

Recovery Times

A newsletter from Alcoholics Anonymous San Fernando Valley Central Office VOL 29, NO 4 April 2005

AA History: Chips, Medallions and Birthdays

The traditions of chips, medallions and birthdays vary in different parts of the country and I thought it would be interesting to look up some of the history on them. Sister Ignatia, the nun who helped Dr. Bob get the hospitalization program started at St. Thomas Hospital in Akron, was the first person to use medallions in A.A. She gave the drunks who were leaving St. Thomas after a 5 day dry out a Sacred Heart Medallion and instructed them that the acceptance of the medallion signified a commitment to God, to A.A. and to recovery and that if they were going to drink, they had a responsibility to return the medallion to her before drinking.

The sacred heart badges had been used prior to A.A. by the Father Matthew Temperance Movement of the 1840's and The Pioneers, an Irish Temperance movement of the 1890's.

The practice of sobriety chips in A.A. started with a group in Elmira, N.Y. in 1947 and has grown from there.

The celebration of birthdays came from the Oxford Group where they celebrated the anniversary of their spiritual rebirth. As we have a problem with honesty, A.A. chose the anniversary of our last drink.

Early celebrations of birthdays resulted in people getting drunk and Dr. Harry Tiebout was asked to look at the problem and he commented on this phenomenon in an article titled "When the Big 'I' Becomes Nobody." (Grapevine, Sept. 1965)

"Early on in A.A., I was consulted about a serious problem plaguing the local group. The practice of celebrating a year's sobriety with a birthday cake had resulted in a certain number of the members getting drunk within a short period after the celebration. It seemed apparent that some could not stand prosperity. I was asked to settle between birthday cakes or no birthday cakes.

"Characteristically, I begged off, not from shyness but from ignorance. Some three or four years later, A.A. furnished me the answer. The group no longer had such a problem because, as one member said, "We celebrate still, but a year's sobriety is now a dime a dozen. No one gets much of a kick out of that anymore."

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Calendar Events

Upcoming Events

20th ANNUAL VENTURA COUNTY ROUNDUP

Oxnard, California
April 15, 16 & 17, 2005
<http://www.vcroundup.com>

24th ANNUAL SO. CAL. H&I CONFERENCE

Orange, CA
April 29 - May 1, 2005
Email: rtaylor3@verizon.net

A.A. DESERT POW WOW

Esmeralda Resort
Indian Wells, California
May 26 - 29, 2005
Info: SherAli @ 760-321-6568

21st ANNUAL, SOUTH BAY ROUNDUP

Torrance, California
May 27 - 30, 2005
TORRANCE MARRIOTT
<http://www.southbayroundup.org>

BIKE-N-FOR-BOOKS

Woodley Park, Van Nuys
June 25, 2005

2005 International A.A. Convention

June 30 - July 3, 2005
Toronto, Ont
Registration forms are now available
<http://www.aa.org>

Registration forms for the events above are at the
Intergroup Meeting or at Central Office

SERVICE COMMITTEE SCHEDULE

- April 18, 2005 **SFVH&I
THIRDMONDAY**
8pm Business Meeting
Get Acquainted Workshop, 7pm,
5657 Lindley Ave.

- May 2, 2005 **G.S. Districts #11, 16
FIRSTMONDAY**
6pm, 11455 Chandler Blvd, N. Hollywood

- May 2, 2005 **G.S. Districts #17
FIRSTMONDAY**
6pm, orientation, 6:30pm meeting
5000 Colfax (church), N. Hollywood

- May 3, 2005 **G.S. Districts #2
FIRSTTUESDAY**
6:30pm, 4011 Dunsmore
La Crescenta

- May 4, 2005 **G.S. District #1
FIRSTWEDNESDAY**
6:30pm, 7552 Remmet
Canoga Park

- May 4, 2005 **SFV Board of Directors**
6pm, Central Office

- May 14, 2005 **G.S. District #7
SECONDSATURDAY**
Agua Dulce Woman's Club
33201 Agua Dulce Cyn Rd
Sharon G. (661) 951-0372

- May 9, 2005 **SFV Intergroup
SECONDMONDAY**
6:30 pm Orientation
7pm Business Meeting
St. Innocents Church
5657 Lindley Ave., Tarzana

