

The Program

By Jean Kirkpatrick, Ph.D., WFS Founder

What is meant by “The Program”? How do we view it? How is it to be used?

The Women for Sobriety “New Life” Program is comprised of thirteen acceptance statements that, when accepted and used, will provide each woman with a new way of life through a new way of thinking.

As alcoholic women, we must learn about ourselves and how to avoid the pitfalls of faulty thinking and destructive behavior that used to lead us to taking that first drink, even though we sometimes did not want to drink.

Since we had a faulty approach to life and living, we must turn our attention to finding new ways of overcoming. This starts with coping first but than moving on to overcoming and a whole change in our approach to each day.

To make the program effective for you, arise each morning fifteen minutes earlier than usual and go over the thirteen statements of acceptance. Then begin to think about each one by itself. Take one statement and use it consciously all day. At the end of the day, just before sleeping, review the use of it and what affects it had that day for you and your actions. For some, it has proven helpful to use a notebook for recording the sequences of the day and the statement’s effects upon you. (A *Program Booklet* is available, and also *The Beginner’s Booklet*, that is helpful to those new in the program.)

To make the program effective for you, it must be consciously used each day. Never forget that our faulty thinking is a result of many years. It cannot be corrected overnight. It takes a long time to realize that most of what we thought was cast in the negative view.

The philosophy of the Women for Sobriety “New Life” Program is that the image precedes our actions. Whatever we think, we eventually act out. If our thoughts are always negative, our actions will also be negative. If our thoughts are positive, so are our actions. One writer once said a garden of weeds cannot produce a beautiful flower. This is also true of our minds. If we have upsetting thoughts, we cannot have a serene life.

We used to think that life was upsetting and our problems followed but it is usually the other way around. Our thoughts were confused and negative, and life’s actions came to be that way also. We create our own world. No one else does. We are responsible for ourselves and our choices. What we are, we made ourselves become.

We have the power of changing our way of thinking. We live in the atmosphere created by our mind and our thoughts.

We are now beginning to create a new woman, the woman we always wanted to be but never thought possible. The Women for Sobriety “New Life” Program helps you to change your thinking and shows you how to be the dynamic woman you have the capability of becoming. We begin by being in charge of our actions through our thoughts. We no longer react but, now, begin to act the way we want to act. We end game playing. We become our whole person by learning independent thinking.

Negative thoughts, so much a part of a drinking woman’s life, are often carried into sobriety. These negative thoughts frequently make the sober woman unhappy and depressed. She begins to wonder if sobriety is really worth it.

We used alcohol to cover pain, emotional pain. When we remove the alcohol, we must then learn a way to remove the emotional pain, which requires a new way of thinking about life.

Our program makes sobriety a happy existence by helping us to understand ourselves better. Our sobriety is more than simply a period of time in which we are not drinking; it becomes a happy learning experience.

Learn to know yourself and your illness. This is how to overcome. ☞ [March 1977]

(This article is from *The Collection of Sobering Thoughts Booklet*, Volume 1 and copyrighted by Women for Sobriety, Inc., PO Box 618, Quakertown, PA 18951.)

Comments from Mary (Huntington, Long Island NY group):

The title of this article reaches a place deep inside myself and stirs feelings of hope, just as it did twenty years ago. This is truly a formula with which we achieve and maintain sobriety. Our program empowers us to take charge of our lives and create a future without drugs or alcohol. The 13 WFS Statements provide us with the framework to live each day fully.

I chose this article so that we could reflect on our program and remember how important it is. Sobriety is our number one priority. ☞ [August 1999]

Comments from Nancy:

I still remember back to the day 12 years ago when I read the 13 Acceptance Statements for the first time. It felt as though someone were giving me back my life. The Statements were just what I had been searching for in my recovery: responsibility, letting go of guilt, moving on, taking life by the tail!

I WAS a worthy, loveable person... so much more than just an alcoholic. I was a woman first of all... albeit a woman with a drinking problem. I was no longer defining myself as an alcoholic... I had a new definition... a woman who had the power of choice. Having this program in my life has taught me responsibility, patience, happiness, self-love, and forgiveness. ☞

Comments from Lynn:

Indeed the WFS "New Life" Program can, and will, give us a whole new way of thinking and of living our lives. To me, the WFS "New Life" Program Statements all work together to create a whole new thinking pattern, a new way to successfully live our lives as we were meant to live them. The program has two elements, sobriety and recovery. Without the first element, sobriety, recovery is not possible and recovery is where we move forward and live our lives fully and richly alcohol free. Jean suggested that we arise 15 minutes earlier than usual and go over the statements and start to think about each statement individually. That was JUST the beginning for me. First I learned the statements, took each statement one by one and focused on applying it to my life. Once our mind starts the retraining process, the next step is living the program, making it a way of life.

