through years of trauma and insults and abuse and isolation and degradation, how long do you suppose it’s going to take to fix everything, undo the damage? Yup! At least that long! Because society, which unknowingly and inadvertently screwed you over, provided you with no road map on how to get back to where you should be now, or how to get back what you’ve lost. In A. I. R. you will be 1.) provided with the Serenity Prayer, the Problem, the Laundry List, the Solution, the Twelve Steps, and the Twelve Traditions; plus, 2.) a whole host of fellow travelers who’ve “been there and done that” who are more than willing to offer assistance and encouragement; and 3.) an awareness (maybe new) of a higher power upon whom to call for everything. It may seem a bit confusing at first, but it’s a hell of a lot better than where we’ve come from in the past. And you will know and recognize that fact very soon.

**June 18**: At times we all seem to be newcomers to A. I. R.: infants, babies, clueless about what we are doing here, ill-informed about directions we are supposed to be going in. If we did truly surrender to a higher power who would determine all of our actions, thoughts, speech, and feelings, then God is now the driver of this taxi and we are all simply passengers, looking out the windows at the passing views. The messages in the readings, performed at the start of every meeting, slowly begin to make sense and sink in. This trip we are now on will take a long time to accomplish, quite possibly the rest of our lives. We get to reminisce about what has brought us here: the trials, the ups and downs, the confusion, the abandonment, the name calling, and the failures, regardless of how hard we tried (and we did try). In this surrender we discover a pervasive peace we never knew was possible. We now wake in the mornings not dreading the upcoming day. We have a new security about ourselves, a sense of belonging, a sense of duty and responsibility to ourselves and this program. We’ve become aware that we are not alone on this journey, that there are way too many of us to ignore and downplay. And we have meaning and purpose and a divine destiny that no one now is able to remove. How about that! Joy for once, and for all.

**June 19**: For any attending A. I. R. meetings, if they should find it difficult to verbally share their histories, experiences, or reflections, they may be able to bring pencils, pens, markers, or crayons along with blank or lined writing paper to their A. I. R. meetings; for there is a marvelous method for helping to dig out long lost buried memories, if one is willing to attempt writing as a means of sharing. Writing or printing answers with your non-dominant hand, by holding the pen in the opposite hand where you’d never dream of trying to write anything down, seems to work miracles. These answers are then in response to questions produced in advance by writing with your dominant hand. It’s awkward, messy, and very slow at first, but the words and ideas that flow are quite revealing. You may be able to find about a five minute open time slot at a preselected time during the meeting for such a writing session with everyone in attendance participating. Because sharing can initially be so frightening and intimidating, due to our histories of receiving society’s disapproval for our ever expressing any opinions whatsoever, we tend to inflict upon ourselves a continuous enforced silence that lasts for years. Writing, then, is an alternative to verbally sharing that potentially manifests a great deal of success. Who knows! We may have a second Da Vinci amongst us!

**June 20**: Fear of the unknown is one hell of an inhibition, regardless of the established habitual patterns of early childhood, be they pleasant, rough, challenging, horrid, easy, hard, peaceful, chaotic. We learn from, and due to, experience. What we know is what has become familiar, even if unfortunate. What we have not experienced, what we do not know, is a dreaded unknown that we seem to avoid at all costs. However, if past experiences and learnings and behaviors and tendencies have become so completely intolerable (and recognized as such), then exploring the possibilities of “the unknown” become more than a curiosity. Hence, we have a new A. I. R. program to investigate to perhaps determine if it can open up new ways of perceiving, new ways of behaving, and new ways of interacting. Here we can question what we know, what we think we know, with a healthy skepticism. Are we sure about who we are? Have we been able to take time to study ourselves critically, objectively, and really introspectively? The questions about why we think the way we do, why we react the way we do, why we feel the way we do: these are questions that may arise in A. I. R., that maybe we’ve never explored before. This obviously new path may be frightening, maybe exhilarating, maybe scary, maybe joyful, maybe all these things, and maybe even “enlightening”! We will explore these new available techniques: journaling, sharing, reading, non-dominant hand writing, meditating, to find out more about ourselves than we have ever known before. There will be ups and downs, starts and stops, flowing and stagnation, but we will gradually move downstream on this ride that takes us into unknown territory, with the help of our cohorts traveling with us and our higher power who will steer us safely and protectively. Don’t forget to take lots of pictures. They will reveal much as time goes on!

**June 21**: As A. I. R. Is a legitimate 12 step program, following in the footsteps of all other 12 step programs, a few critical differing points must be carefully delineated. The 12th tradition explains the need for total and perfect anonymity, but needs to be discussed and examined thoroughly. We who are the expectant beneficiaries of this A. I. R. program, having been medically diagnosed and labeled as intellectually and developmentally disabled, have struggled with the outrageous fact of being designated (without our consent) for the category of “socially and institutionally anonymous”, many of us having been legally “disappeared” or “vanished” from ever participating in any private or public functions anywhere in this country. As of this writing, in 2024, there are still innumerable legal battles in every state regarding the unmet dreams of full inclusion and integration for the “likes of us.” So, socially designated anonymity is a thing which many of us are still fighting against and protesting against and righteously inflamed about. However, when it comes to our A. I. R. duties in this 12 step program, we will always honor, unequivocally, the privacy and anonymity of all of our fellow travelers, never ever revealing their private information or thoughts or sharings. However, again, if we, as individuals, wish to promote our own potentials and successes outside of A. I. R. (Without revealing our participation in A. I. R.) then doing so to erase the ugliness of having been socially banished into anonymity historically seems not only logical but rightfully revolutionary and “about time.” But this high wire tightrope without a net must be walked on extremely carefully and cautiously, so that we do not err in our sacred pledges to our A. I. R. fellows in unity.

**June 22**: “Don’t you understand? It is unacceptable that you are thinking about complaining about your unacceptable conditions of having been labeled unacceptable when we have determined that all of you are to be termed unacceptable following prescriptions over millennia of that type of unacceptability, that over centuries now have become perfectly acceptable.” This is the unstated “logic” of why we have designations of intellectual and developmental disabilities while we patiently wait for the new anticipated terminology to describe us. In biblical times disabilities (the crippled, lame, and blind) were considered the results of curses and disbelief. Later on the terms became moron, imbecile, idiot, defective, simpleton, cretin, and feebleminded. These were thought to be eventually offensive so they came up with levels of mental retardation: profound, severe, moderate, and mild. However these too became irrationally disagreeable so were then transformed to intellectually and developmentally disabled; but now we have differently abled, special, and exceptional. What will the new label be? “Incidentally Unique”? So, now you know why it is that we don’t start off with self-esteems similar to Albert Einstein, Bill Gates, Taylor Swift, and Oprah Winfrey. And why it is that we tolerate the unacceptable things that are done to us, and have been done to us, and what we have done to ourselves: the things we have put up with! In A. I. R. we learn that we do have our own valuable thoughts and feelings that are worth a lot, and have great potential not only for our fellow travelers but especially for us! And we begin here to trust our own native abilities, sensibilities, intuitions, and suspicions! We become better attuned to our own natures, internally and externally. We are becoming successful in our own rights.

**June 23**: How odd is it really, that due to diagnostic profundities, when we were very little, all persons surrounding us, as we grew up, determined that we were all going to be so permanently disabled that we had to be helped (enabled) persistently in everything we tried to do, so that we became “naturally” helpless, incapable of initializing or doing anything independently. And these failings became our ingrained habits: “just wait long enough and someone else will come by and do it” (whether or not we were capable; as we certainly had watched and been witness for decades as to how to do our own things; we were just never allowed or had been encouraged). But now, after a full lifetime of socially ingrained helplessness, it has been determined that we are now to be fully integrated and included in everything in society and expected to work and live and play and compete with the “big boys” like everyone else. So, you see? The societal defects of our upbringing, as defective, are now thoroughly ours as we try to become self-aware and independent individuals with purpose and strategies for improvement and positive directions for our futures. Un huh! Thank God for this A. I. R. program that provides us with the details of our current and past happenstance, so we can now redirect our energies and persons to wholeness and worthwhileness.

**June 24**: From the book, “Strengthening My Recovery,” an ACA twelve step text, pg.  182, “This is an ACA paradox: Letting go creates stronger boundaries.” But, actually, though on the surface it seems like a paradox, it isn’t really. What we are letting go of are all of the dysfunctional nonsense we’ve had ingrained in us and been indoctrinated with for our entire lives (through the work in this beloved A. I. R. program); and the throwing away or dispelling of this crap that we don’t need is really empowering and self-asserting. Therefore, by doing these independent acts of ridding ourselves of what has over-burdened us for years is in fact establishing our own significant boundaries of what we will allow and what we won’t allow in our spaces. It’s not a paradox at all but a logical consequence of our own purposeful deliberations towards becoming free of the dysfunction perpetrated on us from various negative social experiences. In A. I. R., we not only learn to establish our own boundaries but we begin to learn about and respect the boundaries of all of our fellow travelers.

**June 25**: Trying to find any comfort in a dysfunctional society that incessantly calls us ugly, challenged, stupid, idiot, imbecile, moron, and retard sometimes forces us into compulsions and obsessions like over-eating, TV binge watching, video game playing, binge-sleeping, self-isolating, toy collecting, shop lifting, pop drinking, etc. As the societal verbal abuse and isolation continue unabated and the obsessions and compulsions continue or increase, we are the ones who suffer from our own reactions to the abuse; and these reactions have not been in any way healthy. Through working the steps outlined in A. I. R., we begin to study the hows and whys of our reactive obsessions and compulsions. Through study, reading, and investigating other alternatives we can begin to substitute healthy choices in place of our failed attempts at real comfort: eating properly, avoiding junk food, exercising daily (starting very slowly and gradually, like walking regular and moderate distances), exploring art, music, dance, and reading, and getting involved in group sporting events like bowling, frisbee, miniature golf, volley ball, or softball, etc., while avoiding bars, illicit drugs, alcohol, and non-consensual sex. Taking real care of ourselves is one of the first necessary lessons that A. I. R. teaches and encourages. Our fellow travelers will insist upon it. Our higher power will reward our efforts in pursuing it.

**June 26**: Holidays and birthdays are quite unusual as a back drop for yearly and/or daily considerations for folks like us labeled intellectually and developmentally disabled. It is not terribly uncommon for some individuals in our diverse population to announce several times weekly that, “Today’s my birthday,” to anyone who will listen, even when it’s not. For to get and receive just a few congratulations and well-wishes in response to the declaration is temporary attention and joy we might not have experienced otherwise. Birthdays and holidays are looked forward to with exuberant expectation always because it’s as if those special days (Halloween for the candy and costumes, Thanksgiving for the overabundance of great food, and Christmas for the seemingly unlimited presents, and personal birthdays for all of these things) are a huge change from all of the other nondescript unimportant drab days of the year which remain dull and purposeless and earmarked with regular disappointments and unexciting life for us who are so “special.” This is because we, as special population people, have nothing in life to look forward to as opposed to what “normal” and “neurotypical” children and people envision for their futures (remember that short end of the stick?). Our overly exuberant expectations regarding holidays and birthdays simply indicate how starved we all are for attention and congratulations and well-wishes and blessings that we obviously miss out on during the other 351 days of the year. It is a very sad indication of fact. However, perhaps through our A. I. R. program we will be able to study the dynamics of holidays and birthdays and begin to realize that external accommodations for happiness are fleeting and temporary at best and that real happiness is generated by us from inside ourselves. We are truly the real source of our own happiness with our fellow travelers encouragement and our higher power’s eternal guidance.

**June 27**: Do we have self-doubt? You bet! We experience life with our families, in our neighborhoods, at school, in church, around towns or in cities or in the country. And all experiences every day influence what we think, and what we know, and what we think we know. Is it straightforward or confusing, or sometimes both? Sure! We are constantly faced with social and societal actions and reactions indicating that we are not like other people. We don’t fit any normal categories, ever. These experiences are every day. Do these experiences of being treated as different influence how we think, how we know, how we think we know? Of course they do. Is how we feel about ourselves different from how society feels about us? Absolutely! Do the differences between our and other’s perceptions make for total “cognitive dissonance?” Absolutely. Is this then a simple matter of self-doubt? Obviously! We do not see ourselves as we are seen by others! How about my individual opinion of my self-worth against the world’s opinion of my self-worth? Makes the story of David versus Goliath look like a fair fight! With all of the odds against us how do we even begin to cope with the challenges of trying to feel good about ourselves in this world of continual hostility and unacceptable belligerence? For that’s how we experience all of the typically separate and unequal treatments we receive 24/7. And again, we have eyes and ears that work! We know the differences between what people say and how they act. These differences are sometimes (more often than not) monumental, gigantic, humongous! Are we then naturally critical of ourselves more than we are critical of social and societal actions and reactions to us? You bet! No kidding! Too often our anger and frustrations and negativities to all of this treatment are turned inward against ourselves and not outward, or better yet, turned aside and ignored? That’s really hard to accomplish. But, in A. I. R., with a lot of help, maybe we can learn to deflect the daily treatment we receive and begin to believe in our own views about ourselves as being honest and valid and terrific.  We don’t have to accept society’s beliefs about us, nor internalize what they think about us. We can all rise above it all.

**June 28**: “Because we have deemed you legally, morally, politically, medically, and socially to be disabled, we have taken great efforts to determine your caretaking for you, which will never be left up to you from now on. We will arrange for your financial upkeep, your assistants, your schedules, where you will ever need to be, what we will do for you, and where you will go from now on. We will devise how to teach you to be independent within reason. We will guarantee your schooling in special educational facilities which will be focusing on “basic daily living skills,” although we naturally assume that you will require assistance with each and every skill and task presented before you. We will record your every assisted effort, and reward each and every assisted partial success with a pre-designated amount of M & Ms. All of our yearly testing has determined the extent and validity of these strategies. Nothing has changed in the course of our determined expertise. At age 22 you will be granted a diploma and ceremony of completion and be provided with job training for grocery bagging, shopping cart retrieval, and stocking shelves at night at the local food mart, if they are hiring. If not, you will be enrolled in any of the burgeoning new day program activity centers hosting others just like you who also need leisure time activities on a weekly Monday through Friday basis.” We have all experienced this life-cycle storm of bureaucratic thinking, or something dramatically too similar. It is all because a diagnosis of disability is assumed to be one of permanent dependence in all manifested areas (without exception). Maybe in this new A. I. R. program we will be given complete license to literally question every aspect of our designated histories and our projected futures. Let us hope so!

**June 29**: In today’s world of corporate greed and business malfeasance, many large corporations that have suffered public disclosure of illicit criminal behavior have turned to their public relations departments for advancing positively motivated “good deed” philanthropic adventures to attempt to right their failing public images. Our A. I. R. affiliate franchises will undoubtedly be approached continuously by such large business enterprises wishing to establish very public consolidated relationships worth a great deal of money and prestige with many ensuing photo opportunities as a result. However, it is in our A. I. R. charter and mission statement everywhere that all outside influences must be and have to be ignored and not agreed with as our primary and only goals of helping our individual members remain our sole responsibilities which would be forever compromised by getting involved in outside business ventures; therefore, money, property, and prestige are avoided at all costs and are discouraged permanently. Also, to preserve personal anonymity we avoid connecting at any and all levels with press, radio, TV, and films, however lucrative the offers may be.

**June 30**: With a lifetime of scarring, it may take a lifetime for recovery. We are both the patients and the surgeons doing our own work on re-membering our broken selves into healthful conditions. Like the scarecrow, the tin man, and the lion in The Wizard of Oz, we require assistance along our yellow brick roads, with our higher power by our sides on the way while providing us with the lessons and discoveries and transformations for growing into whoever we were all meant to be and become. Are there ups and downs and trials along the way? Absolutely! Are we all damaged beyond repair? No, of course not. Do we have major flaws as well as major strengths? Yes, we do. Do we each help each other on this road to the Emerald City? You betcha!  But do we have what it takes to transform ourselves? Yup. And just like Glinda explains to Dorothy at the end of the movie, "You've always had the power, my dear, you just had to learn it for yourself". In A. I. R. this is virtually stated over and over again: what is inside us can be allowed to grow and expand and prevail, for our higher power dwells in our hearts and always has been there. Through surrender and prayer and meditation and silence we come to know and recognize our higher power and are helped to be delivered from the madness and trauma of this realm. It is a long and slow transformational process, and well worth it: one step at a time, and one day at a time.

**July 1**: You know what? Life itself is a miracle: an infinite number of interconnected variables in a Swiss watch clockwork precision-like functioning of working capability, and we are in it, like characters and actors in a movie or a play, where we are also audience to what is happening. And because life’s a miracle that we all take for granted, why not consider the miracle of our author of it all, our higher power, being always available as an assistant to everything we are doing. Better yet, we aren’t doing anything but observing, and our higher power is doing everything. That’s true surrender! This A. I. R. program explains what it is all about. We who attend are responsible for taking what is and making it real (or, actually, watching our higher power making it real).

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**July 2**: Because we, who have been defined and diagnosed as disabled, and have also been enabled to death (having been determined to be completely dependent for everything), we all have one heck of a hard time and problem in A. I. R. trying to take the initiative and the responsibility of rescuing ourselves by ourselves without anyone’s direct assistance. Holy crap! “You mean I have to fix what I didn’t cause? How fair is that?” Your right! It’s not fair. But do you really want someone else who really doesn’t know you trying to help fix your mess for you and really screw it up? Trying to blindly know you better than you know yourself? (Like an episode of the three stooges?) I didn’t think so. You’ll feel much better as time goes on knowing that your successes were planned and orchestrated by you and no one else! The reading, the studying, the sharing, the exploring, the daily work on discovery and recovery is up to each one of us solely in the program. Encouragement comes from everyone. But the work is done by each individual and his or her higher power. Just like running a marathon solo. No car as going to drop by and carry you the whole way. That’s not how it works.

**July 3**: There’s dissociation, and then there’s dissociation! Confused? We all were! Society, for millennia, has deliberately thrown us (all who were deemed useless and worthless and “less than” and abnormal) overboard to drown in the tormenting sea of abandonment and terror, while being and remaining alone. However, we were all tossed teeny tiny life preservers on tethers so we could hold on dependently and be dragged along behind the “normal” ship for an eternity, being able to see and hear how the “normals” traveled on board while we floundered in turbulent seas. Were we deliberately dissociated? Yes! Helpless and abandoned? Obviously! So what do we do? The ship of “normals,” society’s haven, doesn’t want us, and never did! But we can also let go of their useless life preservers that keep us tethered to their co-dependent purposes of “needed reliance,” holding onto their worthless charity life preservers that keep us forever downtrodden in their sea of perpetual helplessness. We now have an A. I. R. program which allows us to purposefully dissociate from the madness of being society’s slaves in abandonment. We don’t need to continuously plead for membership in a system that will never accommodate us. We have our own group of resourceful refugees in A. I. R. who support us and are mindful of us; and we have our higher power to guide us and protect us regardless of the hostile sea into which we’ve all been thrown. So, yes! There’s dissociation, and then there’s dissociation! But do we want to be dissociated, or do we want to do the dissociating?

**July 4**: A day of independence? It doesn’t exist. It never existed. We are all interdependent, and always have been. Yes, we are, and always have been, creatures of habit, having grown up in a society which refused to allow us to see ourselves as anything else but “dependently disabled.” But these habits of looking at ourselves in a certain scripted way are matters of perception, and we can change those if we choose to. Are we powerless over our pasts? Completely! Do they, and did they, affect us in cruel and unusual ways? Yes! Can we let these effects and our reactions to them go? Yes; it’s a bit of a struggle, as they seem to be a part of us, as they’ve become so “attached.” However, with close examination into ourselves and our pasts, we can dislodge ourselves from the aberrant negativity and rejoice in accepting exactly who we are now, amongst fellow colleagues of unified dysfunction, led by our higher powers, and leading ourselves on into our futures undaunted by the outcry of those (not us) who still try to discourage real independence (excuse me! Real Interdependence!). We’re fine now.

**July 5**: Growing up in a society forever belittling us quite naturally prepared us for learning how to perpetually belittle ourselves without their assistance in doing so! We have been and have become such regulated obedient children! Following the examples of those who have taught us so well! We could have been fish! “This is a rod and reel and line and hook and worm. Pay attention, class! You’re in school, now. Remember to bite down hard on the worm so that the hook gets imbedded properly.” Well, just about every aspect of society bought into our apparent disability as it was overly explained to us through actions more than words, and we therefore had to buy into it all (excuse, please) “hook, line, and sinker.” But over the years the repetition of not being good enough wherever we were, whatever we were doing, grew old, tired, and outworn. We wanted what was happening to others (not us), what they were living for (not us), what they had (not us). Remember? We had eyes and ears that worked! We knew! In A. I. R. we can learn to develop our own love for ourselves, our own purposes for living, for trusting, for believing, for encouraging, for thriving, and all because we truly accept who we really are, while congratulating ourselves for surviving as long as we have, in our unusual and different wholeness. And we can tell each other how terrifically we are all doing, saying positive heart felt things about each other that we never heard anywhere else.

**July 6**: In school we had our own special classes. We may have had recess and lunch at the same time, but we played together on our side of the playground (or just stood still for the half hour and watched everybody else everywhere without ever moving). And at lunch we had our own tables in the corner. Oh, and maybe we rode the same buses to and from school, but maybe we had our own buses for that too. Each year in school we had a gradual increase in taunting, name calling, and bullying from other students in our schools, but we neither witnessed nor heard of any punishments for any of it, so it must have been OK. In a grave sense, things, as they were, seldom if ever changed. A few teachers may have been very, very kind, and generous, but they were rare and maybe nonexistent. All of the other “normal” students always avoided us, always, except maybe biological siblings of any of us, but that was at high social risk for them, if ever they interacted. And those interactions were mostly, “Did you remember your coat?” “Did you forget your lunch?” “Don’t forget your glasses in your desk this time!” Our faults were always made a great big deal over, and the blame and shame never seemed to end, because lack of proper planning never happened to “normal” kids (or if it did, it was easily excused as “that’s sometimes the way life is”). In A. I. R., we may be able to stop our incessant checking everything in our pockets 30 times, or looking to see if we have all of our necessary possessions 25 times, because not having them every single day would have resulted in a barrage of guilt which those in authority deemed necessary for us to always experience. “If we don’t teach properly using repetition how will they ever learn?” When authorized teaching and bullying are the same, nothing good can come from it. In A. I. R., we explore our pasts, sharing how we grew up, where we came from, what we went through. It is sometimes very hard, sometimes very tearful, sometimes so embarrassing and painful we want to run and hide. But in these meetings it’s always in the past and gone. We can learn from these experiences and grow beyond them. We no longer need to suffer at other people’s misperceptions and terribly wrong attitudes and behaviors. We are bigger than that. We are stronger and more loving and forgiving of those who have wronged us. And we are ok and fine just the way we are.

**July 7**: Come to think of it, we really are victims of upside down thinking. We’ve all been designated as intellectually and developmentally disabled (the polite terms for imbecile, moron, idiot, and retard); and as long as we continue to unopposedly fit into our designated and expected limited categories, then “All’s right with the world!” So, basically, we fail at being “normal,” but then we’re considered successful at being failures, and almost recognized and applauded for being so (check out all of the rare news stories about us online for confirmation.). Heaven help us if we actually try being successful at being successfully “normal”, demanding our independence, with voices that are respected and heard, with opinions that matter, and with attitudes that are not always supplicating and appeasing, genuinely self-determined, and self-empowered, and insistent with our presence in “normal” societal adventures and venues. That’ll be the day! If society and authorities continue to refuse to, or fail to, acknowledge us, we in A. I. R. will unequivocally

recognize who we are and what we do as survivors. We will be accepted here as successful, just as we are. There’s no way we will ever be considered truly successful by a competitive society that relies on power, money, influence, and prestige as benchmarks of success. We might be more interested in love, kindness, compassion, cooperation, and interdependence.  And our friends and our higher power will always assist us with these ends.

**July 8**: Regardless of the structures and guiding principles of all other 12-step programs, A. I. R. provides an almost instantaneous welcoming mat and overwhelmingly positive response for first time attendees, due in large part to society’s overall perfected negligence as to who and what we are. There are few, to no, existing oases of positivity for folks like us anywhere where we are not only allowed to be and act and speak as to who we are, but are outright encouraged to do so. We get to share where we’ve come from, what we’ve been through, and what we are still going through outside of the security and sanctity of A. I. R. We get to open up like never before and expose the effects of sanctioned discrimination, segregation, isolation, labeling, name calling, and society’s “favorite status” hostilities directed towards us here and everywhere else folks from our population gather. Through the camaraderie we share here and with our higher power’s direction we will keep coming back because we are worth it.

**July 9**: Maybe close, maybe not: siblings. Could be personality types, or a lot of other things in combination: age differences, sex, outgoing, withdrawn, introvert, extrovert, who knows? But sibling relationships with us on a scale of 1 to 10 can look pretty interesting: 1 being totally involved, loving, protective, concerned, available, defending, best of friends, etc. , whereas 10 would be aloof, distant, quiet, embarrassed by us, critical, standoffish, etc. And our siblings (if we have them) could fit in anywhere between the extremes of 1 to 10: there for us or never there for us, somewhere between loving and caring for us or embarrassed by us and critical of us. But with our new interaction and involvement with A. I. R., the possibility of the extremes of 1 to 10 might very well be stretched even further apart with the 1s being even more supportive and backing us completely with this new impetus and direction and the 10s being even more highly critical and reclusive. Nothing like a little self-muscle flexing and notoriety to bring out the best and the worst in people, eh? The social dynamics of choice when it comes to A. I. R. participation may behave like an electro magnet, attracting some and repelling others. It may seem a perfect fit for some and excruciatingly uncomfortable for others; empowering for some, and a total waste of time for others. As with all things requiring personal time and involvement, it’s always a matter of choice, personal profitability, and allegiance. “Does this work for me or not?” And how our siblings react to A. I. R. goes along the same lines: support or rejection, also a matter of personal choice and preference. Ain’t diversity in human consciousness a trip? Sure is!

**July 10**: One of the biggest (sometimes stated, sometimes not) warnings we ever get from those in authority (or responsibility) is, “Whatever you do, don’t embarrass us!” And of course, we, being who we are, inevitably shatter that directive or instruction wholeheartedly, and a lot of the time not on purpose. We’ve always gotten stares and avoidances and center stage at church, grocery stores, gas stations, theaters, malls, school, restaurants especially!, which maybe why we end up eventually at day programs and sheltered workshops and activity centers. Our relatives, neighbors, and friends sort of put up with us out of feelings of protective necessity, but toleration is always limited. Too much off-the-rails behavior on our parts generally results in controlled quiet yelling, stern expressions, and the stamping of feet. It’s all like a choreographed and scripted codependent waltz-like dance that repeats itself whenever we are dragged into any public arena. Having and demonstrating zero appropriate social skills may be in large part because we were never accepted as being “normal” and had zero experience with practicing how to behave with any modicum of social etiquette. We basically grew up amongst our own and relied on our own creative means for getting along with each other which had nothing to do with appropriate “normal” social interactions. Go figure! In A. I. R. we get to be exactly who we are and what we’ve become without anyone in authority bothering us about what is how we behave or think (except that we don’t cross talk!), which is so cool for a major change. In this sphere we can completely relax for a change and be accepted and accept at the same time. It’s all pretty neat and wonderful, and fun for a change, even if it requires hard work on our part to work the steps.

**July 11**: Sometimes the pains we get in reaction to the abuses: name calling, bullying, segregation, discrimination, isolation, etc., cause us to seek out diversions and activities that mask or block out the pains, temporarily. These activities may include video games, toys, collecting things, music, being on our cell phones, shopping, junk food, jewelry, CD movies, etc., or other chosen forms of diversions. And, sometimes, in the pursuit of collecting or acquiring these diversionary things or materials we end up not having enough money to purchase them or acquire them so we then (out of desperation) resort to stealing from friends, neighbors or family or doing some store shoplifting. All of these can become dangerous and ill-advised for one and all and also become illegal. Some paths we go down seem ok at first and then snowball into unfortunate and wrong behavioral trends, which are inexcusable. But through the A. I. R. program we can begin to look at the pains we’ve gone through, examining them closely for how and why they have occurred, so that we can overcome the pains associated with them and not have to resort to compulsive diversionary behaviors that have consumed our time and efforts and maybe have even gotten us into troubles we should have been able to avoid. With study and meditation and sharing and listening we can begin to calmly analyze ourselves and our behaviors. The steps help, our A. I. R. friends help. Our higher power helps. And our constant coming back and working the program helps. We are growing and becoming more aware of ourselves and our progress here. We are being helped and we are helping.

**July 12**: Maybe the first test we ever failed at was the “APGAR.” (“A learning aid: Appearance (skin color), Pulse (heart rate), Grimace (reflex irritability), Activity (muscle tone), and Respiration.” [from Wikipedia]).

It may have been an indication right from the start that we were not right. And, of course, doctors, especially pediatricians, completely relied on it. Regardless, at some point in time, maybe shortly after we came into this world, we didn’t measure up to acceptable standards, at which point declarations of our future potentials, or their lack, were expressed to our parents; and our scheduled upbringing was altered or stopped altogether. And we’ve all been under a distanced microscope ever since. “What were the odds?” How did this happen?” “What could we have done differently?” All of these questions were in our parent’s minds shortly after the news “broke.” [what a nice word, “broke”, to describe our entry into life!]. We were never going to live up to our parent’s or society’s expectations, were we! We were like manufactured “seconds,” what could be bought at “Good Will” half-price Stores. Maybe the total unease our presence created everywhere was the reason behind the laughter, the teasing, the bullying, the disregard, the embarrassment: because people become so uncomfortable around us that their unusual reactions were because they didn’t know how to behave around us, and what they did do was altogether even worse than not reacting at all. That’s it. Maybe we’d have done just the same if we were them. It’s then understandable and forgivable. Sometimes when we break habit, we just act stupid. Maybe we all do, everyone included. Maybe we all aren’t so different after all. That’s enough for today’s lesson, don’t you think?

