

Recovery Times

A newsletter from Alcoholics Anonymous San Fernando Valley Central Office VOL 29, NO. 11 Nov. 2005

How 14 California Groups Grew to 22

Just over one year ago, Bill made a two-month visit to the West Coast, one month of which was spent in Los Angeles and immediate environs. It, therefore, is natural that the twenty-two A.A. groups in the Los Angeles area should, at this time, reflect on some of the benefits reaped from his visit.

Ostensibly Bill did little or nothing here but tell us informally what he thought about A.A., 'how it happened to him,' and how it worked elsewhere. He gave us no orders and left us no mandates. He proved a past master at dodging when a definite difficulty of a group was thrown into his lap for solution. His answer always ignored that problem but recounted how a group far away met a similar issue. That set the inquirer thinking and in most cases he solved the problem himself. The result was that Bill left us with a realization that he had tossed the ball right back to our pitcher, with a kindly hint that we play ball according to the A.A. rule book. And that seemed to work.

For it made us realize that, in our group problems, as in our alcoholic problems, our "stories are all the same." And so we all set to work to play the game better.

One result is that twenty-two A.A. groups exist now in the area which had fourteen when Bill was here. The membership then was about seven hundred. Now it nears two thousand.

We learned from Bill that A.A. is an answer to a universal need of mankind; that it cannot belong even to him, its founder, nor to any leader, or group of leaders; that it cannot be controlled by those who precede others in membership.

He taught us that only those have a right to A.A. who use it with the singleness of purpose for which it was founded and handed to us. He taught us that those whose ideas veer from A.A. ideals get off the beam and, sooner or later, fail in sobriety when they begin using substitutes instead of "practicing A.A. principles in all our affairs."

Bill remarked while here that sometimes he is startled when he regards the growth of A.A. and realizes that, while he started it all, he does not control it, and has no desire to. He sees that what he gave the world is the world's to use. And if the man who needs it misuses it he does so to his own loss alone. No one can hurt A.A. fatally. No one can stop its growth.

Bill's visit here made us A.A.s realize that we were free to form our own A.A. groups in direct affiliation with the New York Foundation and that no senior individual or group had district or territorial jurisdiction so long as the new group conformed to the Foundation's requirements. We learned that, just as each member may interpret the program for himself (with honesty, of course), so each group may do the same, with the same requirement of honesty.

The result of this was courage for free development and lessening of friction by enabling any members, dissatisfied with the way their group was conducted, to join another group or launch a new group with persons they considered more congenial.

Bill convinced us of the universality of A.A.—that it is as unrestricted as is its need. He made us realize that we alcoholics out here are not California alcoholics, but just alcoholics, branded by a global, not a sectional, disease.

And this understanding has led to more intelligent methods of operating—to methods that are more tolerant of the opinions of others.

In other words, Bill gave us the principle that no one need have too great concern about Alcoholics Anonymous getting into "inexperienced hands."

We learned, as Bill expressed it, that any good idea will work and any bad idea, when tried, will fail of its own weakness. One thing alone is a *sine qua non* in A.A.—honesty with ourselves. With it A.A. and its members are safe.

Frank S., California
(Grapevine, January, 1945)

Calendar Events

Upcoming Events

BURBANK GROUP
15th ANNUAL THANK-A-THON
 November 24 - 25, 2005
 3217 Winona, Burbank CA

16th ANNUAL RIVER ROUNDUP
 January 13 - 15, 2006
 Laughlin, NV
 Website: <http://rcco-aa.org>

31st ANNUAL SAN FERNANDO VALLEY CONVENTION
 February 3 - 5, 2006
 Burbank, CA
 Info: (818) 734-0383
 Email: info@sfvaaconvention.org
 Website: www.sfvaaconvention.org

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

Holiday Hours
S. F. Valley Central Office
will be
CLOSED
for Book Sales
Thursday, Nov. 24, 2005
for Thanksgiving Day
AND
Friday, Nov. 25, 2005
for Inventory.
Normal hours resume on
Saturday, Nov. 26, 2005.