I started out reading the statements each night before going to sleep, so I went to sleep with the statements floating around in my head; and, then, I read them immediately in the morning to start my day out so that I would start my day focused on them. Little by little the "New Life" Program was my way of thinking. I did learn about who I was, what I thought and how to be "in charge of myself and my thoughts", to be "responsible for myself and my actions". This program has empowered me and given me a roadmap to follow regardless of what challenges I face. I know "I am what I think. I am a competent woman that has much to give life. This is what I am and I will know it always."

Even after all these years, I still recite the 13 Statements of the "New Life" Program as I fall asleep. Now, I don't have to read the statements, I know them by heart and I own them. ☞

Comments from "SameOldTooz":

First of all, Women for Sobriety is many things, but first and foremost: This is a program! I am always saying, "Just quitting doesn't work," because it's so true. The intention to get alcohol out of our life is mandatory, but the road to relapse is paved with good intentions. What works is accepting the fact that we have a program to follow here, and if we follow it, we'll be living in grateful recovery and living up to our potential. If we don't follow it, we'll stay in the great swimming pool of life trying to do the butterfly stroke with our wrists tied behind our back.

Every woman who comes to WFS knows that whatever she's been doing so far to quit drinking and stay sober hasn't been a roaring success. She may never have realized that what we *do* isn't as critical as how we *think*. But when the woman first arrives here, the idea that one's thinking can be changed seems unlikely, or impossible. Jean writes, in "*The Program*", "We used to think that life was upsetting and our problems followed but it is usually the other way around. Our thoughts were confused and

negative, and [our] actions came to be that way also. We create our own world. No one else does. We are responsible for ourselves and our choices. What we are, we made ourselves become."

We are, when we arrive here, so in the thrall of thinking "this is just the way I am!" We're very negative, even if we've hung onto some thread of hope that our life can be different, and better. "I drink because..." obsesses some of us. "If only..." thinking is very common. If only I'd had better parents, if only I weren't in this terrible relationship, if only I didn't have these horrid memories to contend with... The list is endless. And contemplating the "If only's" leads nowhere, except to the next drink. We may start off the morning motivated to make great changes, but by 5:00 the negative thinking has had its way with us, and we're opening the beer or bottle of wine, the vodka or whatever, because we deserve it, or need it to "function" or simply have to have it *now* for one reason or another. There will always be a reason to drink, as long as we remain in the world of "drinking thinking." That does not change until we accept the fact that we can and must change the way we think.

We're not following the WFS Program if we're not learning, repeating, printing, and using these statements every single day. Jean wrote, "To make the program effective for you, arise each morning fifteen minutes earlier than usual and go over the thirteen statements of acceptance. Then begin to think about each one by itself. Take one statement and use it consciously all day. At the end of the day, just before sleeping, review the use of it and what affects it had that day for you and your actions."

If we want to gain and keep sobriety, this is what we have to do. I have always been highly skeptical about programs, plans, "habits of effective people," and the like. However, not only do these 13 Statements get smarter the longer we use them – they apply to everything in our life!

Very often, a new woman shows up here and says something like, "Any tips on not drinking will be appreciated!" As if we may have "tricks" to share that will make sobriety happen. We have no tricks, although we do have some ideas, such as eating something substantial by 3 pm, treating yourself as though you were recovering from a serious illness, and so on. But the great and wonderful thing we all have is The Program, just as Jean developed it. If we're fortunate enough to have a f2f (face to face) group near us, that's a huge help. The online WFS we're using right now is also a fantastic help. But women can and have become and remained sober using nothing more than the program, the statements, writings by Jean and others, and the newsletter *Sobering Thoughts* (which you can now get online).

What is really meant by a "new life," anyway? To a depressed woman first arriving here, it often sounds rather silly and totally unlikely. But what Jean meant was developing new ways of thinking about our life that gradually transform the way we live, take care of ourselves, and interact with others. Is that not a "new life?"

The first two Statements set the stage for this New Life. **#1: "I have a life-threatening problem that once had me."** No woman ever came to WFS for whom this was not true. **#2: "Negative thoughts destroy only myself."** In order to succeed, we must learn to recognize our negative thoughts, and "re-cast them." For example, "I drink because I'm so unhappy!" Not once the drinking has become an addiction, we don't – because addictive drinking promotes itself, and needs no help from unhappy situations. *Anything* can become a reason to turn to alcohol. I recall a woman saying, "...and then the front porch light went out, and that was the last straw..." For me, "porch light" has been a meaningful symbol ever since.

Our yellow brick road is the list of Thirteen Statements upon which this program is based. It IS a program! It is not an intention to live in happy recovery. And speaking of happiness, #3 tells us that **"Happiness is created, not waited for."**

Stop waiting. Start creating. Like happiness itself, sobriety and recovery are created, not waited for. "I hope this program works" is also commonly seen on the Introductions board. The Program can and does work – *if we do*. Finally, as I'm always saying, **"We can have the life we want, or we can drink. That's the choice."**

Please, choose following The Program. We want to rejoice in your success. Now, please respond with your own thoughts! ☺
[January 2013]

Comments from "FiveWinds":

The thing that struck me in this essay as true brilliance is the following: *"Since we had a faulty approach to life and living, we must turn our attention to finding new ways of overcoming. This starts with coping first but then moving on to overcoming a whole change in our approach to each day."*

The simplicity of the WFS Program and the 13 Statements, in my opinion, should be celebrated - so much of the work has been done for us. For there is true beauty and practical application in simplicity. And the skill involved in reducing many concepts and thoughts into a simple form is a reflection of not only paramount intelligence, but a true love to make it accessible for all women. Dr. Kirkpatrick, to me, will always be a visionary and a woman who embodied love, because she not only created this for us, she *gave* it to us.

"The Program", at first blush, really is quite simple, conceptually and in its application. What makes it hard for us, and keeps us stuck, confused and in denial, is the failure to accept it, and to use it; which is why the essay begins with thirteen acceptance statements that *"once accepted and used, will provide each woman with a new way of life through a new way of thinking."*

Dr. Kirkpatrick talks about one way to use the program's statements. Statements. These are tools she created. The beauty is in their use. Keep it simple. But use them. Like a well-worn guitar with little nicks from my pinkie finger; my Wustoff cooking knife kept sharp and loved, a gift from my brother; or my favorite Caran d'Ache HB pencil worn to a nub that is my best tool for watercolor under-drawings, it sings on its own, then disappears or harmonizes with the paint. With these tools, I create

wonderful, unique food that I share with my loved ones. I create watercolor paintings and drawings using the schooling I received and my imagination; they make people happy. I create music that stumbles at first, then an instrument that lets me ease into it, gain confidence and share Jingle Bell Rock with my two favorite little girls. They laugh, they sing, they dance. These examples were arrived at, by my experiences, in creation of a new life. I can pop a statement into each one. I would have done exactly zero of those things if I had continued to drink, or even if I got sober but did not use those wise and wonderful statements. So one could say, the program *gave* me life. It will give you life too. But you have to use it.

Tools go wonky if not *used*. That word, to *use*, so bad when applied to people, but so amazing when applied to tools for life betterment. Dr. Kirkpatrick created this program to be used. The other bit of brilliance is that she recognized that we are all individual; each approach may be slightly different. In *The Program* article, she suggests rising each morning to go over the 13 Statements, think about them one by one and before sleep, reflecting on them, pulling out a journal if that helps and feels good. I think that is a beautiful and effective approach. But she knew, and often said, that each woman has to use the program to help her build a new life. She left room for individuality, creativity and those developing new, positive thoughts.