**July 13**: Our A. I. R. program is not only essentially spiritual, but it is so, out of necessity. We can all, here present in our meetings, vary tremendously, attempting to define and imagine what that perhaps entails on a personal level: apples and oranges, zebras and orangutangs. But all of our various differences are perfectly perfect. We grasp for our own spiritual centers because all of the iconic temporal platforms within this realm of materialization (our beloved planet earth) are notoriously pitted against us: medical, educational, religious, economic, familial, political, judicial, and enforcement (there of course may be others not listed here). All of these authoritative and reputedly lauded aspects of the social order (does not matter which country we examine) quite naturally agree that we are categorically different and quite literally have been proven to be so. Therefore, our own program of A. I. R. is perhaps our only real refuge from a consolidated world of very determined and highly skilled landscapers who have always in their minds known what’s best for us. Maybe it’s time for us to explain in our own words who we think we are and how we wish to be viewed. Looking inward towards ourselves and our own spiritual origins rather than looking outward into the jaws of society is why A. I. R. is truly a spiritual program. Our own inner and higher power’s voicings, experienced within our periods of meditative silence, are and will be our guiding lights for how to grow and move forward. We, who are here, are looking for a promised land of peace and equanimity and joy and acceptance rarely found outside of our own sacred spaces. Yet we persist in love, forgiveness, and compassion, and have a solid determination for what is dreamed as possible for all of humanity (without exception).

**July 14**: Many 12-step programs advise us to become very careful during our recoveries to seek out friends and acquaintances who will not be toxic, or dramatic, or draining of our newfound successes and energies, as we slowly emerge from our abusive histories into becoming healthier, self-aware, positive, self-empowered and assured. Hopefully in A. I. R. we will not attempt to be so exclusive and, in a sense, judgmental. Those of us who have been labeled and classified as categorically different from “normal” such that our times have been spent in the secluded and discriminated outsides of acceptable society looking in, with no allowance for ever being invited in, we should be very careful to realize that our selected “tribe” of “abnormals” never consciously engaged in purposeful antisocial and criminal behavior to earn such designations as “drunk,” “drug user,” “sex offender” “dangerous and violent predator,” or “repeat offender.” We didn’t wrongfully earn our designations; they were handed to us. Therefore, we needn’t push away or castigate or ruin those amongst us who are also so privileged with medical and legal diagnoses of disability, when they and we, as a community, need all of the shared help from ourselves as we can get. We will not survive if we are pitted against each other here in our generously secluded placement: below the bottom of the barrel.

**July 15**: Do we need to continue to fear those in society who purport to be in authority over us, designating who we are, what we can do, and what we can’t do? No. Can we develop our own opinions about who we are and where we want to go with our lives? Yeah, we can. Are we all still citizens of the United States of America, with all of the rights and privileges afforded to all citizens by our Constitution and Bill of Rights? Yup! Have we the rights to be allowed all designated freedoms and seek and possess life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness? Of course. What limits that have been set upon us are simply perceptions and a matter of opinion, which are not necessarily our opinions. We can explore things in life we’ve been discouraged from exploring. We can have fun being who we are. We have phones which are computers which are exploring tools. We can investigate opportunities for study and enjoyment and enrichment we’ve been denied. We have access to libraries, literacy acquisition, music, sports, art, theater, and travel. The availability of future possibilities are literally endless. Through A. I. R., we now have the means and the tools to shed our past limitations and psychological blockages for becoming more than whatever society deemed were our restrictive limitations. The sky has no limits for us anymore. With the help of our fellow travelers and our higher power, we can do what we never thought was possible before, and we can do it all with love, compassion, integrity, quiet affirmations, humility, and discretion for ourselves and all of our fellow citizens who can jump on our bandwagon if they wish, or continue to ignore us. But we won’t continue to ignore ourselves anymore.

**July 16**: Any incentive to become involved with this A. I. R. program might have (or might be) derived from “word of mouth” contact. With so many adults with ID and DD in this country escaping school at the age of 22 while remaining completely illiterate or functionally illiterate, the odds of their reading about this program are pretty darned scant. Though, if given the opportunity of having had these materials read to them on a regular basis, they might have found (or might find) the program quite intriguing and even welcoming. The phenomenal underground communication system locally and nationally for folks with ID and DD has been a marvelously creative and untaught masterpiece of subtle and experimental expertise. And the technology of cell phones, laptops, tablets, and computers has been at the forefront of this quiet behind-the-scenes telecommunications explosion. The eventual down-pouring of information regarding A. I. R. from critical reviews to pod casts to blogs to Facebook to twitter to snap chat to Instagram to tik tok  to twitch and to You Tube will eventually seep into the awareness of this entire population of “different” people such that localized chapters of A. I. R. will most probably sprout up everywhere. The online sharing of initial information may be all that’s needed to ignite interest like a prairie wildfire. And hopefully the intrigue will remain for those embarking on a lifelong odyssey of internal examination and healing and spiritual realization and adventure. This entire population has needed a functional (for them, for us) 12 step program to help alleviate the societally induced misery that has gone on unchecked for centuries.

**July 17**: From a research analysis of many correlated academic journal articles: “Sexual abuse among individuals with developmental disabilities is significantly above the national average, with research indicating people with developmental disabilities are at a much higher risk of experiencing sexual abuse compared to the general population; some studies report rates several times higher than the average person without a disability.“ These staggering statements indicate a societal problem that seems not to be in the forefront of our authority’s mindsets for appropriate prevention through education, literature, and video dissemination. The main work of A. I. R. is the systemic abuse that is perpetuated and preponderates in the lives of all individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities; but sexual abuse is too often an almost hidden part of the multi-layered milieu. We are, more often than not, most vulnerable in that, being alone and segregated and disenfranchised, we all too often seek love and companionship and recognition wherever we think we can find it, and this world is full of predators looking out for desperate and innocent and unwatched victims. Through A. I. R., we hope to become an educational force for the assisting with (on the side: before and after meetings) role playing to teach how to recognize people trying to take advantage of us and how to avoid them and such highly volatile circumstances where unfortunate and unwanted relationships could happen. This is a crisis too many of us are experiencing that we cannot ignore.

**July 18**: There appear to be an unusual set of relationships between psychic traumas, psychological attachments, and habitual behaviors. From a website on these conditions: “Psychic trauma is a mental condition that can be caused by an emotionally overwhelming event that overwhelms the body's homeostasis. It can have long-lasting effects and can cause bodily changes that are either temporary or permanent.” And also this comment: “Psychic trauma is described as the action of 'an emotionally overwhelming factor' capable of causing neurovegetative alterations leading to transitory or persisting bodily changes.” So our work in A. I. R. is long term, difficult, and intense, due to societally generated and allowed destructive labeling, segregation, discrimination, isolation, bullying, name calling, and separation from all “normal” facets and aspects within the social order. The above listed events qualify as “psychic trauma” of the worst kind in that they are so overwhelmingly accepted by authorities as “helping” with the problems of physical, emotional, and mental “differences.” And if you don’t think bullying is an institutionally systemic and sanctioned activity, take a very close look at probate court determinations for placement of guardianships, school and class availability, and medical and psychiatric policies: all legal and socially sanctioned without objection from all in authority (though our opinions or objections don’t count and never have). In A. I. R., we hope to discover and evaluate all of the habits and behaviors we have accumulated to see how and why they have become so “attached,” and maybe just maybe get rid of the ones overburdening us with guilt, shame, blame, and the triggers of memories of what we’ve been through and are still going through. With our generous support from our fellow travelers and our higher power’s guidance we will be able eventually to relax and be calm and be grateful and loving maybe for the first times in our lives.

**July 19**: Those of us with labels and diagnoses of intellectual and developmental disabilities know full well that society’s indiscretions towards us are ever present, though ever changing in degree, while remaining consistent in intent. They cannot be argued with; they cannot be negotiated with; they are not answerable to us on any level. All of the external hullabaloo concerning us remains truly outside of our control and necessarily out of our concern. We are here in A. I. R. because A. I. R. has consistently educated us on the true value of ourselves: an internal search for the peace and self-regard, residing within us, which is our only hope for love and freedom and generosity of spirit; because the outside world has given us zero consideration that it has our best or even slightest interests at heart (there may be some indication that a heart is something they do not possess). Achieving any sense of balance in our lives towards ourselves requires understanding how, why, and where we all here stand in relation to a monolithic society that has made such little effort at providing for us a legitimate capacity for entry into any public and private venues for participating and engaging in all social venues: religiously, academically, politically, economically, recreationally, residentially, and judicially. Our only hopes are generated by us. Our only education of where we’ve come from comes from us. Our only peace comes from our solidarity with our fellow travelers and our higher power. It will be quite enough to sustain us.

**July 20**: When we’ve all grown up with feelings of inadequacy and worthlessness continually, this state of awareness is our learned and indoctrinated “normal,” which, when you think about it, is really nuts! Disability and dependency are like conjoined twins, ever together and basically indistinguishable. Being deemed helpless meant we were enabled with everything, almost always: from getting awakened to having our clothes picked out for us to being helped getting dressed to having our meals prepared to having our things and rooms organized to being constantly reminded of what to do, what to say, where to go, whom to play with, and, “Watch your manners,” “Do I have to tell you everything?” and “Stay with your brother or sister,” “Play in the yard,” “Don’t wander off,” “No going across the street,” “Quit playing in the dirt,” “Go wash your hands,” “And no fighting.” Do any of us ever remember the warning, “Go have fun!?” The regimentation of helplessness from all directions of authority elicited an awareness of having to apologize if we were ever caught trying to do anything on our own independently, until the regimentation eventually broke down out of exhaustion and our doing anything for ourselves was finally OK, but apologetically. But the stage of dependency had become so established throughout our lives that we could only do a few little things for ourselves, but nothing really “grown up,” or “serious,” or “responsible,” or “mature,” or “adult.” How odd that we’ve all become really big little children, permanently? With our A. I. R. program we get to examine how and why we have become the way we have: why we behave the way we do, why we react the way we react, and how we might be able to change our own perceptions and survive peacefully amongst ourselves without “rocking the boat” at our own peril, while learning how to love and forgive and become more increasingly and successfully independent (excuse me, interdependent)!

**July 21**: When it comes to authority figures, which line do you want to be in? It’s really quite simple! The authority figures in society (including pretty much everyone who is not us, but who helps determine who we are in their eyes) in all facets of organizational life: religious, judicial, educational, medical, political, economical, and familial have all bought in regarding our insurmountable differences with our determined helplessness and necessary dependency in everything we try to be involved in. A great many times (well actually most of the time) decisions made by authority figures benefit or placate the authority figures and not us. Personal biases and inclinations of a notoriously ignorant nature predominate. Justifications are then based on “safety” and “health” considerations. Here we are describing just one aspect of “authority figures” and it’s been a very difficult road on which we have all traveled. On the other hand, in A. I. R., we learn of another very different authority figure, our higher power, who is always available, always loving, ever present, always consistent, always protective, always guiding our every thought and move and hope and our choices. So, again, which line do you want to be in? Trusting external authorities who will determine for you who you are, where you need to be, how you are to live, who possess zero awareness of you and have zero consistency of direction or focus? Or, do you wish to have trust in a higher power who consistently loves you unconditionally for you being exactly who you are? As habits are hard to break or change, the choice may seem a bit difficult, and it probably is. But attending meetings regularly and listening to your fellow travelers and what they are sharing might just provide you with the necessary information to execute the choices you need to make.

**July 22**: Besides attending A. I. R. Meetings and sharing and listening and doing the step work, it may seem beneficial to make contact with an outside supporting therapist who understands the trials that folks with intellectual and developmental disabilities go through. Therapists are trained attentive listeners who ask leading questions to help discover causes and motivations behind thoughts, feelings, and behaviors without judging. They try to examine ways of dealing with the stresses of shame, blame, loneliness, self-doubt and low self-esteem, without the pressure to conform to any means offered or suggested. They may just attend by listening and being a great “sounding board” for venting and getting out frustrations, anger, tears, and dreams so that clients can better see their own internal issues by sharing what comes out and is calmly provoked. Therapists can be surrogate best friends, while remaining totally professional and distant but compassionate. So therapy should always be a resourceful option if possible, and if necessary.

**July 23**: Grief is a strange possession: it is something we hold onto when there is something that we no longer have that is missed. It is a sadness and intense feeling that accompanies (maybe even replaces) loss of something temporary that has passed. Childhood, happiness, friendships, loves, favorite things or places or experiences: they all may be grieved over. And grief generally has five stages that are experienced over time: “denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance”. These 5 stages generally happen after the initial shock of a loss (or losses). If we become extremely comfortable and expectant of certain things in our lives wishing that they not change, then when they do, we suffer the loss of that or those expectations. The trick of getting beyond grief and loss through our A. I. R. program is beginning to realize that all things existing in this realm of materialization (this planet Earth) are temporary, in that they change and are not eternal. Our higher power and our souls are eternal. Everything else isn’t. But our true selves are our souls, so in essence, what we love and cherish most can never be lost. Same goes for all other souls, though we come and go with surprising regularity. Grief is a very natural reaction and happenstance if we cherish things of this earth. But a strange and beautiful biblical message and advisement applies here, “Be in it, but not of it.” And remember, life is too serious to be taken seriously, so laugh a lot about everything. It’s a very healthy reaction when things screw up! As they inevitably do!

**July 24**: It might not seem like a big leap deciding to attend an A. I. R. meeting for the first time, but it really is. Regardless of how bad (or apparently good) life is or has seemed to be, deciding that some or many alterations to it might be very off-putting to friends, family, acquaintances, colleagues, and neighbors, it becomes then a struggle to figure out how painful it could eventually be. Decisions and indecisions may haunt our every move as to whether or not to delve into the memories of our pasts and childhoods, discovering and uncovering the roots and causes of our systemic labeling, isolation, bullying, segregation, discrimination, and name calling. Who can be hurt by it? Who will perhaps feel guilty because of it? Is this new journey going to be worth it? We can ask and confer with our fellow travelers and dig into ourselves in meditation about all of it with our higher power while requesting guidance. There may be no simple answers. But seeking ways not to be depressed, or not being used, or not feeling alone or downtrodden and worthless. These are, for us, almost universal reasons for questioning where we’ve come from, where we are going, and what could possibly happen that could be worse than what we’ve already experienced? We may all be on similar paths.

**July 25**: Bathing in Lake Mistassini, Quebec in late June, just two weeks after the ice has melted, with the water temperature being about 34 degrees Fahrenheit, is a bit nutty. First, you have to dive in to get wet, whereupon you scream as your head emerges from the water because that’s how your body involuntarily reacts. However upon getting out of the frigid (we’re not kidding) water one then proceeds to soap up with shampoo and bar soap to attempt to get clean…. Do you now see the dilemma? You have to dive back into the frigid water to get the soap off. So twice within a few minutes you’ve placed your life in Mother Nature’s hands. The reason for this horrifying account is that we have all been through a certain level of Hell through the abuses received from society, and have arrived at A. I. R. thinking we will be saved from further trauma at the hands of our outside tormentors. Being now in A. I. R., we’ve just simply applied the soap. Exploring our inner workings and memories and reliving and re-experiencing the pains to understand what it was we all lived through is just again giving back into the frigid painful waters to get completely clean of our pasts. We have to go through the repeat of the pains in order to grow beyond them. Exploring our hurtful feelings requires this second immersion. Becoming aware of our shut-down feelings requires courage, fearlessness, stamina, determination, perseverance, and trust: relying on our fellow travelers and our higher power. Bathing in Lake Mistassini in late June might be easier. Hahahaha!

**July 26**: Internalizing the negativity of society has been easy, and very much our “normal,” though we are all classified as “different” by so many degrees that we are logarithmically somehow beyond 180 degrees away from their perfect “normal.” But maybe we were completely unaware that what negativity we had gotten from society was unsuitable for us or damaging in any way. We may have spent years absorbing the negativity and also projecting it out to others: friends, family, acquaintances, and neighbors. It may be that over time that we began to recognize that our apparent chosen paths in life had not been chosen by us but designated for us by outside agencies. This new awareness may have brought about new abilities to perceive life around us and also inside us, and also brought about questioning why we were the way we were. With these searchings we may have been miraculously delivered to or become aware of this A. I. R. program which initially seemed so interesting and unusual: a group for, by, and of people like us, who are seeking and searching for answers to life’s problems and dilemmas. How can this be? What could possibly be the benefits, as our population has been categorically determined incapable of creating, designing, or building anything worthwhile or constructive? Is this just another social club to keep us happy, preoccupied, and separated from everyone else in society who doesn’t want us around to bother and pester and annoy and embarrass them? Nope! This is (pardon the word) “different.” We have discovered a community of fellow travelers who are experiencing a real source of light and love within us, ever present, ever helpful, ever assisting: a higher power of eternal patience, forgiveness and peace that is guiding our true selves to becoming and having more than we ever suspected was possible (actually uncovering what has always been who we really are, and always have been!). We are all emerging into a new (and old) state of awareness and learning about love and peace and forgiveness and reconciliation. Using the steps and meditation and the silence within to realize who we really are: divine immortal souls residing in very temporary vehicles called bodies. So here we go, one day at a time, one step at a time, slowly manifesting the perfection of being exactly who we are.

**July 27**: Though we often become angered and enraged when others we know suffer at the hands of society’s mistakes and transgressions: abuse, neglect, bullying, name calling, etc., and want to fight for them to end their crying and upset and disturbance, it is often because we have those same issues within ourselves that have remained not dealt with. Before we can really offer the help and assistance our friends need and require in dealing adequately with their similar hurts, we need to deal with our own hurts which we are neglecting and deflecting before we can adequately help our fellow travelers. If we do not effectively deal with our own traumatic pasts successfully, how would we know how to help with those and similar issues without making things way worse than they already are? It is entirely possible that we focus on other’s problems rather than our own out of fear and hesitation of the difficult task of delving into our own pasts to uncover and discover how and why we feel the way we do. Easy to say, not so easy to accomplish. We can offer real support initially by being good listeners in silence as they share their life stories. And we can share how working the steps and uncovering our own pasts is revealing how we are dealing with the same types of abuse we have gone through, without commenting specifically about anyone else or their experiences. Listening while not “cross talking” is vital in our recovery and also in everyone else’s.

**July 28**: The good things, and the not so good things, about invisibility: society has labeled us from birth as different, as categorized, as dependent (probably forever), as not worthy of receiving all of the “normal” benefits available in the regular social order (regardless of how this is legally and politically preached). We have eyes and ears and experiences with how ridiculously unjust the systemic treatment is and has been. So, we are expected to be and remain as invisible as society determines our differences to be, with how much invisibility is required for society to remain utterly cheerful for and by itself. However, our designated invisibility may offer us benefits for exploring who we truly are without the harassment of further abuses, if we seem to exist silently, heads bowed, going our own ways without causing a ruckus, protesting, making scenes, or seemingly withdrawn from public attention. In A. I. R. we can listen and share and commiserate peacefully regarding our collective designated status, one of perfect anonymity and silence and invisibility. We can assist each other and pay attention to what our higher power delivers in his/her/its (your pick) silent language.

**July 29**: One of the symptoms of chronic abuse and neglect is referred to as hyper vigilance: being constantly on the alert for violence, trauma, emotional tensions, bullying and name calling, wherever we may happen to be. It is also highly linked to sensory integration disorder (  <https://www.angelsense.com/blog/10-signs-sensory-processing-disorder/?gad_source=1&gbraid=0AAAAADl_r5t5Q4kykElRxY2o9iL-AztW_&gclid=EAIaIQobChMIvNPtqvbFiAMV20H_AR1weRs3EAAYAiAAEgJ6RfD_BwE>) or sensory processing disorder. PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder) seems to also fit in with the levels of abuse we have all experienced. That these naturally occurring symptoms following the abuse and neglect are too often attributed to our predetermined diagnoses of ID and DD borders on criminality. We have senses that work and feelings that matter. Our diagnoses do not preclude us from having awarenesses and a variety of typical human attributes, whatever “unban legend” may erroneously declare as fact. But too many memories may remain deliberately hidden from us as our natural defense mechanisms buried them for our survival’s sake. Through our A. I. R. program we attempt to unbury our long lost memories of where we’ve come from and what we’ve been through. Sharing and listening, doing the step work, and following our higher power’s sensibilities of love, forgiveness, tolerance, patience, and compassion will be our primary goals and personal responsibilities to ourselves and our fellow travelers. With this work maybe our hyper vigilance will decrease and eventually cease altogether.

**July 30**: All 12-step programs are financially self-sufficient and do not ever accept outside solicitations, endorsements, or contributions. For us in A. I. R., this may be quite difficult, but we will just have to find some in-house members with enough resources to provide for everyone else who may not be able to contribute much or anything at all. We may be able to be allowed by schools or churches or neighborhood houses to have a meeting place that is free. We may also be provided free or inexpensive copying for our meeting routines and flyers. If we are allowed to become a 501-C3 non-profit organization we may be able to get unforeseen benefits from that status, though we will not be able to get outside contributions due to our having tax-free contribution status. And members must all be aware that membership is 100% free and there are no financial expectations placed on any members whatsoever. From the ACA book “Strengthening My Recovery” pg. 219, “Being fully self-supporting, we do not owe outside interests, so no one else tells us where or how to carry our message.” This statement applies to us in A. I. R. completely. We are here, we are beginning to become successful in helping those who have suffered damage from a society that does not know any better, and we will continue to be a place of refuge and hope and love for the downtrodden.

**July 31**: Isn’t it amazing that the isolation that society deliberately placed us into, due to the labeling and classifications of “different” we were given (so many standard deviations below “normal”), that they created a space where so many others, who were really quite different from us, were also thrown into the same places, stations, and classrooms; so our intended isolation became like an enclosed corral of fellow (literally) “misfits,” because we were not allowed to really mingle with others deemed “acceptable.” Our new best friends became our new best friends because they had been placed and situated beside us. We had all “drawn short straws”, which had been deliberately picked for us. Our compartmentalization probably had provided us with lifelong friends and fellow travelers inadvertently, those whom we could rely on and depend on through thick and thin forever.  We have cried together, we have held each other up, and we simply knew in silence what the others amongst us had been through, were going through, and would go through without having to say a single word. In A. I. R., though, we are now encouraged to realize we have voices, that our opinions matter, that our experiences have had value and meaning and vitality and originality and purpose. We will always depend on each other, and we will learn more and more about relying on our higher power for direction, and self-confidence, love, forgiveness, and peace.

**August 1**: “Everything in its own time” is a statement that seems extraordinarily foolish and maybe simplistic, but to the observant attendee to A. I. R. meetings, it makes a great deal of sense, after seeing it reflected in the many experiences of being almost handed the right message, the right lesson, the right teaching at the exact time when it feels perfectly right. It’s a miraculous occurrence that happens regularly to and for those seeking awareness and enlightenment during the hard times of disillusionment. When one expresses a truly heart felt need, whether silently or out loud, for real assistance with difficulties, problems, confusion, or hardships, invaluable and unfailing answers show up in the most profound ways for the individual or individuals making the solemn requests. It’s a cosmic law of attraction and it happens all the time. Confirmation of this law will be eventually forthcoming from all of the dedicated fellow travelers over time who seek the hidden answers to their own and life’s dilemmas. For those on this path of self-discovery they will attest to its truth. “Everything in its own time.”

**August 2**: Growing up in a society that universally agreed that our labeling and classifications were 100% scientifically correct meant that, if we ever thought of having or making objections to our placements, our objections were simply wrong. The fields responsible for this perfect collusion were political, educational, medical, judicial, economical, legal, and religious. There was no alternative ruling or discovery or miracle that would or could change our predetermined destiny. Our fate had been ground into historical understanding for several millennia. The competitive marketplace of, for, and by all human affairs had determined unequivocally that there was no room for us anywhere (amongst them) as we would be literally and figuratively trampled. Total acceptance of our “less than” status was always considered our best and only alternative, as our differences could and would never allow us in the same breath as those considered “normal” or “OK” or “acceptable.” Dissociation\* (a rare occurrence, maybe) could possibly have happened for anyone so completely misdiagnosed (and these persons would have the self- awareness to know this) that their average or above average intelligence would have been ridiculously masked by unusual physical or behavioral overlying symptoms. Then again, maybe there exist a whole lot of cases of incredible misdiagnoses plaguing our “different” community. What Kafkaesque circumstance would that have devolved into? Are there any records anywhere that that could possibly have happened anywhere?  (<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autism_Is_a_World#/media/File%3AAutism_is_a_World.jpg>) or maybe  ([Non-verbal girl with Autism speaks through her computer 20/20 ABC NewsYouTube · STAR InstituteAug 8, 2012](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xMBzJleeOno)).  We may have to rely heavily on our A. I. R. program and training to provide us with the courage and determination and perseverance to be able to survive in this world of unsavory competition that abhors and detests our remarkable differences. We’re not going anywhere or away. Thank God for our fellow travelers and our higher power to illuminate our pathway onward and upward.

\*From an online search: “Psychological dissociation is a mental process that involves a person disconnecting from their thoughts, feelings, memories, or sense of identity. It can be a normal experience, such as when daydreaming or getting lost in a book or movie. However, dissociation can also be a symptom of a mental health condition known as a dissociative disorder.”

**August 3**: What are the challenges that we face every day? Are these challenges impediments or blocks that prevent our moving forward or achieving success with our lives and our work? Are these difficulties things we have placed in front of us or the results of our actions, inactions, or reactions? A great deal of the pain, hurt, and misery we experience in life is due to our inability to respond with acceptance and love during the day-to-day trials we go through. We must learn how not only to love and forgive and accept all that happens to us, but also love and forgive and accept all that we do and have done to others and to ourselves. Examining very closely where we’ve come from, where we are now, how we’ve gotten here, and how we feel about ourselves and others can help provide us with a substantial list of those whom we feel or know have wronged us, and also a substantial list of those we have wronged including ourselves. We can set aside times during the day to actively think of and project forgiveness and love towards everyone we know and have met and had relationships with over the years, knowing that everyone in their hearts felt they were always doing and trying their best with what they had, including us. Our step work and reading and sharing and listening will all provide us with the day-to-day step-by-step vision and direction we need to remove the blockages and difficulties we’ve all managed to build up against our moving forward.

**August 4**: Because of the fact that acceptance, tolerance, forgiveness, and love are pretty much internalized as being central to the A. I. R. philosophy, trying to side-step around how to diplomatically label (odd word for us, eh?) our higher power so that everyone feels comfortable is downright funny. That we even consider inviting and encouraging all new members to wholeheartedly entertain and keep a steady relationship with their own higher power is an amazing plus! That this program is essentially a spiritual program of discovering and uncovering an inner higher consciousness makes any discussion of the validity of a higher power somewhat humorous. It is actually through the steady and continual daily calm and peace of practiced silence and love and forgiveness over time that permits our higher power the means of altering our consciousness and awareness into a more advanced and better state. The groundwork is ours to do. The direction and enlightenment and awareness are our higher power’s to bestow. Dispelling the useless baggage and attachments of hurt, pain, distress, self-doubt, self-hate, anxiety, worthlessness, and zero self-esteem are the slow steady work that is accomplished. Replacing these discarded things with love, forgiveness, gratitude, tolerance, and joy is the continuous path to freedom, liberation, and wholeness. This seems to be the right place for it all to take place.

**August 5**: When the pains of existence are the ever present normal, then acceptance of that condition becomes routine, and the thought of unexpected change becomes more terrifying that the routine of pain, as the fear is that any type of change could be worse. As creatures of habit whatever we have become used to is tolerable. Whatever is unexpected is fearful. Whatever our typical pains are: physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual, they are nonetheless part of our routine and accepted as who we are. Being the permanent targets of societal disparaging and isolation and derision, we become ever so used to our abuse and anticipated derogatory station of lowliness. Our natural state of perpetuation is that of survivors, essentially “street wise” avoiders and deflectors of attention, if we can manage it. Until we reached A. I. R. meetings and discussions we may have never realized that our lives were completely out of our control and ridiculously chaotic and unmanageable. And our entry into A. I. R. was most probably fraught with fear of not knowing what to expect from the new challenges of looking at ourselves (both inside and out) with a purposeful and deliberate microscope. But these A. I. R. people are us. They know who we are. They’ve all been through the same damned crap that the rest have experienced. We are understood for being exactly who we are. And we are loved and accepted. Now that’s a change we can all get used to. Hallelujah!

**August 6**: We’ve all become too aware of the old and ugly adage: “The cure may be worse than the disease.” But when we were all treated like a “disease” and placed in isolation for being different and essentially toxic, the “cure” for society’s managing of us was better for them than it was for us. We have no control (zero) over society’s dispositions towards us (we never have and we probably never will), and we only have control over how we see ourselves, how we react or not to our placements and labelings. But our distresses, which we have taken so seriously for far too long, have all been temporary. And A. I. R. has unceremoniously revealed to all of us that we are fine exactly the way we are, not needing any drastic environmentally determined alterations so that we can actually fit better where we’ve been exiled. With A. I. R.’s disclosure that our higher power resides within our hearts and always has, we travel together with a self-sufficiency that is unparalleled and perfect. We truly have everything we need right where we are.

