

# Recovery Times

A newsletter from Alcoholics Anonymous San Fernando Valley Central Office VOL 29, NO 10 Oct. 2005

## DAYS OF HEARTBREAK

Eighteen days since her funeral. Eighteen days which, in so many ways, feel like an eternity. My little girl (age thirty-six at the time of her death) was one of those unfortunates who could not—or would not—grab onto this wondrous thing called Alcoholics Anonymous.

The price of her inability—or refusal—to do so was the ultimate one, her life.

It has been eighteen days of heartbreak, punctuated by moments of anger and frustration. Anger at her? God? Alcoholism? I'm not yet sure. But it has also been a time of deep reflection and gratitude. The support of my loving wife, my family, and my brothers and sisters in AA has been overwhelming. The frequent phone calls, the hugs, the honest compassion and hurt in their eyes. The outpouring of love.

My last conversation with her was over a year ago. It was brief and painful. I told her that I knew what she was feeling; that I understood too well the hell she was living. And I told her that I knew how to make it stop; that I would do anything within my power to assist her recovery. The offer was refused. Then I told her that I could no longer watch what she was doing to herself. That the outcome was inevitable if she continued to refuse help.

I've wakened in the middle of the night a hundred times; imagined the call from the hospital or the police. Imagined a hundred different scenarios, and imagined my reaction to them. Preparing myself. And I've prayed. God, how I've prayed. And cried. When the inevitable call came, I wasn't prepared. Nowhere close. Can we ever prepare ourselves for the death of a child? I think not. It hits us at such a visceral place. And it feels like a piece of my heart and soul has been ripped savagely away. Unimaginable pain. The loss of both of my parents within thirteen months hurt terribly. But nothing like this. At times it seems impossible to survive. But then I put one foot in front of the other, and go on. And another day passes.

In calmer, more reflective moments, I wonder why I was so incredibly graced by my Higher Power. I was given the chance, at age fifty-two, to rediscover this miraculous Fellowship and way of life. I had been away from it for so many years. Given sobriety and the chance to lead a meaningful life. And the price? Follow a few simple Steps, and listen carefully to those who have gone before me. It is the easier, softer way.

And I wonder why me, not her? Fortunately, I'm quickly pulled from that dead-end street. I realize that puzzling over that particular imponderable serves no useful purpose.

To the contrary, too much time dwelling on it can—and likely will—lead me down a path at the end of which lies self-pity. And that is a place too familiar. A place where inevitably the only refuge seems to be a drink. A lot of drinks. But never enough. And he pulls me up short. "Get out of there!" "Go do something useful!" "Do I hear someone whining?" "You know where that ends!"

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# Calendar Events

## Upcoming Events

### **44th ANNUAL HAWAII CONVENTION**

October 18 - 25, 2005  
Honolulu, HI  
Info: (209) 536-1404

### **2nd ANNUAL SANTA CLARITA VALLEY CONVENTION**

October 21 - 23, 2005  
Santa Clarita, CA  
Website: [www.scvaaconvention.com](http://www.scvaaconvention.com)

### **18th ANNUAL INLAND EMPIRE CONVENTION**

October 21 - 23, 2005  
San Bernadino, CA  
Info: (909) 973-4254  
Email: [gotorose@adelphia.net](mailto:gotorose@adelphia.net)

### **31st ANNUAL SAN FERNANDO VALLEY CONVENTION**

February 3 - 5, 2006  
Burbank, CA  
Info: (818) 734-0383  
Email: [info@sfvaaconvention.org](mailto:info@sfvaaconvention.org)  
Website: [www.sfvaaconvention.org](http://www.sfvaaconvention.org)

Registration forms for the events above  
can be obtained at the Intergroup Meeting  
or at Central Office

## SERVICE COMMITTEE SCHEDULE

- Oct. 17, 2005 **SFV H&I  
THIRD MONDAY**  
8pm Business Meeting  
7pm Get Acquainted Workshop  
5657 Lindley Ave.  
\*\*\*\*\*
- Nov. 7, 2005 **G.S. District #11  
FIRST MONDAY**  
6pm new GSR orientation, 6:30pm meeting  
315 W. Vine St., Glendale  
\*\*\*\*\*
- Nov. 7, 2005 **G.S. District #16  
FIRST MONDAY**  
6:15pm meeting  
15950 Chatsworth (church), Granada Hills  
\*\*\*\*\*
- Nov. 7, 2005 **G.S. District #17  
FIRST MONDAY**  
6pm new GSR orientation, 6:30pm meeting  
5000 Colfax (church), N. Hollywood  
\*\*\*\*\*
- Nov. 1, 2005 **G.S. District #2  
FIRST TUESDAY**  
6:30pm, 4011 Dunsmore, La Crescenta  
\*\*\*\*\*
- Nov. 2, 2005 **G.S. District #1  
FIRST WEDNESDAY**  
6:30pm, 7552 Remmet, Canoga Park  
\*\*\*\*\*
- Nov. 9, 2005 **SFV Board of Directors**  
6pm, Central Office  
\*\*\*\*\*
- Nov. 12, 2005 **G.S. District #7  
SECOND SATURDAY**  
Agua Dulce Woman's Club  
33201 Agua Dulce Cyn Rd  
Sharon G. (661) 951-0372  
\*\*\*\*\*
- Nov. 14, 2005 **SFV Intergroup  
SECOND MONDAY**  
6:30 pm Orientation  
7pm Business Meeting  
St. Innocents Church  
5657 Lindley Ave., Tarzana

## Valley Events

TO FIND OUT  
WHAT ELSE IS GOING ON

YOU CAN:

COME TO CENTRAL OFFICE  
CALL US AT 818-988-3001  
VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT  
<http://www.sfvaa.org>

## Special Events

November is  
**GRATITUDE MONTH!**

'When anyone, anywhere,  
reaches out for help,  
I want the Hand of AA  
always to be there.  
And for that, I am Responsible.'

# 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 third Monday of each month 8:00 PM at St. Innocent's Church, 5657 Lindley Ave, Tarzana, CA. For more information, contact Central Office at 988-3001.

### 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 7:00pm. 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: [sfvaanews@sbcglobal.net](mailto:sfvaanews@sbcglobal.net)

### **San Fernando Valley Central Office Intergroup Representatives Meeting September 12, 2005**

Richard W. Chairperson – Meeting opened at 7:00 pm  
Richard retired from the Board and turned the gavel  
over to Mike F. – New Chairperson

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: Rosanne L. was approved as new Co-  
Chair and Di V. was approved as new 2nd alternate.

Birthdays Denise - 1 yr, Holly - 4 yrs Dave - 16 yrs

*Motion to adjourn 7:30 PM*

*The long form of the Intergroup Meeting Minutes for  
August is available at Central Office or at the Intergroup  
Meeting. These minutes are pending approval on October  
10, 2005*

*Next Meeting - October 10, 2005*

*Prepared and submitted by: Dawn H.,  
Recording Secretary*

## **HAPPY BIRTHDAY!**

**September 2005**

**Linda V. 23 years**

**Nancy M. 30 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.*

# ANTARCTICA OR BUST

Ever since I was three years old and saw pictures of the Antarctic continent, I have dreamed of experiencing that world. The continent has a magical quality, especially the light. It is the coldest, windiest, driest, and most extreme environment on Earth. But my first drink, when I was seven years old, along with other factors, sent me into the abyss of alcoholic despair and almost robbed me of my dream.

Twelve years ago, I entered AA in Cape Elizabeth, Maine, as a trembling, anti-social, and nervous wreck. My drink of choice was hard liquor straight from the bottle, and I drank alone more often than not. I drank to get drunk, period. Drinking in a bar seemed an odd idea because: 1) I had to wait too long for the shot glass to be refilled. (Patience isn't my strong suit.) 2) It was too expensive. 3) I was underage when I got sober (nineteen). 4) I thought, Why risk getting caught driving under the influence when you could drink at home, save money, dream without anyone bothering you, and pass out on a comfortable couch?

Two weeks before I graduated from high school, a severe accident related to drinking prohibited me from walking, working, driving or functioning for almost a year. So even if I could have functioned in the world, I had never learned how to. I had no idea what to do.

But in AA, I learned there is a big world out there waiting to be experienced and wonderful people to get to know. Once I was able to drive, I went to two hundred and seventy meetings in ninety days, and began to want what others in the rooms had. I still wanted to go to Antarctica, but thought my life was too much of a wreck to ever make that dream come true.

Then in the summer of 2000, I got a job working for the United States Antarctica Program, headquartered here in Englewood, Colorado, and that December I traveled to the Antarctica Peninsula! I was hired to do computer and marine radio repair work on a Russian icebreaker in the Weddell Sea and Graham Land areas. The trip was titled 90 degrees South Latitude 2000-2001: Not Without Peril Polar Expedition.

After eventful days flying to the tip of South America, we boarded the icebreaker at the Tierra del Fuego National Park. It took three days to cross the Drake Passage, the roughest part of the world's oceans.

Rogue waves ten meters high hit the boat frequently, making it suddenly list forty degrees right or left. It was difficult to keep your balance, much less concentrate on working on computer and marine radios. There was also a great deal of drinking on board. After the day's work was completed, the bar did a brisk business, and frequently, drinks of all kinds were pushed my way. (One person decided to spike my Coke when I wasn't looking, and I still thank God that I smelled the drink first and dumped it down the sink.) However, thanks to the Serenity Prayer and my Higher Power, I made it through.

There is one meeting in Antarctica at McMurdo Station on the other side of the continent from where we were. McMurdo (affectionately called "Mac Town") is the largest permanent base on the continent, with as many as 3,000 people in the summer and 1,200 residents year round. But the AA meeting depends on who is stationed at McMurdo. It is not uncommon for months to go by when there is no meeting and no one in recovery at the station.

McMurdo is roughly 4,500 kilometers across the ice sheet from the peninsula where I was working. Temperatures are routinely minus 35 degrees centigrade, winds reach 300 km/hour, crevasses are hard to spot, and the TransAntarctic Mountain Range with peaks as high as 8,400 meters all interfere with travel. No commercial flight permits are issued for travel across the continent, and the only way to get across is via military aircraft using special Twin Otters, modified LC-130, and C-5 cargo aircraft. Even if you can get a ride, the weather often prohibits safe flight operations.

Calling my sponsor and others in the program was out of the question because communications are highly unreliable and cost a minimum of \$20.00 USD per minute and getting through via e-mail was questionable. At any rate, it is of more benefit for me to actually talk to someone, as I work on computers all day.

I had my Big Book and my Higher Power (whom I choose to call God) and that was it. So for me, the continent of Antarctica is prima facie evidence of a Higher Power: it is a timeless place, which is by turns serene and calm or life-threatening and volatile. I found a God of my understanding there and plan to go back.

Dave G. Reprinted from the Grapevine  
Denver, Colorado

## DAYS OF HEARTBREAK (cont'd from front page)

And miraculously it happens. I'm tugged free of the morass, marveling once again that God is doing for me what I cannot do for myself. And the price is so low. Call an AA friend. Answer the phones at the local central office. Go to a meeting. Do something kind and thoughtful without being recognized for it. Just get out of myself!

The Big Book says we are afflicted with "self-will run riot." So true. Over time, though, AA has somehow modified my behavior. I don't know when or how it happened, just that it did. And so, I'm grateful. Grateful that I have the faith to believe that God will pull me through this tragedy. Grateful that I've been given back my life. Grateful to have been granted "teachability" at this late stage in my life. Grateful to be grateful. I've thought often, since her funeral, about what this would have been like if I were still drinking.

Would I have allowed myself to feel . . . anything? Probably not. Alcohol had long before ceased being "fun." Rather, it was an anesthetic. My destination, via the quickest route possible, was to a state called "numb." No sadness, no happiness. Numb. A place where nothing mattered. I imagine my family's grief, doubled. The dead and the living dead. Looking for strength and support from Dad? Better look somewhere else. Tragedy compounded. And more reason to drink.

She has a younger brother. Twenty years old. He discovered this thing at age eighteen. Straight, clean, and sober for two years. Another miracle. I marvel at him and I watch him spiritually grow every day. Teachability at the other end of the age spectrum. Perhaps an even more difficult one.

It's difficult to be objective, to have much balance or perspective this short distance from her death. Much reflection and learning remain to be done. Will all of the "whys" be answered someday? Perhaps her younger brother is her lasting gift to us. Has she unintentionally made a statement about the gravity of this thing called alcoholism? Will someone else be saved because of her message? I don't know. I look for meaning amid the emptiness and sorrow. And I pray once again for acceptance. I wear out the Serenity Prayer. "Thy will, not mine, be done." And a few moments of peace are granted me. The faith given me by this program tells me that there will be more. And I believe.

Jim O., MI



### *Co-founder Quotes*

Each Alcoholics Anonymous group ought to be a spiritual entity having but one primary purpose—that of carrying its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

Says the old proverb, "Shoemaker, stick to thy last." Trite, yes. But very true for us of A.A. How well we need to heed the

principle that it is better to do one thing supremely well than many things badly.

Because it has now become plain enough that only a recovered alcoholic can do much for a sick alcoholic, a tremendous responsibility has descended upon us all, an obligation so great that it amounts to a sacred trust. For to our kind, those who suffer alcoholism, recovery is a matter of life or death. So the society of Alcoholics Anonymous cannot, it dare not ever be diverted from its primary purpose.

## **WHERE DOES IT LEAD?**

My name is Jack F. I am an alcoholic. By the grace of God, I haven't had a drink since February 11, 1960—one day at a time. It seems to me that in recent years I feel more and more out of place, or out of step, at the AA meetings I attend. Increasingly I hear things that don't pertain to the Big Book, the Twelve Steps, or the Twelve Traditions. Apparently, members would prefer to live in the problem rather than in the solution.

Because business travel is essential to my profession, I make meetings in a wide variety of places and this disturbing new mood is apparently common to many AA groups. I find myself wondering: Are we diluting AA just a bit more each year? There are notably more people in AA meetings but they don't stay. They may attend for a week, two weeks, or a month—then they're gone.

Maybe we no longer have anything people want or need. Perhaps we have forgotten how to sponsor people. Nor do I see many members making Twelfth Step calls anymore. It's my opinion that we have resigned from our Twelfth Step responsibilities and turned them over to professionals. It's as if we said: "You take the drunks. Keep them for thirty days. Clean them up. If we like them, maybe—just maybe—we'll work with them." To my mind, that's very dangerous.

I keep hearing this lie repeated in AA. It goes: "Just don't drink. Come to meetings and you'll be all right." That is a lie. Just not drinking, just attending meetings isn't enough. If you don't drink, come to meetings, and do the Twelve Steps, then you'll be all right. But not until that time. Not until it's done that way. I know—from my own experiences. I tried staying sober without the Steps for two years. It was the hardest thing I ever did, an endless struggle because I craved a drink for a long, long time. All of that suffering was because I hadn't done those important Steps of this program.

I hear subjects discussed in AA meetings that have no relationship whatsoever to the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. I go to conventions and see and hear special speakers at the podium. Sometimes they're gone before the meeting has concluded. They fly in and out again—and that's it. I watch AA members who have been sober for a while refuse to greet a newcomer, introduce themselves, give a phone number, or even sit down with the nervous new man or woman, trying to help them feel welcomed—the way members did to me, when I got here. I think we're "too busy" — too wrapped-up in ourselves, our own worlds. I see more and more of the obvious selfishness and self-centeredness that got us here in the first place. And I don't understand it.

I observe members who rush into the room five minutes prior to a meeting's start. I see the same people hurriedly departing five minutes after the meeting's conclusion. And some I never see again. If this trend continues, I'm afraid we'll end up like the Washingtonians and the Oxford Group. Mere vague memories.

Thank God, there were people who cared about me at my first meeting. People who cared whether or not I stayed sober. People who allowed their concern to show. Who took the time, effort, and patience to see I was given transportation to meetings, to see that I was given a good AA sponsor and my own copy of the AA Big Book.

This is a "we" program. Increasingly, I'm sadly aware of all the individuals who are trying to do the program by themselves. There are experienced AAs who are afraid to tell newcomers what the newcomers need to hear. Tough love is gone. Newcomers want to be liked, want to be loved. Older members don't want to hurt the newcomers' delicate little feelings. Adios, tough love, which dependably worked wonders before it was deported.

The other day I told one of my pigeons: "Fifty percent of the people in AA who know me personally love me. The other fifty percent hate my guts, and that's one hundred percent better than it was when I drank."

I have seen head hunters from treatment centers come to AA meetings and pounce upon new members the moment they enter the room. If they have insurance, they're whisked away to a treatment center. More and more, we are hospitalizing alcoholics who don't need hospitalization.

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## WHERE DOES IT LEAD? (cont'd from page 6)

I know of AA groups that, in effect, are sponsoring ACOA groups, NA groups, and other varieties of codependency groupings (and God only knows what else by affiliation). Yet, the Sixth Tradition clearly states that we will not lend "the AA name" to anyone, nor affiliate with anyone. Personally, I don't really care if you want to belong to NA or ACOA or even the Keepers of the Seven Veils—just stop dragging it into my AA meetings.

The name of the meetings I attend is Alcoholics Anonymous. That's why I show up. My dog is codependent, too. He'd likely starve if I didn't feed him. But he doesn't belong at AA meetings.

You know, this AA Fellowship can come unravelled for us, and a lot faster than it was put together. Many AA members actually know very little (and in some cases, nothing at all) about the history of Alcoholics Anonymous. Too many of them seem to think it sprang forth complete and developed, from absolutely nothing, just existing until they found it. They're ignorant of the hard work and intense effort that went into launching new groups, spreading the AA message in small towns and in even tinier, isolated communities, ignorant of all the dedicated members who often returned to those obscure places for the purpose of giving newly established AA groups encouragement and financial support until they grew stronger and larger and got on their feet, safely able to function by themselves.

I ask each of you who read this: Look to your own conscience. Take your own inventory. Reevaluate your own participation in Alcoholics Anonymous. One of my sponsors told me: "If you were dragged into a court of law and accused of being an AA member—would there be enough evidence to convict you?"

Each of us must look deeply inside ourselves to find out if we have truly lost interest in selfish things and become interested in our fellow members. Bill W. said: "This will not become our vocation but our avocation." Alcoholics Anonymous is the greatest gift that God has ever given me. I beg of you, please, please, don't let it die—for the millions of people who will follow us in future years. Please be sure you're doing your part. I was taught that there is a price for sobriety and it isn't the money I put into AA baskets at meetings. The price of my sobriety is making Twelfth Step calls, carrying the AA message, sponsoring new members. That is the price of my sobriety—my willingness to give it away. Old-timers told me if I ever got "too busy" to attend meetings or it ever became "inconvenient" to sponsor a new man, that I was in trouble—that I had already lost it. And they were right.

Are you doing your part? Are you—really?

Jack F., IL

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**Newsletter 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

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ St \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

New

Renewal

Additional Contribution \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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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.*

### Former Address

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ St \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_