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>

SERVICE COMMITTEE SCHEDULE

Nov. 21, 2005 **SFV H&I**
THIRD MONDAY
 8pm Business Meeting
 7pm Get Acquainted Workshop
 5657 Lindley Ave.

Dec. 5, 2005 **G.S. District #11**
FIRST MONDAY
 6pm new GSR orientation, 6:30pm meeting
 315 W. Vine St., Glendale

Dec. 5, 2005 **G.S. District #16**
FIRST MONDAY
 6:15pm meeting
 15950 Chatsworth (church), Granada Hills

Dec. 5, 2005 **G.S. District #17**
FIRST MONDAY
 6pm new GSR orientation, 6:30pm meeting
 5000 Colfax (church), N. Hollywood

Dec. 6, 2005 **G.S. District #2**
FIRST TUESDAY
 6:30pm, 4011 Dunsmore, La Crescenta

Dec. 7, 2005 **G.S. District #1**
FIRST WEDNESDAY
 6:30pm, 7552 Remmet, Canoga Park

Dec. 7, 2005 **SFV Board of Directors**
 6pm, Central Office

Dec. 10, 2005 **G.S. District #7**
SECOND SATURDAY
 Agua Dulce Woman's Club
 33201 Agua Dulce Cyn Rd
 Sharon G. (661) 951-0372

Dec. 12, 2005 **SFV Intergroup**
SECOND MONDAY
 6:30 pm Orientation
 7pm Business Meeting
 St. Innocents Church
 5657 Lindley Ave., Tarzana

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

San Fernando Valley Central Office Intergroup Representatives Meeting October 10, 2005

Michael F. 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: None
Birthdays: Debbie - 1 yr, Alan - 16 yrs, Sarah - 21 yrs.

Motion to adjourn 7:30 PM

*The long form of the Intergroup Meeting Minutes for
October is available at Central Office or at the Intergroup
Meeting.*

*These minutes are pending approval on
November 14, 2005*

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

November 2005

Jan C.	? years
Garey G.	8 years
Anonymous	9 years
Steve H.	10 years
Richard W.	14 years
Ron A.	16 years
Kay W.	19 years
Frank K.	21 years
Leo S.	25 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.

COUSIN GWENDOLYN & THE TWO-HEADED DRAGON

Honesty slays the foe and lifts it high. . .

THE gin and the vermouth in a morning glass of last night's stale Martinis were no more mingled than my feelings when I set out to visit my Cousin Gwendolyn.

One of the feelings was joy, for Gwendolyn, which is nothing like her name, is my favorite cousin. She's the cousin who lay awake nights over me when I was plastered, and who rejoiced, gave thanks and sang by return Western Union when I wrote her about going to my first meeting. One of the feelings was curiosity, for the personality-change in my two sober years has been a substantial one, and my near and dear, seen through fog-free eyes, look as different to me as I do to them. One of the feelings was apprehension. A two-headed dragon of apprehension.

For Cousin Gwendolyn's lively life is lived in genteel small-town drinking circles, circles which go in for a couple-of-highballs-before-dinner, couple-of-highballs-before-bedtime, regular as breakfast. Her friends are the front-porch cocktail-party sort, who follow up with suitable wine with dinner. It has been a long time since let's-close-up-the-bar- and-fall-upstairs-with-another-bottle has looked interesting to me, but Cousin Gwendolyn's crystal-stemware, pearl-onion approach to liquor might, I feared, be more insidious temptation. Fear of that temptation was one of the dragon's heads.

When I'm offered a drink in my own bailiwick, which is outspoken and metropolitan, I have my own out. I use the alibi which stops arm-twisting for keeps. Thanks, no, I say under most circumstances; I'm an alcoholic, one of those unfortunates with a permanent allergy. It is not an out suitable for use by a tactful visitor in a small town—at least not in Cousin Gwendolyn's small town, to Cousin Gwendolyn's friends. Fear of embarrassment to my cousin in my search for seemly refusals was Dragon-head No. 2.