Valley Events

As of publishing time - no valley events
have been submitted

**TO FIND OUT WHAT'S GOING ON
YOU CAN:**

COME TO CENTRAL OFFICE

CALL US AT 818-988-3001

VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT

<http://www.sfvaa.org>

Special Events

CENTRAL OFFICE

The almost Memorial Day, almost Free

Central Office Picnic

is scheduled for

Sunday, May 22, 2005 - 11am to 3pm

Woodley Park
(Japanese Garden Entrance)

Tickets are \$2

Speaker at 1:30pm

Service Opportunities & News

Service Opportunities in the San Fernando Valley

PUBLIC INFORMATION COMMITTEE -

Provides information to the general public about what A.A. does and does not do. Could always use volunteers, especially young people and Spanish speaking A.A.'s for health fairs and to speak at various schools and businesses. Contact Central Office (818) 988-3001.

HOSPITAL AND INSTITUTIONS COMMITTEE -

Carries the message of Alcoholics Anonymous into hospitals, prisons & treatment facilities to those who are unable to get out to meetings. Meets the 3rd Monday of the month 8:00 PM @ St. Innocent's Church, 5657 Lindley Ave, Tarzana, CA. Info: Sarah G. (818) 894-9921.

SAN FERNANDO VALLEY INTERGROUP -

Elected Intergroup representatives maintain and develop policies for Central Office, and inform other IG Reps about Alkathons & fund raisers, etc. Meets second Monday, monthly, St. Innocent's Church, 5657 Lindley Ave, Tarzana, CA. Orientation 6:30pm, Meeting at 7:30pm. Contact: Central Office at 988-3001.

SAN FERNANDO VALLEY CONVENTION -

Volunteers are welcome to participate in the planning of the 2005 Convention. The Committee meets the 3rd Tuesday of each month (except February and March); 7 PM at St. Innocent's Church, 5657 Lindley Ave, Tarzana, CA.

Central Office News

San Fernando Valley Central Office is On the Web

The SFV Central Office website is now available for Internet browsers. On the website, you can find a map to our office in Van Nuys, a listing of upcoming events in the Valley, service organization information and links to other cool A.A. websites. Our meeting schedule is also accessible on the website. Meetings are listed by day, Sunday through Saturday. Check it out: <http://www.sfvaa.org>

Do you have an article for the Recovery Times?

Email it to us at: sfvaaews@sbcglobal.net

San Fernando Valley Central Office Intergroup Representatives Meeting March 14, 2005

Richard W. Chairperson – Meeting opened at 7:00 pm

Treasurer's Report; See Insert

Service Committee information - see page 2 and 3 of the Recovery Times for more information

Old Business: None

New Business: .Picnic scheduled for May 22, 2005

Birthdays Suzy - 17 yrs, Tony - 18 yrs, Lisa - 18 yrs.

Motion to adjourn 7:30 PM

The long form of the Intergroup Meeting Minutes for March is available at Central Office or at the Intergroup Meeting. These minutes are pending approval on April 11, 2005.

Next Meeting - April 11, 2005

Prepared and submitted by: Dawn H., Recording Secretary

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

March 2005

Elizabeth T.	3 years
Kevin D.	9 years
Craig M.	9 years
Kay G.	12 years
Tony M.	18 years

Your Birthday Gift to Central Office

Many A.A. members share their birthdays with those who need the same help and opportunity that A.A. gave to them.

By sending a donation to Central Office you share your birthday with Recovery Times readers. Send a dollar (\$1.00) a year - or \$1.00 for each year of your sobriety - or send as much as you wish to give to celebrate your birthday. The amount doesn't matter - it's the "counting" that counts.

May your special day be filled with joy from morning until night, and may the "24's" that lie ahead be especially glad and bright.

An Alcoholic's Story - A Dog Named Casper

His warm, soft head relaxed and slowly sank for the last time. I was holding my best friend as his last breath slipped away and his body was quiet and still. I had been telling him through my shaking sobs to “Go to the garden, go to the garden,” - a place which he dearly loved to be with me.