**August 7**: We find it a bit odd thinking perhaps we may be recipients of unconditional love from agents and agencies of society when we quite regularly receive conditional labeling, conditional segregation, conditional discrimination, conditional education, conditional housing, conditional work placements, conditional banking services, conditional governmental benefits, and circumstantial bullying (that was the cherry on top). Our higher power gives us unconditional love, along with many of our A. I. R. fellow members. Unconditional love almost requires complicit understanding of who we are, why we’re here, and whom we can always unequivocally rely on 24/7. Our journeys together may go on completely unnoticed anywhere else besides in our quiet unobtrusive A. I. R. meetings. We have no general agreements for raising the decibel levels of our survivalist comments regarding our feral community right under the proverbial noses of our indifferent tormentors. Maybe it’s a really good thing that we’ve all been unexpectedly taught from day one that we can only expect to be able to rely on ourselves for comfort, care, love, compassion, acceptance, and commiseration.

**August 8**: In order for us to have fooled who we thought we were (and had become) and had escaped who we thought we were (and had become), we had to completely turn ourselves inside out and upside down and backwards, psychologically (as physically would not have worked so well), in order to pretend we had not been the products of societally induced irreversible breakage. It’s like a sick survival mechanism when a healthier one had not been available or discoverable. Our attempts at hiding had become progressively more damaging, while salvaging ourselves [as if our upside-down thinking and actions had been healthy] in the ever present throws of dysfunction, as we continued to overwhelmingly be attracted to more and more diverse forms of chaos. At this crucial point we may have realized that seeking out a better way, so as not to continue committing antisocial suicide, would be our last gasp at survival. How many who have needed A. I. R. have never found it or discovered it? We perhaps have been lucky, fortunate, and curiously privileged. A. I. R. was like that randomly floating life preserver we accidentally bumped into while strugglingly swimming vainly to make it to any land available through earth’s volcanic and tempestuous sea. Now that we are in A. I. R. we will be able to make the most of our uncoverings, discoverings, and productive changes for the good. Our higher power thinks it will be so.

**August 9**: “Why couldn’t you be more like your brothers and sisters, or even your cousins?” “Why do I have to explain everything to you a thousand times, and you still don’t get it?” “You are so useless!” “Give that to me; I’ll do it!” “Stop doing that; you’re driving me crazy!” “We’re all gonna be late again all because of you!” “You know he’s always trying to be lovable, but he’s such a pain in the neck!” “Just sit down, shut up, and don’t move a muscle!” “You’re back already? What did you forget this time?” “You just couldn’t leave well enough alone, could you?” “Go to your room this instant!” “Hey, Retard, could you throw us back our frisbee?” “Why do we have to play with him; you know he’s not right and no fun.” “And the game’s no good if we have to change all the rules ‘cause of him.”…..And it all went on incessantly, all the time, every day, endlessly. And the hurt and blame were anticipated and just like pealing wallpaper in every room, and on weekends and holidays and back yards and playgrounds and shopping malls. We were everybody’s square peg and every occasion was a round hole. “It was so funny, he had a birthday party but nobody came!” The ancient fable, “The Ugly Duckling,” was written by Hans Cristian Anderson. From Wikipedia. “In reviewing *Hans Christian Andersen: A New Life* by biographer Jens Andersen, British journalist Anne Chisholm writes "Andersen himself was a tall, ugly boy with a big nose and big feet, and when he grew up with a beautiful singing voice and a passion for the theater, he was cruelly teased and mocked by other children".[1]” The reason for his writing it has become so obvious, so tragic, and so painfully applicable. We all know how it was, and what he went through. In A. I. R., we explore our own travails, our own histories. There is no other way out of the box we’ve been placed in besides forgiving, loving, and becoming more than was ever expected of us, healing, triumphing in being exactly as we are, as we were meant to be.

**August 10**: Here’s an unusual quotation for us: “Our real blessings often appear to us in the shape of pains,

losses, and disappointments.” From the poet, Joseph Addison. And this is so odd because throughout our lives we have so often determined that our pasts were the banes of our existence: that the horrors of our abuse and neglect and insufferable name calling and bullying were a horrific negative and not a launching pad to understanding and enlightenment. How incredibly odd to perhaps now be grateful for the torments we all lived through, as our current elevated compassion and love and forgiveness have bestowed upon us and everyone around us a profound positive impact, being the result of our trials and tribulations. We have been baptized by and with fire and have come out of it better because of it. Thank you, thank you, you ungrateful and indifferent society, for providing us with an unexpected education in how not to behave towards all of the rest of humanity. It is through our A. I. R. commitments and encouragements that we can sit back and realize we can overcome anything hurled at us and become whatever we choose to be.

**August 11**: Many 12-step programs suggest that our “inner child,” our true self, undergoes the pains and sufferings that are experienced during childhood and early adulthood due to the dysfunctional pasts we happened to live through. It is also suggested often that we need to re-experience the pains and traumas with a detached and understanding stance to get beyond them to reveal the blossoming and growth of our inner child or true self. However, it may be that our temporary illusory selves (bodies, emotions, mentalities) are what seemingly experience such pains and sufferings, whereas our inner children or true selves (our souls) are simply unaffected witnesses to all of it and remain untouched and unblemished by all earthly happenings. We may in fact be projecting onto our true selves what we think we are going through when it is just our false selves imagining it all. Like that perfect biblical statement, “Be in it, but not of it.” Perception might just about sum it all up. Was the hurt and pain and suffering real? Sure as hell seemed to be! Was it unbearable and awful? Yup. Was it temporary and now over, like a passing storm! Uh huh! Just remember that self-doubts and self-judging and questioning and deceptions abound. We seem to live in a paradoxical universe of missteps and mistakes and misjudgments while ever groping for positivity within dualities. Maybe the A. I. R. advice of total surrender and insistence on “letting go” is what’s needed and the faith that this particular path will lead us to a greater understanding and appreciation of where we ought to be: a new birth and new perception.

**August 12**: Readjusting and paying attention to A. I. R., rather than the dictates of society and its labeling determinations affecting us all, is a really huge step to take. It’s bigger than David versus Goliath, bigger than an ant versus a rubber tree plant, bigger than Mr. Spock versus Khan, bigger than Willie Coyote versus the Road Runner. We seem to be utterly alone against an entire multi-organizational alliance that has persisted in our being and remaining exactly where they have all designated us to be: hopeless, helpless, dependent, unquestioning, isolated, invisible, and grateful for all and everything we don’t have. A. I. R. is a refreshing and delightful happening and place where we can explore alternatives to everything we’ve been mandated to accept. The switch from the habit of nothingness to the unknown of everythingness is daunting and scary and perplexing and an “anomaly of change” into the terrifying unknown that makes us all hesitate initially. But, after a few deliberate participating sessions in A. I. R., we begin slowly to recognize the ensuing benefits that are graciously available to all in attendance. We are with fellow soldiers and travelers in the effort to make life better. We shall continue. We will grow together. We will grieve no more. We will find joy and happiness and godliness amongst all here in the presence of our higher power.

**August 13**: Words that were indelibly impressed upon us as children (and throughout our lives) never completely leave, regardless of the therapies, the session work, the sharings in A. I. R. we’ve undergone.  From Wikipedia, regarding the early life of Scottish actor and comedian, Billy Connolly, “Connolly and his older sister, Florence (named after their maternal grandmother, and eighteen months his senior),[14][17] were cared for by his father's two sisters, Margaret and Mona Connolly, in their cramped [tenement](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tenement) in Stewartville Street, [Partick](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Partick). "My aunts constantly told me I was stupid, which still affects me today pretty badly. It's just a belief that I'm not quite as good as anyone else. It gets worse as you get older. I'm a happy man now but I still have the scars of that." Billy Connolly, an extremely successful human being, at the age of 81 now, in a way, represents all of us. Words are potential debilitating wounds and scars that never leave. Recovery and healing are necessary and responsible for providing deliverance from an unsightly and unforgiving past. But as we move forward and onward and upward, having escaped formidable pasts, we carry permanently the memories of where we’ve come from. There were mistakes, some accidental, some deliberate, and some unknowingly deliberate. And these will continue. But we have found where we need to be to overcome the most difficult barriers and human contrivances ever delivered. We are survivors and we aren’t going away.

**August 14**: You see? “All of science is the academic observational study of patterns and the lack of patterns.” T. W. G.  So, in essence, we are the true victims (or outcomes) of science, having demonstrated extreme patterns that fall several statistical deviations below “normal.” It’s a game we could not have possibly won. Our DNA was stacked against us. The “normed” tests proved it. Our differences weren’t just observed. Those differences generated huge disturbances in the seismic needle that recorded the earthquake of our birth, and then registered all of the aftershocks and subsequent collapsed architecture. The faults recorded were our faults, permanently. The generational bell curve acknowledgment of us (A bell curve is a symmetrical curve that is also known as a normal distribution or Gaussian distribution), regardless of ancestral connections or proclivities, made our existence one that fit perfectly into the grand scheme of chance, probability, and academic footnotes. That we are still just human beings is hardly ever stated, as apparently that’s never mattered. Our A. I. R. memberships will not get us discounts at Starbucks, or Walmart, or Drug Mart, or Urgent Care Centers. Nor can we get free popcorn at AMF bowling alleys or movie theater complexes. But we do have a higher power who (which) will always protect us and guide us through thick and thin and all unforeseen unbearable calamities. As sung so brilliantly by the Monty Python group, “Always look on the bright side of life.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SJUhlRoBL8M>

**August 15**: One of the very clear messages gleaned from participation in A. I. R. is that even people and agents and agencies that really think and espouse that they know what’s going on rarely if ever seriously do. We in A. I. R. frequently admit that we are not in control of anything and have responsibly concluded that we never were in control. We are here in A. I. R. to learn and discover and uncover who we really are at our base and core. And we turn to our higher power for will and guidance and direction, step-by- step, day-bypday, slowly but surely. There’s an ancient Chinese book of Tao series of statements, paraphrased here: There are four classes of human beings: those who do not know and do not know that they do not know. These are fools who have not begun to travel a path to enlightenment; then there are those who do not know, but know that they do not know, and they are fledgling students beginning to walk the path of enlightenment, then there are those who know, but do not know that they know, and these are the dreamers who are about to awaken. Then there are those who know and know that they know, and these teachers are the rare ones who manifest love for all creation, but they appear outwardly, just like much of the fools do, who know nothing, for they are very often completely silent about what they know. Love is an eternal divine energy that all always deserve, but very few there are who are receptive to its comings and goings, though it is spoken about daily almost everywhere. We in A. I. R. who have turned our attention to it are ever hoping to experience it openly and fervently. But all things, especially divine things, happen in their own time and at the right time.

**August 16**: Maybe the biggest disincentive to joining A. I. R. meetings is an overwhelming fear at participating in anything potentially controversial. We have all learned firsthand the rapid-fire retaliations and retributions leveled against us and those we’ve known and loved amongst our ranks for being differently different: for challenging our status quo disenfranchisement and isolation from mainstay society and social functions, for objecting to being labeled, for protesting being bullied, for stepping out of our predetermined line, for standing up for ourselves against mythologically gigantic forces, etc. We have learned through tough experiences to remain invisible, head bowed down, voices quieted, withdrawn, avoidance behaviors perfected, never rocking any boat anywhere. Discouragement from excelling at anything (aside from participatory medallions at special Olympics) has all of us trembling at the idea of doing anything even slightly revolutionary. “We’re different, yes, but we can’t risk being THAT different!!!” But, maybe by being around for a while with very quiet “words of mouth” being selectively spread, maybe a good message about A. I. R. perhaps will get out there slowly and be gradually accepted as legitimate. We shall see what we shall see.

**August 17**: The path to inner peace is a choice. Turning over control of our lives to a higher power is a choice. Relinquishing all of our habits and desires and judgments and opinions to our higher power is a choice. These choices may result from a sudden or even complex realization that we have no control over any circumstances in our lives (and maybe never did have any control), so that deciding to “pass the steering wheel” over to someone or something that clearly knows life’s path better than we do (this does take a great deal of faith) is a rather smart and clever available option. In life we might just discover we are better witnesses, observers, and passengers than we are drivers. However, allowing our higher power to dictate our daily events and circumstances provides us with decisions and choices regarding specific things to do or not to do as circumstances and events unfold. Generally everything laid out before us is done through love, compassion, generosity, honesty, helping, blessing, and courageous calm, realizing that all results and consequences are completely out of our hands. In A. I. R., these discoveries naturally occur after working the steps, sharing, listening, participating in the service aspects of participation in the meetings. All past pains, terrors, fears, traumatic memories, and triggers are let go as they dissolve and disappear. They no longer hold any importance or significance in our lives. Our fellow travelers and our higher power provide the direction and incentive to proceed with each day and time and circumstance. Nothing is impossible while everything is possible.

**August 18**: The question is, “Do we really want change for the better badly enough to commit to a process to achieve it, when we have no confidence 1.) in ourselves, and 2.) in a program called A. I. R., which we know absolutely nothing about, and 3.) in a society always shoving something new and miraculous in our direction?” Are we crazy? Society for years has promised us this miracle medication, and this miracle school program, and this miracle activity center, and this miracle day program, and these special excursion trips, and these special new friends, and these special new job skill placement programs. And where are we now? Have these miracles produced miracles? We are still isolated, bullied, lonely, segregated, discriminated against, and, after years of nonsense promises, very skeptical about anything “new.” So what’s this new A. I. R. program all about anyway? With our own Serenity Prayer, a Problem, a Laundry List, a Solution, a 12 step process of inquiry and discovery, and a list of 12 Traditions? How is all this going to help or solve anything? Since when has anything ever officially or unofficially been designed and built just for me? And especially if it’s free? Nice try!….Well, for starters, we can come and go as we please. There are no contracts to sign, no expectations to commit to, no arm twisting involved, or threats, or under-handed secret rules or gamesmanship involved. Everything is laid out simply every week that you attend. You take what you want, or what you need, and if it helps terrific. If it doesn’t, you haven’t lost anything. But you just might learn a healthy bunch about yourselves while attending, and about the world, and how you’ve been placed in it without your permission or awareness. So come by, sit down, relax, pay attention, see where this river boat takes you. It’s an unusual ride.

**August 19**: When our parents told us, “Pay no attention to what other kids are calling you. They don’t know any better.” That advice works maybe once or twice. But when different kids who don’t even know each other are all using the exact same words, we begin to get mighty suspicious. And it goes on everywhere and for years? And when our parents tell us, “Your class at school is just right for you, honey. You’ll see.” But our class is at the end of the hall by the wheelchair ramp or in the basement by the elevator. And other kids move each year from new class to new class, but we stay in the same room with our same friends year after year. Some things change, and some things don’t. Some things we get used to, and other things not so much. Our best friends whom we meet and keep, who are very different, much like us, experience their world through their eyes and our eyes pretty much the same, and we just look at each other and know without saying a word. Our new A. I. R. program wants us to communicate and have a special relationship with our true self and our higher power who both reside within us! Who do you think we’ve been relying on for all these years, society’s goofballs? When only our friends and our higher power know what the heck we’ve been living through? Our parents would like to know, but they can’t, because they’re not us. In A. I. R., we get to tell our fellow travelers all about us, but they already know a lot anyway, but it’s good to see their smiling faces and nodding heads. Our higher power approves our being here, while we’re learning that we are all OK just the way we are. That’s really terrific and wonderful.

**August 20**: “Survival Skills”: Away from or into? That is the question! So many of us have existed using our own self-acquired street-wise survival skills in order to dodge and maneuver around the unforeseen difficulties and trials that have plagued us our entire lives. These survival skills have been basically protective and defensive and ingrained to the point of being instinctive reactions to avoid any and all conflicts in order to keep us safe, secure, and invisible. We continue to use what for us has worked in all social and interactive commitments and interactions: avoidance, masking, lying, sarcasm, inappropriate behaviors (or comments), withdrawal, silence, day dreaming, perseveration, etc. However, most of the acquired tools that we’ve used and developed will not be a benefit for us if we attend A. I. R. meetings with the hopes of self-improvement. We will find it probably most difficult trying to learn how to clear out our past dependable protective street-wise survival skills and replacing them with positive inclusionary survival skills of a very different order: acceptance, compassion, understanding, listening, involvement, loving, caring, tolerance, forgiveness, and respect. This change-over will definitely take some time and a lot of hard introspective work looking deeply into how we’ve thought and behaved in the past. With our fellow traveler’s assistance and encouragement and our higher power’s direction and guidance, all of this delicate transformation will be possible.

**August 21**: What happens if the chaos and dysfunction of our early lives has become so familiar to us and accepted by us that we spend most of our waking hours seeking out other toxic events, circumstances, personalities, and notions that replicate the extreme situations, effects, and results of absolute chaos we have become used to, because that’s what we’ve come to expect, yearn for, and cherish? What if every possible change we may accidentally encounter surrounding positivity or love or happiness is then demolitioned by us because it represents a fearful unknown that we are completely unaccustomed to? What if our accustomed habits are so negative that we are permanently lost in a state of unknowing self-destruction (not entirely our faults)? Can we find our way out of this catastrophe? Is there any help out there to resolve this? With whom and to whom are we to rely on? We’ve always come to rely heavily on ourselves. This will prove eventually to be a huge positive. So, if we happen to attend an A. I. R. meeting, we may surprisingly recognize acceptance of us, tolerance of us, and unconditional love, quite unexpectedly. This initial shock may begin to alter our perceptions of others and consequently of ourselves. Returning and continuing to return to the meetings may advance a gradual transformation of self-awareness. The meetings do emphasize and encourage self-motivation, self-reliance, and personal hard work, while also relying on the encouragement of fellow travelers and direction from our higher power. But the feelings of camaraderie, fellowship, and tolerance offer an unexpected welcome that is different and marvelous and invigorating. The welcoming and unconditional love works to provide the room and means for each of us in person to change and grow.

**August 22**: In order for us to fully understand PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder), we should investigate everything about sensory integration disorder. Due to the constant insufferable treatment by societal agents and agencies over the years, our internal defense mechanisms have eventually collapsed under the weight and barrage of too much systemic negativity. From Wikipedia:

“Trauma can have a significant impact on sensory integration and can alter how people with PTSD process sensory information”

So, we come to A. I. R., if we come at all, with internal regulatory mechanisms down or imbalanced or malfunctioning. As survivors, we tend to automatically react to real and perceived negativity with a “fight or flight” reaction due to overwhelming experiences of discrimination, segregation, isolation, abuse, bullying, name calling, and indifference. Our reactions (even if destructive to self and livelihood) have become instinctive and habitual. It may seem like an unending downward spiraling treadmill that we are on and have become used to.  Our methods of coping (although seemingly necessary for survival) have been reduced to negative reactions leading to negative outcomes. Through an introduction to A. I. R., we can take a very serious look at how we have managed to come to where we have arrived, and see that we have alternatives of thinking and behaving that were unimaginable before joining. We can change ourselves and our outlook on ourselves and those around us and on society at large. Through doing the 12 steps, and listening to our fellows sharing, and reading all of the literature made available to us, we can embark on a new quest, both externally and internally, with encouragement from those exercising the same goals of freedom and self- awareness as us, and continue evolving with our higher power’s help and guidance.

**August 23**: When we come to A. I. R. meetings with the encouragement to share our life stories and experiences freely without comment or interruption or criticism or downplaying, this all means that maybe for the first time in our lives we were being taken seriously, we were being listened to, our opinions have mattered and do matter: holy clay, Batman! This borders on the surreal! And the stories of and from everyone else doing their sharing also matter and are taken seriously! Wow! We are all in a very safe and understanding place, where respect and love and hope for a new and empowering future can actually happen. And the displaying of grief and sorrow and sadness through the sharing is like a spring rain that washes everything clean and fresh. The trials and difficulties and horrors of the past are somewhat like trophies that we can raise and say, “We did it! We survived! We overcame! We triumphed! Yes, we have memories and scars and stories to share and cry about and also laugh about now. But all that is past and obsolete and not worth caring about anymore.

**August 24**: “Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Sounds great, doesn’t it, what our United States Constitution expected and anticipated and suggested? But words can be highly confusing and varied in meanings and subtle in their interpretations. The word “pursuit” too often refers to a hunt, a grandiose weekend expedition out of doors with horses and beagles and foxes and wide-open territory and all kinds of weaponry deliberately carried for the capture and kill. All Hollywood and big screen and popcorn and unrivaled entrainment. But did Thomas Jefferson and Ben Franklin and John Adams ever imply by using the word “pursuit” that the word “pursuit” (or search) was an “external” exercise? Nope! How many mystics and seers and prophets and wise sages have indicated that happiness hardly ever comes from anything external but is “divined” and discovered by an exhaustive internal meditative search inside all of us, who carry around with us (more often than not, unknowingly) our own sacred secrets within us always? “The kingdom of God is within you!” Stated One who clearly knew of such things. Our A. I. R. program also insists we submit and surrender and let go of our emotional and mental baggage and attachments and cleave in faith to the higher power dwelling within each of us. Apparently the founders of 12 step programs knew a thing or two also. How simple: no cost, no registration, no screening, no waiting in line, no pre-qualifications or resume required. Just leave everything else behind: no fears, no regrets, no doubts, no hesitations, no sorrows, no grief, no worries, no pains: just take everything of and from this world (all the temporary crap) and dispose of it all, and be free of it. None of it was helping us, none of it! Have a blessed day, forever!

**August 25**: We all seem to have been victims, and many of us have, in turn, become victimizers. We have seemingly fulfilled the generational roles we fell into unknowingly and undeservedly; victims, all of us: parents, grandparents, great grandparents, children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren; maybe one of us stopping somewhere to wonder, “Will it ever end; or how will it ever end; or who is going to break the chain of continuance? From the internet: ‘The quote “All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players” is from William Shakespeare's play As You Like It. It is the opening line of the character Jaques's famous "Seven Ages of Man" speech, which appears in Act 2, Scene 7.’ Maybe Shakespeare (excuse me, Francis Bacon) was right! We may all be actors on life’s stage fulfilling our destinies as if they were scripted beforehand. But through this new A. I. R. program, maybe we can stop the unfortunate generational misery and cease the victimhood and victimization of others by recognizing the patterns of ill-gotten behaviors, the lashing out in frustration, the blaming, the shaming, the “payback mode” of retribution, the unforgiving anger and holier-than-thou false superiority. A. I. R. provides the means; we provide the will and the work. Nothing is guaranteed. But hope and possibilities for renewal and transformation are ever at hand. To be or not to be redeemed, that is the question!

**August 26**: Having arrived (maybe being born into it) at being a victim and subsequently a victimizer, living with rationalizations and half-truths and lying; and simply surviving amongst the chaos and ruinous dysfunction with no apparent way out; not trusting our own selves as we were never believed to have a legitimate opinion or decision regarding anything to begin with; never attempting to be honest with the outside world or ourselves; mired in depression and self-hate and seeking safe refuge anywhere where it can’t be found; the last thing we think we need is “honesty” with anyone or ourselves. But getting out of the swamp of victimhood and victimization, being bullied and bullying, being mistreated and mistreating, requires honesty. And honesty requires peering into the mirror of self and self’s history consistently, rigorously, and honestly, regardless of how painful and upsetting and distasteful; examining the effects and causes of the abuses and dysfunction, looking seriously at the negativity and brutality of generational misconduct; reopening all of the old and buried wounds, both received and self-inflicted, and displaying all of it out there, bravely, courageously, to see where it has gotten us. Refusing to hide from ourselves and our histories is a first step in redoing where we’ve come from. Stepping into the light of exposure and honesty and acceptance of all of it: “This is who we are! For God’s sake!” But we’re still here, alive, breathing, aware, stalwart, resolved! We can work the steps of A. I. R. day by day, piece by painful piece, if necessary, to discover and uncover our real selves, our buried truths, our wholeness and divine worth. Past crap is in the past. We don’t need to continue this protective “fight or flight” mode any more. It is not helpful to us or anyone else. Success in anything begins with a first honest step.

**August 27**: We can’t fight against societal abuse and neglect that has daily enforced and reinforced the labeling that’s been entrusted to us. We can’t protest the segregation and discrimination and isolation and bullying regularly imposed upon us by societal and systemic structural means. With the labeling fully in place, we’ve been denied a legitimate voice to counter what’s been done to us, and what continues to be done to us. If we continue to accept without questioning what has happened to us, we proceed to self-sabotage ourselves with misgivings about our true worth and viability anywhere. If we continue to believe in what is said about us, what is written about us, we have bought into the dysfunction of separation and exclusion that keeps us downtrodden and dependent forever. We need not continue on this path of invisibility. Through A. I. R., we get to explore the histories of why we are where we are, and seek our own voices to expound upon and explain what we’ve been through. We are human beings first and foremost. We live precariously in a chaotic world that is truly interdependent and not independent. We have worth and awareness and hopes and dreams and love and care and possibilities to share and explore. Our fellow travelers and our higher power affirm these facts about us. We hope and pray that someday the world will wake up.

**August 28**: Boundaries and power plays, toleration and forgiveness; interactions and sharings, mindfulness and preoccupation. With universal histories of abuse and neglect and indifference, we try to tread lightly at A. I. R. meetings due to similar and yet highly divergent histories with very fragile personalities who require all of the opportunities they need to blossom and grow in this safe environment. As perennial victims we have wounds and scars galore and the chosen means of avoidance and ignoring our own ingrained levels of dysfunction. We are all here to explore our own ways of healing through the steps, but our interactions with fellow travelers might be awkward, tense, seemingly similar to the dysfunctional conversings that brought us to this place of refuge. We need to be and stay calm, relaxed, and listen to the stillness within, while composing ourselves and waiting for divine direction from our higher power. Balance is everything. Mistakes happen; but even mistakes are learning and teaching moments.

**August 29**: Caring for our health and our bodies is a very necessary part of recovery. Reading up on (or listening about) proper nutrition, proper exercise routines, and proper sleep habits, and all of the ancillary things to seriously consider avoiding ill health are necessary parts of keeping healthy and maintaining a proper balance physically. We may have spent years never even bothering to emphasize or ever considering our own health due to the constant awareness of simply surviving in a chaotic and dysfunctional world, but now in A. I. R. where we are taking the time and energy to examine closely everything going on in our lives (currently and historically) we get to look at what it means and what it takes to get healthy and stay fit. The healthier we are the better we are able to be prepared to undergo this strange and unusual day by day work journey of recovery. We will need all the help we can get and can acquire; and health and wellness are things we can control, with assistance from our fellow travelers and our higher power.

**August 30**: If this A. I. R. program works and takes off to become a success in helping all recovering individuals get out from under their abusive and dysfunctional nightmares, then these writings and sharings will have confirmed its initial purpose. With that said, there may be hopes in establishing a central national or international headquarters to help with disseminating flyers and brochures and introductory materials explaining who we are and what we are trying to accomplish: the 100% free acceptance of all in this vast community who are willing to participate in the program (in person or through Zoom-like sessions) wherever A. I. R. programs are available. With our higher power’s direction and divine sense of purpose, the means for establishing the necessary networks and functionings to fulfill that purpose will most assuredly be arranged and manifested. It is enough that we continue the message with the permissions we have received from the central New York City Offices of Alcoholics Anonymous (holders of all 12step program copyrights) to pursue this acceptable “spin off” sister organization of recovery: Adults In Recovery (A. I. R.). Blessings to all who contribute and volunteer and delight in this new enterprising adventure. May all of our dreams and aspirations of divine positivity be realized.

**August 31**: The apparent generational trauma of societal labeling of us as scientifically and legally different from those deemed “normal,” has placed all of the subsequent burdens of isolation, discrimination, segregation, bullying, and name calling squarely on our own shoulders (things we will have to cope with on our own). We are the necessary victims of all this legalized nonsense. All of our “specialized” daily and yearly placements have been deliberately “officially” engineered into cordoned off areas “for our special benefit” because we don’t fit in with the “regulars.” That we are a very eclectic mix of unusual and diverse diagnoses apparently makes no difference to the legal orderings by officialdom as to how we are supposed to now fit homogeneously together (again, our problem!). The establishment of our A. I. R. program might be a means for our determining how we are not only to get along with each other but perhaps how to create the means for self-awareness, self-empowerment, self-sufficiency (within reason), and self-determination (absolutely) in regards to self-esteem and happiness and love and purpose in this very chaotic and dysfunctional world and time in which we live (survive). What dreams may we wish to think about (those amazing speculations offered to our “normal” counterparts never considered appropriate for us)? What opportunities of study and participation have been offered and afforded to our “normal” counterparts that have never been considered appropriate for us? How many persons in authority (that’s everyone not us) have assumed that because of our legalized labeling that what we all have currently is all that we’ll ever need? Has anyone ever bothered to look at what we currently have now? Not so much! Our real lives are neither for Hollywood nor for the 6:00 o’clock evening news. Our own little niche at A. I. R. may just become our own healthy destination for a while, as we learn to better cope with our own discoveries and learnings about us: which is our most important work in front of us.

**September 1**: Letting our guards down is a formidable and daunting task to say the least. We, who have been summarily abused and dismissed by a society parading objectionable indifference, have little reason to be trusting anyone or anything in any environment anywhere. However, in A. I. R. we are confronted with the necessary challenge of opening up our hearts and surrendering (letting go) in order to become receptive to being taught. It seems that surrendering to our higher power is the invitation our higher power requires to be able to accept the instruction we need to remove all the dysfunctional accumulated blockages preventing our becoming whole and free and truly alive and functional. Seems an odd paradox, in a way. But it’s free to any and all curious, interested, or completely bottomed out. The Serenity Prayer, the Problem, the Laundry List, the 12 Steps and the 12 Traditions are an invitation and an opening and a doorway for learning about this magical mystical opportunity. But surrender is the escalator towards redemption and the means we all need to heal and be healed amongst our fellow travelers: our choice.

**September 2**: Do any of us know how to express our feelings in a public forum where we are not told to “shut up” or “keep quiet” or “quit complaining” or “you’re sounding like a baby?” That tiny shred of confidence we have to mightily search for to be able to gather enough strength to be able to open our mouths and share for the first time is a monumental achievement. It may take weeks or months or longer attending A. I. R. meetings and listening to others sharing their emotional stories and histories before we get up the courage to open up and speak. The meeting rules of “No cross talking” seems to provide a huge lesson in acceptability, trust, confidence, and validation, as each sharing person is allowed free reign to share and speak without interruption or comment or questioning or suggesting or criticism. Free speech happens here: nothing to infringe upon it. Not like anywhere else out in the wide, wide world.  Holy smokes! We’re in a very safe place!

**September 3**: When we are confronted in A. I. R. with the truths about generational abuse, neglect, isolation, and invisibility, we may not have realized the depths to which we had been involved in victimhood and victimization, almost inadvertently. It may have seemed like that’s the way life was supposed to be, is all. We grew up with it. That’s the way it was. Why would we have ever assumed it could be different? But the realization of complicity may have shaken us to our very cores. We have not just wronged ourselves with blame and shame and doubts and self-hatred, we may have unintentionally hurt others by blaming and accusing and name calling and bullying. Yikes! We are now in A. I. R. and have been requested to not only make amends and apologies to ourselves for what we’ve done to ourselves but make amends to all others we have harmed (unless of course the making of amends would or could cause greater harm!). Tough questions and analysis, really. But using our best instinct and meditative silences we may discover the means for resolving all of these unfinished occurrences. Doing so frees us of the baggage of indecision and confusion and helplessness. Our efforts do produce love and peace and compassion and forgiveness all around.

**September 4**: We may not have grown up with or into a grieving process, but because we have eyes and ears which work we were probably able to observe that others in our lives or schools or neighborhoods were able to get and receive things and opportunities which we did not get. Grief that is constant and unresolved can fester into shame, sadness, depression, and insecurity, all of which can lead to poor health, illness, and chronic medical conditions. But entering our A. I. R. program we can examine the root causes of our grieving and begin to value what we have and have had bestowed upon us. Our fellow travelers and our higher power encourage us to understand gratitude and helpfulness as opposed to helplessness. We can also begin to appreciate who we are and have become without jealousy or insecurities regarding our position in life. Doing the step work encourages us to relax and completely accept who we are and have become. We are truly OK as we are.

**September 5**: Unconditional love and respect is what we’ve all been looking for; love and conditional toleration is maybe what we’ve gotten occasionally, disdain and indifference we’ve gotten a lot of. In A. I. R., amongst our own, we get plenty of unconditional love, lots of respect, pleasant companionship, and helpfulness everywhere we turn. Acceptance and insight and teachings abound. The differences between societal intolerance and A. I. R. tolerance are literally night and day. And the truth about this program is that we are all works in progress, ever changing, ever growing, ever living life more and more fully. Maybe it’s a permanent journey we are on with no conclusion or ending; but with our fellow travelers and our higher power’s assistance and direction we can travel this path together in a spirit of unity and light.

**September 6**: For those of us who knew things were very wrong with how we were expected to think about ourselves or act or speak or behave as we were growing up, we may have dived into or pursued various diversionary activities to keep our minds off the uncomfortable nature of how we never seemed to fit in anywhere. These diversionary activities may have been compulsions like video games, toys, phones, computers, food, collecting, music, or a whole host of other basically idiocentric preferences. When we first attended an A. I. R. meeting we may have been overwhelmed by the unusual nature or newness of the program and perhaps slipped back into pursuing our former diversionary past times rather than concentrating on the program work. And we may have vacillated a lot back and forth from curiosity about the program to indulging in our obsessions. These obsessions (like addictions) may eventually be dropped in favor of beginning to see the positives that the program offers in terms of real healing and understanding how and why we previously needed the diversions to replace the constant pains and uncomfortable nature of our trying always to fit in where we didn’t. Through working the steps and sharing and investigating our inner true selves we come to a point of accepting not only our pasts but accepting ourselves exactly as we are and becoming content with how we naturally fit in with our A. I. R. crowd. It all does take some serious time to make all of the necessary internal adjustments.

**September 7**: That inner repeating voice we heard all the time in our heads, “You’re not good enough.” “You lazy good-for-nothing oaf.” “Why were you ever born?” “Do you have any idea how much trouble you’ve been?” “You just can’t get out of your own way, can you?” “You just couldn’t try to be any clumsier, could you!” “You make me sick!” “How many times have I had to tell you?” And even though we all try desperately to stay focused on the work and the program and the new friends we’ve made in A. I. R., we never seem to be able to quiet those inner voices that continue to repeat all the negatives we ever heard wherever we were while growing up. And even if we didn’t hear the voices we constantly remembered the incidents where we embarrassed ourselves or our friends or our parents for doing the stupid things that we did or said or even thought of doing! And by the beginning of the program we were often told it actually gets worse before it gets better, as the old thoughts and deeds and desires try to hang on even more tightly than before. But over time with continuing to attend the meetings the old thoughts and forms gradually are replaced by positive self-affirming messages that bolster up our self-esteem and make us feel good and at home where we are now. It just takes time and patience and a lot of receptivity.

**September 8**: Self-doubts? Of course we have self- doubts! Any positive feelings we may have ever generated about ourselves have been summarily dismissed or extinguished by every visible and invisible agency in society in perfect amorphous collaboration: education, medicine, politics, law, economics, religion, and business. That brick wall has been impervious forever. But what has never been made absolutely clear to us ever is why we have been declared so “different” from everyone else. We’re not from a different planet, nor a different species. We think, we feel, we know, we understand, we experience, we believe, we trust, we thrive….all of these attributes different in measure and scope, but still right there to a degree that makes and keeps us human. We have been declared “wrong” our whole lives, but we don’t know what that particular “wrong” is. So our self-hate and mistrust of ourselves and our lower-than-low self-esteem is mired in confusion which is permanent. But entering and staying with this A. I. R. program we discover and learn that Society’s ingrained labels and designations are wholly perceptions and opinions based on society’s predilections and determinations for society’s own good. What we’ve been handed is not our perceptions for our own good. We can consider ourselves just fine the way we are; for we all (without exception) live in a very interdependent world and we all require assistance and are dependent for a great many things. Our differences on the whole are slight. We can work the steps in peace, and share our pasts and histories here freely; and while staying here, we can all fly under the radar, but still fly.

**September 9**: What is the aftermath of societal dysfunction? Just more of the same, when it comes to us. Deeper withdrawal into ourselves in the face of utter hypocrisy. More fears than there are days to experience them. Trying to hide in plain sight when camouflage only exists in a dream in which we have no part. Our diagnoses are like fluorescent targets painted on us in indelible scotch bright tones. OK, already, we stand out! Maybe it’s our overabundant jewelry of beads, necklaces, bracelets and plastic rings, or maybe our colorful unmatched clothing, or our many shopping cart bags we carry wherever we go. It couldn’t just be the rocking, hand flapping, or jumping in place periodically. Doesn’t everybody? We do it to quell or slow down or temper the unusual internal imbalances that we struggle with daily that you “Neurotypicals” don’t have. You wouldn’t understand. And the only real protection and consolation we have is through our A. I. R. program where we and our fellows share insights on our outcast status, or our illustriously painful histories, or our negligent futures, while still delighting in our ever present glorious perfect selves, being who we are, right where we are, and happy to be where we are. It’s what we have in our community of differences that is so compellingly terrific and wonderful.

**September 10**: Society and social organizations have for a very long time considered those of us with disabilities as being quite different from “normal” people. And because we have been deemed different, society has created “special” terminology to designate us. From the internet: “In the Bible disability is viewed as a disease (The Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible: 1962; Encyclopaedia Judaica: 1972). The most common diseases mentioned in the Bible are blindness, deafness, dumbness, leprosy, and paralysis.” And medical terminology from the 1800s to the not so distant past has listed us as: cripple, spastic, invalid, lame, infirm, feeble, defective, retard, backwards, dumb, degenerate, idiot, simpleton, cretin, imbecile, and moron. Even the relatively modern terms of profound, severe, moderate, and mildly mentally retarded are now considered derogatory, insensitive, and highly demeaning. What is most curious though in society’s ever searching for a more politically correct and un-embarrassing phraseology is that no one of the “terminators” has looked at the fact that aside from “human being” any and every other description separating us individually or collectively from the whole of the human race would be offensive to us. Amen!

**September 11**: Who would ever have imagined that attending a scheduled meeting once a week or once every two weeks or maybe just once a month would result in feeling like being invited home on a perfect Thanksgiving weekend vacation where everyone is cheerful and friendly and welcoming and it’s better than warm and cozy? Too often for us in this very crazy exclusionary world we have never felt that we truly belonged anywhere ever. And we’ve always felt unappreciated, unwelcomed, uneasy in practically every social event we’ve ever attended. But here in A. I. R., there’s a very different and distinct atmosphere of fellowship and trust and joy that simply feels right and wholesome and positive and natural, and it feels exactly like that each and every time we walk through the door. We are all brothers and sisters from different mothers, and love each other like long lost siblings caring for each and every one of us, fussing like there’s no tomorrow. Interested in where they’ve all been and what they’ve all been doing. Each session is a reunion time: sharing, caring, listening, smiling, crying, laughing, and pondering wistfully, “It don’t get no better than this!”

**September 12**: Whom do we relate to? Whom do we tell about our pasts? Whom do we share about this unusual A. I. R. program that promises to relieve us of our pains and anxieties and crappy self-esteem? There are people, and then there are people. It’s like that scene in Men In Black, where they’re sitting on a park bench and Will asks “K” why all the secrecy? And “K” answers, “A Person is Smart, People Are Dumb’ (WILL SMITH & TOMMY LEE JONES FUNNY SCENE)” So, we just have to be very careful whom we open up to. We’ve all been burned in the past, haven’t we? Our work in A. I. R. is indeed personal, regardless of how amazing and life-changing it really is. So, we are happy and delighted with our own progress and success, but then somewhat hesitant to share our huge strides with anyone or everyone else we know or meet. Past hurts can make us overly cautious for sure. But in the meeting room of A. I. R. we are assured of anonymity and security and not worrying about being troubled or assaulted or ridiculed. Sharing is free and easy and productive of good. A. I. R.’s atmosphere shelters us perfectly and casually. We are in a safe and sacred place.

**September 13**: As we explore the basic principles of A. I. R., our Serenity Prayer, the Problem, the Laundry List, the Solution, the Twelve Steps, and the Twelve Traditions, we may ask ourselves what are we ultimately responsible for and to? Is it enough that we begin a process of gradual transformation? Should we be conscious of and helpfully assisting the others in our group and also those who have not yet found their way to this process? Is it enough that we take care of ourselves in this very long and arduous trek towards self-awareness and discovery or do we also lead by example and try to show the world our successes and determinations sometimes quietly and sometimes vociferously? The answers may be derived from the expected and unexpected interactions we encounter with others within and outside the A. I. R. group. Not only will our group members more or less dictate both the obvious and the subtle interchanges, but our higher power whom we should be paying very close attention to will dictate our general and specific courses of action to take, or not. By loving, being compassionate, being tolerant, and accepting, and humble, and courageous, we should be led to accomplish everything and anything our divine source indicates should be done. There will be a time and a place and a purpose for everything under Heaven.

**September 14**: Our entire lives we have been fed an endless stream of mixed messages: some purposefully directed at us, and others directed to those deemed “normal,” which we have heard and seen and experienced, in spite of our “supposed” disabilities. “Be all you can be!” “You’re not good enough!” “Strive for the stars!” “Who do you think you are anyway?” “I am inspiring people through my simply being.” “There are always problems.” “I am an unstoppable force of nature.” “I am always so tired.” And one of the biggest problems with advice and confirmations is that “actions” always, always, always speak way louder than words. We happen to be the perfect stereotypes for denigration. Even all of the “normals” of the world have upon many occasions called each other names using our designations as their best insults. Wouldn’t that be the day when we could all wear t-shirts emblazoned with, “RETARDED, AND PROUD OF IT!” “YOU ONLY WISH YOU WERE ONE OF US” “STEP ASIDE NEUROTYPICALS, WE’RE COMING THROUGH.” We can only hope, and continue our quiet and steadfast personal betterment in our unobtrusive A. I. R. meetings, purposefully loving and meditating and holding on to each other for blessings and forgiveness and solidarity enduring a lifetime of cheerful difference.

**September 15**: We may have grown up never realizing that there were polite and acceptable ways of greeting and interacting with others. Those proper ways, which we may have never learned, are based on personal codes for boundary recognition and acceptance. We may have never learned or appreciated that personal boundaries are reasonable and necessary and essentially sacred envelops surrounding people for a real sense of safety and security; and that the people expressing such a need are able to non-verbally determine and express the appropriate distances for them. It seems to vary amongst peoples and cultures and countries. But maybe our natural boundaries were so trampled on or negatively impacted when we were little that we never acquired a sense of understanding where our boundaries should have been or where other’s should have begun. Through our new education in A. I. R., we can explore the essence of boundaries due to our respecting the sharing and the “no cross talking” proviso that inhibits and prohibits interrupting or ignoring the preset boundaries in place. With a new awareness we may begin understanding a need for our own sense of boundaries and also discover that others both in A. I. R., and outside of A. I. R. naturally anticipate everyone knowing about such bodily limitations. Growing awareness of self and others can only help our confidence and interrelatedness of all peoples and circumstances.

**September 16**: Finding value in the past for us is a very strange conception and point at which to arrive. In a way it’s very much like that old “sick” joke, “Why do you keep hitting your head against the wall? Because it feels so good when I stop!” There are two potential tangential benefits from the past. What they are is that upon very close examination of what has and hasn’t been done to us and for us we get to see 1.) a clear indication of how we should NOT and NEVER behave towards others ever, and 2.) we can re-experience those circumstances and events in our pasts to know how and why they happened, and especially for seeing the generational “passing on and downwards” of abusive and hurtful tendencies so that we can break the ongoing chains of insanity. Working the steps doggedly and courageously allows for the critical and insightful examination of our pasts to happen. It’s a lot of hard but productive work.

**September 17**: A lot of 12 step programs talk about “repetition compulsion” as a syndrome of incessantly choosing relationships based on early patterns we were exposed to when we were very young and quite literally impressionable. And too many of our other fellow 12 step program initiates experienced early relationships that were discovered to be toxic in nature, and it goes without saying (almost) that their continuing the habitual practice of choosing relationships which were too similar (familiar) and therefore comfortable was almost always a very bad continuation of toxic choices. However, we in A. I. R. may have a somewhat different type of “repetition compulsion” in that we seem to be always searching for any outside source or agency or figures in authority who will be generous, kind, nonjudgmental, fair, just, tolerant, beneficial, compassionate (in other words: nice); but we almost inevitably run into a buzz saw of bureaucratic similarity bordering on distaste, indifference, callousness, and cold regimentation. In A. I. R. we experience what we’ve long been seeking and praying for: unbridled love and compassion and total acceptance. Our searching is finally (thanks to our higher power) over.

**September 18**: How did this program and these people know me better than I know myself? What’s with that? I thought I was a pretty closed book for all these years of silence, withdrawal, quiet frustration, and denial. And I’ve never shared anything of my past with anyone ever! Has NASA recently developed and unveiled an alien mental probe for unlocking hidden cognitive secrets? Oh, well! But anyway, my skepticism hasn’t held up very well, because everyone here is so nice and accepting by allowing us to be who we are without any criticism, name calling, or blaming. And sharing for everyone here has been opening up on their pasts, without any negativity whatsoever. Since society has been for all of us a source of constant pain and dread for years, if not for decades, we’ve had no heads nor hearts for any sanity. And so we’ve been unable to process anything coming to A. I. R., initially, except with fear and trepidation. But staying here for just a few sessions was all it took to get completely hooked on this incredible program. What a contrast!

**September 19**: One of the major difficulties we experience in and out of A. I. R. is repeatedly attempting to establish, confirm, and control our own level of sovereignty over ourselves. Having been summarily relegated into a status of permanent dependency, legally, it is very difficult to convince those exercising authority over us that we are capable of handling our own affairs and justifiably have equal rights and privileges and boundaries as any other citizens of this country living in this decidedly interdependent world. Being able to say “yes” and/or “no” regarding any decisions we may make or decisions exercised over us is crucial in literally everything we choose to do or not to do. Determining autonomy then is especially relevant when it comes to sexual encounters and relations. We have the right to always say “no” when approached by anyone interested in engaging in anything sexual with us, regardless of our age or level of disability or cognitive or physical impairments. There is no time or place or circumstance or allowance for coercion when it comes to sexual anything, unless 100% consent willingly is provided by us. Those are the rules! And our innate sovereignty is expected and entitled. In A. I. R. meetings these facts are emphasized and encouraged.

**September 20**: Many 12 step programs encourage and emphasize working with a simple self-created prayer to assist with connecting to our higher power. Life does not happen in a vacuum and trials and difficulties and setbacks occur with uncommon regularity. For these circumstances we are all burdened with times and emotions and difficult decisions that do require assistance (most probably divine) when we stop to consider what would be the best courses of action or inaction to take. Here is a brief poem describing just this:

“As life asks that you drink from Her cup,

And the bittersweet flows while you sup,

Do give thanks for your share

And be grateful in prayer,

Which you do, when you simply look up.”

And it should occur to us all that divinity is smarter, quicker, and better at determining “us,” and where we are, and where we need to be than we are. So asking in prayer is so simply done, and then already accomplished for us. When it comes to asking in prayer, everything becomes possible.

**September 21**: From the ACA (Adult Children of Alcoholics) textbook of daily lessons “Strengthening My Recovery” pg. 274, “ ‘Every adult child has unexpressed grief, which is usually represented by the symptoms of depression, lethargy, or forms of dissociation.’ BRB p. 199.” It would be a question for psychologists and neurologists as to whether or not “unexpressed grief” might possibly be inhibited by a more or less permanent state of “flight or fight” mode in one’s daily life, thus blocking the grief from being truly known or experienced. Trench warfare soldiers might be such candidates for this occurring, along with chronically abused and neglected and dissociated individuals tormented by societal displacements. We who have survived a myriad of horrendous lifetime abuses (emotional, psychological, physical, mental, and spiritual) may also be experiencing unexpressed (and unresolved) grief. Through our intense involvement in A. I. R. programming with sharing and listening we may be able to investigate and explore any unexpressed and unresolved grief from our pasts and come to terms with it successfully. Truth be told, those hurts and pains and scars do not go away, but they can be examined over time and managed and dealt with. It is all part of a very necessary healing process with coming to grips with our pasts so we can move on and become whole, maybe for the first times in our lives.

**September 22**: The one thing about social chaos and disequilibrium is that we have zero control over them and their effects. So regardless of the number of times we have objected to how we’ve been labeled or categorized or bullied (by individuals, groups of individuals, or institutions), we have had no recourse against those persons or things which have opposed us or denigrated us. We may have spent pointless hours alone in solitary thought devising bizarre means and methods for getting back at those who have “done us wrong,” only to eventually quit the mental meandering and return to whatever we’d been doing before being assaulted. Through A. I. R. we discover the worthless wasting of energy that sums up our total lack of control over anyone else or anything else, with a new or renewed awareness that our only control is over ourselves: how we think, how we behave, how we feel. By diving very deeply into our pasts we get a chance to undo the wreckage of our received abuse and our self-abuse, our placating of authority figures (rightly or wrongly), and our habitual dodging of our own avoidance behaviors in favor of countless diversions that keep our best selves buried and unnoticed. A. I. R. provides us with a refreshing way of living, of a unique relationship with our fellow travelers and our higher power, and the freedom to pursue it all leisurely at our own uninhibited pace.

**September 23**: Resentment for things that coulda been, alternatives to the way things turned out, “what ifs” considered over and over again in the face of unforeseen turmoil, confusion, and sadness. We who have had targets on our backs most of our lives have certainly had a rightful occasion to consider resentment as a payback maneuver, though in reality much more damaging to our own psyche than to any well deserving recipient. And, in A. I. R. where we learn of the unending generational “passing on and down” of abuse and trauma we need to stop and realize that the abuses basically have a life of their own and hardly anyone is deliberately at fault. Here’s a brief poem that perhaps outlines the ridiculous intertwined nature of resentment, blame, guilt, and unknown crimes of deliberation:

The Nuremberg Rag

I’m sorry,

Your Honor,

I was actually

only the fifth one

in line in the water

brigade.

I didn’t

even know

the barn

was on fire.

So resentment is a waste of energy and time and effort. We are better off forgiving, loving, compassionate energizing, and understanding.  Clearing our own energy fields is a much better way of dealing with past harms than trying to be resentful, in both the short and long term runs.

**September 24**:  Growing accustomed to the unaccustomed (just another paradox in life). Our fates have delivered us into the realm of paradox. We have all been designated different from what is deemed “normal.” Though we are never told, or have never had it explained to us, what “normal” is. So perhaps we are abnormal. Through A. I. R. we begin to learn how to accept the unacceptable, to practice the impracticable, to notice the unnoticeable, to watch the unwatchable (our pasts with their painful origins), to manage the unmanageable. A. I. R. is a blending of life’s opposites, of life’s dualities. We learn how to function in a dysfunctional world. We learn to love the unlovable (us!). We learn to be emotional with the unemotional (us, again!). We begin to share feelings with the unfeeling (society’s agents). And as proposed initially here, we begin to accept the unacceptable. For if we can begin to feel good (really good) about ourselves being exactly who we are (the deemed unworthy), then most of our battles are won. Here we are learning how to seek perfection in an imperfect world, looking within and beyond life’s cruelties and tragedies and seeing the beauty in the abnormality of it all: expecting the unexpected, and seeing joy in it, the wonder, the strangeness in the familiar, within the unfamiliar. And the love and acceptance we get from our fellow travelers and from our higher power will be the strength we need to get through the unthroughable (it’s a new word that applies to us; we just made it up).

**September 25**: There are a few lines from one of the world’s most ancient books, The I Ching, or Book of Changes, which we will add here (copyright 1950 by Bollingen Foundation Inc., New York, NY), pg. 44, “The fact that the strong treads on the weak is not mentioned in the Book of Changes, because it is taken for granted.” These lines from a book that may be over 15,000 years old (at least) seem to indicate that human nature has not changed at all (an odd statement from a book referred to as the “Book of Changes”). So we, being deemed weak, will tend to be tread upon a lot; and as it noticeably seems, we have always been tread upon, and will most probably tend to be tread upon a lot in the future. Because bullying of us has always happened (and will continue to happen), it can be assumed that we have no recognized  “boundaries” understood or appreciated by society. We can be figuratively “stepped on,” at will, made fun of, bullied, laughed at, ignored, mistreated, and humiliated, without inhibition or interference. But just maybe, in our A. I. R. meetings, we will be provided with the opportunity to establish boundaries for ourselves, and become aware that we have limitations we can set, and have restrictions as to how we will be treated, how we will be perceived, and how we will be interacted with: acceptable dreams that, at least, in our A. I. R. meetings, have some definite basis in reality.

**September 26**: It may be that humility is slowly learned after a lifetime of humiliation, but humiliation rarely comes out of a lifetime of humility. In A. I. R. meetings we examine where we’ve come from, where we are now, and where we intend to move on to in the future. Our pasts have certainly been experiences of humiliation and disrespect. And we have all reacted (in many ways badly) to the negative experiences by self-shaming, self- doubting, withdrawing, quitting, hiding, perseverating, hating, distrusting, tantrumming, etc. But in A. I. R. we learn that we never had any control over others or the effects of others (and never will have), and that the only control we have is over ourselves. And, in order to relieve ourselves of the past pains and troubles and negative impacts is to become self-loving and accepting and tolerant and compassionate, and shed all of the negativity we no longer feel obligated to hold onto. It requires, and at the same time, establishes humility. We don’t have to treat ourselves and others in the ways that others have treated us. That path is not, and never has been, healthy for us or anyone else. And humility is a very quiet total acceptance of who we are without any accolades or fanfares or “I TOLD YOU SOs”. We accept ourselves as unconditionally worthy, just as our higher power does. We don’t need anything else for confirmation.

**September 27**: When life is nothing but a continuous series of mistreatments and discouragements and unfortunate discriminations, life, as it is (although horrendous), is viewed as acceptable and “normal” and seemingly unchanging. We’ve all been treated like crap throughout our lives, so we must be crap! There it is! Even if, upon careful examination of ourselves, we seem to see a certain disconnect between our observations of ourselves and what society (and its agents) have determined for us what we should be, well !!!! We must be wrong on our assessments of who we are! Case closed! If, however, we somehow miraculously attend an A. I. R. meeting and hear what others are sharing and read our A. I. R. literature and explanations, we may see an odd glimmer of real truth behind our madness at fully accepting society’s madness. Holy cow! Even though we’ve all been declared as “wrong,” and how we’ve perceived ourselves as “wrong,” maybe in fact what we have come to believe was really and truly “wrong!” There may be nothing really wrong with any of us. Yes, we are very different, but everyone in the world is different. Hell, even identical twins aren’t identical!! If we keep attending A. I. R. meetings we may continue dispelling and getting rid of more of the ridiculous mythologies we’ve come to accept as truisms. Who knows? Maybe life will become better and safer and possibly even terrific with more investigation and disclosures of our pasts. We shall see what we shall see!

**September 28**: Well, if we’ve been told most of our lives that we’re stupid and undeserving and worthless and overall permanently dependent, and disabled, why would we ever bother trying to work hard doing anything (except for maybe our own personal diversionary activities that keep us preoccupied enough to be able to ignore most of the draining hostilities we encounter practically daily)? We have the privilege then of cautiously and silently enjoying being enabled and being taken care of for most things that our “normal” counterparts would be expected to have the responsibilities of having to do. However, when we get to A. I. R. meetings we are unexpectedly required to begin “working” the program and having to seriously practice the steps and read the materials and get in the habit of considering and examining all of the facts and facets of our remembered pasts and journaling about them and sharing them at meetings. And we probably are not used to all of this new hard work and what it entails. We can all hear it now, in our most whiny cranky voices, “Do we really have to do this stuff? Isn’t there any easier way to do it?” And the answers are actually yes, and no! In order to recover and heal and grow beyond the labels and societally fostered designations, we have to put in the individual work (however difficult and disagreeable and painful) in order to succeed. And it’s worth it because we are worth it.

**September 29**: Our own A. I. R. meetings wherever they are, and wherever we may be within them, are their own autonomous organisms, even though following the basic structures and creeds as all other 12-step A. I. R. programs everywhere. Individuals within our meetings run the meetings, some noting the roll call, some collecting donations for the activities and literature, and some chairing any committees authorized under the rules and structures of the particular A. I. R. program wherever it may be. Older members and new members share equal rights and authority in all meetings; and love, respect, cooperation, understanding, and compassion are the ruling principles directing the daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly flow of activities. If an A. I. R. World Service Board is ever established then questions about particular organizational needs, priorities, conflicts of interest, legal considerations, and structural bylaws may be addressed to it for consideration and deliberations. Otherwise all concerns can be dealt with in each A. I. R. individual setting. We’re all in this together taking care of each other in this communal workshop of love and mutual benefit for all.

**September 30**: If we have spent years thinking ill of ourselves because of society’s concerted efforts to designate how low-functioning society has determined us to be, then of course we will find it very difficult to change our ways of habitually thinking about ourselves. If anyone tells us we are actually pretty darned smart, will we credibly believe them? Heck no! When every collective agency (educational, medical, judicial, political, religious, economic, and legal) has agreed that the testing they employed on us was irrefutable and justified, then we might be a tad hesitant to disagree with all of those in authority who exercise their will and judgment upon us. Everything that’s happened to us has been thoroughly ingrained into our consciousnesses for too long and controls our thoughts and actions and behaviors as if we were puppets on strings. If we happen to attend an A. I. R. meeting and get a chance to listen to the sharings and read the literature and pause to think about it all in relation to who we are and where we have come from, we may experience a slight chink in the armor, a small doubt may creep in, a lingering apprehension of thinking might arise to challenge who we are and how we think about ourselves. But we may react almost violently to any unexpected and unanticipated change in our consciousness. We may run and hide initially. But we might just out of curiosity come back and listen and speculate on these new ideas, this strange acceptance of who we are and where we are. A first encounter might be like a snowball off the top of a mountain that turns into an avalanche. But A. I. R. provides no pressure, no sales pitch, no arm twisting to appeal to visitors. All are simply welcome to come and go as they please. Self-direction is entirely respected and approved of. Our own judgments are hailed, whatever they may be. It is understood by the mission that recovery happens in its own time with everyone differently. So entering and staying are entirely up to us and everyone else.

**October 1**: To be an adult in recovery means several things: 1.) that we have recognized that we are in need of getting our lives sorted out and fixed if possible, and 2.) that with any illness or malady we will need almost specialist help in starting and working on and completing the healing, and 3.) that healing does not happen miraculously overnight, and 4.) that healing itself may be quite painful in the long drawn out process of remediation back to normal or quasi normal. This A. I. R. program has the opportunity and potential to be fulfilling emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and even physically, depending entirely on how we work the program and are receptive to the means provided through the literature and the sharings and the group consciousness of loving, acceptance, positivity, resilience, empathy, and compassion. Progress is always self-driven. Progress is accepted; setbacks are accepted, coming and going are accepted. Doors are always welcoming.

**October 2**: Where we all came from: The state of wanting to remain perpetually invisible requires very short answers, while staring at the floor: “How are you doing today?” “Fine.” (Short and sweet, never revealing how we really feel). To say anything more might result in (heaven forbid) conversation, which should always be avoided, especially when trying very hard not to provoke the beast of society’s antagonism. Why produce unnecessarily the worst of the bullying and name calling by standing out? Our useful coping skills were forever trying to remain quiet and hidden, always. But in A. I. R., we can now explore turning around our attitudes and purposes a hundred and eighty degrees to becoming involved, alert, vocal, present, honest, and surprisingly cheerful. Having never been aware that there might even be a possibility of being sensible is absolutely mind blowing. But attempting to becoming open, receptive, compatible, serious, and tolerant, while ceasing the self-hatred, the self-doubt, and the self-sabotaging which have become personal perennial habits is asking a great deal. We are almost now hard wired for receiving and accepting abuse from all in authority (which just means: not us!). But in A. I. R. we get to see others who have shed the negativity we have become so used to expressing. We get to see those who have explored their own inner demons and past abuses and have accepted all of it in order to transcend it. And they have survived to become loving compassionate service workers and sharers in A. I. R. with much to be grateful for despite pasts of total wreckage. The work demonstrates its very functional and very possible outcomes.

**October 3**: Working the steps and realizing that mistakes and backsliding are inevitable and a major and acceptable part of this new educational process, makes attending and sharing of problems we are having of being wrong or tired or feeling bad or struggling with depression, anxiety, and fears all OK, because we are not stopping our continual close examination of where we’ve come from and where we are going. If everyone else in A. I. R. can be comfortable and accepting of us just exactly as we are (while we appear sometimes as a complete wreck) then we can be accepting and comfortable and tolerant and loving of ourselves just as much as they are. It’s not a contest, but a loving atmosphere we are trying to get used to.

**October 4**: Hitting rock bottom and letting go into surrender may come at an unexpected time and circumstance. What happens then is a final shedding of desires and hopes and dreams and attachments all at once with a perfect realization (emotional as well as mental) of being alone without help and pleading for rescue. It is then that a path to awakening begins, and a divine spark of destiny emerges out of seemingly nowhere to guide us to A. I. R., or a myriad of other fortunate places of direction and assistance. It’s the old saying or adage: when one door closes another door opens. And being a punching bag for way too long gives rise to another realization that it’s time to drop that role we’ve been handed or given because it’s simply not right or allowable anymore. Striking back, hitting out, or protesting has never worked and isn’t appropriate anyway as we’ve somehow learned throughout the brutality that it would just be furthering the insanity if we behaved with the same nonsense and ill-gotten behavior of our tormentors. Go figure! So where are we? Entering A. I. R. into a space of acceptance, tolerance, love, forgiveness, and discovery and recovery. A place of renewal, a grace of opportunity, a place of harsh reflection from a safe distance, a calm after the storm. Our higher power, who has directed us here through all the trials we’ve undergone to get here, is also here. And our fellow travelers, who have come from very similar pasts, are welcoming us as we join this collaborative mission.

**October 5**: The idea of seeking for joy when you’re one of us, is quite an unusual proposition. Joy is somewhat allowed in “special needs” bowling, “special needs” fishing competitions, “special needs” camping, “special needs” proms: activities generated for us by concerned people and organizations attempting to anticipate what will make us all truly happy. And maybe we just don’t know any better. The total lack of exposure to anything and everything else that “normals” or “neurotypicals” have made available to them is a stark and truly unfathomable contrast. For us, as adults, when a new proposal or

activity is offered, “Hey, would you like to try \_\_\_\_\_\_?” The answer too often is, “I don’t know.” Which is too often taken as a “No!” when the reality is perhaps having zero clue as to what would ever be expected through this totally perplexing unknown! For us, our joys are often accompanied by not-so-buried sadnesses that are masked too frequently by our expressing temporary joys with the few yearly exciting events managed for us. Through A. I. R. meetings and sharings, we might be able to express our grief and loss at missed opportunities for dreams we never before related or expressed in public. But in A. I. R. we learn to accept the fortunate and the unfortunate, the expected with the unexpected, and the joyous with the mundane, for life is precious and good and wonderful over all.

**October 6**: A lot of 12 step programs declare that when we get to become adults we should consider dropping the inner critic voice that tells us we’re not good enough because that inner critic (original voice of parents or caregivers) is in the past and no longer present to chastise us. Sounds great in principle, but for us in A. I. R. that inner critic voice from society has never really gone away or died a merciful death. We are constantly reminded by all-in ever-present authority (everyone not us) that we are less than purposeful (and that’s being moderately polite). And the radio and tv and internet and social media with their bending over backwards apologies for us being treated the way we are while treating us the way we are isn’t just ironic but more slap-stick comedic in a three stooges Mel Brooks sort of way. Hilariously funny if you’re the other guy, but we’re always the other guy. The solace we experience in A. I. R. is like the quiet in a secluded greenhouse far from traffic and people and insulting behavior. We only wish that that kind of calm and peace could be found everywhere else, though unfortunately it isn’t…..yet.

**October 7**: Due to our having a nondescript status (not “normal”) with very few functional role models to teach us or mentor us on how to interact and behave (talk about being deliberately excluded and ignored) we too often display extremes of behavior: either acting out loudly, violently, and destructively (thus getting or attracting way too much attention, which “proves” what everyone has said about us as being different), or we are inclined to be too silent and withdrawn and invisible (which also tends to “prove” what everyone has said about us being different). These extremes are solely due to our never having been properly engaged in any meaningful or purposeful interactive conversation or interaction while growing up, so that we could become accustomed to proper ways of being social without the extremes of our now usual attempts at antisocial display (Becoming both the proverbial “pot” and “kettle” simultaneously). Becoming involved in A. I. R. programming however, we may now have the primal opportunity to actually be allowed and taught (through witnessing) proper social etiquette of conversation and interaction while being allowed to speak without interruption and listen attentively to others commenting on the lives without their being the extremes of undo silence or verbal and tantrumming explosion. With our following the steps and the literature and getting the tacit approvals of our fellow travelers and our higher power, we get to practice decent and moral and forgiving techniques that we’ve never before been allowed to practice or ever been afforded the opportunity to display (or as Cheech states in his cameo appearance in the movie Ghost Busters, “Better late, than never!”).

**October 8**: What the heck do we have to do or accomplish to prove to ourselves (and others) that we are worthy of being accepted, acknowledged, “allowed in,” and welcomed, just simply wanting to be recognized as human beings? And when do we quit trying, if our attempting only results in nothing but continuous failure? Is our then acceptance of less than second class citizenship almost inevitable with society’s steamroller effect of our being labeled with academically and medically validated designations? How incredibly pervasive such designations are: like the perfectly endless and unchanging scenery of the Sahara Desert, or any night sky, or a New England Church bell tolling noon, or the smell of popcorn and frying onions at a county fair: those things you need such little imagination to envision. But we, on the other hand, are like farmhouse living room wallpaper you cannot recall having ever seen or remembered. We are a social itch no one wants to scratch in public. And this is uncovering the truth: what can be shared in group, what can be understood amongst ourselves, what can be smiled at and grieved at and cried over, together or all alone. But in A. I. R. such sharings are welcomed.

**October 9**: In society’s eyes what we were was never going to be OK. There would never be something to live up to. There would never be goals to strive for. Our best would forever be mediocre. Our destined dreams would be like Dollar Store “seconds” and Cracker Jack prizes, at best. And at our births (or shortly thereafter) the doctors and priests would all say, unanimously, and in unison, with hands and eyes downcast, “I’m so sorry.” And only after a lifetime of tears and groping and not surprisingly challenged stumblings would we happen to encounter an A. I. R. program that was remarkably open and unchallenging, accepting and loving, and illogically upbeat about who we were and where we’d come from. The welcoming members seemed to understand every single travail we’d ever encountered, and embraced us cordially and wholeheartedly, without exception. Our arrival was treated like a homecoming, a splendid celebration with all the trimmings. And even if we felt initially uneasy and skeptical, the long-term positive energies that never receded kept us engaged and coming back for more. For our best, whatever it was, was their best, and rewarded as such.

**October 10**: Some of us are truly hyper vigilant, while a lot of us simply don’t care. It seems to be pretty black and white, with a very little grey. Hyper vigilance seems to result from too many batterings and successful bludgeonings where caution and watchfulness are predominantly present in every waking state; and “flight or fight” mode is the subsequent disposition. But then some of us have simply quit worrying about the ever-present attacks and inconveniences while accepting them as normal every day occurrences, realizing that we are defenseless and always have been. Regardless of our reactions, or their lack, when we arrive at A. I. R., we get to examine ourselves (and what and who used us as target practice) and much of our lives that was not very pretty. And whether we reacted to it like maniacs or Buddhist monks did not reduce the savagery or the intent of the malice. But either way, now, examining the truth of it allows for healing and understanding and awareness and acceptance. We can all grow from moving beyond it, even if it continues to chase us as it pretends to inhibit us. Our higher power protects us now from such adversity.

**October 11**: Although many 12 step programs emphasize making serious attempts at avoiding realms of “excitement,” which clearly lead away from discovering our true selves and what we really deserve out of life, we on the other hand tend to focus more on personally curious diversions and activities that help us and deter us from focusing on the degradation and abuse society has promulgated and needlessly exposed us to. Such activities as music, cell phones, video games, TV, movies, collecting things, shopping, snack foods, etc., help us all to remove ourselves from constantly thinking about how the world has treated us unmercifully through discrimination, segregation, isolation, name calling, bullying, and labeling. As adults we are still allowed, and even at times, encouraged to pursue childish things, for we are perceived as still basically immature and un-adult-like due to so many of our typical idiosyncratic behaviors and inappropriate speech patterns. But, like any other typical human beings, we tend to do whatever it takes to avoid pains in any forms (not unusual at all). However, in A. I. R. we can either choose to let go some or all of these diversionary habits, hobbies, choices, or not. If they’re not harmless and make us happy, so what? We’re not out to destroy the world, even if the world is out to destroy us. But maybe in A. I. R. we can all do one better, by loving and forgiving and becoming compassionate and tolerant not only of others outside of A. I. R., but also of ourselves and one another in A. I. R. We are blessed to have this program and are quite capable of sharing the blessings everywhere we happen to be and wherever we intend to go.

**October 12**: It’s very difficult (and seemingly contrary) to ask for help or assistance from anyone in authority (not us), when it’s been expressed so often to us throughout our lives by persons and agents in authority (not us) any of the following: “How many times do I have to tell you…?” “You are so helpless!” “Go and get someone else to do it!” “You’re driving me crazy.” “I thought I’d met stupid before.” “Why don’t you ever listen?” “Do you need me to show you everything?” And the list goes on and on and on. But we still grow up trying to please everyone because feelings of inadequacy are so painful and hurtful and intolerable. And we try showing off with the few things we’ve been able to teach ourselves that we do correctly. But it’s never been enough to dispel how we feel about ourselves that is now so ingrained and habitualized. However, when we finally encounter and meet up with A. I. R., we get encouraged to be who we are and yet ask for help whenever we feel we need it. Our fellow travelers are now our assisting guides who love us and delight in us and provide whatever we need to help us in our individual journeys, because they’ve all been down that same road which they know too well. Our higher power now helps too. We are among friends and colleagues and confidantes who truly appreciate us.

**October 13**: We all have to pay very close attention (without rocking any boats) to all of the limitations set for us by agents of authority (not us) who dictate their regulatory and measured fences surrounding us. We are then reminded daily, if not hourly, what we can do and what we can’t do, what we’re allowed to do and what we’re not allowed to do. We are also reminded that all decisions placed upon us are for our own good, and should not be questioned (“When I get told to jump!, I’ve learned enough to know that I don’t ask, ‘How high?’ “). And whenever we get yelled at for anything, it’s because it was our fault!, naturally, because we don’t know any better, that’s why! Without really knowing why, we have tied ourselves to the decisions made for us by anyone and everyone in authority (not us), even if the directives are all over the place and completely inconsistent. Too bad for us! So when we get to A. I. R., we are informed that our opinions do matter, that here we have a voice and are encouraged to use it, and that we do not have to agree with societal limitations on our abilities. Also, we need not agree with the discrimination, segregation, isolation, name calling, bullying, and determinations and designations we’ve all been handed and forced to comply with. Our choices which are guaranteed by our Constitution and Bill of Rights are ours. They need to be allowed and upheld.

**October 14**: One thing about recovery that should be stated: sometimes beginning the process makes things at the early stages way more difficult initially, before anything begins to get better. That’s a very hard and difficult “pill to swallow”, but it is generally true. The real and abstract desires and habits we have accumulated for years, or over decades, have a grip on us that makes it seem like they are almost alive with their clinging and grasping and not letting go. The work we do at the beginning of our A. I. R. Involvement can be exhausting, difficult, and tedious, but eventually the initial storm subsides and vanishes, and life becomes new and exciting and calmly relieving. We’ve gone through the gauntlet of trials and have survived. A. I. R. becomes a permanent sanctuary for us, and recovery enters a healing phase that lasts a long time.

**October 15**: Success in our field or area (before A. I. R.) means that we succumb to societal edicts regarding who and what society deems we are and should remain: the designations that science and medicine and the law have chosen for us. For any of us to think outside of “the box” and imagine we can possibly be anything different from what society imagines for us is almost impossible. Doors and opportunities are closed and locked before we can get to where we think we’re going, and keys are not shared with us. And we certainly do not need any spotlights on us if we determine to try to become more than what our “place” in this universe allows. And we’ve all become so accustomed to our relative successes (failures) that seeking for more than what we’ve all had in the past is frightening, scary, and verging on the illegitimate. In A. I. R. we get a chance to move beyond caring about successes and failures and learning what it truly means to simply be content and satisfied with being exactly who and what we are without judgments of any kind from us or anyone else.

**October 16**: Loving ourselves just might be trying to go against everything we’ve ever been taught about ourselves, seriously. All of the power of society and its agents have determined that we NEED to be segregated, discriminated against, isolated, name called, and institutionally bullied (the fact that individuals as strangers, neighbors, classmates, relatives, and acquaintances also comply is just “icing on the cake.”). So, attempting to love ourselves is more than swimming against the tide (in this case “rip tide”), or maybe more like selficide. Why would any of us disband from the comfortable self-hate, self-demolition, self-disdain, self-torture, self-isolation, and self-silencing just for the sake of self-love? You’ve got to be kidding me! Well, in A. I. R., if we pay close attention to our Serenity Prayer, our Problem, our Laundry List, our Solution, our Twelve Steps, our Twelve Traditions, our higher power, and our fellow travelers, we might just get a glimpse of becoming safe and secure with the idea of loving ourselves wholeheartedly for the first time. It could happen!. Time for healings and blessings!

**October 17**: If anything in fact changes in our lives for the better (through involvement in A. I. R.), it may actually be considered a freaking miracle, considering the strength and determination of the opposing forces and the odds. I “bet” Vegas would not have a point spread or a parley offer on this one. What with backsliding as a possibility (or even probability), plus friends and colleagues not wanting us to change a lot or even a little: “You’re no fun anymore, since you got serious about this A. I. R. crap. You’ve turned into one heck of a loser, you know that?” We can hear it all now. Outside peer pressure is one hell of a downer, isn’t it? And life wasn’t all that bad now was it, considering how much hard work this A. I. R. program requires. Well now, is freedom from the past worth it or not? How is it, living as a perfect imperfect cog in a system that never had your best interests at heart? Not a question for the feint of heart. Choices/consequences. Which line do you really want to be in? Lots of time to think it over. Let’s change that line: “The more things change, the more they stay the same.” Maybe just wake up and be somebody different for a change (a permanent one).

**October 18:** With our higher power’s help, “surrendering into freedom” sure sounds like an oxymoron, like jumbo shrimp, or awfully good, or deafening silence, or even small crowd. We might even be bombarded by caustic friends, or sedentary travelers, or mindless know-it-alls, who all try to get us to resist being classically new, or the same difference. But we can take a running walk away from them in a cold heat by approaching A. I. R. In that near distance to experience success in that dusky dawning of ourselves. We can ride up the steps, work at this play, make an easy struggle of the whole part we’re in. It’s a matter of fluidity and practiced recital. And like Doc Brown we can go back to the future! That way out is what we need to be safe and in.

**October 19**: Recovery and the work that it requires does not remove the chaos and difficulties in life, the bumpiness of the road. But it does provide a sensibility and an awareness never before learned that we do not need to react to it the way we’ve always done, or in ways that society and common practice expect us to. The negativity that we’ve all lived with for years or maybe decades does not suppose that we act or react with counter moves or equal measures of negativity. In A. I. R., with our higher power’s help and direction, and with the examining of the literature, we get instructed about love and compassion, and calm and reserve, and toleration and understanding as better means of interaction and acceptance. People and societal agencies simply do not know how to deal or interact with us. It’s not anyone’s fault really: an ingrained habitual frailty that is historically and culturally and systemically based on fear, inexperience, and happenstance, understandable, though still inexcusable. But we can do our very small but necessary parts attempting to break the chains of intolerance and ignorance and separation. Rather than as victims resorting to becoming victimizers (an all too understandable and prolific happening), we can all become teachers and healers through example, rising as high as our higher power encourages us to ascend to, like a very gentle spring rain and subsequent sun washing everything clean.

**October 20**: Because of society’s labeling and the designating of all of us, we’ve never really been without each other, wherever we’ve been placed: an eclectic bunch of unusual personalities having been referred to as, or placed in, the reject pile for involuntary exclusion and disappearance. Our differences were apparently the qualifying and annoying particularities that somehow required separation and culling from the “normals” or “neurotypicals” of the world. The very competitive fabric of the social order might be enough of an explanation as to uncovering the roots and the whys of this odd distinguishing. That we, who are so categorically different from each other (though we have been isolated together), are capable of getting along so marvelously and interconnectedly together, completely shatters the mythology that we are incapable of getting along with or interacting with everyone else, including those claiming to be “normal” or “perfect” or “better than” those of us deemed different. Ya gotta laugh! Nothing like social “fruit salad” to expose the illogic of the need for separation and exclusion (Down Syndrome, Asperger’s, Autism. Cerebral Palsy, Dyslexia, Traumatic Brain Disorder, ADD, ADHD, Angelman’s, Williams Syndrome, etc.). And we thought we had problems, hahahahahaha!

**October 21**: Recovery seems to take time and patience, and even patience takes time to acquire. But for most of us coming to this A. I. R. program we don’t feel we have the time or the patience to acquire the necessary capabilities to pursue recovery. Life’s too short and we only have one life to live, so why are we wasting our time when there are no guarantees? So, here’s a curve ball answer: we don’t have to go worrying about time because our souls (our true selves) are immortal; our souls have always been, they are here now, they always will be. These body vehicles we temporarily inhabit are disposable and die, of course, but we survive and continue and reincarnate over and over and over again ad infinitum. So worrying about not having enough time to acquire the patience is kind of ludicrous seeing as how time is no longer a pressing factor (the whys and wherefores regarding why reincarnation is not taught and understood and accepted everywhere is for another time and discussion). Also, the “rat race” mentality of life certainly loses its edge when time no longer is considered a serious factor in anything. So even though recovery takes time and patience, we can openly pursue the step-by-step, day- by-day slow process of examining every detail of our pasts to learn how we got to where we are now. We’re not at fault, the social order is not at fault. We are simply fine exactly the way we are: different, yes, but still fine; and we can accept who we are as fine without any further hesitations. And life apparently will lose none if its craziness and difficulty and chaos, but it can now be seen as entirely manageable from a calmly reassuring A. I. R. perspective.

**October 22**: In A. I. R. sessions we may be listening to others talking about grief and grieving over missed opportunities in life: the holes in their experiences where things and events that were wished for never happened or were not allowed or offered. Then there are the myriad of things and events we never knew existed or that we never knew even happened. For all of us who have been summarily and perfectly isolated, discriminated against, and segregated from “normal” educational and social encounters everywhere since before we could even talk, it goes without saying that the  experiences that “normals” went through and simply took for granted as unnoticeably regular events were completely unknown to us. So grieving for us not only entails what we know we missed out on, but everything else we know nothing about that we also missed out on. In a great sense, we are all like an invisible “feral” community living amongst strangers (right under their noses) who are still completely unaware of us and our manufactured social deficits. But we also have eyes and ears that work and have worked. We are aware or slightly aware of the fact that we have missed out on a lot, a whole huge, big lot. But we can forgive and love and move on and become content with what we’ve gotten and what we have. Our awareness should bring us peace with what we now know.

**October 23**: Safety is, for us, an elusive imaginary accommodation due to the fact that most of our experiences throughout our lives have been jumping from danger to danger without a reprieve. We have become used to agencies and organizations of and within society that have treated us with disdain and avoidance. Our proclaimed-from-the-roof-tops differences in appearance, demeanor, speech, behaviors, and interests have all been boxed up within the labels and designations which medical and academic science have rubber-stamped into legal permanence. So if we happen to get introduced to A. I. R. from some friend or a “concerned” professional, our first (and maybe second or third) reaction will be ignoring it or walking away from another mistrusted organization with a skepticism that is unquestioningly deep rooted. We may never discover A. I. R. as being positive, helpful, trustworthy, and sincere and with our best interests at heart. Why would this new program be different and not completely co-opted by all of the other organizations or agencies that have professed well-intentioned services for us, only to be in line with all of the others which have set-in-stone “limited” determinations of who we are and always have been? Safety is something that is experienced, and is an earned trust, over a lengthy extended period of time. But maybe, just maybe, sticking around for a few or more sessions in A. I. R. will deliver the trust and safety so desperately sought and needed. Who knows?

**October 24**: “Just give it a chance. It could be different.” “Uh huh!, sure! I’ve heard words like that before. Like when all the time I’ve been told that I’m different, and that’s why I’m treated the way I have been. So this A. I. R. program you’re telling me about is a “different” different? Like that’s OK?” So here we are faced with another choice, a possibility, a door, a way to help restore for us some sanity by trusting in and surrendering to an invisible higher power who can turn our lives around? Is this just another gimmick, like a Halloween trick or treat, or something (again) truly different? “How can I have any faith in myself and my own decisions of choice when society has repeatedly informed me I don’t have the authority to make my own choices because I’m totally dependent which means I rely on others to make all my choices for me?” Breaking the chains of societal dysfunction for us is exactly the same as watching a baby chick breaking out of its protective eggshell once it needs to be alive and working on its own. The shell during the 21 days of gestation was protective of the growing chick inside, but when the chick is ready the shell ceases to be protective and becomes an inhibiting force that must be shattered and left behind and gotten rid of. Having initial faith in a higher power is the strength and power and force needed to break the inhibiting chains of societal control that are preventing us from ceasing our total dependence on others making decisions for us. We can start by becoming aware of our necessary place in this very interdependent world by establishing a choice of our own to begin relying on a higher power (not societal) which will direct our sensibilities and choices and behaviors from now on. We can love and be loved. We can be tolerant and be tolerated. We can be accepting and be accepted. Our own choice to allow a higher power to direct us provides us with our own ability to choose how we wish to live and to see with open eyes how we are to be seen by others with open eyes. We can choose to begin a new beginning.

**October 25**: The word “Control” is such a pivotal conceptual term in A. I. R. programming. As a linguistic term it can be seen as two basic forms: “Con” meaning both “with” or “against”, and “trol” meaning “conjuror,” “mage,” or “witch.” So “control” can mean either with a conjuror or against a conjuror (take your pick!). But the “trol” part refers back to the word “troll”, that mythological character from ancient children’s stories where the troll or ogre resided under a bridge preventing travelers from crossing over without paying a toll to the troll. In a way it is no different from today’s world where we who are disabled attempting to make our way through life by crossing that bridge from abnormal to normal, from disabled to abled have to pay societal ogres when attempting to be and become more than we are. Funny how that works, where we aren’t able to have the same status as everyone else: “human beings”. We get to have labels that discern that we are all qualitatively different from “normals” and “neurotypicals,” because we aren’t “in control” of our own destinies, being considered permanently dependent and always needing assistance with the simplest menial tasks. But in A. I. R., we discover that we, along with everyone else on this planet, have no control over ourselves or our destinies. We are in good company apparently. When we officially surrender to our higher power the control (we never really had) and accept our higher power’s direction over everything, we acquire an invaluable teammate and leader who will never ever let us down even if we occasionally backslide into old and useless habits. And we can also then cross any conceptual bridge, toll and troll free, whenever we want to or need to.

**October 26**: “We’re all different from what we should be and it’s our fault.” Of course that makes absolutely no sense at all, but it’s a very common conclusion or insight we all seem to possess at times. For how would anyone rationally accept the societal labels thrust upon us, with all of the ensuing name calling and systemic bullying, and discrimination, and segregation, and isolation following along behind such declarations like floats and marching bands in a scheduled holiday parade? If how we are treated (mistreated) is not our bully’s intentional fault, it must then be ours. Well, here’s our answer! So then hating ourselves for who we “necessarily” are is very hard to undo when it comes to forgiving and loving ourselves in an inclusive A. I. R. program that encourages us to feel good about ourselves, and begin taking better care of ourselves, and accepting and encouraging ourselves to be honest and open and trusting and free with our pasts and our future progress. Turning and steering an ocean liner may be easier than flipping around 180 degrees a distraught and lost human being struggling with major self- concept issues, like who we are when we arrive at A. I. R., but with a lot of assistance from our fellow travelers and our loving higher power. It’s all very possible.

**October 27**: The odd thing about forced dependency is that the societal agencies that have leveled that dependency on us have also packaged along with it all of the major enticements and enforcements to not only insist we maintain that dependency financially, medically, educationally, and environmentally, but have also insisted we practice it daily psychologically,where we continue to know and keep our designated inferior places almost religiously. We are all kept on very tiny and short psychological leashes as obedient pets, where we’re required to behave and think and believe and act and perform in certain required (and expected) ways wherever we happen to be. And our monitoring through various oversight agency personnel keep track of where we are at all times and what we are doing and how we are getting along (why do you suppose they have and keep stacks of potential “incident reports” on us? For our protection? Hahahaha). They’ll deny it vociferously of course should we bring it up, but the actions (documentations) speak louder than words (excuses). And should we protest or fight or object in any way, the fear of abandonment will be hurled at us matter-of-factly, to follow as required punishment for even thinking about forsaking our permanent dependent pet status and running away leash free; we must all know and respect our required places. In A. I. R., we get to examine our trainers, our labelers, our enforcers, and also ourselves, and our reactions. What we may discover should surprise us.

**October 28**: When we all grew up with conditional “love” and “concern” from societal agencies and agents looking out for us and our best interests, it wasn’t really true love and concern, it was simply projected expectations with praise for “approved of” reactions, or reprisals for “disapproved of” reactions: “do this and you get a treat; do that and you get a smack!”: The worst of operant conditioning (of which there may be no best part). Because we all grew up having to become “survivors,” we all learned very quickly how to manipulate the system and pretend obedience wherever we were, and if it was worth it for us at that moment, or whether it was not. Punishments were dealt with as if they were entirely expected and nothing to worry over. This is all “prisoner mentality” at its best (or worse). But in A. I. R., all of this survivor nonsense can be examined very closely and brought out into the open and eventually disposed of and dispensed with. Real love is unconditional, with no expectations of results or compensations. Real love is not manipulative. Our sessions are meant to help expose where we’ve come from and where we hope to be going, free from false love and fear, free from manipulation and duress, while learning how to become understanding and compassionate with those who have harmed us intentionally or unintentionally.

**October 29**: People can make mistakes. People can pass on mistakes. But people (including us) are not mistakes. We can be angry at mistakes that have harmed us. We can analyze them to death. But blaming the people who have unintentionally or intentionally done them to us is not right. We may have absorbed those mistakes and done them to ourselves, or to others. We can strive to be and become less ignorant of what we do and have done. As others are not to be blamed neither should we be blamed. Generational hurt that gets passed along and down is a formidable foe to try to expose and get rid of. Forgiveness for past or current hurts is a mainstay of this A. I. R. program for delivering us from the burdens of guilt and hurt that blaming and shaming produces in ourselves as well as in others. It is a very simple and easy step to become familiar with that produces an awareness of the joys that discovery and recovery allow for. The monolithic and systemic drudgery of society and its agents also fosters and foments blame and shame and conditions of difference allowing for mistreatment and abuse and ignorance. These conditions are also blameless and need forgiving for them to able to (very gradually) transform, if possible, into more positive and nurturing organizations. We can be hopeful but not impatient. Real change takes time. We can love and wait in the meantime.

**October 30**: The only real focus of A. I. R. is on recovery of all of the individuals involved. Outside issues do not have a reason to be involved in A. I. R., unless we are discussing the systemic abuses of society that have brought us here to try to investigate them, open them up to discussion, and provide the help each individual member of A. I. R. needs to figure out ways to dispel them from continuing to do their harm. Politics, other social events, media issues, etc., have no business in A. I. R., their discussions or sharings, unless they have been triggers for the reactions in the hearts and minds of our fellow travelers.  But there may be some very fine lines between what is traditionally acceptable and what is not. The session moderator may be able to put a lid on anything not considered appropriate for the meetings, if it in fact does not pertain to elements of individual healings. Otherwise, the meetings are open for sharing any of the deep troubles we all go through while trying to recover.

**October 31**: If everyone and every agency or organization (having authority over us) have determined we were different and therefore qualified for all of the “special” placements and treatments and considerations that completely dependent individuals require (including, unfortunately, the segregation, discrimination, isolation, name calling, and systemic and institutional bullying that we receive in tow), then where is the recourse we would ever need to argue that our treatment is immoral, wrong, disgraceful, undemocratic, unconstitutional, and thoroughly reprehensible? Only in A. I. R. are we permitted a voice and allowed a voice and encouraged a voice. Nowhere else ever is it even recognized that we may have a voice. Prior to any involvement in A. I. R., we all quite probably believed most of the misinformation distributed and attributed to and about us, and what was said to our faces. Things that always went wrong in our lives were our fault. There was no consideration for thinking otherwise. Why would there be? And besides, we had both eyes and ears which worked to show us all the time that we were systematically treated very differently from “normal” and “neurotypical” kids in our families, in our neighborhoods, and in our schools. We were the “unprivileged,” always, and we didn’t have to be rocket scientists to connect the dots: we were different, and that too must have been our fault. But into A. I. R., all of the systemic and institutional nonsense simply dissipates and disappears: all of it. It may continue unabated everywhere else, but in A. I. R., it is silenced.

**November 1**: We, who have been gathered up together and placed in categories of disability and difference, find it quite easy to share with each other stories of abuse and neglect received from the hands and minds of those in our very dysfunctional society. Our solidarity arises from experience more than from uniform human particularities, because in many ways we could not be more different from each other, as opposed to different from the “normals” or “neurotypicals.” So we know each other, have our backs, and stand up for each other whenever things get difficult or ludicrous, especially when life gets personally hard for any of us. We know what we’re going through and how we feel. Most of the rest of the world does not know, nor even care. We can then share the main points of the A. I. R. program with our fellow travelers as we have “been there, and done that.”  Our own awareness has been tested and sharpened by other members with more experiences than we’ve had, and we all implicitly trust each other because of who we are, struggling to paddle in the same dysfunctional boat. Our learnings and difficulties are all shared. Our understandings of (and our love for) each other is shared. Our dreams, and openly declared decisions about where we are going and how we are getting there, are shared. Our camaraderie is wonderful and beautiful, and it benefits each and every one of us. How little did those who placed us together realize the powerful group opposition that was created against their monolithic and divisive measures by keeping us collectively away from them and out of the mainstream. But the force that we possess for them to begin to reckon with is one of love, charity, forgiveness, peace, and reconciliation: not particularly off putting or dangerous. We will exist and survive, all alone and by ourselves, if necessary.

**November 2**: “Hurry up and slow down!” A message from A. I. R. participants wishing to embrace the program. Patience, patience, patience! Before practice, practice, practice. It takes time and calmness and centering and meditative silence for all involved in A. I. R. to begin advancing inward to connect with our higher power. Nothing rash or haphazard or quickly generated produces positive or lasting effects. Be as slow growing as an oak or maple or beech or ash tree. Take in the seasons of change that are slow and methodical and comprehensive. A. I. R. is not like an over-the-counter pill for a cold guaranteed to bring “instant relief.” Society’s dysfunctioning did not just happen. It actually took millennia (several); and uncovering its diverse uncompromising endeavors will also take time and patience and teamwork. Also, many new attendees arriving for the first time really want to try changing other people first for the better and finding out as soon as possible what means are suggested or available for fixing other people. Major early lesson: Forget it! A. I. R. is never ever about trying to fix anyone else. It is all about fixing and changing oneself, and only that. The steps and the literature are all about working in our own thoughts and emotions and physical and spiritual health, which are positive things we can actually accomplish…. But these take time and patience and concerted hard work. And as the saying goes, “Keep coming back because it’s worth it and you’re worth it.”

**November 3**: If we have ceased our trusting in the pervasive lies about us from outside sources, we may begin to investigate thoughts and insights that are projected in the 12 step program literature. It is a truly bizarre phenomenon that so many powerful societal organizations and agencies and participating fields of endeavor collaborate undeniably in the stated and unstated propaganda. However, seeking maybe for the first time a relationship with God (or however we may choose to state or define our higher power) will bring about slowly a rising consciousness that we are not horrible, not worthless, not incapable, and not unlovable nor unloving. Our existence is ok, and real, and exciting, and profoundly versatile. We are a vibrant community of very different and eclectic personalities. And we pray that we are led from now on to do good, to see good, to understand where we’ve come from and how we’ve been for too long unfortunately fooled by the vast misrepresentation of all of us. We no longer need to follow or listen to the whispered degradation and colossal abuse from outsiders and officials who are not us and will never truly understand us. Our fellow travelers support and love us unconditionally. And our higher power guides us. We are fine exactly as we are.

**November 4**: Fear is learned. Abuse is experienced. Toleration and excuses happen over time. Exhaustion is the result. After years of exposure to it all, a final moment of realization and expectation and refusal to continue the madness and insanity arises. There has got to be a better way: this is not life nor living. And somehow we are led to A. I. R., where a glimpse of tranquility, peace, and love is made apparent and visible. “Yea though we have walked through the valley of the shadow of death….” But here in A. I. R. fears become irrelevant, no longer of any utility or meaning. Our true self arises out of the past, whole, alive, awake, aware, and afresh. We no longer depend on dependence. We are amongst friendly friends in a very interdependent world where we can love and be loved, where we can appreciate and be appreciated, where we can be tolerant and be tolerated, all for free, without any faulty contractual arrangements. We owe ourselves this much, and we don’t owe any outsiders anything, except love and respect and watchfulness.

**November 5**: Many 12 Step programs utilize the acronym HALTS, which stands for “hungry, angry, lonely, tired, and serious.” Supposedly, if we are too much of any of these particular feelings, thoughts, or circumstances, we should immediately seek help to prevent backsliding into worse straits which could negatively compound our progress in recovery. Maybe the term HALTS should be interpreted as “Have a lovely time studying (or sharing, or searching). The steady belligerence of society and social organizations (never ceasing with their public declarations regarding our differences) may not be enough of a single horrendous onslaught to ever cause us to collapse under a full blown “HALTS” experience, so maybe we aren’t as susceptible as other 12 step candidates to need revival from falling down or off from all- of-a-sudden being too hungry, angry, lonely, tired, or serious (though it might possibly happen). Regardless, connecting with A. I. R. on a regular basis with meetings and fellow travelers and our higher power might stave off the HALTS phenomenon and keep us focused on our own healthy conditioning: sleeping well, exercising appropriately, eating properly, and reading and journaling in our program. Loving and meditating are also endeavored for good measure.

**November 6**: An old sage once said, “One man’s religion is another man’s mythology, and vice versa.” What we in A. I. R. have been told about ourselves our entire lives might not have a shred of truth in real science but be a lot of “academic” opinion from the likes of The Journal of Polymorphous Perversity, or any other such rag tag deliberation of words. We who have been “blessed” with labels, we’ve never agreed to, have had our voices stricken from us because those who have been deemed legally “incompetent” have no right or authority or legitimate standing to object or call into question the very means with which they’ve been silenced. It is a most perfect (as the author Joseph Heller coined the phrase) “Catch 22.” We can all get along with society just perfectly by completely agreeing with our lowest station in life ever afforded a breathing human being, or we can ignore the collaborative edicts of society and choose to acknowledge our clear purposes and identities unburdened by the labels that never fit us. Our higher power and our fellow travelers in A. I. R. love us and respect us and acknowledge us as perfect just the way we are. We may not need any other affirmations. Society’s words against ours? We think we win!

**November 7**: When tortured (directly and subliminally) by societal abuses towards us on a very continual basis, our natural reactions include escaping into our selected diversions (TV, music, cell phones, shopping, toys, collectibles, junk food, caffeinated soft drinks), silence, bedrooms, social avoidance, acting out, withdrawal, etc. But all of these various types of reactions involve and require a certain “acceptance” of the labeling, categorization, belittling, and bullying, otherwise there wouldn’t be any reacting at all. Using various means for escaping from the torture is a far cry from standing up to it and denouncing it. And none of the chosen means of escaping are very productive of good for us, generating positivity and means for personal growth and satisfaction. The escaping all lead to dead ends emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. Through exploration of A. I. R. principles and literature, we come to realize the negative self- shaming and blaming and aversion we have towards ourselves through our absorbing the ingrained designations society has bestowed upon us, “you’re not good enough,” “you don’t measure up,” you’re different,” “you’re abnormal,” “you don’t fit in anywhere.” But all of these designations attributed to us are wrong, because we are not wrong; we are not worthless, we are not dispensable. We’ve always known this but our work in A. I. R. confirms and affirms this: there’s nothing wrong with us! We don’t have to continue to believe the lies about us by punishing ourselves unmercifully for accepting the lies. Through experiencing the love of our colleagues and our higher power we can accept who we are while denying the crap society throws at us. It’s a new choice and a new day. And we no longer need to hide or escape.

**November 8**: “Let me give you some really good advice. There are a few things you can do, actually that you’re only allowed to do, and then there are a whole bunch of things you shouldn’t even bother trying to do, actually that you’re not allowed to do. We can offer you some opportunities that have been proven to be really, really good for people like you that we know will make you really happy. We’ll send your caregivers the list.” “And where the spinning wheel and the music stops nobody knows.” For all our lives social service agencies, schools, medical personnel, and counselors of various sorts with grave responsibilities have given tailored advice to us (knowing what was best for us without asking our opinions) as if we would jump at the opportunities presented knowing we are and have always been duly starved for attention in our compromised isolation and separation from mainstream existence. And we don’t seek their advice ever as we have come to fear all authority (which is everyone else not us).  But authority figures somehow feel obligated to periodically instruct us of our healthy boundaries for our own good, as if they were border collies and we were sheep. Do they look at our pre-existing labels and designations before giving us advice, having concluded that the existent methodologies and accepted determinations on us require zero variation or compromise? Their actions and questions and behaviors seem entirely rubber stamped, emotionless, and matter-of-fact. We have always responded somewhat positively and done what they’ve expected, whether or not it resulted in temporary happiness. We pretended to be anyway. If we miraculously discover A. I. R., we may uncover a lot of similar stories and hopeless encounters, while seeing some newly opened doors of self-determined possibilities: things never before attempted, goals of an unusual nature, visions and dreams of entitlement always denied us before. A. I. R. teaches us self-determination and self- reliance. We share where we’ve come from with our fellow travelers and learn how much to rely on outside forces and how much not to. Our opinions matter here for maybe the first but not the last time.

**November 9**: Guaranteed, in all of our pasts, any and all mistakes we ever made were laughed at. We were always a three-ring circus of clowns for everyone’s useful entertainment.  A lot of the times we enjoyed the attention, negative though it was, because sometimes attention in any form confirms we actually exist and the feedback is wonderful in that it proves we are alive. But for the majority of the rest of the time we are solidly invisible. A lot of the times when we do make mistakes and are laughed at, the humiliation and degradation pile on insufferably. The mistakes confirm what everyone knows or suspects about our diagnoses, our differences, our being is simply a “plague” upon our families who didn’t deserve us. Few ever console us, few ever try to undo the hurt. It is only after we enter A. I. R. that we make friends who can be trusted not to humiliate us and destroy us in public. We get to relax and be who we are without any worries about feeling badly or without hope or being lost ever again in an unkindly crowd. Here we belong. We share our histories (good and bad) to listening ears that do not judge at all. And we are congratulated for having survived so far under the worst social and societal mistreatments imaginable, just like all the rest of our fellow travelers, too.

**November 10**: Growing up having been declared by everyone in authority that we are permanently disabled and utterly dependent, we are never afforded an opportunity to make our own decisions or choices regarding anything. We are voiceless. We grow up not trusting our own thoughts, feelings, or sensibilities. We think we have no right to determine anything. So we wait for direction and help always, except that because we are ignored a lot or most of the time, we end up having to do some things for ourselves when nobody’s watching or listening (we do have eyes and ears and pay attention though we’re not supposed to), but we have to be really, really careful not to be observed when we actually do some things for ourselves when no one is paying attention to us (why would they?). We grow up timid, shy, fearful, accused of being lazy and good for nothing. But as adults entering an A. I. R. meeting for the first time, we are greeted by others who are just like us but who have determined to try being more independent and more self-determined than we ever dreamed would be allowed for us or even permitted. We are told we have rights and privileges like “normal” people, that we deserve respect and a means for developing self-confidence and self-awareness and self-trust. That we can love and be loved, that we can accept and be accepted. That we are ok and just fine being exactly who we are without judgement from others or unduly judging ourselves. In A. I. R. It’s as if a whole new world has been opened up for us and new beginnings never imagined are entirely possible. It all starts with baby steps, slowly, one day at a time, gradually changing ourselves and our perceptions of ourselves from within. We are the ones responsible for our own changes if we choose to do so.

**November 11**: Serenity might be a state of perfect balance that is almost impossible to describe adequately; and there may be no way to tell you how to get there or achieve it; but it might be such that you’ll know it when you get there. It may not be found on any map with directions. Your GPS locator may in fact laugh at you if you sign in to ask for help on how you can get there from where you are. It’s described as a mental and emotional and physical and spiritual state of bliss, calm, peace, and love. It’s definitely a tautology if you say that serenity is a state of serenity, which truly would not help. But in A. I. R., it is anticipated that anyone following dutifully the steps and reading and studying the literature and attending the meetings and doing the “leg work” will have an excellent opportunity to experience real serenity eventually. It may be a requirement for spiritual enlightenment, and then again it may actually be the goal for spiritual enlightenment. But even striving to achieve serenity will put you on the right journey to experience life the way it should be approached and discovered and uncovered: an internal journey for sure.

**November 12**: Projections of ourselves (anticipations, expectations, determinations) from outside sources, as opposed to our own sense of self direction, can be any of these or any combination of any of these: positive, negative, disarming, offensive, and/or confusing. We, who have been labeled pretty much utterly dependent and therefore defenseless for our whole lives, are regularly subjected to directives and criticisms which may have absolutely nothing to do with who we really are. These formal and informal prescriptions and instructions from early childhood on into adulthood are based almost solely on medical, academic, and legal justifications of the “known” possibilities of who and what we are: different in so many pre-determined and qualified ways, as if our histories and futures were absolutely set and unalterable. In other words, we’re not qualified to make up our own minds regarding anything. So, if we are listening to everybody else’s determinations of who and what we are, it amounts to total confusion and misrepresentation. But, in A. I. R. we are provided alternative explanations on how to go about claiming or reclaiming our lives and ourselves and our pasts, relying on our own memories and thoughts and feelings to build and build up a plausible (for us) picture of ourselves and who we want to be. Our A. I. R. meetings are a safe and sacred place for us to explore confidently amongst friends who we are and who we are not, never forgetting the various (but similar) hells we’ve been through to get here. With our higher power’s total and loving assistance we can move forward into productive futures together.

**November 13**: When a lifetime of overwhelming abuse and degradation are the mainstay of existence for those of us labeled different, trust is never something to be taken lightly, or easily. We are not Charlie Brown, and the world is not Lucy Van Pelt with a football. We have been down the road of crushed hopes and dreams by trusting in others who have laughed behind our backs. Optimism is one thing; realism is another. And experience is an honest and exacting and brutal teacher. And memories are that blind justice carrot on a string in front of us leading us on to a better remorseless path away from distractions of promise and enticements of illusion and frustration. A hand on a hot stove is only burned once. We can stay safe and healthy and remarkably calm and free from harassing distractions by paying attention to the signs of past humiliations and embarrassments when trust was thrown around all too frequently. We need not repeat past errors. A. I. R. gives us the support and consistent alliance we’ve all needed. We can depend on our friends always to assist in figuring out all of the external craziness and chaos. Our higher power also protects us when we need it the most. Rest assured we are loved and held upright always.

**November 14**: Does trauma cause accidents, or do accidents cause trauma, or are both true? Or are they theoretical rival siblings trying to out do the other? We grew up with both, apparently, wondering if we were at fault for causing them to happen. We certainly were blamed a lot, and shamed for simply being, as if we were the source for both. We thought we were unique, being so different, but our school classes had been the all-around receptacle trash bins for all of the behavioral and substandard misfits that those in authority had deemed worthy of “special” placement. So, we weren’t too different from each other, but different enough from “normal” to all be herded into the same depository. In a way we just accepted the placements as part of an existing social order that made sense to authorities even if it made no sense to us. And we were the “accidents” that regularly experienced trauma; go figure! And the number of things we always did to try to make ourselves look and act as much like “normal” as possible were disgusting: make up, clothes, hair styles, vernacular, walks, dances, back packs, decals, slang… all to no avail. Our designations and labels and social targeting were somehow obvious to everyone else but ourselves, apparently. And years and years of abuse and degradation and isolation finally came to a startling end when we encountered A. I. R. Through this unusual discovery we were able to disentangle ourselves from our past (other and self) designations of intolerable loneliness and accidental trauma and begin experiencing a new solidarity with fellow “abnormals” who didn’t mind being exactly as they were, free and calm and open hearted with themselves and others. This was a freedom we never knew existed, and we were all the creators of it, along with our higher power’s oversight and assistance.

**November 15**: We’ve been labeled; and so we, in a way, naturally react to it, defensively, apprehensively, discourteously, or maybe even with a pervasively burning silence. Attacked (whether obtrusively or unobtrusively), we respond with instinctive measures for survival. We are our own means of protection, not being able to rely on anyone or anything else most of the time. Our reactions over time become habitual and fashioned in a way that seals our position in the social order. We have come to expect attacks, and we react because we have developed our own means for responding. Our attackers expect our responses, and have become used to the very dysfunctional interactions, seemingly enjoying or finding some pleasure or use in the social battling. But none of it serves a greater or positive purpose. But it continues purposelessly indefinitely. However, once we begin attending A. I. R. meeting sessions (if in fact we miraculously discover them), we find it incredibly difficult to uncover and shed the instinctual reactions that have become too habitual over the years. Our reactions of snide sarcasm that we used to use to deflect insults and abusive comments no longer fit the calm and pleasant interactions during, before, and after our meetings with fellow struggling attendees. Our attempts at gentle interactions may be fraught with awkward comments or reactive interjections, causing us embarrassment and confusion. Our initial attending may be sporadic and tentative due to not feeling initially relaxed and at home in these very different but welcoming surroundings. But if we continue to come by and listen and read and think about all that is shared, the fears and confusions begin to vanish. We are understood and never attacked. We can cease being so defensive and hypervigilant. We’ve arrived at a calm and peaceful and welcoming place where we are safe and secure and at home.

**November 16**: The old saying, “When one door closes, another door opens,” has an unusual aspect not mentioned in the saying: where it might be referred to as “The dark night of the soul.” For, often when that first door closes, there might be a short or long period of time waiting in darkness, isolation, confusion, and fears before the next door opens. It’s like a spiritual test of patience, faith, and courage. These proverbial sayings might happen in reality when we get ready to leave thoughts or feelings or habits we have become used to or have tolerated within ourselves and others whom we have become close to, when we determine for ourselves it is time to change or grow or evolve into becoming more positive, helpful, optimistic, encouraging, loving, and centered. The choice is then the subjective closing of a door behind us while then looking eagerly for a new door to open in front of us. This is a time of testing, of “sack cloth and ashes,” a time of forgiveness and atonement, often happening in the fall season when the sun is experienced receding into the quiet of winter. It requires depth of spirit and a commitment to renewal. In A. I. R., we are propelled by the encouragement of our peers and our higher power to proceed for as long as it takes to wait in patience for the arrival of newness and the opening of doors for our better futures. It is a natural cyclical process, and seemingly part of a highly developed divine plan.

**November 17**: When society says, “Hey Kid, this is who you are!” we generally think, “Well then, I guess I am.” There’s not a whole lot of discussion about it, because it’s from every aspect in society that we are aware of: educationally, medically, legally, religiously, economically, judicially, politically; and they all agree methodically and in principle, so of course they must be right! Right? Well, unfortunately we all in this designated disability community have eyes and ears that work so we are aware daily of the mammoth discrepancies and injustices and outright fraud in the labels and determinations about us as opposed to everyone else in the supposed “normal” population we’ve been told are different from us (we, who are so “different.”) And none of our observations which we keep to ourselves sit well anywhere. We just have to quietly remain where we are in isolation, discriminated against, segregated, name called, bullied, disenfranchised, enjoying what little we don’t have (compared with everyone else we can see and hear about), and be content and happy about our non- existent lot in life. Well, there you have it. Through A. I. R. we get a serious and ample ability and sense that we no longer have to rely on society’s determinations of who and what we are (and are not). The “bell curve” with its standard deviations below “normal” has tolled for us, and its clang has never stopped. But we can of our own volition ignore it. We are human beings with guaranteed rights that we will uphold if no one else will. We can meet to discuss our pasts and our dreams, our hurts and pains, and our futures. We are no longer voiceless. We can share and support each other wherever we choose to go with our determinations and to hell with society’s predilections; they’ve certainly made a thorough mess of their own lives and directions; they can leave us alone to decide for ourselves. “That’s the ticket.”

**November 18**: In discussing the relationship we have with our divine higher power, perhaps it has never been said better than the following: “God has a million Names. Select any Name of His, any Name that appeals to you, select any Form of His; every day when you awaken to the call of the brightening east, recite the Name, meditate on the Form; have the Name and Form as your companion, guide and guardian throughout the toils of the waking hours; when you retire for the night offer grateful homage to God in that Form with that Name, for being with you, by you, beside you, before you, behind you, all day long. If you stick to this discipline, you cannot falter or fail.”

Baba. Who knows what is right or what works or has the most credibility. We are all here blindly moving into unknown futures trying to figure out what we are doing and where we are going. We have come to A. I. R. to try to understand what we have all been through; and we are seeking anything that might assist us with discovering and uncovering our supposed inner divine nature to heal and be healed by sharing and listening and commiserating and surrendering, while having experienced that we are not in control and never have been. So asking our higher power to take over completely seems like an ok agreement that is necessary and possibly very productive of good. And a poem here to assist maybe:

“We go through life a wandering for ev-

er and a day, without a clue of me

and you or what we’d like to say. We nev-

er know where we’ve come from or what our sea

will bring. We live alone, in flesh and bone,

and fears to which we cling. We strive to know

why we are here, on earth where we’ve been thrown,

while giving, taking, and mistaking, tow-

ing all we’ve sewn. We live with no direc-

tions, though we hope and dream and smile, and pray

we make it through to peace, beyond life’s wreck,

in style. If we could just hold hands this day,

perhaps to share what’s here, it would appear

we’ve found what’s real, before we disappear.”

We have much to learn and a long arduous road to walk step-by-step.

**November 19**: If we can’t accept ourselves, just us, exactly the way we are, who the hell else is going to? There ain’t a long line waiting to congratulate us on being who and what we are. We’ve seen funeral processions shorter than this line. For those of us who have experienced a lifetime of verbal abuse and derision from all quarters of life, we have naturally developed a rather keen sense of radar for the unnecessary harassment and how to turn away from its happening before it gets launched at us. And, as we have never lived a day without reminders of what the world in general (and specifically) thinks about us, we have all become resoundingly resilient to the name calling and bullying from all quarters of the social order who don’t care (for they’ve never considered it) if we should ever sign up for suicide prevention on account of their persistent efforts. Our skins are tougher and thicker than that. We’re a lot more balanced than we seem. But in A. I. R. we meet up with fellow travelers and survivors who all exert a claim of success by triumphing over any and all hostilities from pervasive societal onslaughts. We develop calmness and awareness and magnanimous sensibility towards injustice while learning how to love and tolerate and accept and be overly compassionate to fellows and outsiders alike. Being nice loses us nothing, but gains us everything. Our higher power protects us and delivers us from society’s foibles, as we understsnd it to be, and we are eternally grateful.

**November 20**: What all of society accepts as standard and reasonable and perfectly ok seldom is placed under a microscope. We wouldn’t fit there anyway; but were we to object on how we’ve been systematically treated for centuries if not millennia, we might not even get a glance, or a clearing throat cough, or a smile and nod in our direction. No one on God’s green earth would ever consider in the slightest that society’s behavior towards us would be “dangerous.” The raucous laughter would never cease. Would anyone but us consider it possibly or potentially dangerous to us? Hardly likely! We don’t even have thoughts or feelings or identities. Why would we be impudent enough to suggest that society’s discrimination, segregation, isolation, name calling, and systemic bullying (all for our own good) would be dangerous to and for us? Preposterous! We don’t have opinions, so of course, our opinions don’t matter and have never mattered. Just remember, “The most perfect lies are those that are never questioned.” So, only in A. I. R. meetings are we ever allowed or permitted to voice our objections to ways in which we have been historically treated (excuse us: mistreated). There has never been an allowance for equal treatment under the law (even when the laws emphatically state it). And who but us would ever attempt to uphold them? Wouldn’t you just love a Hollywood movie where we are represented in a court room by a rocking, hand flapping, Tourette syndrome autistic lawyer in front of a judge with Down Syndrome? The outtakes would not be as funny or as apt as the movie. We are alone together as a unified group in A. I. R., and thank heavens we have these meetings and each other.

**November 21**: Maybe recovery for us is a lifelong journey; but sure as hell, grief is not. Grief is always temporary and thoroughly debilitating. People don’t survive a lifetime of grief. That’s a constant state of accidents ever happening, with forgetfulness, a crushing loss of memory, and a dash of depressive purposelessness, some fear and anxiety, plus trepidation, with all of those characteristics happening at once, together. Human beings can’t survive in a grief state permanently. That level of cruelty can’t withstand the normal barrage of everyday fateful unexpected lifetime cruelties that regularly occur in this realm of materialization. With the constant social harassment we all receive continuously our recovery exists in a state of necessary permanence that survives only due to the persistent help of our fellow travelers and the assistance of our higher power. It is like a static tug of war that won’t ever leave or let up. But recovery is better than not having recovery.

**November 22**: What is it like being labeled intellectually and developmentally disabled and then for a lifetime taking on the supposed characteristics of the labeling as opposed to simply thinking that we’re human beings only? What are the cognitive and emotional changes that may (or could) take place when over a lifetime we are thoroughly absorbed into socially and systematically designated categories? Would not our accepted life styles perhaps resemble the effects of Stockholm Syndrome in an odd way? By following along with the labeling and categorization we are then abandoning who we really are even if we are unaware of our self-denial. We spend all of our time aiming to please all authority figures who’ve bought into the labeling, and then we continually gravitate towards the perfection (and expectations) of the categorization even if it completely tears us apart internally. We become time bombs of cognitive dissonance without ever grasping the trauma we’ve been subjected to. So we spend a small lifetime fulfilling the roles we’ve been summarily handed, and we’ve made everyone else happy about it but ourselves. If we chance to encounter A. I. R., or participants in A. I. R., we may get a glimpse of others who have tried to shed the labeling and misrepresentation by striking out independently as being (and referring to themselves as) human beings, first and foremost. These others may exude a confidence and self-determination that seems impossible to describe or get a handle on. By listening and sharing life histories and experiences of past traumas and inequities we may find our own lives coming into question upon closer examination. Our lives may have been ritualized and habitualized due to outside influences we never knew were for their sakes and not ours. Recovery from our pseudo-Stockholm syndrome conditioning may take a long time to fix, undo, and emerge from; but regardless of how long it takes it will indeed be worth it.

**November 23**: Going along with the “social order,” as defined for us by authorities we’ve never met, was always the safest and least (apparently) destructive thing for us to do, considering how relatively safe it is to be entirely invisible. But going along with the labels and designations we’ve been given ends up with our sacrificing and sabotaging ourselves, whether we realized the consequences or not. Through following what was expected of us, we participated in our own victimization in order to be accepted by a world which systematically ignored us or verbally abhorred us with despicable name calling to denigrate and embarrass us. Our capacity for self-criticism: “We are stupid,” “We are worthless,” “We are a waste of space,” “We shouldn’t exist,” “We deserve to be alone.” “We deserve to be ignored,” all work to witness that we’ve bought in to the abuse and degradation without bothering to look at how destructive it is to our own future recovery. But breaking old habits and replacing them with new unknown strategies for positivity is so unbelievably difficult; it takes time and patience and assistance and forgiveness and “trial and error” and relapses and struggling and mistakes and loss of old friendships and acquaintances and lots more time as we very, very slowly evolve into a newness we never before imagined. With our cohorts in A. I. R. and our higher power’s will we will slowly progress in our recovery and accomplish a lot of growth in this very interdependent world.

**November 24**: Multiple Choice (when there is none) Test:

Question: What did one retard say to the other retard? Answer:

A. Nothing. They weren’t informed they were allowed to tell jokes. \_\_\_

B. “You go first. I don’t believe in the lines I’ve been given.”\_\_\_

C. “We’re the same because they said we’re the same, even though we’re different.” \_\_\_

D. “How do you scramble an egg? You put it in a separate “special” container away from all the other “normal” eggs. \_\_\_

E. All, or most, or some, or none of the above. \_\_\_

How come we always get laughed at and made fun of when we’re not trying to be funny, but just trying to be “normal,” which we’re not?

How come we’re always placed in places called “special” when there’s nothing “special” about those places?

How come there’s a certain “special” day set aside from regular days at Cedar Point Amusement Park just for us when “normal” people don’t show up?

How come we have a “Night to Shine” Prom in the dead of winter when we haven’t graduated from anything?

How come the only places we’re ever allowed to go to, or even attend, are in public places and not in private places?

How come, if it never really matters whether or not you win or lose, but how you play the game, they always keep score?

How come there are no retarded people in positions of authority? Oh, there are? They’re call politicians?

How come we don’t have any answers to these silly and stupid questions? There are no legitimate answers! But even if there are no legitimate answers, at least in A. I. R. these are questions we can ask!

**November 25**: When psychological testing is the major (if not sole) justification (legal excuse) for the ensuing labeling used to determine our status, present placements, with limited future possibilities (and therefore potentials), we who are the resultant experiments of such testing have been collectively situated in that proverbial “handbasket to hell.” As the famed author Samuel Clemens once stated, “There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics,” though he apparently attributed the phrase or quotation to England’s Prime Minister, Disraeli. Regardless, society’s authorities, always stooping to the lowest levels of fabrication to justify our removal from every mainstream venue (without exception) invariably demonstrate a systematic and caustic insensitivity and callousness often attributed only to reptiles and other cold blooded species. This unjustified “pre-retribution on society’s behalf is not in the slightest bit an isolated situation, nor a disparagingly unique circumstance. In this courageous country (this USA) of ours, over the last 40 years, group home companies, when attempting to build new residential facilities for those of us labeled mentally retarded (now intellectually and developmentally disabled), have run into and experienced bomb threats, arson, firearm exchanges (mob warfare) repeatedly by angry local citizenry protesting the purchasing of land and the rights for the building of residential group homes within their suburban community neighborhoods. Now get this: not even just once has there been an exception to this; but in 100% of every attempt in multi-thousands of attempts, this unequivocal, immoral, insensitive, and extremely hostile circumstance has happened and been recorded, because all of the “normal” human beings in all walks of life don’t want us near them ever. The only available recourse used by the group home companies in each of the over 10,000 such cases and attempts was by their requesting the federal government to intervene. The federal intervention always went something like this: “So, we hear that the local citizenry is objecting to the building of a group home in your community for folks with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Is that right?” “Yes that’s right!” “Well, does your town receive any annual federal funding in support of your infrastructure; such as schools, hospitals, police, fire departments, roads, municipal buildings, etc.?” “Yes, we do, as a matter of fact!” “Well, if your community continues to refuse entry in your suburb of this small almost inconsequential and harmless group home, all of your federal funding will be terminated immediately. Do you now understand us?” And this is the only way in over 10,000 such cases (100% of the time) that folks like us were permitted to live amongst “normals” in their peaceful segregated neighborhoods. And people wonder why our collective self-esteem is below the bottom of the barrel. Not once has any local community ever rolled out a red carpet and exclaimed, “We welcome you! All of you different but lovely people into our neighborhood!” (Not once!)

**November 26**: In our A. I. R. meetings we are peacefully confronted with perceptible truths about how our lives struggle daily in an ever threatening society that systematically goes about its unopposed bureaucratic mindlessness with impunity and sacred officialness. We have all been stamped as helpless and useless cogs in a social machinery that knows of no other reality. Our segregation, discrimination, isolation, legalized name calling, and perfunctory bullying are part and parcel of the organizational hypocrisy leveled against us. Our first reactions to A. I. R. revelations just might be, “You’re kidding me!” When our fellow A. I. R. members, who have begun the process of healing and change and growth explain that we can do absolutely nothing ever to change society and its malevolence towards us, they do offer that we can however change ourselves and our perspectives and our reactions over time to really and seriously heal from the destructive forces around us. It’s the bad news, good news, theme of A. I. R. Our present and future work is solely on us, working individually on our own inner awareness, emotions, thought processes, and reactions to “inner and outer” triggers that seem to want to reinforce our old and useless habits of compliance to outside forces and determinations. We can all do better than that. With encouragement and facilitation from our colleagues and our higher power we can succeed with step-by-step progress towards enlightenment and positivity, and claim some healthy self-esteem that has escaped us for years if not decades.

**November 27**: If reaction to the hardness and harshness of life has produced a withdrawal and outward silence in any of us personally, we may end up as adults resembling what an ACA description recounts (from Strengthening My Recovery, pg. 343), “So we have become controlling, stand-offish, closed-minded, over-bearing, painfully shy or awkward, fearful of others, perpetual victims, people pleasers — the list goes on.” The daily hurt and hurting requires built up defenses to ward off the incessant onslaught of abuse resulting in not being able to really and truly trust anybody. We become hyper-sensitive and watchful of any possible attacks from anywhere; and we’ve become lonely in the process without emotional and psychological supports from anything or anyone. Over time the cascading downward into permanent depression and suspicion overwhelms us and prevents any beginnings of possible growth or positivity. The learned negativity (a natural response of survival in an overly hostile world) becomes like active accusatory demons in our heads denying outside contact while supporting our reactive untrusting defensiveness. This is truly a “vicious cycle,” seemingly permanent. But maybe the loneliness becomes more intolerable than the possible anticipated hurts that social involvement could produce. Maybe after too much solitude an attempt at studying the current landscape from a secure distance brings about an awareness of A. I. R. And maybe with cautious questioning and analysis an attempt at coming to a meeting with our full blown quiet defenses raised up and silently raging, a first observation happens; only to discover a gentle open-hearted welcoming, an unexpected exuberant joy coming from other participants, a happiness that was either long forgotten or a happiness we may never have known, and a peaceful confidence we recognize as lacking within us. Is this group and place even possible? We’ve heard stories of sublime oases in the middle of forsaken deserts, or lost Shangri-Las in the middle of the remote inaccessible Kunlun Mountains of Tibet. But this A. I. R. program, right here in the USA, which we can attend without any painful ties, or hurtful stipulations, or twisted requirements is rightfully available. And the people here just simply want to help without infringing on our rights or thoughts or emotions; and they expect nothing from us but our own healing and sense of self-worth? Wow! A secure place unexpected and unlooked for actually exists. We’ve found a new home and a new family. Cheers!

**November 28**: “They say or report that they never intended to hurt us.” Then why did they do it? “It was only meant to be fun and not really serious, the bullying and name calling; it was just a pleasant little social joke, is all.” Then why do we retain these huge and permanent scars that will not go away? “You folks are acting like crybabies, whining all the time.” Maybe because you don’t see or understand the damage and hurt you’ve caused at our expense? “Oh, get over it. Life isn’t fair for any of us. You just think you deserve center stage because you’re all so different. Take a ticket and get in line.” Just a helping hand held out, just a hand held out to help up, just a simple heartwarming smile is all we ever wanted, or needed. “Just fill in the necessary application in full. Use a pen and not a pencil. Please include the proper I. D. information that you’ve brought along with you. Sign and date at the bottom. We’ll get back with you after you’ve been processed. Have a nice day.” No apologies forthcoming. No explanations delivered. No rescue from the madness. No “We‘ll try harder and better next time.” No stopping or termination of the societal steam roller that’s produced our hurtful pasts and continues to produce our futures. Yet in order for us to move on, grow, heal, and succeed, we need to examine what we’ve all been through and somehow forgive what’s been done, forgive ourselves for our survival reactions (if not or ever positive), drop the blame and shame heavy burdens we’ve been carrying to our own detriment for years, decide we can break the chains of abuse and neglect and destruction by ourselves by beginning to practice love and respect and allowance and toleration and compassion, because we can and we must. A. I. R. affords us this precious opportunity to do so, even if it takes the rest of our lives to accomplish.

**November 29**: The A. I. R. program is one of attraction, not promotion. It follows along the lines of “teaching is best done by example and not by preaching.” People should come to know us by our example (how we behave) and not by our words. For “talk” from anyone but an enlightened Master is cheap. And the work in the A. I. R. program is not done or accomplished in a day or a week or a month. Most likely years of intense thought and reflection and meditation and uncovering are required for the necessary transformations to take place from becoming a full-fledged victim to becoming a fellow rescuer and recovered human being. The world’s forces of chaos and confusion are too often the powerful contingencies attempting to undo the creative and loving work presented by A. I. R. and other twelve step programs. The means for becoming a rescued survivor too often take place in a battleground of opposing thoughts ideas and principles. Recovery is a struggle of mastery over the promoters of abuse and irreverence and disenfranchisement. It takes patience and love and acceptance and toleration and compassion, and real serious internal investigation to understand the negative directions we have all internalized from outside authorities that never had our best interests at heart. Pecking away at the accumulated garbage bit by bit does take time and incredible perseverance, but is encouraged from our fellow travelers and our higher power. We are not alone in this journey, as long as we continue to attend and work the work.

**November 30**: We spend an exorbitant amount of time in our adult lives seeking praise and affirmations in an unwholesome attempt to balance out the constant abuse and negativity we have all received; while paying attention to any praise whatsoever for anything positively accomplished is seldom believed by us because the absorbed and entrenched negativity we’ve gotten for always and forever is so overwhelmingly strong and basically unrivaled. It is an unusual dilemma that we believe overwhelmingly all of the negative things said about us and done to us rather than accepting the few positive things said about us and done for us. Praise seems so undeserved while the hurt and memories of abuse and embarrassment linger in our conscious minds like fly paper on a hoard of stuck and attached insects. We dwell on the pervasive horror and not on glimmers of happiness. It might be due to the total lack of security we feel because of the labeling we’ve all been permanently marked with, from which we’ve been unable to sidestep or escape. It might also be because our attempts at doing things so often are public displays of disaster and become laughed-at mistakes as unaccomplished shortfalls. We too often produce what amounts to a comedy of errors seeking out an appropriate circus clown suit of adornment. But in A. I. R., we get to accept our mistakes as part of life’s learning process and a necessary part for growth and development. We then are not daunted by past remarks and painful commentaries from outsiders regarding who and what others may think of us. We become aware of relinquishing judgement of ourselves and others and simply accepting everything about us: the good, the bad, the ugly, and the marvelous, all at once. Our higher power affirms all of who and what we are. We don’t need anything else, really.

**December 1**: When all societal agencies, through medical and academic and psychological testing, have collaboratively concluded that we are retarded (excuse us, intellectually and developmentally disabled), then we had all better act our parts successfully and rigorously and determinedly or else receive unknown, but most probably, heinous reprisals for disobedience. Whether or not we want to, having nothing to do with how street-wise and intelligent we may be (which we naturally keep hidden), we have to keep our best survival skills and self- preservation techniques fully operational while being watched and monitored 24/7 in this Gulag “Ameripelago” that lets us know we are not in control, never have been, and never will be. Perfection in chaos is the backdrop for how we are to behave and to be seen at all times. Our perfected happy smiles and conducively good natures make for great public relations and Hollywood-like documentaries on how well we are being treated and cared for. The “One Flew Over The Cookoos Nest” movie is not about us, but it sure as heck could be. Control, whether stated or simply assumed under the placements into which we have all been dropped, is an ever-present reminder of the authority which directs our every moves, thoughts, emotions, dreams, futures, and expected and required daily roles. What is unusual about A. I. R. programming is that we, who have never had voices to possibly object to how we’ve ever been treated or handled or labeled, are now given full opportunities to voice freely where we’ve all come from and are now given rare validation for all of it. With encouragement from our fellow travelers and our higher power we continue our personal internal explorations willingly in order to grow and become productive of good. It is a huge contrast to where we’ve all come from and an unfortunate reality we never want to return to.

**December 2**: Feelings and emotions that are reactive and derived from years of abuse and neglect from societal determinations of segregation, discrimination, isolation, name calling, and bullying are not the same as voluntarily expressive emotions and feelings spontaneously arising from delightful experiences of camaraderie, fellowship, wholesomeness, acceptance, love, friendship, and calm. It’s basically a one hundred and eighty degree turn from before and after discovering A. I. R. and attending recurring sessions. Beforehand there’s frustration and denial and self-hatred and sadness and loss, and fear and misery; the feelings that accompany a wrongful status and upended position in the world. Unfortunately, the abundance of these negative feelings and emotions, provoked by prolonged societal and environmental circumstances, have become comfortably habitual and are extremely difficult to change or eradicate. It’s why the atmosphere in A. I. R. focuses on patience and gentleness and a state of relaxed calm, knowing that transformation is indeed difficult and requires a lot of time and energy to proceed towards accomplishment. Happiness, joy, love, confidence, and self-motivation are not easily acquired, understood, or even recognized as being possible after a lifetime or decades of mistreatment, abuse, and guarded defensiveness. Too many impulsive reactive instinctual characteristics are set and ready to explode out of our thought and feeling processes when memories of the horrors we’ve lived through exist in our conscious thoughts from living through reactive defensive times and experiences. Life is hard, and recovery from it perhaps even more so. In A. I. R., we are allowed to be expressive emotionally and are provided a “reactive free” sharing time to explore what we’ve been through. It is an odd change from the expected silence we’ve been forced to become conditioned to. At first we can be very tentative, wondering when all hell will break loose by daring to share the very personal and buried and hidden reactions to our miserable pasts. But over time, through listening and observing and contemplating other’s sharings of their pasts, we do begin to become comfortable in these new and strange A. I. R. surroundings. By continuing to attend the meetings we give ourselves the necessary opportunities for changing, growing, and finding our true inner selves, too long buried under defensive reactive self-made walls for survival.

**December 3**: Arriving at A. I. R. is not having come to an end point, a conclusion, a finish line. It is truly a “commencement,” which means a new beginning. While we may be extremely pleased with discovering and beginning to attend these sessions, it may be difficult to realize that our individual happiness is solely derived from our own personal experience and may not be of any interest to our friends, family, colleagues and acquaintances, with whom we’d love to share our new found joys with A. I. R., and what this newly discovered organization has in store for us. We perhaps should put on the breaks when speaking about how great this A. I. R. program truly is, and let everyone else we know discover it for themselves, if the fates, or their higher power, determines it right for them. Our own growth and self- determination and work at delving into our own inner workings are our own single most important priority and will remain so until we arrive at that spiritual awakening point in our development where we can then help and guide others on this path of recovery.

**December 4**: In order to temporarily escape the pains of abuse we often became addicted to a multitude of diversions: shopping, junk food, video games, music, toys, books, collectibles, caffeine products, chocolate, etc. These were all forms of escape that were mildly successful but never totally relieving, such that misery always returned and more often than not with a vengeance. When we arrived at A. I. R., we encountered the dilemma of trying to begin to undo the habitual nature of our diversionary compulsions, which was not at all easy. By removing those unhealthy habits we created a vacuum which had to be filled, and the filling required new unknowns from our higher power called love, and gratitude, and self-awareness, and inner exploration, and compassion, and acceptance, and surrender; all kinds of new things never applied by us to us and for us ever before. These changes only happened over time, slowly, difficultly, deliberately, and somewhat painfully. The work of recovery is not easy, but ever so necessary.

**December 5**: Our own opinions are best provided only to ourselves, and not to anybody else. In other words, our own judgements of things are our own internal perceptions of what’s going on with us. We have our own answers. We probably do not have answers for anyone else. These are the reasons for “no cross talking” during the meetings. Our being present and paying attention and listening are what are important for others who are sharing, not our being vocal about what we think we know. For all of us who are sharing our inmost secrets and personal observations, silence is the best listener and participator we can offer, because any and all comments would most probably be interpreted as a form of criticism. And criticism was what we always got everywhere else when we spoke up about ourselves, which generally shut us down. None of us need perceived criticisms when we are trying to discover our pasts and becoming open to the buried hidden truths about where we’ve come from. We all sincerely want to help each other during our recoveries, but helping is best achieved and provided by simple presence and keeping quiet. It’s what works. Silence and paying attention and witnessing are the best encouragements and assistance we are now able to provide for each other.

**December 6**: Our eyes and ears, which have always worked too well and too sufficiently, for most of us, have been the monkey wrenches in our own dysfunction. We’ve been labeled as very different from those deemed perfectly “normal,” who have received designations and placements and benefits qualitatively different from what their “normal” counterparts (us) have received (for our own good, as we’ve been informed). But all of those wonderful American dreams portrayed on radio and TV and in movies and on Billboards have not escaped our attention. We’ve been told (and virtually warned) to stay in our designated places and behave and act accordingly; and yet we are daily bombarded with ads and pronouncements of what amounts to the “best things” and golden opportunities and unique privileges we should all be striving for. But those gated opportunities are closed off for us, uniformly. However, in A. I. R. we are informed that true happiness, success, and balance are always and simply generated from within, and the offerings of such from outside forces and agencies are nonexistent pipe (as in smoked opium) dreams: illusory, phantasms, and outright lies. Our fellow participants in these A. I. R. meetings will assure us that working the steps under the guidance of our higher power with the encouragement of all of our fellow travelers will be the necessary keys to personal success in achieving full awareness of love and compassion and self-confidence and self-love and humility and confidence; and we need not seek it outside of ourselves.

**December 7**: Aiming at wholeness for all of us is like being blindfolded at night trying to hit a silent moving dart board at 50 paces with an empty squirt gun (We hear you! “But you could throw the empty squirt gun!”). And most of us are at least that resourceful. Anyway, having been labeled who and what we are (and have been) since birth or shortly thereafter (most likely before we could even talk), we probably have little clue about wholeness or perfection or prodigy or even “normal;” our collective self-esteem being somewhere between the bottom of the barrel and below the bottom of the barrel. And the disparity between how the world or agents in society or authority figures view us and how we perceive ourselves might make the Grand Canyon look more like a sidewalk crack. Wholeness is a thing we probably don’t even wish for when blowing out our birthday candles, or throwing a penny in a fountain, or praying and lighting a well-placed candle in church, or placing a baby tooth under a pillow. Such dreams are more like Hollywood thrown away scripts. Our decades-long search for peaceful anonymity rather than wholeness is one of experienced survival rather than center stage notoriety. If we happen to chance upon A. I. R. meetings we may learn that wholeness exists right the heck where we are without having to change a single thing about us; that perfection is a matter of perception left completely 100% up to us and not anyone else; that love and peace and tranquility are available as internal unfoldings we get to experience without having to ask permission to experience them. We work the steps, we try incessantly, and we eventually succeed in the awareness of our divine selves. We’ve had it all, all along, and just weren’t aware of it. Smile, everybody, you’ve earned it!

**December 8**: Self-love is almost an impossibility when one lives entirely in a survival fight or flight mode. The constant terror of abuse and degradation tossed at us systematically and socially wherever we happened to be, verbally, non-verbally, legislatively, literarily, and most often unexpectedly, kept us in a defensive posture of hyper-vigilance almost permanently, unless we succeeded in diverting our conscious attention into well thought out addictive diversions: shopping, collectibles, video games, toys, junk food, music, cell phones, computers, lone exercising, etc. Otherwise, self-love remained a non-existent unknown. Growing up with no other glimpses of long term, stable positivity, nurturing, caring, acceptance, tolerance, compassion, and unconditional love, we struggled always with trying to nail down an identity that wasn’t societally driven, reinforced, or mandated. And there were no safe or balanced middle grounds. Only through finding A. I. R. did we begin to see a way off of the terminal rat race of name calling, bullying, and isolation produced by brutal designations of an academic and legal nature. We were in A. I. R. amongst fellows who had experienced exactly what we had gone through. We would never be alone again. Sharing and listening and working the steps provided a real avenue for our beginning to experience self-love, a far cry from where we had come from, from where we were beginning to evolve.

**December 9**: Having fun takes place when chaos and confusion, the constant warfare of “other over self”, of limitation over expanse, of terror over peace, become so tired and exhausted in battle, that they too must rest and slumber (it happens occasionally), and stop temporarily their madness. Only then can fun emerge out of hiding and begin to dance and sing and frolic, ever cautious of the temporary joy within limited timeliness. Fun seems just like that to an always wary victim of societal torture and denigration. We who have been systematically brutalized unceasingly do not recall fun as a thing of joy or positive possibility. It has seldom preoccupied us, ever. We pretend of course very warily and cautiously to have fun when we’re not. Our fake smiles and laughter exist more out of hysteria than joy, for what is joy to us but sleep or solitude or being temporarily forgotten about, when a “negative within a negative” almost seems like a “positive”, even though it’s not. Though fun may be a luxury we observe from a distance enjoyed by “normals” (sometimes even at our own expense), we are not invited to attend or participate ever. We aren’t even the last chosen in a pickup game, nor invited to popular party celebrations, nor allowed in set social functions where it is suspected we might act up or act out (though we wouldn’t out of fear of certain reprisals). In A. I. R. fun is something suggested as a replacement for survivalist diversionary preoccupations; those obnoxious things we developed and used to focus on whatever removed the ever-present pains we lived through and with. Fun? What’s that? You mean we can? We’re allowed? Since when? Yes, we’re allowed. It’s ok now. Here we can try to be what we’ve never known we could be before. Here’s some Kleenex!

**December 10**: It’s very difficult to argue with direct experience, when the virtual imprisonment of labels, where medical, legal, and educational designations, perpetually reinforce the “less thans,” and the “worse thans,” and the “not good enoughs.” There are few “wish lists” of everyday extravagances, or mindlessly useless rich kid’s play things, that we imagine could be ours. We would just be simply overjoyed to experience common-place mundane things that “normals” take for granted. Respect, unconditional love, and inclusion in everyday occurrences and happenings would be so marvelous if their absences were somehow to proceed unnoticed. It’s like that old 1960s Hippie song statement, “I’ve been down so long, it looks like up to me.” (Nancy Sinatra and Lee Hazlewood, 1968). Our status and station in life has never been overly kind to us. We carry our zoo without a cage around with us wherever we go, and admissions are free to all observers. We should all wear T-shirts emblazoned front and back with, “Yes, this is us. That’s who we are! If you had any doubts!” So, A. I. R. Is that rare oasis in a mad, mad, mad, mad world that eclipses normal life for us, who are conditioned to view it from afar, or from a less than shallow distance of extreme compromise. We’re allowed only that which society deems we should deserve, and that’s always proclaimed by a collective vote from an unknown out-of-reach committee (and for our own good). But A. I. R. allows us to be exactly who we are and what we are without judgment of any kind. And we are all encouraged to pursue an inward journey of awareness and enlightenment forever. Just keep attending and listening and sharing and doing the quiet and peaceful and methodical work for as long as we are able.

**December 11**: Do we place ourselves last by focusing on others and their wants and needs, or have we been placed last due to our categorized and worthless differences? It could be a reasonable combination of both, resulting from a numbed acceptance due to the overwhelming odds and power of the forces behind our classifications. We never had a fighting chance to put forth any objections to our demeaned status, as all adult-like levels of responsibility or authority would never have been allowed or been recognized for anyone in our quarter. So we accommodated to all others and whatever whims they considered priorities as we and our needs or wants or means of interest were nonexistent or invisible. Who would have bothered to ask? What was that old abusive but hilarious observation: “You make a better door than a window?” We were both silent and silenced, quiet and quieted, self-blaming and blamed, self-shaming and shamed, and we went along with anything and everything happening to us like a lone unattached leaf, floating upturned, down a stream as casually as a mite of dust hovering between gusts of wind, unobserved and so unnecessary. We were just simple unobtrusive changeless scenery in time, wherever we happened to be, and accepted like old and obvious furniture in our household landscapes. But if we chanced, upon entering an A. I. R. meeting, we were welcomed because we mattered. Whatever we were, or happened to be, we were considered vital. Our inner beliefs and thoughts and feelings had substance and meaning and were worthy of recognition. This is what home and life and society should have been like all along! But at least we are here now where we should be, amongst people who thoroughly understand us and have walked the same paths in similar shoes. Blessings and love to all present.

**December 12**: Come to think of it, there may not be (at the moment) any other Self Help programs especially designed for folks with disabilities. If there are, God Bless them. It does seem like it’s been quite a long time coming and maybe a whole lot overdue that we finally have this A. I. R. program to assist with accepting and elevating everyone desiring to learn how to change and augment their lives into a healthier space. And life is such that people come and go for a variety of healthy and unhealthy reasons, all due to crucial or even critical circumstances beyond anyone’s control. Even very healthy stations like A. I. R. are simply steppingstones into a better future and not terminal end points outside of growth and development. The only thing absolutely constant in life is “change”; and if life’s a classroom, then moving on because of dropping out or graduating is primal to any establishment where learning takes place. So life is like a constantly flowing and evolving river: sit back, and enjoy the ride and the view. We are all in one heck of an interdependent boat ride that knows somehow how to steer itself. Blessings to and for one and all.

**December 13**: “🎼🎹Oh I wish I was an Oscar Mayer Weiner; for that is what I’d truly like to be-ee-ee; for if I was an Oscar Mayer Weiner, I wouldn’t have to heal Society!🎹🎼” For way too many of us, before we ever knew of A. I. R., we had it in mind that we had to be the ones to change or fix or remove or undo the perpetrators of our abuse and denigration somehow; and clearly some agents representing society at large were the authors of our regretful labeling, segregation, discrimination, isolation, bullying, and indecent placements apart from the mainstream, where we could watch with envying curiosity how everyone “normal” benefitted from privilege, of which we were never allowed or encouraged to partake. And we sure as hell didn’t create the insanity, but we sure as hell were the victims of it. But in and through A. I. R. we learn that fixing anything outside of ourselves never has been nor is now our responsibility. Our only duty is working on ourselves to become better and healthier and more loving and compassionate and insightful and tolerant and beneficial to all others struggling with the misperceptions and misunderstandings of longstanding abuse and neglect. We are healers of ourselves, first and foremost. Detachment from previous pains and memories helps the growth process, one deliberate step at a time.

**December 14**: “Hurry, hurry, ladies and gentlemen, to the greatest show on earth, the quintessential display of unnecessary, but classic codependency of victims and victimizers, this side of the Great pyramid of Giza, the River Nile, and the unmistakably perplexing Riddle of the ancient Sphinx of Egypt. Come one, come all, and get your tickets right here, first come, first serve, for an unmistakable chance at a peek of self-imposed and self- inflicted horror and treachery, of the self-imposed ridicule and unforgettable, unmistakable, yet irreplaceable benefits of down and out misery and tragedy. Yes, folks, right here in this one of a kind booth, from the sewers of Paris France, a five star glorification of homeless, bottomless, self-immolated wreckage of refusal, denial, and hopelessness, the all-time winner of success through failure, and only for a single quarter of a measly dollar. Yes, friends, you too can embrace the ill fortune of misbegotten happenstance, right before our very eyes, and welcome all of the unforgettable charm of unleashed despondency for the sake of futureless victimhood and unrivaled masochism. And all it takes is circumstantial quitting in the face of A. I. R. opportunism. And the limitless, horizonless lines are already forming. What an imaginary display of forgettable nonsense!”……..However, A. I. R. may perhaps present a more profitable and positive entrance into a better future where victimization and victimhood can be exchanged for a thriving life where happiness and joy are forever abounding. Step right Up!

**December 15**: Promises, promises, promises…pro-misses, pro-misses, pro-misses. There’s not a lot of difference. Balance is everything….balance in everything. There’s not a lot of difference there either. Remember this folks, A. I. R. is just a beginning. The real work starts here, and it’s progressive and unending. But at least we’ve been fortunate enough to have been led to a safe place to where we can all begin the work. Not everyone gets that opportunity. For every one person who discovers A. I. R. (Or any other beneficial 12-step program), there are at least nine other lost souls out there who never come to it or find it. Recovery is only possible or even necessary after a disease (dis-ease): a lifetime of unfortunate circumstances that have allowed for dysfunction in so many areas of our lives. Humiliation, shaming, blaming, and embarrassment are just the obvious effects and subsequent reactions to segregation, discrimination, isolation, name calling, and bullying. And the retribution for objecting or complaining can be far worse. Life only presents us with recovery after we’ve all been handed difficulties and problems which we need to (and have to) overcome. It’s like that childhood game, “Mother, May I?” We are handed opportunities for moving forward or backward, staying still or running, and all for the experience of learning. We are not exempt from life’s trials: before A. I. R., during A. I. R., or after A. I. R. But through A. I.  R. we discover the loving presence of our higher power who will lead us and guide us through whatever present and future trials we may encounter; and that awareness is a monstrously huge benefit…. “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou [Higher Power] art with me…” Not a bad companion to have under any and all circumstances, hahahaha!

**December 16**: Perhaps the biggest hindrance to opening up even at A. I. R. meetings, let alone anywhere else, and sharing intimate details of life and school and family histories, is the fear of retribution, reprisals, payback, or receiving further, more intense, difficulties. Trust, for all of us in this multi various disability population, is terribly difficult to acquire. We’ve all been “burned” way too often in our pasts. We may not even know how to share, or how to examine our own inmost feelings, or explain what motivates us to think, behave, or feel. If we’ve hidden from ever saying anything publicly, there’s a great chance our inner workings have also been hidden from our conscious deliberations, in other words, ourselves. Constant abuse from every angle of societal channels and collaborative agencies towards all of us labeled “different” leaves permanent disarrangements of being and consciousness that are almost impossible to recover from, let alone cohesively describe. In a way we’ve all become unconsciously mute due to the pervasive assaults on our simply being the essential much needed targets for everyone other than us. A. I. R. encourages us to communicate and express who we are and what we’ve been through. It may be quite a long time before we are trusting enough to open up. Listening to others is what helps to unleash our tied-up insides.

**December 17**: Feelings are more often than not reactions to both internal and external phenomena, experiences, and circumstances. They are positive, negative, mixed, and are basically instinctive, reactive, and uncontrollable, erupting spontaneously to the stimuli that promotes and elicits them. It is no wonder then that most of us in the disability community, having been unfortunately socially ostracized and denigrated in the process of interaction or confrontation, have reacted somewhat negatively to most displays from outside ourselves when confronted by negative comments, non-verbal expressions, name calling, and the inciting and coaxing of bullying and taunting. It is also not at all surprising that we attempted to eventually bury our reactive feelings rather than expose them, as our reactions to these past horrors invariably produced more laughter, hostilities, abuse, and unimaginable and unforgivable pains that never went away. Attending A. I. R. meetings naturally brings out of the past and our self-imposed crypts too many hurtful buried memories that require evisceration, exposure, and removal before real healing can take place. The process is excruciating and doubly devastating, having to relive what was first and foremost unbearable. Only through the loving support of our fellow travelers and the undeniable unconditional love of our higher power are we able to suffer through the transformative healing process to emerge healthier than we’ve ever been before.

