

LETTERS OF SUPPORT

In the previous section, three medical professionals in the field of eating disorders treatment provided support for EDA's approach. In the interest of providing further assurance that our ideas are sound and well-respected, we are including two letters from leading voices in the field of eating disorders recovery research and advocacy—Jenni Schaefer and Robyn Cruze. A third letter, from a pastor in recovery through AA, affirms that EDA's message of recovery through reliance on God remains the central theme of our text. A final letter of support comes from the editor of a respected AA forum, AA Agnostica, backing EDA's expansion of the 12-Step approach to all who wish to recover, whether they follow a spiritual, religious, or secular path.

Jenni Schaefer, bestselling author of *Goodbye Ed, Hello Me*, conveys such warmth and humor through her writing that her ideas have brought hope to millions, inspiring us to change the way we think about eating disorders. As Chair of the Ambassadors Council of the National Eating Disorders Association, Jenni carries the message of recovery to a wide array of audiences, including treatment professionals, individuals seeking recovery, and their loved ones. She speaks via national broadcasts as well as presentations in schools, conferences, and treatment centers. Jenni leverages her position and influence to help advance research in the field of eating disorders recovery and recently teamed up with Harvard Medical School and Jennifer Thomas, PhD, to co-author the book *Almost Anorexic*. We are delighted and grateful to have her support.

Jenni Schaefer's Letter of Support

To those who courageously fight eating disorders:

One of the most helpful books in my eating disorder recovery was the “Big Book” of Alcoholics Anonymous. I’m not an alcoholic, but that didn’t matter. While reading AA’s basic text, I replaced the word “alcohol” with “food” and “alcoholism” with “eating disorder”—or simply the initials E.D. Personifying my illness as an abusive partner named “Ed” was a therapeutic technique I learned that allowed me to separate from the eating disorder. Let’s just say that Ed hated the “Big Book.”¹

Despite Ed’s kicking and screaming, I highlighted pages and inserted sticky notes throughout, marking places where I felt particularly understood and inspired. I related to the stories of overcoming adversity and gained hope that maybe one day I, too, could triumph over my illness. Upon the suggestion of a friend in AA, I made a point to read certain passages from the “Big Book” every day. I am happy to see that some of these sections are quoted directly within this book.

What you hold in your hands is the heart and soul of AA’s “Big Book” exquisitely linked with experience, strength, and hope related to your struggle with an eating disorder. Unlike me, you won’t have to worry about swapping out words as you read. This book was written just for you. I wish a text like this had existed when I was lost in my illness. I am thrilled that the founders of Eating Disorders Anonymous began their life-saving work, which eventually made this book a reality.

¹ If you decide to utilize this personification technique, you might choose to refer to your eating disorder by another name. Like some, you might view your illness as a female. The key with this technique isn’t the specific name or even whether you name your illness at all, but rather that you begin to think about yourself as being separate from your eating disorder.

I am also grateful that the founders started Twelve-Step meetings. A couple of years into my recovery, I attended the first-ever EDA meeting in Nashville, Tennessee, where I lived at the time. Each week, a group of us squeezed into a small room in a local church. Back then only one EDA meeting took place in the community per week, so I supplemented my program by attending open AA meetings, where non-alcoholics are welcome as observers. Inspired by the release of this important book, I believe that one day, as with AA, Eating Disorders Anonymous meetings will happen regularly, throughout the day, every day, in cities across the globe.

EDA meetings and the Twelve-Step approach were keys to my ultimately reaching full freedom from my eating disorder. I have always valued EDA's message that a complete recovery is, in fact, possible. I didn't know this when I wrote my first book, *Life Without Ed*, but I did know it—and actually lived it—by the time I wrote my second, *Goodbye Ed, Hello Me*. In the time between these two books—and my being “in recovery” and “fully recovered”—I embraced something pivotal, and that was spirituality. I learned, again from a friend in AA, that there was a hole in my life that needed to be filled with spiritual substance. To me, this meant letting go and having faith in a Higher Power, which I call God. I began to regularly recite the Serenity Prayer, words commonly heard in Twelve-Step meetings:

*God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.*²

But spirituality, for me, wasn't about just believing in a Higher Power. It was also about connecting with music, nature, and people. Spirituality is anything that connects

² Often attributed to American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, the Serenity Prayer in its current form is used within Twelve-Step groups worldwide.

me back to myself in a real, authentic way. So, if you have trouble relating to a spiritual framework, don't worry. This book is for you, too. EDA has found a way to relate to all people, whether they embrace spiritual concepts or not. The "Big Book" of Eating Disorders Anonymous creates no boundaries, but instead reaches out to help everyone who suffers with these insidious illnesses. EDA makes room for every type of eating disorder.

Many of us, at least initially, try to disqualify ourselves from getting help. Ed might say, "You don't binge, purge, and restrict enough," or simply, "You don't have an eating disorder." Our eating-disordered culture supports this notion, too, as some of us actually receive accolades for having a life-threatening illness (e.g., "I wish I were as thin as you.") Despite my being underweight at the time, I remember walking into my first eating disorder therapy group, scanning the room—analyzing body shapes and sizes—and hearing Ed yell, "You're not thin enough to be here!" But eating disorders don't look a certain way, and how often you binge, purge, or restrict is irrelevant. What matters is pain and suffering. No specific eating disorder diagnosis—or lack thereof—can adequately measure the torture that is an eating disorder. If you are miserable because of food and weight, or if negative thoughts about eating and your body take away from your quality of life, EDA's "Big Book" is for you. Eating disorders may look and manifest differently, but the agony of the disorder is the same.

Many of us also need professional help, and I appreciate that EDA supports reaching out for assistance from eating disorder experts. I don't think I could have recovered from my own eating disorder without the help of a qualified therapist, dietitian, and doctors. I needed continued, professional care in order to stay on the recovery path. Gratefully, my treatment team encouraged me to attend

Twelve-Step meetings. My recovery was like a big jigsaw puzzle. It took years and lots of sustained effort in order for me to find all parts of the puzzle, and even longer for me to see how the differently-shaped pieces fit together. I do what I do today—speak and write about recovery—so that others won't have to spend as much time looking for puzzle pieces as I did. I am guessing you will find that this book, and the EDA fellowship, are essential pieces of the puzzle of your life.

As you read, you are likely to experience resistance. Maybe you already feel some—or a lot. Consider that Ed might be the one encouraging you to put this book down. Ed doesn't want you to get better, and it is likely that he will become very angry—and loud—when you first start making changes. Ed's goal is to continue to control your every move, and this book is about breaking free. So, of course, he will say that these pages lie. But, within this book, you will read one true story after another about people who never believed they could recover—but they did.

It is surreal to me now that I am writing a letter of support for the “Big Book” of Eating Disorders Anonymous. Years ago, when I was reading my tattered blue copy of AA's “Big Book,” I wouldn't have even considered that one day, I'd be a small part of a similar effort aimed at helping people overcome their eating disorders. Back then I believed I could not possibly get better. Maybe you feel the same way. But I assure you: when you continually add pro-recovery actions to an eating disorder, your life can come full circle in the most amazing ways.

If you follow the guidance in this book, stay connected with support, and never give up, you can find independence from your eating disorder. And, one day, when you are working your 12th Step—carrying the message of hope to those who still suffer—you will look back and clearly see how your life has come full circle. Seemingly impossible

things happen when you make the decision to recover in each moment, one day at a time. Even if you are in the middle of a relapse right now, you can choose recovery with the turn of this page. As they say in Twelve-Step meetings, “Do the next right thing.”

This beautiful book will show you how.

Sincerely yours,

Jenni Schaefer

Author of *Life Without Ed* and *Goodbye Ed, Hello Me*
www.jennischaefer.com

Robyn Cruze is Eating Recovery Center’s National Recovery Advocate. She is a member of the National Speakers Association, a certified life and corporate coach, and has published several books, including *Making Peace with Your Plate* (co-authored with Espra Andrus) and *Lovely Dreams*. Robyn writes and speaks on topics that promote eating disorder recovery and the building of healthy relationships with food, body, and beauty. The letter that follows reflects Robyn’s experience of recovery and supports many of EDA’s core tenets: that shared stories of strength and hope can pull us through the hard times, that we need to take care of basics and develop trust before we can make headway in recovery, and that happiness and safety are found not at the dramatic extremes to which some of us gravitate, but instead emerge somewhere in the middle area—in balance. We are grateful for Robyn’s insights and are delighted to present her letter of support.

Robyn Cruze's Letter of Support

As a recovery advocate, certified coach, and author, I spend my days educating professionals as well as helping those who struggle with an eating disorder—and their loved ones—claim recovery. The messages I share are a combination of research, nuggets of hope freely provided to me, and lessons learned via my personal journey to and in recovery. The power of story, together with research, is a magnificent tool. It evokes identification and inspiration, which bring about awareness—and often significant change—on how we treat and recover from eating disorders, a distorted body image, and other comorbidities.

Many of us who struggle with an eating disorder have found that it's like being in quicksand—the more we fight, the further down we go. We've also found that recovery is a combination lock that is unique for everyone. There is no one right way to do it, and what works for some may not work for others. I found recovery by applying the Twelve Steps, finding balance and perspective, taking care of basics, and learning to trust—first others, then a higher purpose, and then myself. Much of my own recovery process is reflected in the approach suggested by the text you are about to read, the “Big Book” of Eating Disorders Anonymous.

In my experience, a common belief keeping many people from recovery is that without the eating disorder they would find themselves out of control, both physically and emotionally. This fear is crippling and has them either running away from food or towards it for relief. Ironically, the very act of surrendering and giving up the fight becomes their saving grace, providing them with the ultimate empowerment. And within the surrender comes a connection many of them have longed for and needed.

There are two sides to recovery that are equally powerful, yet neither is as successful alone as when coupled with the other. On the one hand is treatment for and education about eating disorders (and comorbidities), and on the other, is inspiration and identification. Just as we benefit from appropriate treatment for our mental, emotional, and physical concerns, we also need good people to identify with, who inspire us through the ups and downs of ongoing recovery.

While the Twelve Steps of EDA, adapted from Alcoholics Anonymous, provide strength and hope, the program is not easy. In the beginning, we can expect to experience difficulty with new concepts and verbiage that ask us to “admit powerlessness” and surrender to something other than the eating disorder—something outside ourselves. Don’t be alarmed; you wouldn’t be the first to have concerns about such ideas. My course of action whenever I have been in doubt about anything in my life, is to ask whomever or whatever may be in the universe supporting me for the willingness to try something new. It is this surrender and willingness that sets me free, not the label I use. The truth is, believing in a power outside of ourselves often has nothing to do with religion or spirituality, but rather with trust.

Recovery, in its early stages, can be messy, scary, and hard. Many of us who advocate and educate in recovery fail to tell you that. We get so busy cheerleading for recovery, because we know it is so very possible. But there is work to be done. Recovery can feel like you are being told to jump off a cliff not knowing that anyone will be at the bottom to catch you. “Oh no, no, no!” we cry. “We need a harness, a rope, hiking boots, and a clear map to get down! We need to take baby steps and we require lots of hand-holding!” Well, good news: the people that we find in Twelve-Step meetings are our rock climbing tools. They are holding our hands, making this journey with us—one step at a time.

Many of us who struggled in the isolation of the illness, desperately crave connection. Our eating disorders closed us off from the outside world, promising that they would set us free once we fulfilled their demands. Well, they lied. Recovery is not achieved in seclusion. After all, “a sick mind can’t treat a sick mind.” Recovery takes a village; it grows on support and love. Knowing that we are not alone and that others are on the same journey are healing tools freely offered in Twelve-Step meetings. Eventually, we discover that we begin to trust others and later ourselves. And that, my friends, is the gift of recovery.

Those of us who have had eating disorders have the propensity to live life at the extremes. We are either “perfect” or “useless,” “good” or “bad,” “elated” or “suicidal.” When we come to recovery, the extremes of the illness have exhausted us. But by beginning to work through the Steps, we find balance. Who knew that the gray area of life, the patch between the polar extremes, is where we discover safety, comfort, and true happiness? Finding balance is not about food or the way our bodies look—though these are part of the equation. More importantly, it is about discovering a sense of clarity and a profound sense of self that has been concealed within our illness, waiting to be reclaimed.

In recovery, we can begin to explore our truth and feel our feelings without fear that they will destroy us or make us insane. Working on the Twelve Steps gives us the courage to question our beliefs about ourselves and our purpose in the world. I promise you, every one of us has a purpose, and you will surely discover yours on your recovery journey. Just like the promises from AA’s “Big Book” affirm,

If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will know a new freedom and a new happiness. We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it. We will comprehend the word serenity and we will know peace. No matter how far down we

have fallen, we will see how our experience can benefit others. That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear. We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows. Self-seeking will slip away. Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change. Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us. We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us. We will see that our service to God, our Higher Power, or the greater good has done for us what seemed humanly impossible. Are these extravagant promises? We think not. They are being fulfilled among us—sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. They will always materialize if we work for them.³

My hope for you, dear Readers, is to make way for the miracle that recovery offers and boy oh boy, dream big—so very, very big.

Remember: hope is found in surrender, and recovery is found in action.

I believe in you!

Robyn Cruze

Author of *Making Peace with Your Plate* and *Lovely Dreams*
www.robyncruze.com

Balancing EDA's acceptance of secular ideas about recovery with the idea of finding peace and freedom through reliance on God, the General Service Board (GSB) of EDA is happy to include a letter of support from someone vested with religious authority. We respect that a letter from one

³ *Alcoholics Anonymous*. (2001) New York, NY: AA World Services, Inc., 84. Substituting "we have fallen" for a phrase that is inappropriate for the current context, and substituting "service to God, our Higher Power, or the greater good" in place of language that is less inclusive.

such person cannot possibly speak for all of us with religious conviction, yet Pastor John's letter emphasizes three important points: that reliance on God remains at the core of Twelve-Step recovery, that our Fellowship reflects a plurality of positions of faith, and that this book is not just for people wanting a secular path.

The author of the following letter is the Community Life pastor at a church in a region of Florida recognized for its strong support of addiction recovery.⁴ Pastor John is a married father who holds a Bachelor of Science in Psychology with a minor in Communication. He is currently pursuing a Master of Divinity in Biblical Studies and has a newborn son. Sober through the Fellowship of AA for sixteen years, he is grateful for the candor and authenticity that Twelve-Step community brings. He is also passionate about seeing people discover and enjoy a new capacity for freedom through intimate relationship with God and authentic relationships with others.

Pastor John's Letter of Support

My name is John and I am a recovered alcoholic. I am also a person who has struggled with disordered eating and body image issues my whole life.

These struggles used to be a source of serious discouragement for me. Left to my own devices, I was next to defenseless against my habits of acting out. Prior to taking action I was no match for the titanic struggles generated by the allure of my cravings. I turned to food for comfort and pleasure, for a reward and an escape. When I was bored I

⁴ Cross, J. (2007, November 11) In Florida, addicts find an oasis of sobriety. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/16/us/16recovery.html>

turned to food. If I wanted a diversion food was always there. If I was pissed, food helped. I felt so out of control.

This was confusing to me.

Why was it that I had been able to achieve sobriety in one area while I continued to struggle so intensely in this one?

Wrong question.

By asking “why” without facing and admitting my problem, I was preventing myself from recognizing and embracing a solution.

Eventually I realized I needed rescue.

I needed rescue from myself.

Further, I needed the reassurance that there would be an ongoing rescue for me and a promise of soul-satisfying, life-giving restoration and beauty to enjoy. I needed companions and camaraderie if I were ever to make a lasting change.

How would I sustain that commitment to change? I needed hope. I needed hope embodied by those who had found it themselves. I needed a community around me that could understand the perils of disordered eating and the distorted thinking about body image that accompanies it.

I am pleased to say that just such a community awaits you in the pages that follow.

This is where the unifying power of the Twelve Steps comes in. I have long held a deep love for the Twelve Steps. They give me a framework for reorienting my heart and mind when I am struggling. Unlike my alcoholism, I cannot just be abstinent from food. With the grace of perspective that I gain from the Steps, however, I am able to manage my various struggles with self and temptation successfully.

What’s more, I need a simple, ongoing program of action if I am to protect the freedom I’ve begun to experience. Here the Twelve Steps come to the fore again. They are a continual source of direction that helps me to reorder my priorities for effective action. The four main

movements in the Twelve Steps help me to remember the shape of the journey before me: (1) remember and admit my problem (powerlessness), (2) embrace and adhere to the solution (for me, enjoying and exalting God), (3) know which strategies will reinforce my commitment to growth and change, and (4) live for a purpose greater than myself by putting God and others before myself. Through following this repeated process I get to increase my collaboration with God in His mission to impart hope and restore beauty to the world.

The four basic outcomes of working the Steps can be thought of as (1) peace with God vertically, (2) peace with self internally, (3) peace with others horizontally, and (4) peace with the world around me externally. I begin the process self-imprisoned and self-obsessed and finish outward-oriented and other-centered. Along the way, my aims and desires are purified to maximize my usefulness to God and others. I begin the journey weak and double-minded and discover traction and momentum as I persist in fighting the good fight. I get stronger over time. I've tasted freedom and do not want to forfeit it or lose the accompanying agility and power that come from protecting my sobriety from disordered eating and self-consumed thinking.

For me, resolving the spiritual malady resolves and uproots the other two issues: the obsession of the mind and allergy of my body to acting out in eating-disordered behaviors. I'm thankful for books like this one that enhance my understanding of how to grow and change in my relationship to food and body image so I can be free to live for—and serve—God and others. This book reminds me that freedom is possible and achievable through working the Steps; they encourage and motivate me. They make me thankful to have such resources and companions. They boost my confidence in increasing my self-mastery and

self-efficacy through continued dependence upon God. I am enabled to be a blessing to others. What more can I ask for?

It's my joy and humble honor to commend EDA's "Big Book" to you and invite you to join us in this journey toward increasing enjoyment of and capacity for freedom from disordered eating and body image issues.

You are not alone.

Learning from each other we can continue to rely upon God and continue to fight the good fight.

An imperiled and embattled journeyer with you,

John O.

While the previous letter affirms that reliance on God remains central to Twelve-Step recovery in EDA, our General Service Board (GSB) wishes to further reassure readers that EDA's seemingly radical ideas about secular recovery have a long and deep history within AA. The idea that Twelve-Step groups should reach out to and embrace everyone—regardless of their position on matters of faith—finds support in statements by AA's co-founder, Bill Wilson, and members of AA's GSB.

The reason we have chosen to adapt the message of spiritual recovery to reach out to atheists, agnostics, and others with an alternative approach is twofold. First of all, there is no doubt that people can recover from their illnesses by applying the Twelve Steps in a secular way: one of the founders of our organization quietly did so, and remains in recovery after many years. A secular approach to working the Twelve Steps is broadly applicable, and secular groups in the Fellowship of AA are growing rapidly. Yet perhaps the most compelling reason for expanding our perspective

is that people die of their eating disorders every day. Some who died might have found recovery had it not been for the insistence of Twelve-Step groups on proffering an exclusively spiritual or religious path. We think it is time to clear up any confusion on this point. If EDA's main purpose is to carry the message of recovery to all who suffer, then we must carry the message that one can build and maintain recovery by working the Twelve Steps as an atheist or agnostic: it absolutely does work.

That said, EDA does not insist that everyone adopt or embrace the secular approach! Nothing could be further from the truth. The spiritual solution is and always will be at the core of Twelve-Step recovery. Instead, we have added guidance and support for those who simply cannot work a program that requires dependence on spiritual aid. As "roomy" as the traditional Twelve-Step view of spirituality may be, any approach that requires reliance on something a person cannot trust is not going to work for them. An honest atheist is never going to be able to form a deep personal connection to, faith in, or reliance upon, any "realm of the Spirit." An atheist can, however, form a deep personal commitment to, and reliance upon, the idea of service to the greater good.

Our key point is that recovery need not depend on the intercession of any spiritual entity. The AA text itself makes clear that *reliance on the idea of something more important than ourselves* is what we need to provide the peace and perspective to think and act unselfishly. We could not recover on the basis of moral and philosophical convictions, nor on the basis of religious faith alone⁵, nor on the basis of

⁵ *Alcoholics Anonymous*. (2001) New York, NY: AA World Services, Inc., 76, 88, 93.

anything else that was grounded in a limited, self-focused perspective, until we were willing to let go of preconceived ideas and began to rely absolutely on ideas that we could trust—whether these ideas were of God, or of a higher purpose. The original AA text is absolutely correct about that point: *Reliance on something greater than ourselves is a solution—one that anyone can apply.*

The lived experience of atheists and agnostics in EDA and other Twelve-Step groups is that secular recovery using the Twelve Steps as a foundation is absolutely possible. Many have walked free of eating disorders, alcoholism, and other issues by following the same process as their more spiritually-inclined, fellow Twelve-Step group members. It is not an easier, softer way.

The idea that people with secular views can work the Twelve Steps is supported in the following letter from Roger C—author, editor, publisher, and administrator of the AA Agnostica website. AA Agnostica provides support and inspiration for non-religious seekers of recovery through their website and publishing company. They have released six books over the past several years, including *The Little Book: A Collection of Alternative 12-Steps*, which contains twenty mostly secular versions of the Twelve Steps with concise interpretations of each Step by well-respected authors Gabor Maté, Stephanie Covington, Allen Berger, and Thérèse Jacobs-Stewart. Roger's letter invokes AA co-founder Bill Wilson in support of the idea that Twelve-Step groups ought to embrace anyone with a desire to recover.

Roger C's Letter of Support

To whom it may concern:

I would like to tell you a bit about the secular movement within our fellowship, one that is becoming an increasingly important part of Alcoholics Anonymous. Let me be clear that while there has been some resistance within AA, opposition has been the exception and not the rule. Fortunately, most people understand AA in much the same way as Bill Wilson expressed it at a General Service Conference in 1965:

In AA we are supposed to be bound together in the kinship of a universal suffering. Therefore the full liberty to practice any creed or principle or therapy should be a first consideration. Hence let us not pressure anyone with individual or even collective views. Let us instead accord to each other the respect that is due to every human being as he tries to make his way towards the light. Let us always try to be inclusive rather than exclusive. Let us remember that each alcoholic among us is a member of AA, so long as he or she so declares.

Bill Wilson had no problem with secular versions of the Steps. When presented with one rewritten by Buddhists, which replaced the word "God" with "good," he wrote:

To some of us, the idea of substituting "good" for "God" in the Twelve Steps will seem like a watering down of AA's message. We must remember that AA's Steps are suggestions only. A belief in them as they stand is not at all a requirement for membership among us. This liberty has made AA available to thousands who never would have tried at all, had we insisted on the Twelve Steps just as written.⁶

⁶ *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*. (1957) New York, NY: AA World Services, Inc., 81.

The previous quotes from Bill Wilson are from the 1950s and 60s. What about today? In February of 2016, the AA General Service Office (GSO) wrote the following:

We are aware that many AA's feel that by using an unauthorized version of the Twelve Steps a group so removes itself from AA that it should call themselves by another name, while many other AA's feel that this fellowship allows unparalleled freedom...

A quick look at our AA directories indicates that the GSO lists atheist and agnostic groups, and some appear to have been listed for many years. In describing an AA group, the directories use the long form of Tradition Three:

Our membership ought to include all who suffer from alcoholism. Hence we may refuse none who wish to recover. Nor ought AA membership ever depend upon money or conformity. Any two or three alcoholics gathered together for sobriety may call themselves an AA group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation.

For many of us, this issue is all about moving forward and being respectful of a contemporary reality in which polls and research over the years—Pew Research, in particular—have shown that more and more people describe themselves as agnostics or atheists. When asked about their religious affiliation, the answer is increasingly “none.”

I am happy to report that within the fellowship of AA our secular movement is growing fantastically. When AA Agnostica was first established just a few years ago, there were two agnostic meetings in the Toronto area. Today there are a dozen. At the same time there were less than eighty agnostic meetings worldwide. At last count, there were over 300, with new ones starting up every day of the week.

In November 2014, the first international Convention

was held for agnostics, atheists, and freethinkers in Alcoholics Anonymous in Santa Monica, California. Over 300 people attended. Great talks were given, one by Ward Ewing, past chair of AA's General Service Board and another by Phyllis Halliday, then General Manager of the GSO of Alcoholics Anonymous. There have been other regional conferences since, including one where I presented a talk on "The History of Secularism in AA."

What is it all about?

As Bill Wilson put it in 1965, we need "to accord to each other the respect that is due to every human being as he [or she] tries to make his [or her] way towards the light." In that same talk Bill discussed the people—he specifically mentioned "atheists and agnostics...people of nearly every race, culture, and religion"—who came into the rooms of AA and "did not stay." He asked, "How much and how often did we fail them?"

Later that summer, at AA's 30th anniversary International Convention at Maple Leaf Gardens in downtown Toronto, more than 10,000 delegates, trustees, and AA representatives from twenty-one countries rose to their feet, joined hands and, led by Bill, for the first time ever recited the new AA responsibility declaration: "I am responsible. When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of AA always to be there. And for that I am responsible."

That's what it's all about. That's how I understand the mission of any Twelve-Step organization, and the inclusive language it must therefore employ: we are committed to "anyone, anywhere" in recovery.

Best wishes to all of you in Eating Disorders Anonymous,

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