In early sobriety, I used the statements as situational tools to begin and, in many aspects, I still do. Because like most folks, as the essay says, I had faulty ways of living, so the first matter of business was *coping*. I had to learn new ways to cope, well, with darn near everything. The statements were awesome for that. I was a big and inherent believer of Statement #1 (“**I have a life-threatening problem that once had me**” - check - I was stuck and unhappy) and #13 (“**I am responsible for myself and my actions**” - check - I knew I had to do this by my own hand - it is my life, after all), that I focused on Statements #2-#12 when I had tough stuff come up that in the past, I drank around. I am a big reader, so that little “New Life” Program bookmark is with me all of the time (it came with the Beginner’s Special package). I even tuck it into my e-reader! In addition, someone gave me the teensy *Program Booklet* at WFS Conference 2012 and I carry it with me in my purse. Just the warming presence of those two things keeps me on track and, if I still feel wonky, even after five years and some months of sobriety, I turn to those comforting tools to keep on with the beautiful creation that is my new life. When I go to that awfulizing or insecure place, for self-esteem is where I am apt to struggle, I touch the bookmark, think of a statement and very easily remember, “Keep it simple Five. Don’t create bad stuff. Create GOOD stuff. Handle things honestly, without agenda, with an open heart and hefty dose of love, and it will be okay.” And it always, always is. I find my love statements or my spiritual statement and soothe myself. I find my happiness and enthusiasm statements to fill my life with better things. And for my Achilles’s heel, self-esteem (i.e., the feelin’ puny days), I use #12 (“**I am a competent woman and have much to give life**”) and post here, write, paint, create; and #5 (“**I am what I think**”) to supplant the “I can’t” thoughts with the “I will, I am, I can” thoughts. And in short order, the actions. The program has made me a woman of love and action, not one of what I will be when I do/am/accomplish/get/leave ____ (my sad little wine-binging mantra, i.e., the legend in my own mind, with tons of words and no actions).

Lastly, like some, at the beginning, I was a huge skeptic on the simplicity of those statements. I was like, oy, that statement doesn’t really *say* anything! I feel like a goof saying that over and over. But what I have learned in trying to disprove them (ha – I am a lawyer, so I guess I had to try) is that the statements are amazing tools and they encompass and capsulize many, many thoughts and journeys of many scholars, sages, common folk and well ... those who lived how I wanted to live; and in places I want to live it in. While they seem and sound simple, what underlies their creation is not. They are rich, oh so rich, in hundreds of years of wisdom, by a beautiful woman who opened the door for us to walk through and discover on our own.

I actually encourage you to discover as you go along, to see how right of heart, thought and love this program really is. Really, we shouldn’t believe in something we do not feel. And when you feel it, you will walk on the side of teacher, because you will believe in it. My recent joy is that I found a lot of parallels to Buddhism (which I am learning), but even in the farthest flung places on this planet (usually in nature somewhere). So I will leave with this. *Five* is a skeptic no more. I look at my life, what I did, what I am becoming and I see ... wow ... what the program did for me.

Buddhism says something very much along the lines of what Dr. Kirkpatrick wrote in *The Program* essay. I am paraphrasing because I don’t remember it exactly, but it is these two simple concepts: 1) There is suffering in this world; and 2) As human beings, we can choose not to suffer. That, my friends, is exactly what Dr. Kirkpatrick says when she wrote, we had a faulty approach to life and living (i.e., we chose suffering, there is suffering). This starts with coping first, but then moving on to overcoming a whole change in our approach to each day. We can choose to not suffer (i.e., accept and use the statements). The program gives us a HUGE leg up on figuring that out. We are lucky to have it. Many don’t. In fact, most don’t. The statements show us not only how not to suffer, but how to *thrive*!

The statements are tools. Let us USE them! Look around and see all of these beautiful women creating amazing new lives. Hopefully, some of them will pipe in. I just know, even after years of sobriety, the tools get to fit nicer in one’s hand, they become me, they improve with use. But like so many tools we have, they get brittle, dull or rusty when ignored or not used. This degradation of thought, and failure to exercise and use the statements and tools we have been so graciously given can be dangerous as that can lead to relapse, or just icky malaise of thought (where negativity reigns supreme and before we know it, we are choosing the path of suffering). We are never too “old” in our sobriety to learn and I look forward to hearing everyone’s ideas.

Make your use of the statements joyful. Make it powerful. Make it loving. Make it your own. Or keep it simple for now, just make it positive, say the statements, feel the statements, cope, get through the next hard thing to the first happy thing. This

is a journey to self. To **YOU**. And there will never be another YOU, not in this form, in this life, this day, January 3, 2013. No one will ever walk these same steps, and no one will take them for you. But what you learn, you can share, or you can build on. And that learning to cope gets easier as you go along. I swear to you, it does. But you have to use your tools, my beautiful ladies. Life is precious. Life is fleeting. Start today. Or continue today, if it applies.

Whether it is a fledgling idea or a well-walked path, how do you use the statements? How do you *use* The Program? 🍀
[January 2013]