**December 18**: The introduction to A. I. R. comes from a slowly developing internal awareness and realization that our own lives are completely out of control and that there must be (felt emphatically) a better way of living than what we’ve become horrendously accustomed to. A. I. R. produces in all of us initially a tremendous amount of hope and exhilaration, with feelings of potential and possibility and excitation. We seem to be on the verge of greatness and openness and discovery, internal as well as external. However, this initial joyful experience of ours becomes somewhat dampened when we see around us so many others who could benefit from exactly what we have discovered, but they are not ready, have not “hit rock bottom”, have not realized what we have found out: that there must be a better way. Way too many are seemingly irretrievably lost in the confines of their own dysfunction and do not see themselves or their circumstances properly at all. It produces both an overwhelming sadness for their plight, but also an uneasy gratitude that we were lucky enough to have found this unusual and extraordinary path. We can do little but hope and pray fervently that their time will come, if that is what is meant for them, and that by our living as examples of these new possibilities we can be lights on the path for others without having to proselytize or preach or castigate or denigrate. Love from a reserved distance is still love and all powerful.

**December 19**: How much current behavior is sanctioned through ancient and mystified and ritualized stupidity? We who have been declared different and unfit and “less than” and abnormal (there are tons more historical and inappropriate names attributed to all of us) are castigated regularly for what we seem to be in “Society’s eyes”. Today, wherever we are, whatever venue we are placed in, whatever we are expertly trying to accomplish or mistakenly trying to accomplish, we are “scapegoats.” Ever wonder about that word “scapegoats?”

 From an online source here’s an explanation: “The concept of the "scapegoat" is in the Bible, in Leviticus, as part of the ritual of atonement. The word "scape-goat" itself, though, did not appear until 1530, according to *The Oxford English Dictionary*: "In the Mosaic ritual of the Day of Atonement (Lev. xvi), that one of two goats that was chosen by lot to be sent alive into the wilderness, the sins of the people having been symbolically laid upon it, while the other was appointed to be sacrificed." That first goat escaped death, though it was loaded with sin. Since "scape" was merely a spelling variation of "escape," it was, literally, an "escape goat." Maybe "escaped goat" would be more grammatically correct, but no matter. Perhaps, one could say, it was a goat on the lam. (Sorry. Couldn't resist.) It wasn't until the first quarter of the nineteenth century, though, that people began to carry the sins of others.” *Merrill Perlman*

Perhaps we are both of these two goats. One is the “sin eater” (sent off into the wilderness, or discriminated against, or segregated, or isolated, or institutionalized, or made invisible) and the other is sacrificed (or crucified, or castigated, or blamed, or shamed, or publicly humiliated). Yup! We’re both: “Scapegoats” for sure. And as scapegoats we were always blamed for everything going wrong, so of course we grew up trying to fix everything…except ourselves (which would be simply stopping to try and fix everything, relaxing, calming down, and becoming content with being exactly who we are without having to change a thing except our perception of ourselves, for we are ok and fine and perfect, exactly as we are and have been, AMEN!

**December 20**: “Diversions” is a strange word (from an online dictionary source) : “an activity that diverts the mind from tedious or serious concerns; a recreation or pastime.” The possible implications of which are: “The meaning of DIVERSION is the act or an instance of diverting or straying from a course, activity, or use: deviation.” These comments from an online dictionary: [Diversion Definition & Meaning - Merriam-Webster](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/diversion)

We also have a biblical comment: Matthew 7:13-14 KJV: “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.”

And we who suffer from outrageous abuses from childhood (and on into adulthood) try to “divert” our attention from the daily pains by seeking “diversions” in order to escape the pain of abuses: junk food, caffeine, chocolate, sugar, video games, TV, music, cell phones, toys, collectibles, isolation, exercise, etc. So, “diversions” can be very useful and beneficial for a while, because needing to escape from the effects of abuse are for our survival and therefore a great necessity. However, once attending A. I. R., with the new need to seriously explore our pasts and delve into the pains and abuses to see where we came from and how we got to where we are now, dropping some or all of the diversionary activities might be required to concentrate on the new inward study and exploration. “Whattaya think?”

**December 21**: Grief is a normal reaction to the loss of a loved one, but for folks like us, it can also be the loss or disappearance of our own perceived self-images or self-concepts through brutalization and terrorization from societal agents intending for us to conform to pre-determined academic and medical standards without our permission or consent (the pounding of square pegs into round holes). And grief for us can also entail the emotional effects from segregation, discrimination, isolation, name calling, bullying, and “separate, but unequal” placements in every public and private venue everywhere. And if we don’t talk about our experiencing of grief and loss, for fear of reprisals, then they will continue unnoticed and become gradually permanently scarring. With unresolved grief comes the loss of identity, that sense of security and confidence that is necessary for self-worth and productivity in life. Our lives then become as meaningless as the original expectations of our primary diagnoses that suspected, expected, envisioned, and upheld who we were anticipated to be. We then became, inadvertently, our own self-fulfilling prophecies. But for whose convenience? In A. I. R., we attempt to understand how all of this chaos surrounding us and within us could possibly have come to be. It may take the rest of our lives to sort it all out. Somebody, please wish us luck! We’ll need all of the good wishes of our fellow travelers and the blessings and love from our higher power to see us through!

**December 22**: There it is! A new goal to strive for, a new success, a new perfection. Did we receive any praise for the last attempt, regardless of how futile or imperfect or deranged? We weren’t paying attention! Endings are just overlapping beginnings, never quitting, never stopping, on and on we go. I’ll get this one right this time for sure! We can if we try real hard to erase all of the past’s: “you’re not good enough,” “you’ll never amount to anything,” “you’re the laziest kid God ever blew breathe into I swear,” “if I have to tell you once I have to tell you a thousand times,” “what the heck is wrong with you?” “If I have to come over there you’re gonna get it,” “you’re such an embarrassment, you know that?” “For crying’ out loud,” “whad I tell ya?” “Do I have to explain myself all over again?” So we try and try and never quit trying, to do anything right, to blot out the constant barrage of complaints; and we’re just waiting for just one complement to our faces, when we hear how great we are that’s said in front of strangers or neighbors, when we hear none of that to our faces ever. In A. I. R. it’s explained to us, slowly, gently, calmly, repeatedly, “You can quit trying to impress anyone. You’re fine just the way you are. For once you can stop and pay attention to yourself. You can take a good long slow hard look inwards and examine why you behave the way you do. You can listen to others here share their very similar stories and hear their explanations.” Everything you see and feel and think and do has all been done and said before, so you’re not alone and you never have been.

**December 23**: Forgiveness of oneself and forgiveness of others go hand in hand. These deliberate willing actions are extremely difficult to attempt to process or understand when the entire world is built and established upon litigation, courts, lawyers, judges, prosecutors, defenders, juries, trials, evidence, blame, retribution, sentencing, punishment, and prisons. What moral and ethical principles are founded in forgiveness? For those of us who have been brutalized by systemic misrepresentation, misunderstanding, and collective categorization to our own detriment, we are not overly encouraged by our experiences to be or become naturally forgiving. But regardless of societal directives and discussions, forgiveness is the door and the key for us to open into a pathway of love, compassion, acceptance, toleration, understanding, faithfulness, loyalty, and trust. It provides for the “everything is possible” witnessing to then become routine. And healing for us requires that we begin by forgiving ourselves for following what should never have been allowed as guideposts for our existence. Forgiving others for having misunderstood us and mistreated us is a bit easier then. But also forgiveness needs to become an ongoing aspect of our full recovery and should be daily employed when necessary. Step by crucial step we walk this path.

**December 24**: Why would my little teeny tiny itty bitty single opinion about myself be enough to stave off a Goliath declaration from society about who and what I am? I’ve never had (or been allowed to have) any faith in my own judgments about myself or anything else. “Well, that’s what they said, anyway!” We may not be able to change society’s well established (over a few millennia) doctrines and opinions about us nor their basically immoral behavior (though nonetheless, legal) towards us [though ever changing, if it’s looked at objectively over time], we can alter our perceptions about ourselves and any subsequent but related behaviors regarding such. Unfortunately, our thought processes and behaviors that are purely survivalist are definitely habitual over (probable) decades, and are just very, very hard to change and get away from. It’s hard work; (excuse us) it’s very, very hard work, and takes time and energy and resourcefulness and support (huge amounts). But it’s possible to change and grow and develop confidence and self-reliance and good habits for a change. As Captain Quincy Taggart states so magnificently in the Movie “Galaxy Quest,” “Never give up! Never surrender!”

**December 25**: “You can find serenity in A. I. R., but guess what, you can also find serenity in yourselves. Love, peace, and balance all exist within the heart. It is a path found in meditation, in the quiet and peace of acceptance, and “letting go;” that surrender to a higher power who will direct everything (literally) from now on. It is a very slow but profitable experiencing of growth and expansion and elevation. It is a never-ending practice in faith. It is knowing that regardless of difficulties, trials, and back sliding (all for the education of it all), we are on the right path, and continuing makes perfect. Merry Christmas!

**December 26**: Self forgiveness, self-love, self-respect, and self-esteem are all so inter-related that choosing to follow this A. I. R. path seems to engender all of them together and all at once. And although the work is hard and at times we seem so lost and alone, we have fellow travelers with whom we can connect to sort out the difficulties and trials. A poem here perhaps describes some of it:

“I’m sharing and presenting and I’m scared

like nothing sane. I’m worried that my words

offend in ways I can’t explain. What’s spared

may not be worth a lot and for the birds

or worse. But if I share what’s really true

my words may seem adverse. We all do walk

a fine line here describing pasts askew.

Our pains may act as triggers and our talk

may be taboo. Our healing can be pain-

ful and our helping may seem rough. But heal-

ing’s just as painful as the wounds so plain-

ly tough. Our remedies aren’t kind, but real,

we need all hands that serve. We all deserve

what’s love and light, but starting takes some nerve.”

Here we really need to be gentle with ourselves moving forward. Meditating, self-inquiry, patience, listening, reading the literature, all help uncover the hidden memories buried during modes of survival. We need to also begin trusting our intuition, and praying that our higher power forever leads us to better discoveries in our recovery. And self-forgiveness provides the acceptance of our good and bad traits, our successes and failures, our progress and our back sliding, our internal and external observations along with our futile judgments. We are divine human souls residing in flawed material vehicles, and that’s all ok.

**December 27**: Journaling by writing or typing, or using a voice recorder, if that’s easier, or even using non-dominant hand writing as an exercise to dig up past thoughts, dreams, memories, and feelings are all possible tools we can use in our recovery. What works for one may not work for another. There’s no set curriculum or system of short cuts or “set in stone” methodologies required. And progress is always at a pace suitable for each individual choosing their own methods of discovery within recovery. The one person we are trying to please and help with our efforts is our individual self and no one else (look in a mirror). This is not a graded course. It’s not even scored as “pass/fail.” There’s no clock. There’s no buzzer. There’s no screaming paying audience. But our resilient loving supporters are our patient fellow travelers and our higher power who assist with our self-love and self-forgiveness.

**December 28**: As A. I. R. is a program designed as a self- motivated and self-generated path for recovery and healing, it seems appropriate to look at the origins of the word “therapy” and go down to its roots for suggestions and accommodations:

(From an online A. I. rendering)

“The Greek word therapeia (θεραπεία) means "service or attendance" and can refer to a variety of things, including:

Treatment or cure: A service rendered to humans in the form of treatment or cure

Household service: A service rendered in the home, such as by servants, domestics, or attendants

 Service to the gods: A service rendered to the gods

Holistic healing: A term that encompasses all aspects of healing, as the ancient Greeks believed in the interconnectedness of the mind, body, and spirit

 The word therapeia comes from the Greek verb therapeuo (θεραπεύω), which means "to serve" or "to attend to". In Greek mythology, the gods were often associated with therapeutic practices, such as Apollo, the Greek god of healing.

The adjective therapeutic comes from the Greek word therapeutikos, which is derived from therapeuein, meaning “to attend” or “to treat” “

So, self-analysis and self-exploration are vital aspects of this A. I. R. lifetime adventure, and whether or not any of us seek outside therapy services, our own sense of self determination requires a modicum or a lot of self-therapy and self-healing, in order to address the issues that have brought us individually and collectively to A. I. R. for relief. So, outside therapy, other than self-therapy, is simply another possible recovery tool available to us if we choose to attempt that route (it is an individual choice always, and never an outside or organizational recommendation). All of the work in and through A. I. R. then is considered essentially “therapy,” and with very sound reasoning.

**December 29**: Apart from the somewhat strict structure of all A. I. R. meetings, with the recitation of the Serenity Prayer, the Problem, the Laundry List, the Solution, the A. I. R. Twelve Steps, the Twelve Traditions, and the time for individual sharings (with the “No Cross Talking” permitted), followed by affirmations volunteered by any and all present, we do allow for and encourage, before scheduled meetings and after scheduled meeting times, open social interactions for members to gather and speak freely about their lives and dreams and aspirations and challenges with definite feedback for group and individual reinforcement and encouragement. Blind searching for means and methods is seldom profitable or successful, and personal heart to heart connections can be so vital and necessary. The only personal touch of establishing friendships can be a mainstay of the success of this A. I. R. program. We all welcome such crucial benefits. And so does our higher power.

**December 30**: Anonymity is a very necessary and vital part of A. I. R. We are obligated to remember and consider that this path of recovery is a personal and private choice for members to join or leave at any time. It is a self- therapeutic journey requiring a high level of personal privacy and intended secrecy, as the issues, memories, experiences, and sensitive recollections often divulge extremely difficult renderings and courageous disclosures. To honor ourselves and all of our fellow travelers, we must all practice serious anonymity of “shared everything” from the meetings. “WHAT HAPPENS AT THE MEETINGS STAYS AT THE MEETINGS.” This must be honored and respected and upheld, or the sincerity and usefulness of the meetings is jeopardized. We are all here to recover. Let us not violate that for ourselves or for others who are dedicated to their and our survival and our unfolding!

**December 31**: “Keep coming back! It works, if you work it; and you’re worth it.” This old series of 12-step affirmations, admonishments, advisings, platitudes, and directives are there to reinforce the intensity and difficulty of participation in this vital 12 step program. We are not losers and never have been. We are not rejects, and never have been. We are human beings with a great deal more to offer than society has ever expected or believed in or recognized. Our A. I. R. program is here to help us establish our God Given Rights to exist, lovingly, peacefully, courageously, and perfectly, being and accepting who we are, and exactly as who we are.  We are not alone and we are capable of amazing feats of bravery and accomplishment, in all areas and venues we choose to become participants in, or not (our choices). Our recovery from the misrepresentations of and about us are squarely in our own hands and are a matter of our own personal perspectives, not anyone else’s. Our voices will never again be silenced, nor will we allow them to be so. We will learn from each other to be more loving, compassionate, tolerant, forgiving, accepting, and understanding. We may even lead the way for these accomplishments of decency.

**February 29**: How odd is it that we are here celebrating a day that only comes by once every four years? A neglected day, an off-rhythm day, not completely rejected, nor completely invisible. A last-ditch effort to correct (maybe) the earth’s wobbling waltz around the sun with its dance partner, The Moon: a little bit, but not quite, circular, revolution around the sun, with varying degrees of not quite perfect flow. You see where we’re going with this? We are all a part of Earth’s and society’s wobbling effort at perfection and synchronicity. We, who dance with our “normal” partners as “abnormal” participants in this awkward bounding around through dysfunctional aberration, are simply trying wholeheartedly to fulfill our part in the involuntary bargain. We’re here. The music’s playing. Are we a part of this glorious dysfunction called life or not? What do we have to do to get your inglorious attention? Or do we remain like that marvelous Mel Brooks scene in the movie “Blazing Saddles” where the segregated African American wagon train family remains alone by themselves, futilely and defeatedly circling their own wagon in vain in the middle of a sage brushed cactus landscaped wilderness? We’re fine. How are you?

﻿**Permissions Requested and Permissions Granted:**

Greetings from the General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous, US/CA,

I received your email as it is my responsibility to respond to inquiries regarding the use of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. (A.A.W.S.) intellectual property – its copyrighted material, registered trademarks, and domain names.

Thank you for sending us your request. We would have no objection to your adaptation of the Twelve Steps being used for your new fellowship, Adults in Recovery (“A.I.R.”). We would ask that you reprint the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous in their original form, after your adapted version when publishing, and that you use the following attribution/disclaimer:

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If at some point you elect to translate the Steps into a particular language, we would ask that you notify us of your intent, in writing. Please let me know if you have any questions.

I hope that this has been helpful.

Sincerely,

Drew Deetz

Intellectual Property Administrator

General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous

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[www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org/)

Alcoholics Anonymous                                                                                                                                                       7/23/24
World Services
475 Riverside Drive West
11th floor
120th Street, New York, NY

10115

Dear Beverly,

I have spent the better part of the last 54 years in the fields of intellectual and developmental disabilities (ID & DD) and am currently working part time as a literacy acquisitions instructor at a very progressive adult day program for ID and DD individuals in Brook Park, Ohio, USA, a suburb of Cleveland (Inclusion Works, 5855 Smith Road Brook Park, Ohio: <https://inclusionworksoh.org/>).

I am also an ACOA (adult children of alcoholics) past attender of weekly Zoom conference calls (Healing Hearts, ACOA, Medina, Ohio) and have written extensively on being an ACOA.

I have written a prospective 12-step program for the individuals at the day program and would like to request permission to adopt this “piggy-backed” version for folks with disabilities. Those in the United States labeled with ID and DD have experienced a lifetime of isolation, abuse, segregation, disenfranchisement, and discrimination from a society that summarily misunderstands and denigrates those with differences. Therefore, making a 12-step program for these persons becomes an obviously purposeful necessity, not only for the current 22 individuals whom I serve, but also for the 8 million plus citizens with diagnoses of ID and DD in this country.  Please review my enclosed proposal and consider this as a request to be included in the amazing umbrella of services that you have generously provided for other spin-off 12-step programs.

As my enclosed draft will most probably be a work in progress, I will of course provide you with updates as time goes on as to more details and writings as they are introduced into the monthly meetings and discussions for our clientele at Inclusion Works.

Please respond with any and all questions, comments, suggestions, and criticisms which will make this promising adventure feasible and productive.

Blessings,

Tom Gilbert
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Parma Heights Ohio 44130
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Specialty Services Coordinator
NCC Solutions, Inc.
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**A Twelve Step Program:**

**A.I.R.**

**Adults In Recovery**

Hello, my name is Tom. Welcome to the Inclusion Works meeting of Adults In Recovery (A.I.R.)

We meet to share the stories of our lives: the good things and the not-so-good things that we remember, growing up in a world that may not have treated us kindly, or well. By studying the 12 steps and learning about the Solutions, and thinking about God and love, maybe we can understand better where we are now and how to move forward successfully. By facing the hard times of our pasts we can grow, one day at a time, and find peaceful solutions moving forward.

Will you please join me in a moment of silence followed by our “Serenity Prayer?”

**God,**

**Grant me the Serenity to love those people I cannot change,**

**The Courage to love all those I see,**

**And the Wisdom to love especially me.**

Can anyone please read The Problem or the Laundry List?

**The Problem**

Many of us have become aware that we all have several traits in common, as a result of being labeled different. In many ways we feel isolated, and uneasy at times with other people. We’ve been made fun of, bullied, laughed at, abused, pushed aside or away. So we have learned to over- react to criticism, negativity, name calling. We try to escape or leave when these things happen. And life can be too hard and uncomfortable and stressful when these things happen. Sometimes we withdraw into our own worlds and thoughts and interests, and give up trying to be a part of group experiences. It’s often been really hard making and keeping friends.

We’ve lived lives like victims, always defensive, seldom happy. We prefer to think about lots of other things in the world and not think about ourselves. We feel guilty when we have troubles with other people and think that it is always our fault that we don’t seem to get along. We have learned not to stand up for ourselves, as that seems to make things way worse. We are overly dependent on others for so many things in life, and often are not allowed to make up our own minds or have our own decisions; and we always seem to wait for help with everything, even things we need. We will do almost anything to hold onto relationships, even if we suffer in those relationships. We are always worried about being left behind, or even abandoned, and we try to please people, so we won’t be left behind or abandoned. And we are always hoping to love and be loved, when too much of our past experiences have not been finding love or being able to love. Too many of the problems we experience are actually Society’s problems: rejections, misunderstandings, abuses, neglectful reactions, and above all, discouragement for us to be accepted for who we are; for we are who we are, and that won’t or can’t change. In the world, our thoughts and feelings remain hidden too often, and we’re not allowed to truly express what’s really deep inside. We are here to express who we are, share who we are, without fear of criticisms or hate or abuse, or name calling, and we are here to recognize and acknowledge and accept the same exact feelings and hurts and wholesome desires in all of our fellow travelers who are here with us today.

**The Laundry List**

These are characteristics we seem to have in common due to being brought up in a society which daily delivers misunderstandings, dysfunctional perceptions, and misguided expectations.

1. We become isolated and afraid of people and persons in authority.
2. We become approval seekers and lose our identities in the process.
3. We are frightened by angry people (even by our peers) and any personal criticism.
4. We become withdrawn, and associate with others who are withdrawn, or find unusual compulsive behaviors or interests to try to fulfill our sad abandonment needs.
5. We live life from the viewpoint of victims and are attracted by that circumstance in our love and friendship relationships.
6. We have a lifetime awareness of betrayal, and it is easier for us to be concerned with others, and with compulsive interests, rather than focusing on ourselves, which enables us not to look too closely at our own circumstances.
7. We get guilt feelings and become afraid when we stand up for ourselves instead of giving in to others and those in authority.
8. We become addicted to passively watching all excitement.
9. We confuse love with pity, concern, and feeling sorry for us, and tend to love people who feel and act responsible for our welfare.
10. We have stuffed our feelings away from our awareness due to the trauma of our daily lives; and we have lost the ability to feel or express our feelings because it hurts so much, and is so uncomfortable.
11. We judge ourselves harshly and have a very low sense of self-esteem.
12. We are dependent personalities who are terrified of abandonment and will do anything to hold onto a relationship in order not to experience painful abandonment feelings, which we received from living daily in an uncaring society which was and is always discouraging, isolating, discriminating, abusive, and unresponsive.
13. Segregation is a societal disease, and we became cooperatively “segregational” and took on the characteristics of the labels society has given us, even though we never realized we had a choice in the decisions.
14. We have become reactors rather than actors.

Can someone please read the Solution?

**The Solution**

The Solution is to become our own voices, our own decision makers, our own responsible persons.

As A.I.R. (“Adults In Recovery”) becomes a safe place for us we will find freedom to express all the hurts and fears we have kept inside ourselves, and to learn how to become free from the shame and blame that were placed on us from our pasts. We will become persons who are imprisoned no longer by Society’s “Expectations of Limitations.” We will recover the persons within us, learning to accept and love ourselves.

The healing begins when we risk moving out of isolation. Feelings and buried memories will return (or resurface). By gradually and positively releasing the burdens of unexpressed and untold grief, we slowly move out of Society’s “Expectations of Limitations.” We learn to promote ourselves with gentleness, humor, love, and respect.

This process allows us to see Society as a possible or potential goal or destination for “belonging”; but, also as that uncaring force that has daily declared that we should not belong, nor seek belonging.

Our actual source of belonging is that higher power we call God. Although we live in a dysfunctional society, our higher power has given us the 12 steps of recovery.

This is the action and the work that heals us. We use the steps, we use the meetings, we use our voices. We share our experiences, our strengths, and our hopes with each other. We learn how to change our thinking and feeling one day at a time. When we recognize Society’s inability to direct or motivate our actions and thoughts today, we become free to make healthful decisions as self-empowered and self-motivated responsible and responsive persons, We progress from hurting, to healing, to participating. We awaken to a sense of wholeness we never knew was possible.

By attending these meetings on a regular basis, we will come to see Societal Dysfunction for what it is: a diseased mindset that has infected us as children, and continues to affect us as adults. We will learn to keep the focus on ourselves, in the here and now. We will take responsibility for our own lives and supply our own motivations for positive growth.

We will not do this alone. Look around now and see others who know exactly how we feel. We will love and encourage all no matter what. We all ask to be accepted, just as we accept all others in and outside of this group. This is a spiritual program, based on action coming from love. We are sure that as love grows inside us, we will see beautiful changes in all our relationships, especially with God, ourselves, and our families and friends.

Can someone please read the Twelve Steps?

**The A.I.R. Twelve Steps**

1. We admitted that we are powerless over the effects of Society’s misunderstandings, dysfunctional perceptions, and misguided expectations. That our lives seem to be unmanageable.
2. We arrive at a place where we believe that a power greater than ourselves can restore us to sanity and peace.
3. We make daily decisions to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God.
4. We all take a serious look at our own plans, our decisions, our choices to see if these are our own choices, or if we are doing and saying things just to please others, and whether or not these choices are good.
5. We admit to God and to ourselves, and to our friends and families when we have said and done things that were wrong.
6. We ask God to remove any and all defects or problems **of character**,those chosen things we have adopted into our lives that do not serve us to do and be good.
7. We humbly ask God to remove all of our shortcomings, our faults, our bad choices.
8. We sit and think about people we have not treated well, and we then put together a list of those we have harmed, and set about calling them, or writing to them, or speaking directly to them to apologize and make things right.
9. And we try to fix things with those we have done harm to, unless trying to do so would produce more or greater harm to them or to others.
10. And we continue to question our own choices to make sure we do not backslide into former or previous directions or patterns, which we know now have caused harm to me and to others. And if we do wrong, we are now aware of it, and we admit it, so we can continue to change for the good.
11. And we seek in prayer to improve our awareness of God and become better aware of God’s daily intentions for us, and we are willing to work hard at making daily personal progress and improvements.
12. We are having a spiritual awakening and awareness as a result of these steps that we are doing and practicing, and we will try to carry these messages we have learned here to others we know and love, and to practice these daily skills in all of our relationships.

We will now ask someone to read from our own version of “A.I.R., The Adults in Recovery Daily Handbook of Lessons,” relating to the specific day relating to this day of our meeting [The Weekly lessons are finished and available and can be used in order or out of order depending on what the meeting consensus is].

You may have related to our readings even if there was no apparent discrimination or segregation in your own home. This may be common because the dysfunction of segregation and discrimination within Society can overwhelm the reactions within our families, affecting our daily routines. We welcome you.

If you are attending an A.I.R (Adults In Recovery) meeting for the first time, will you please introduce yourselves by your first name? This is not to embarrass you, but so that we may welcome you and get to know you. We are glad you are here. Keep coming back. May we go around the room and introduce ourselves by our first names. My name is Tom.

The A.I.R. program is not easy, but if you can handle what comes up at 6 consecutive meetings, you will start to come out of denial and silence. This will give you freedom from the past and current difficulties. Both you and your life will change. In the beginning, many of us could not recognize or accept that some of our current attitudes and behaviors resulted from some experiences related to segregation and discrimination in our childhoods and in our current lives. We behave as co-segregationists, which means we bring self-doubt and fear learned in childhood (and currently) to all of our adult interactions. By attending 6 meetings in a row and attending regularly thereafter we come to know and begin to act as our True Selves.

We encourage each member to share openly about his or her experiences as time allows. This is a safe place to share your “Adult In Recovery” experiences without being judged. To allow everyone a chance to share during the meeting, we ask each person to limit their sharing to 5 minutes.

What you hear at this meeting should remain at the meeting. We do not talk about another person’s story or experiences to other people. Please respect the anonymity of those who share with us today.

We do not “Cross Talk” during the sharing time. Cross talk means interrupting, referring to, or commenting on what another person has said during the meeting. We do not cross talk because “Adults In Recovery” come from a society background where feelings and perceptions were often judged as wrong or defective. We accept without comment what others say because it is true for them. We work towards taking more responsibility in our own lives rather than giving advice to others.

We now begin sharing. Who wants to go first. There will be time for everyone to share.

[Group sharing ends]

It is now time for the Seventh Tradition (pass the basket) which states that “Every A.I.R. group ought to be self-supporting, declining outside contributions.” Newcomers are encouraged to buy literature/books and need not contribute at their first meeting. We ask newcomers to be our guests this time.

Can someone please read the Twelve Traditions?

**The A.I.R. 12 Traditions**

1. Our common welfare should come first; our personal recovery depends on A.I.R. unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority – a loving God as expressed in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants, they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for membership in A.I.R. is a desire to recover from the effects of growing up in a dysfunctional society fostering discrimination and segregation of individuals with I.D. and D.D.
4. Each group is autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.I.D. as a whole. We cooperate with all other twelve step programs.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose – to carry its message to the adult who still suffers.
6. An A.I.R. group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the A.I.R. name to ant related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every A.I.R. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Adults in Recovery should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. A.I.R., as such, ought never be organized, but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Adults in Recovery has no opinion on outside issues, hence the A.I.R. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, TV, and films.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

Now it’s time for the:

Secretary’s report

Treasurer’s Report

Intergroup Committee Report

Does anyone have any other A.I.R. related announcements?

If Time allows, Does anyone else have a desire to share? That’s all the time we have for sharing.

Thank you for being here and please come back. If you did not have a chance to share, please speak to someone after the meeting if you need to talk.

Let’s now stand and hold hands in a circle and say the A.I.R. Serenity prayer together:

**God,**

**Grant me the Serenity to love those people I cannot change,**

**The Courage to love all those I see,**

**And the Wisdom to love especially me.**

Keep coming back; it works good if you work it, and You’re worth it.

 THE TWELVE STEPS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

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.

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