

## NOTES ON STEP 4

***When the spiritual malady is overcome, we straighten out mentally and physically. (64: 3)***

*I ruthlessly faced my sins* [blocks to Spirit]. (Bill's Story, 13: 2)  
Heard in a meeting: "We need self-acceptance before we can have self improvement."

### **Problem / Solution / Program of Action**

We have come a long way to reach Step 4. We now understand that our problem lies in being powerless over such recurring mental obsessions as the thought that we can drink again in safety, when taking that drink triggers our physical compulsion to drink to excess.

Our solution is to find a power greater than any one of us which can restore us to sanity, health, and wholeness. We come to believe that we can get well.

Our program of action is to turn our life and will over to such a power, of our own understanding, by the discipline of the daily practice of the principles of the Twelve Steps within the AA fellowship. The key to this action is our experience that *our troubles...are basically of our own making.* (62: 2) We have learned that our own reactions to hard times or good times have become self-centered thought-habits that frequently stand in the way of recovery. We learn that with help, we can change these for our own serenity.

### **Kit of spiritual tools            The 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> working of Step 4 lists**

We have been promised a *kit of spiritual tools.* (25: 1) Step 4 delivers a *process* (64: 1), a *method* (114: 1) and a *treatment* (551: 1) that we can use often on our reactions to past events and present day troubles (Step 10), so we are less likely to pick up a drink and more likely to have peace of mind. While there is hard work ahead, we will be learning a lot about ourselves, and we do not have to dread it. Step 4 is not a test, we cannot fail it. The last thing we need is another chance to beat up on ourselves.

### **Inventory of Character Assets and Character Defenses**

[An] *inventory...is an effort to discover the truth about the stock-in-trade.*(64: 1)  
We are in the business of staying sober, and the ways we think and behave are the stock

in trade. We are practicing understanding the exact nature of what we have done in our lives that has worked, and what has not worked, to give us peace of mind. We may address questions like these to better see our character assets:

- When have I done the right thing? What are my successes?
- What qualities do I like about myself? That others like?
- What are my values? Which ones am I committed to living by, and how?
- How have I shown concern for others, including myself?
- What spiritual principles am I practicing in my life?

[For Step 4 character assets see BB pages 67: 0, 1 and 70: 3. Also see the optional adapted 1946 A.A. *Grapevine* “Character Assets and Character Liabilities checklist” on page 40 of this workbook for a sample list of assets.]

### **Blocks to our spirit**

The premise of Step 4 is that we have difficulty turning our life and will over because some of our thoughts and behaviors block us from experiencing our spirit – our higher power or our own better nature. We use the Step 4 process in order to identify these habitual blocking thoughts and behaviors in any resentment, fear, or hurtful action. Once we look deeper inside for the source of our old worn out defenses, or patterns, or defects, or shortcomings – which are usually involved in the roles we played in painful life events – then we can move on and change them in the Steps that follow. This enables us to clear a channel choked up with self-centered, dishonest or fearful motives and permits us to return to our search for our higher power's will, not our own, in any moment of stress. [Optional, see *12&12*, 103: 0]

### **What part of ourselves?**

Through practice we learn to focus not so much on who it was that hurt or threatened us, or how they did that, but more on what part of ourselves was disturbed so that we drank, or acted as though we had been drinking. This often relates to feelings associated with our attitudes, personalities and behaviors in reaction to real or imagined threats to our security, our self esteem, or our sex / relationship instincts. We have little control over others and what they do, but we can change how we habitually react to life events. This is difficult for us. But, if we do not change we may drink. We have to ask for help. We find that help through the discipline of the practice of the Twelve Steps.

## **Where are we responsible?**

We develop new skills in asking where we were responsible in the course of day to day happenings. The Big Book authors never accuse, criticize, or judge us. The purpose of this step is to help us become aware of ourselves as we were in the past and how we are today. We are invited to precisely describe our thinking and behavior. We name our part. We wrestle with spiritual inquiries such as, “Where were my *motives* self-centered or dishonest or at fault?” (See 86: 2) We must honestly ask what these terms mean to us in our own experience and in our own words. (See 47: 1; 63: 3) We set down a true picture in accurate proportion and real perspective of how we were involved.

We may have been *selfish* intentionally, or because we did not even think of the concerns of others. Certainly we have often lied or not been genuine on purpose, but we are also *dishonest* when we see things only in our own distorted way, and not as they really are. Our *self-seeking* and *inconsiderate* behaviors relate to where we tried to control or manipulate others, thinking that we were better than or inferior to them. *Fear* is our number one character defect, underneath all the others. Our behaviors are driven by ancient fears for our very existence, of losing our security, of not getting our desires, and of being shown up for what we are trying to hide. These culminate in our *faults*: our instincts and emotions in collision, or deep seismic gaps between what we instinctively want for ourselves and what we wish for others. (67: 2, 3; 69: 1)

In Step 4, we practice giving accurate descriptions of what has blocked us from our spirit. We state where we missed the mark when we could have been on target, and where we were out of bounds in this game of life. Why do we behave in these ways? Because we are alcoholic. (See 60: 2; 338)

## **Turnarounds**

In focused meditation and prayer, we recognize that others like ourselves are sick and suffering. We ask our higher power to help us wish for others and for ourselves that we all may have deep happiness, genuine serenity, and peace of mind. This helps return us to being right size, and gives us a new perspective as we join in with life. We find that we put our trust in this new faith, not by way of emotion or wishing, but by our own experience through our own practice.

#### **Step 4 Directions: “Who-How-What” & “Why, When, Where and Willing.”**

The directions for Step 4 are in the Big Book, yet surprisingly few alcoholics in recovery comprehend them, and fewer still practice them. Our goal is to do both. Our method is to follow the instructions as written and see what the results are.

The reading describes what an inventory is. (64: 1) Then the Big Book authors look at *the things in ourselves which had been blocking us* (64: 0) from our higher power, which turns out to be *self, manifested in various ways*. (64: 2) This chapter specifically mentions the blocks to our spirit of our *resentments* (64: 3), our *fears* (64: 3), and the consequences of *our own conduct* (69: 1) in the area of *our personal relationships (including sex)*. (64: 3 - 65: 0) For every one of these three manifestations of self (anger, fear, sex) the book has us analyze our life experiences in each of these four ways:

**1<sup>ST</sup>** *We set them on paper.* (64: 3) **Who-How-What** We learn that our troubles are not so much who hurt us or how they did that, but rather may stem from our own reaction to what part of ourselves is being threatened.

**2<sup>ND</sup>** *We considered it carefully.* (65: 3) **Why? Why** work to change? We learn that we have to wrestle with these issues or we may drink again and die.

**3<sup>RD</sup>** *We turned back to the list.* (66: 3) **When? When** ready to change we learn to avoid retaliation, and instead see others as being as sick and as worthy as ourselves.

**4<sup>TH</sup>** *Referring to our list again.* (67: 2) **Where & Willing?** By examining our *defects and shortcomings* (50: 1), our *motives* (86: 2) and *the exact nature of our wrongs* (59: 2), we learn where we may be *selfish, dishonest, self-seeking, and frightened* (67: 2), we thereby become willing *to set these matters straight.* (67: 2)

An annotated selection from the Big Book Step 4 follows on pages 45 – 48 of this SbBB workbook which highlights these four workings of *our grudge list* (65: 1).

[Optional: *Once this healthy practice has become grooved, it will be so interesting and profitable that the time it takes won't be missed.* (12&12, 89: 2)]

~ Sessions 8 – 11, SbBB pages 54-76, thoroughly look into what the Big Book says regarding resentments, fears, and relationships including sex. Optional written inventory forms are provided.

~ “Other Options” on SbBB page 50 points out that some may choose to skip the intervening Sessions and go directly to Session 12 on SbBB page 77 for one group member’s condensed summary of the Big Book Step 4 process.

# STEP 4 BIG BOOK *ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS*

Chapter 5, pp 63: 4 – 67: 2 – Annotated to show four workings of list

69: 3 "In other words, we treat [resentment, fear or] sex[/relationship conduct] as we would any other problem." [ie: MAKE A LIST, etc.]

## [THE FOUR WORKINGS OF OUR GRUDGE LIST: 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup>

1<sup>st</sup> Who-How-What; 2<sup>nd</sup> Why; 3<sup>rd</sup> When; 4<sup>th</sup> Where & Willing

1<sup>st</sup> Who (resentful at?);  
    How (hurt us?);  
        What (part of self affected?)

2<sup>nd</sup> Why (do this work?)

3<sup>rd</sup> When (ready to change, what do we do?) {Turnaround}

4<sup>th</sup> Where (were we at fault?)  
    & Willing (to change?) ]

.....**From the Big Book:**.....

63:4 “Next we launched out on a course of vigorous action, the first step of which is a personal housecleaning, 64:0 which many of us had never attempted. Though our decision was a vital and crucial step, it could have little permanent effect unless at once followed by a strenuous effort to face, and to be rid of, the things in ourselves which had been blocking us. Our liquor was but a symptom. So we had to get down to causes and conditions.

64:1 “Therefore, we started upon a personal inventory. This was Step Four. A business which takes no regular inventory usually goes broke. Taking a commercial inventory is a fact-finding and a fact-facing process. It is an effort to discover the truth about the stock-in-trade. One object is to disclose damaged or unsalable goods, to get rid of them promptly and without regret. If the owner of the business is to be successful, he cannot fool himself about values.

64:2 “We did exactly the same thing with our lives. We took stock honestly. First, we searched out the flaws in our make-up which caused our failure. Being convinced that self, manifested in various ways, was what had defeated us, we considered its common manifestations.



“Mrs. Jones	She's a nut She snubbed me Committed her husband for drinking he's my friend She's a gossip	Pers relat. Self-esteem (fear)
“My employer	Unreasonable, unjust overbearing Threatens to fire me for drinking etc.	Self-esteem (fear) Security
“My wife	Misunderstands & nags Likes Brown Wants house in her name	Pride Sex relations Security (fear)

.....

65:3 “We went back through our lives. Nothing counted but thoroughness and honesty. When we were finished =>

[2<sup>nd</sup> WHY should we look at this?]

[2<sup>nd</sup>] “we considered IT [LIST] carefully. The first thing apparent 66:0 was that this world and its people were often quite wrong. To conclude that others were wrong was as far as most of us ever got. The usual outcome was that people continued to wrong us and we stayed sore. Sometimes it was remorse and then we were sore at ourselves. But the more we fought and tried to have our own way, the worse matters got. As in war, the victor only seemed to win. Our moments of triumph were short-lived.

66:1 “It is plain that a life which includes deep resentment leads only to futility and unhappiness. To the precise extent that we permit these, do we squander the hours that might have been worth while. But with the alcoholic, whose hope is the maintenance and growth of a spiritual experience, this business of resentment is infinitely grave. *We found that it is fatal.* For when harboring such feelings we shut ourselves off from the sunlight of the Spirit. The insanity of alcohol returns and we drink again. And with us, *to drink is to die.*

66:2 “If we were to live, we had to be free of *anger*. The grouch and the brainstorm were not for us. They may be the dubious luxury of normal men, but for alcoholics these things are poison.

[3<sup>rd</sup> WHEN we were ready... {Turnaround} ]

[3<sup>rd</sup>] 66:3 “We turned back to the LIST, for it held the key to the future. We were prepared to look at it from an entirely different angle. We began to see that [WHO] the *world and its people* really dominated us. In that state, the [HOW] *wrong-doing of others*, fancied or real, [WHAT] had *power to actually kill*. How could we escape? We saw that these resentments must be mastered, but how? We could not wish them away any more than alcohol.

### [REPEAT:]

66:4 “This was our course: We realized that [WHO] the *people who wronged us* were perhaps spiritually sick.

67:0 “Though we did not like [HOW] *their symptoms* and [WHAT] the *way these disturbed us*, they, like ourselves, were sick too. We asked God to help us show them the same tolerance, pity, and patience that we would cheerfully grant a sick friend. [WHEN] When a person offended we said to ourselves, ‘*This is a sick man*. How can I be helpful to him? God save me from being angry. Thy will be done.’

67:1 “We avoid retaliation or argument. We wouldn't treat sick people that way. If we do, we destroy our chance of being helpful. We cannot be helpful to all people, but at least God will show us how to take a kindly and tolerant view of each and every one.

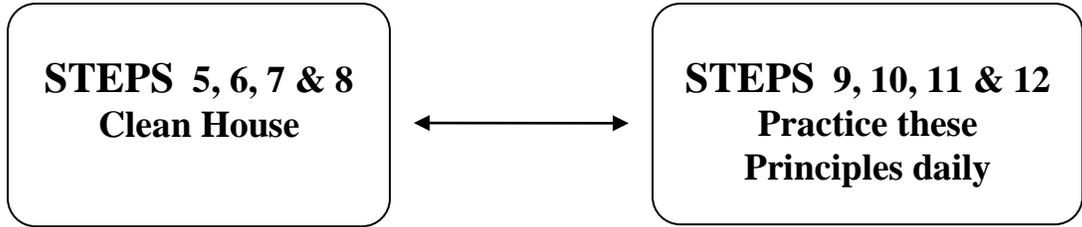
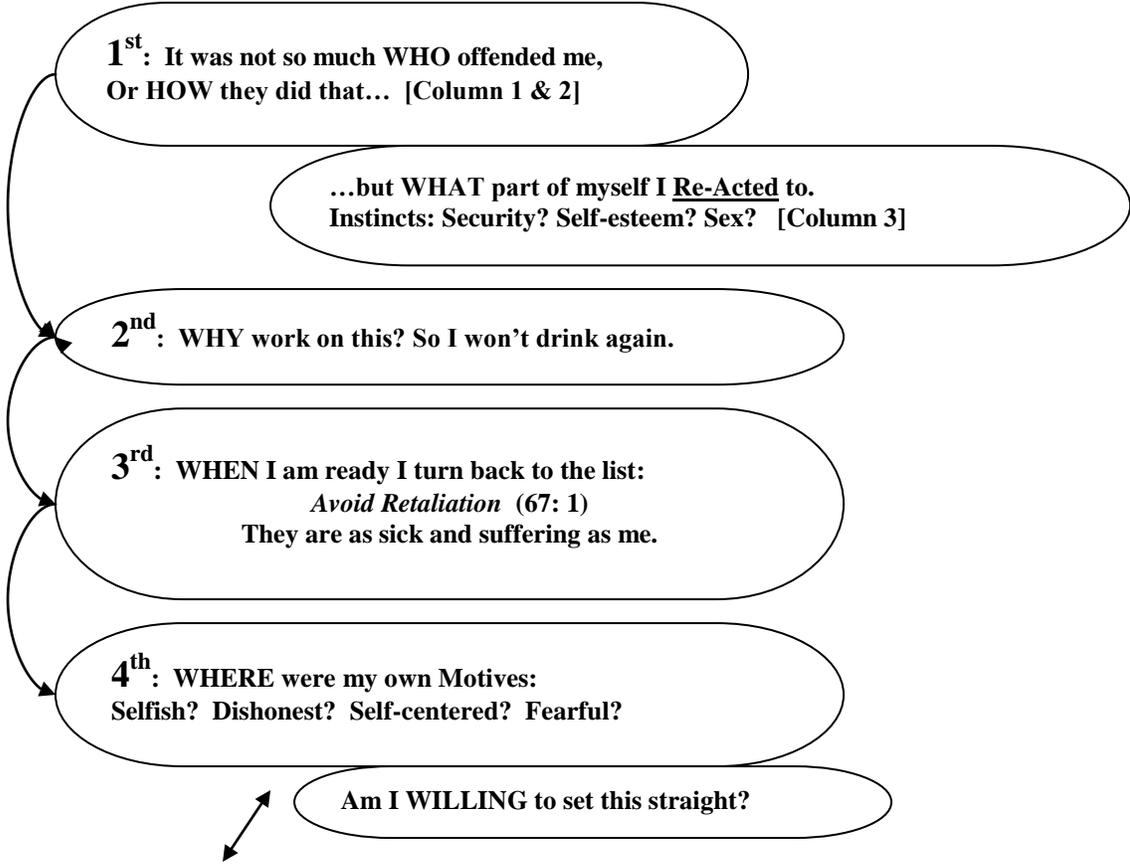
[4<sup>th</sup> WHERE at fault? & WILLING to set things straight.]

[4<sup>th</sup>] 67:2 “Referring to our LIST again. Putting out of our minds the wrongs others had done, we resolutely looked for our own mistakes.

[WHERE] Where had we been selfish, dishonest, self-seeking and frightened? [See motives 86: 2] Though a situation had not been entirely our fault, we tried to disregard the other person involved entirely. Where were we to blame? The inventory was ours, not the other man's. When we saw our faults we LISTed them. We placed them before us *in black and white* [LIST]. We admitted our wrongs honestly and were [WILLING] willing to set these matters straight.”



**STEP 4**  
**Inventory: Assets & Defenses**  
**“Who Am I?”**  
 Work GRUDGE LIST 1-2-3-4 Ways  
 Big Book pp. 63-67 Resentments, etc.



## Other Options

Before launching into Sessions 8, 9, 10 and 11, you may wish to pause and reflect a moment. Perhaps you are “restless, irritable, and discontented” (xxviii: 4) about this whole Step 4 process and it may be good to let that go. Relax. Take some deep breaths. Allow yourself to be present in your body for a while.

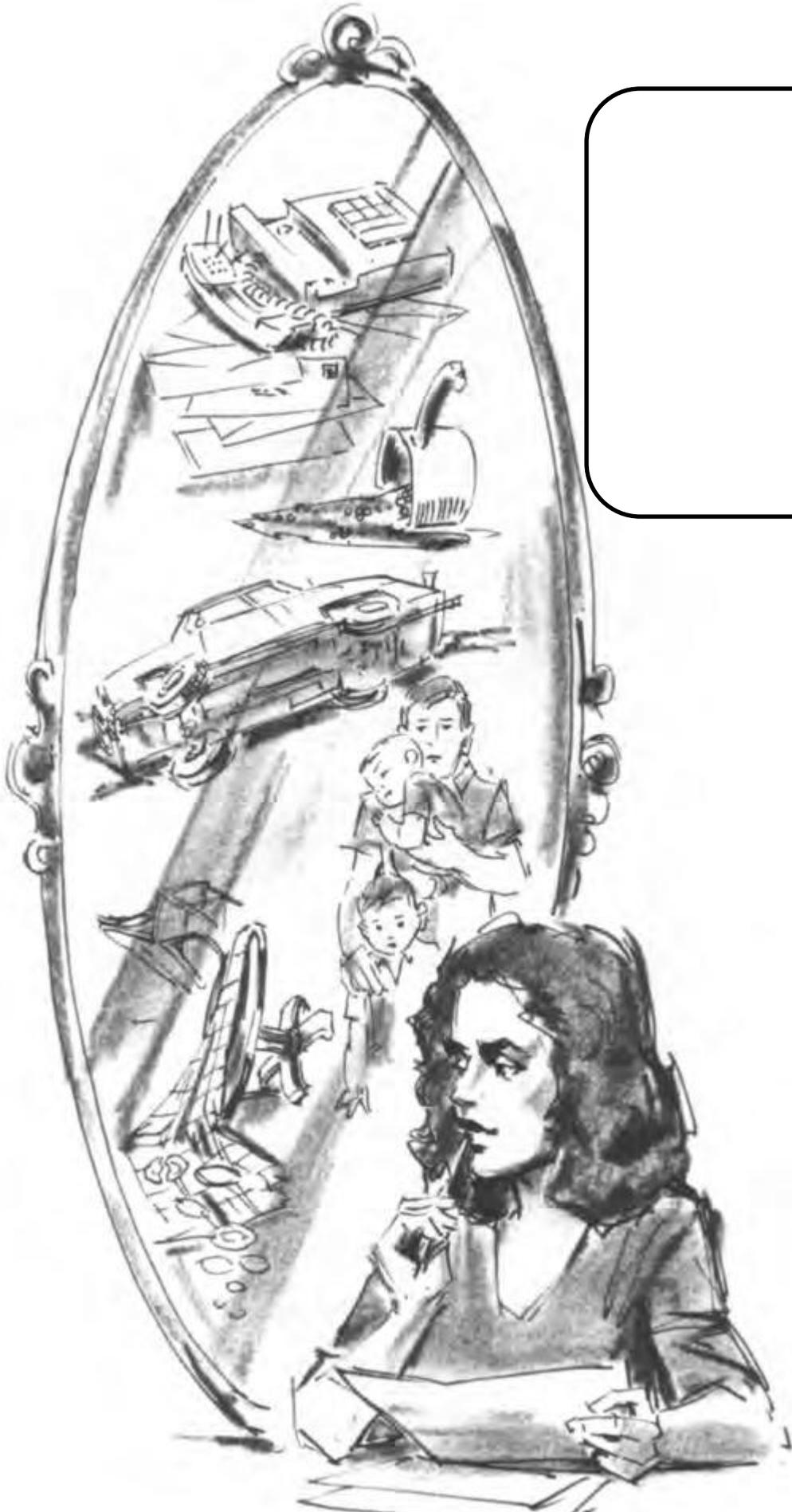
Remember that there are as many ways to list one’s own character assets and character defenses by taking Step 4 as there are people in recovery. The following story is one condensed example from a time before the Big Book was written down:

“...It was Dr. Bob's afternoon off - he had me to the office and we spent three or four hours formally going through the ... program as it was at that time. ... Dr. Bob led me through all of these steps. At the moral inventory [now Step 4], he brought up several of my bad personality traits or character defects such as selfishness, conceit, jealousy, carelessness, intolerance, ill-temper, sarcasm, and resentments. We went over these at great length, and then he finally asked me if I wanted these defects of character removed. When I said yes, we both knelt at his desk and prayed, each of us asking to have these defects taken away.

“This picture is still vivid. If I live to be a hundred, it will always stand out in my mind. It was very impressive, and I wish that every A.A. could have the benefit of this type of sponsorship today.” (BB, “He Sold Himself Short”, 263: 0, 1, 2)

That was one way to do it. Now, in these Steps by the Big Book sessions, we are looking at the method presented on pages 64 to 71 of *Alcoholics Anonymous*. It is not THE way to do the Step 4 inventory, but it is A way. There has been a lot of confusion about the process of taking this inventory by the Big Book, but it is actually quite simple. The instructions are condensed, and it is often difficult to understand and follow. In Sessions 8 - 11 of this workbook we will be looking at them in great detail. Give it a try with the group, your buddy and/or your sponsor.

However, at this point some groups elect to spend a session on the Big Book directions and then skip Sessions 8 - 11. They go right to Session 12 on page 77 of this SbBB workbook, the “Grudge List - One Group Member's Pocket Treatment,” and that is fine too. The point is to get to work on writing your own inventory. Easy does it, but do it!



## Step 4 Notes