Let me back up a little. We got Casper when he was so small. He was born on Oct 3, 1990 and he came to live with us soon after. A small black and brown dachshund, lively and frightened, and missing his family. I was drinking then and I was fighting the fact that I had a real problem.

I was functioning, working, still had friends, taking care of the ranch and planting huge gardens in which Casper and I spent many hours. He loved to burrow under the huger zucchini plants and race around looking for gophers.

Back then at night I would start drinking at five o'clock and get so drunk in the evening I wouldn't eat dinner. Casper became my best friend and confidant over those years. I could talk to him when no one else seemed to care. I felt so sorry for myself and it came to the point that I was isolating and shutting people out of my life. I got up in me morning and hated to start my day.

I would sit at night with Casper by my feet and drink heavily until I could only go to bed. He never left me during those years but he knew there was something very heartbreaking going on.

On April 2, 1993, I was getting ready to work on the ranch and the phone rang. Someone I did not know said “Is this Sandi?” I said “Yes.” She said, “I'm sorry to tell you that your son is dead.” I remember falling to my knees and screaming “Is this a sick joke?” It was not a joke.

My son had been murdered at 26 years old. During the next two years I nearly drank myself to oblivion, not really wanting to die; but not wanting to live either. The horror of those two years will stay with me as a reminder the rest of my life. It was a very valid excuse to me, at the time, to consume as much alcohol as possible to numb the gnawing, excruciating pain. Some of those two years is a blur of the police picking me up or spending time in Mental Health. When those doors lock behind you, there is an awful feeling.

Somehow I knew in late 1995 that if I did not do something I was going to die. I came to Alcoholics Anonymous and in the beginning I just sat there and held on to my chair. People actually hugged me and made me feel welcome. Little by little the terrible loneliness started to disappear and I began to take part in the program. I was able to spend some years of sobriety with Casper and we worked and romped and played together. Casper would actually pull his lips back over his teeth and smile and nod his head up and down. He could sense the relief I felt.

I took the suggestions to heart and I worked the steps and I read the Big Book and I started reaching out to others and seeing them as human myself and started to help others. I also stopped being critical

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AA History - Chips, ... (continued from front page)

The AA Grapevine carried many articles on chips and cakes and the following is a brief summary of some:

Feb. 1948 - Why All the Congratulations? "When we start taking bows, (even on anniversaries) we bow ourselves right into the cuspidor."

July, 1948 - Group to Give Oscar for Anniversaries. The Larchmont Group of Larchmont N.Y. gives a cast bronze camel mounted on a mahogany base to celebrate 1st, 5th and 10th anniversaries.

"The camel is wholly emblematic of the purposes of most sincere A.A.'s to live for 24 hours without a drink."

August 1948- The Artesta, New Mexico Group awards marbles to all members. If you are caught without your marbles you are fined 25 cents. This money goes into the Foundation Fund.

June 1953 - "We operate a poker chip club in the Portland Group (Maine). We have poker chips of nine colors of which the white represents the probation period of one month. If he keeps his white chip for one month he is presented with a red chip for one month's sobriety.

The chips continue with blue for two months, black for three, green for four, transparent blue for five, amber for six, transparent purple for nine months and a transparent clear chip for one year. We have our chips stamped with gold A.A. letters.

Also at the end of a year and each year thereafter, we present them with a group birthday card signed by all members present at the meeting."

Dick B.



Co-founder Quotes

The unity of Alcoholics Anonymous is the most cherished quality our society has. Our lives, the lives of all to come, depend squarely upon it. We stay whole, or A. A. dies. Without unity, the heart of A. A. would cease to beat; our world arteries would no longer carry the life-giving grace of God; His gift to us would be spent aimlessly.

Within AA, I suppose, we shall always quarrel a good bit. Mostly, I think, about how to do the greatest good for the greatest number of drunks. We shall have our childish spats and snits over small questions of money management and who is going to run our groups for the next six months. Any bunch of growing children (and that is what we are) would hardly be in character if they did less. These are the growing pains of infancy, and we actually thrive on them. Surmounting such problems, in A.A.'s rather rugged school of life, is a health exercise.

Treasures From Heaven

Alcohol was the poison that fueled my fears, resentments, anger, rage, wrong thinking, wrong reaction and poor choices. This disease led to the total collapse of my life, rejection by everyone I loved, failure in marriage and severely restricted visitation with my young son Aidan.

The soul-crushing pain led me first to the rooms of AA, then to my knees to ask for God's intervention, and back to AA. By the time the debilitating anger, resentments and insanity had somewhat dissipated, so too had the hope of reconciliation with my loved ones all but vanished.

I knew I was sick and needed to heal. I had grown up a child of an alcoholic. I had lived with fears of abandonment for years. I did not want the same for my son. AA was the only hospital bed and metaphysicians I could afford and that would have me.

I first came to AA with little expectation of salvaging my life. The kindness and acceptance I received was unusual and curious to me. In the twinkling of one eye I came to discern an unfamiliar presence in the rooms of AA. I inexplicably recalled a poem by John Henry Newman: "I sought to hear the voice of God and climbed the topmost steeple, but God declared: Go down again - I dwell among the people."

Later, this "presence" was recognized by Deepak Chopra in a book a fellow AA had recommended, in which the author said, "The human representatives of God constitute an infinite treasure. Dipping into this treasure will help you to open your heart. At just the right moment when your soul wants to blossom, the words of a saint or a sage may be the right fertilizer." We know there is no shortage of God or fertilizer in AA.

I came to feel a trust I had never known. I clung to AA as my life raft in a chaotic sea. I knew there were many forces against me, but this one thing could save my life if I could just hold on... so I did.

I get to see my son now 2 hours a week in a supervised setting. He is now almost 4 years old. He's in a Peter Pan phase and one of his favorite adventures is when I hide small treasure chests around the building and provide him with treasure maps to seek out the buried treasure. Usually I place gummy bears, pez, licorice, coins and such in the boxes. He doesn't pay much attention to the treats but revels in the discovery.

Without much thought, I included my one-year chip in one of the treasure chests. Upon finding it he was unusually thrilled. He asked: "Dad, is this real treasure?" I said it was indeed. He asked, "Did you get it from pirates?" I said, "No, it came from heaven, and I had to work a whole year to get it."

He set it aside and we continued to play. I didn't even see him pick it up later. He did beg me to allow him to take his new slingshot home. I reluctantly yielded, knowing there would be maternal repercussions due to my toy selection being weaponry in nature.

When Mom arrived, however, it was not the slingshot he heralded. Instead, he announced, holding my one year medallion up high: "Look, Mom! Real treasure, treasure from heaven!"

I've shared my defects and defeats with you and now I share my faith and joy. The promises do come true. I thank God everyday for you, my fellows; you are my "treasures from heaven."

Kernan M., Ventura County

An Alcoholic Story - cont'd

and honestly got to know people inside instead of just superficially. Most of all I opened up my ears and started to really listen to how others were learning how to live.

Today it is not about alcohol anymore. It is being a part of this universe and a part of humanity and learning how to live this life one day at a time. As I said, Casper never left my side, no matter drunk or sober, sad or happy, sick or well. I truly believe he was happy with sobriety.

Today I have such wonderful memories of Casper. Sometimes when I meditate I can almost feel his presence. In sobriety I have lost a mother, dear nephew, a brother, and a father and I have not needed to take a drink. Life goes on and I must keep learning to be involved with life and in life instead of a shell on the outside.

I believe everything is an experience we can choose to learn from and today I do have a choice. Today I do things in memory of my son. Perhaps I put a dollar in the basket for him as well as for me. And perhaps now and then I'll see a young man like my son who was so gifted and maybe my experience can help that young man go from losing everything to finding everything as I did. My life is a gift and everything in it today is a gift. I have wonderful friends and I live to arise in the morning and wonder what the day will bring.

Casper was going on fourteen that day when he quietly passed, and hopefully I'll have nine years of sobriety very soon. It really works.

Sandi S., Paso Robles

Newletter Subscription: *If you wish to receive your copy of the Recovery Times at your home, please complete this form and return with a check (\$7 donation to cover delivery cost) to:*

*San Fernando Valley Central Office
7417-E Van Nuys Boulevard
Van Nuys, CA 91405*

Current Information

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Moving ???: *We need your former address as well as your new address to correct our records. Fill out both forms and mail to the address above.*

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