The dragon lost his first head very easily. The first night of my visit I slicked myself up all nice and shining for dinner, with Cousin Gwendolyn's Christmas earrings and a new shade of lipstick. I sent up a small petition while I did so, knowing the liquor-cabinet of old—the Scotch, the aged bourbon, the Martini

makings, the imported dry sherry. Please, just tonight, let it not look too good, I said.

It didn't. Maybe they'd changed brands since my last visit, although the labels were the same. It all smelled terrible, reminding me of hangover dawns, and the dregs of gin in last night's party-glasses. I said, I'd rather have iced coffee, please.

But the second head still flicked its forked tongue at me. Next day the cocktail parties began.

A cordial lot they are, in Cousin Gwendolyn's circle; you can't get away with holding an untouched glass of whatever fluid is going. They watch you. They urge you to drink up. They come around with refills. The simple approach won't do. I needed alibis, lots of them, all of them honest.

The first time mine was the sole vote for V-8 as against Manhattans, I glanced southward where the waistline lies when explanations were called for. Thanks, no, I said. I'm on a diet. I am, too. Everybody's on a diet. Mine consists strictly of food and non-intoxicating potables. It was a fine story, and it got me by without even a raised eyebrow, and my self-restraint drew a great deal of exclamatory admiration.

But the diet tale, however truthful, wouldn't wash at the next party—the time I drank water, sparkling, cooling, delicious, detectable only in flavor, odor and effect from straight gin. I could hardly lay convincing claim to a diet when I was tying into the little cream puffs filled with roquefort and the shrimps you dunked in lovely slathery sauce. I came up with another true story. I said, no, thanks, it makes me ill. My host, absorbing his sixth, said it makes me sick sometimes too. So we were two honest citizens. "Makes me ill" was a statement of absolute fact; I was happily not called upon to detail my symptoms. . .

Then Cousin Gwendolyn, who looks nicer than ever through fog-free vision, took a hand.

"These excuses must get monotonous; let's camouflage when we're on the home front," she suggested.

continued on page 5

COUSIN GWENDOLYN.... (cont'd from previous page)

So we did. We went in earnestly for domestic entertaining, and no excuses needed. Tom Collins on the front lawn on a hot day? I drank lemonade made with seltzer, and I defy anyone to tell the difference unless the naked eye is aided by the investigating sniff. Whisky-soda? Gingerale and plenty of ice comes in a color near enough so nobody will notice. Rum-and-coca-cola? Nothing on the outside of the glass will reveal that the rum's left out. Old-fashioned? Not quite so easy to duplicate, but tastes just as good out of a squat glass as out of a tall one, and a slice of lemon and a slice of orange do it no harm whatever. Champagne cocktail? Gingerale suffers no damage from a maraschino cherry in the bottom of the glass. The ruse worked fine, as long as we were under Cousin Gwendolyn's roof and suitably prepared.

Came the last evening at Cousin Gwendolyn's. Came a bevy of unexpected guests. Nice people they were, delightful people, non-alcoholics, who could take it or leave it alone, and who usually took it. Came a new dawn, breaking in my mind, clarifying something. No zone ever had to alibi for refusing mashed potatoes. I could still take liquor—too much of it, the way I used to. Or I could leave it alone, the way I do now. The option was always there. I realized, for the first time, that I am very much happier this way. I don't like what alcohol can do to me.

It isn't a deprivation of any importance at all, not any more.

Everybody else was hoisting Martinis. I went into the kitchen and made myself a nice, tall, undisguised glass of iced coffee.

The man at my right asked the inevitable question.

"Why don't you drink?" He asked.

I drew a long sigh of relief—the kind of relief that goes with complete honesty, with yourself as well as with somebody else.

"I used to drink," I said. "Too much, sometimes. But I don't now—I find I truly don't like it any more." I did not add that my discovery had only been made within the last five minutes.

I left Cousin Gwendolyn's with mingled feelings—a mixture a little different from the one I brought with me. One of the feelings was regret, because I was leaving Gwendolyn. She is still my favorite cousin, and we have more fun together than ever, now that I'm sober. The other feeling was relief, the lovely relief which takes the place of vanished apprehension.

Any takers for a dead-as-mutton two-headed dragon, laid forever to rest, I hope, on Cousin Gwendolyn's hearthrug?

M.C., Los Angeles (Grapevine, Dec. 1950)



Co-founder Quotes

I am very grateful that my Higher Power has given me a second chance to live a worthwhile life. Through Alcoholics Anonymous, I have been restored to sanity. The promises are being fulfilled in my life. I am grateful to be free from the slavery of alcohol. I am grateful for peace of mind and

the opportunity to grow, but my gratitude should go forward rather than backward. I cannot stay sober on yesterday's meetings or past Twelfth-Step calls; I need to put my gratitude into action today. Our co-founder said our gratitude can best be shown by carrying the message to others. Without action, my gratitude is just a pleasant emotion. I need to put it into action by working Step Twelve, by carrying the message and practicing the principles in all my affairs. I am grateful for the chance to carry the message today!

As Bill Sees It, pg. 29

THE BIRTHDAY PLAN

Excerpts from a talk given by the originator of "The Oklahoma Birthday Plan," at the AA State Meeting in Great Bend, KS.

I BELIEVE Bill and the founders in giving us the Third Legacy gave us everything we need to work AA and to perpetuate it, except a permanent way to finance ourselves. The \$2.00 a head suggested as a yardstick for group contributions to Headquarters sounds all right; but in my opinion a lot of us are "passing through" AA: 25 per cent of those in this room tonight will have "passed through" a year from now—sober, chances are, but not active—and new ones will be taking your places.

I have had an opportunity to look at this thing from a financial standpoint and I am worried. The seventy-five districts in the United States and Canada which send delegates to our General Service Conference every year have averaged about \$1500 a year in contributions.

On the twenty-eighth day of February in 1951 while attending a state meeting in Oklahoma City a fellow who knew I was interested in AA finances said to me: "What do you think of starting a voluntary individual birthday contribution to the New York office--a dollar for every year since first contact with AA, up to a top limit of \$10?" I received a great inspiration from this suggestion and couldn't get it out of my mind. After being home a day or two I called seven or eight old boys who had "passed through" and gave them the thought. Every one of them was interested.

Then I called AA in Oklahoma City—where I'd first heard the idea—and got the same reaction. The boys in Oklahoma City started talking about it and I started talking about it and in July we decided to try it around the state. We also decided to back up and include the birthdays that had already passed during the year. The result was we sent to General Service Headquarters from Oklahoma, whose groups are below the average, almost exactly twice as much in 1954 as the year before. We continued to follow the plan in 1955, with even better results. And, at least 90 per cent of the old-timers are repeating their contribution.

The way we approach these old-timers is this: we ask them how they would like to do a little Twelfth Step work with money. I contend that as Americans we think in terms of money. If we can get the old-timers who are no longer active to make their birthday contribution, it is a habit they won't forget, and one that will remind them about the most important day in their lives.

We alcoholics are blessed with two birthdays: the first birthday God gave us life and a soul and on this birthday we receive gifts. Along came old John Barleycorn and misjudgment and we lost our soul; we lost it and we almost lost our life. Then this great philosophy of AA came along and through it we eventually found our soul, and for finding our soul we should give of ourselves in gratitude. My AA birthday is the most important day of my life. I have outlived my real birthday and I am living from my first contact with AA eleven years ago.

When these older guys and gals seven and eight years sober are asked if they want to do some Twelfth Step work with money they feel the same way. Under our plan we do not write letters, but when the second year rolls around we follow up and it gives us a chance to do some Twelfth Step work. I have come to the conclusion that it is just as important to reach the old-timer as it is to save the last boy or girl who comes through the door. If we do not save some of them then we are turning into a processing fellowship.

There are a few groups that are growing but most are still about the same size. The older ones are "passing through"; we get new members who are processed, and that is not good for AA. We should be grateful for AA as long as we draw a breath, and we should do something to perpetuate this fellowship—we will let it go to the dogs if we do not find some plan to finance ourselves!

You might think I am kidding, that I am showing an over-amount of enthusiasm here, but I have been all over the country and have made about thirty-five talks and visited many, many groups. I find some enthusiasm, sure—but where are all the 200,000 or so who have "passed through"; what are they doing? We who are active in AA have the greatest responsibility that we have ever had in our lives: to try to reach the inactive old-timers.

To get back to the Birthday Plan: the idea is that you talk about this in your own group. The group doesn't vote on whether to accept the Birthday Plan—that's an individual, voluntary thing. It does vote on appointing a birthday boy or girl. On the first of the month the birthday boy or girl checks all the birthdays for the active and inactive members of the group. (Some groups make a lot out of birthdays while others do not.) He makes a list of all the birthdays, then studies the Handbook and the Third Legacy Manual enough to prepare a fifteen-minute talk.

The birthday contribution is voluntary. No one has to contribute. But the talk will at least educate the new member in AA and tell him something about the over-all job that we had failed to do until we started working under the Third Legacy (worldwide service). The birthday boy or girl talks to John and Mary. . . John and Mary go to see Bill and Susie to tell them about this new way of doing Twelfth Step work with money. . .and you'll be surprised at the results.

I want you to remember how this inspiration came to me. . .by talking to these older members and to the new ones too. They want to do something; they want to be a part of this fellowship; they feel when they make a little investment that they are a part of it. And they are! Who is an AA? He doesn't have to go to meetings. . .an alcoholic who has a sincere desire to stop drinking is an AA if he says he is.

I hope you will all go home and do a little serious thinking. We have not gone to pieces yet but too many

continued on page 7

THE BIRTHDAY PLAN (cont'd from page 6)

are "passing through" and we have to reach them some way. Bill W. has scratched his head and many of the active old-timers have tried to figure a way to reach the old guys and bring them back into AA. They haven't come up with anything yet.

God has been good to me. . .when this plan was dropped in my lap I was walking with a cane and the doctor had told me to go home and get my affairs in shape, and play gin rummy. I have been "talking the Birthday Plan" since last February 28th and I think I am in pretty good shape for nearly sixty-eight. God has given me health and has given me the "wherewith" to come and talk to folks like you, so I know God is in this thing.

The Birthday Plan may not be the answer but from this will come the answer because I know you folks are going to go home and look the facts squarely in the face. Get out the old Handbook that the gals at General Service Headquarters spend much time in compiling and go to studying it.

Do you know what generally happens to that book? It is sent to the secretary of each group and about the only time it is used is when someone inquires if there is a group located in such-and-such a place. Read the front part of this book—there is a lot of valuable information in it. Then get out the Third Legacy Manual and get to schooling yourself!

I have been to the General Service office in New York many times besides to attend the Conference meetings when I was a delegate. I know they are always on their toes when the Conference is in session, but as I say, I have dropped in many times. I was there at Bill's birthday dinner last year. Did you know they were \$40,000 in the hole? We came up with \$39,000 of it, and do you know where this money is coming from that we are short? It is coming from the sales of the Big Book, and did you know that the reserve up there is now less

than \$100,000? It is a pity. What if there is a little depression? You can see why we are forced to look this situation squarely in the face: we have all got to come up with something permanent in order to finance ourselves.

We in Oklahoma are going to try to educate the new member as he comes into AA, and try to accumulate the necessary funds to do the things we should in order to run our Head quarters in New York with dignity—and we are "teasing" the old-timers back. It is all AA, every bit of it.

If there are any questions about the Birthday Plan and the three-year-plan we are going to plan and the three-year-plan we are going to start in Oklahoma, I'll be more than happy to answer them. The experiment is working in Oklahoma, and I hope by the time your delegate goes back to New York to the next conference he will have something great to report about the Birthday Plan. It has been working in many others states too.^[1]

We have made good progress. . . . I think it is the answer, and it is later than you think. We who are active in AA have a job to do, and our job is never done.

Ed. note—we've been hearing murmurings and rustlings about the Birthday Plan for some time. Finally we decided to take a look at the mail and see just how far the idea had gone by word-of-mouth. We were amazed to come up with this (incomplete at press date) list of sixteen areas where groups are using the Birthday Plan: Arkansas, California, District of Columbia, Georgia, Idaho, Kansas, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, Washington, