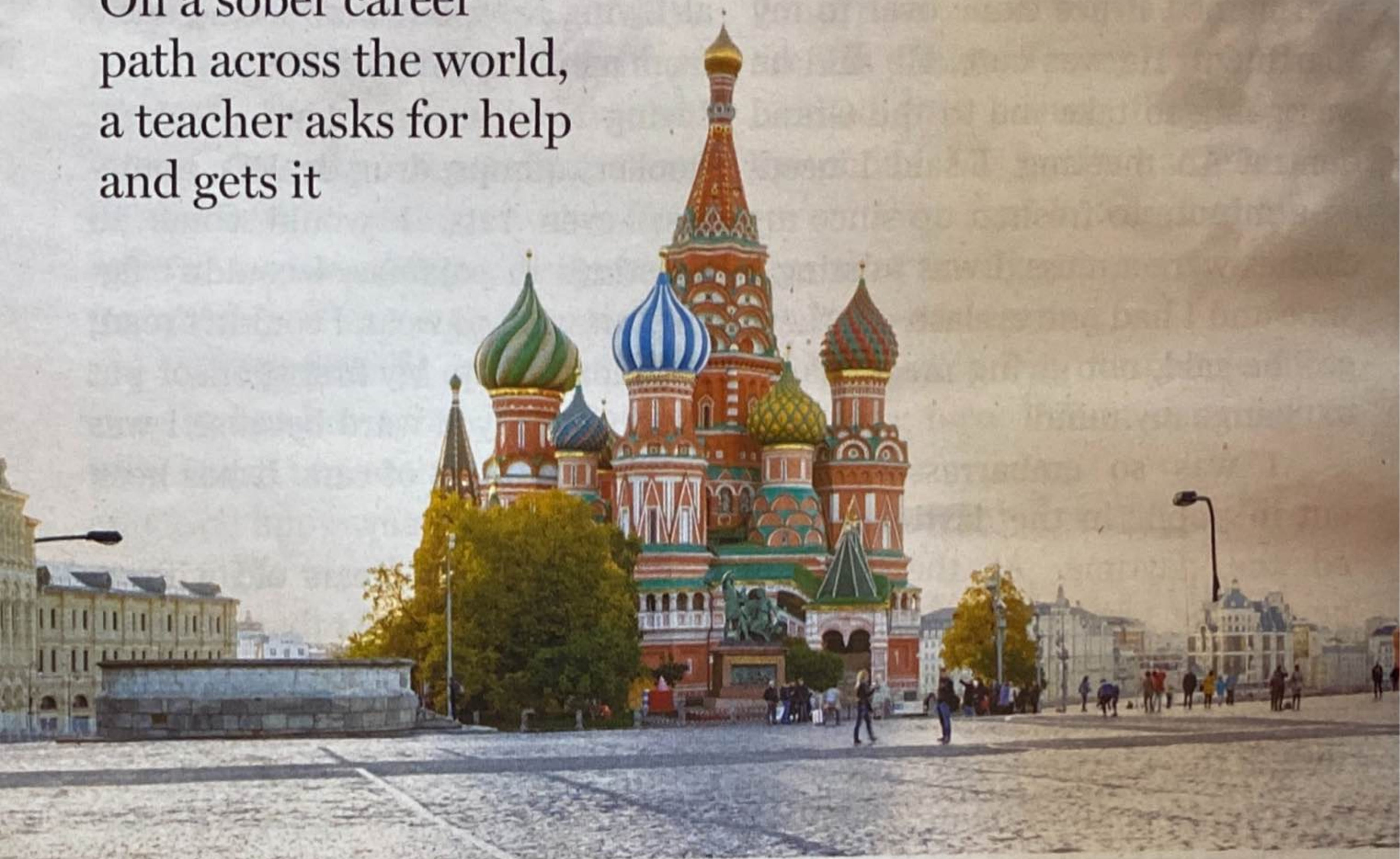


LESSON LEARNED

On a sober career
path across the world,
a teacher asks for help
and gets it



THEY say that if you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans. Given how much of a serial schemer I can be, I must regularly have him in tears. They also say that happiness is reality minus expectations. I would like to be happy, but I also really love to hang on to expectations.

Even in a comfortable, familiar setting, my expectations and rigid planning—two things I often indulge in—can make life an awful lot more difficult. So when I packed my bags

and moved to Russia a few years ago, my tendencies made an already challenging change far more difficult than it needed to be. I'm happy to say that today, as a result of continuing to work the program along with the help of other alcoholics, I've learned to tone down my scheming and my demands on life. But I had to learn from trial and error, which Russia was happy to offer.

I moved to Russia to teach English and, I hoped, become fluent in Russian. That more or less happened



and I am thankful for that. But I also brought a lot of expectations with me. First of all, I expected to quickly fit in with the recovery community in Vladimir (the city where I lived). That didn't happen, probably in part because Russians don't mix easily with foreigners. They've learned to be suspicious of us. But it sure didn't help that I couldn't speak Russian very well, so my new AA Fellowship could hardly understand me.

After coming to terms with the lack of warmth and comfort from lo-

cal meetings in Vladimir—which, by the way, is a smaller city not far from Moscow—I started to lean harder on my Higher Power for support, or so I thought. But as I came to learn, relying on a faith you don't have won't yield very good results.

So in October of that year, disappointed with the Fellowship and the God that I still firmly believed had saved my life back home in Salt Lake City, I finally made my way to the English-speaking group in Moscow. Traffic delayed me, but I was so desperate not to be late for my first meeting there that I sprinted down the church basement hall to get to the meeting on time, causing a ruckus that made everyone else look at me with caution as I entered the room, as if they were silently asking each other, "How crazy is this guy?"

I was grateful to be offered a seat and a handshake all the same and I was really pleased to be asked to read the Preamble. For the first time in my sobriety, I uncontrollably teared up as I read and couldn't make it all the way through without stopping several times. After the reading of the Steps and Traditions, I felt a tension in the room and, whether it was reality or just my ego talking, it felt like the other members were asking themselves, once again, "What's up with the new guy?"

So I shared. I explained that I hadn't been to an English-speaking meeting in months and that I hadn't

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felt the shelter and support the program usually gives me in all that time. I said that what I thought would be a grand adventure to a foreign country and a start to my future career in government work turned out to be, it seemed, a painful, lengthy mistake.

That's about the time things all started to turn around. Since then, I've had days when I've felt down and depressed and many times I've had to reach out for help to the alcoholics I met in Moscow as well as the ones I've stayed in contact with back home. I cannot imagine where I'd be without their help today. But I've also managed to find the good. I kept learning Russian until I could confidently attend the local meetings, understand what was being said and contribute to the discussion. Now I feel I'm part of the Vladimir Fellowship. I've also made a handful of friendships outside of the program in Vladimir that are dear to me.

And...I've also fallen in love. I've had, and continue to have, the plea-

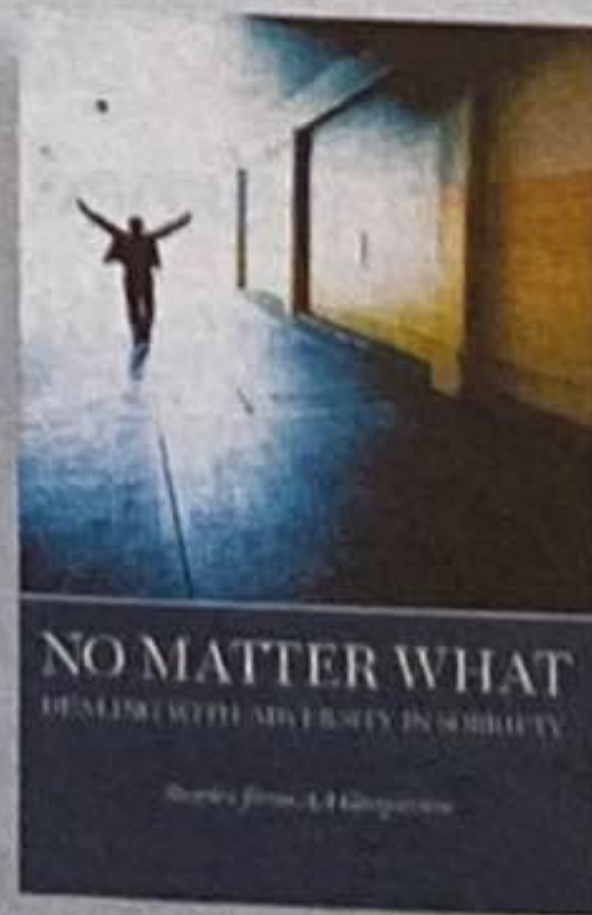
sure of my first sane, sober, healthy relationship with a wonderful woman who was born on the other side of the globe.

My students can be a constant source of stress, if I want to see them that way. But if I pause when agitated and ask for the right thought or action, I find that building relationships with my students that cross national, cultural and linguistic barriers is one of the most worthwhile things I've ever done.

I think it all comes back to that crucial moment with the Moscow Downtown Group where I didn't try to hide just how overwhelmed and underprepared I felt. I surrendered myself to God, which I call a Group of Drunks. That group caught me as I fell, lifted me back up and set me on my feet, ready to help another alcoholic in need. Thank you to everyone who was there for me. I encourage anyone else in a similar situation to do the same thing. It sure helped me.

CHRISTIAN S.
Salt Lake City, Utah

NO MATTER WHAT BOOK



How do we get through fear, pain or loss when drinking is not an option? The stories in this Grapevine book show how AA members use the tools of the program to get through difficult times. Visit aagrapevine.org/books for info.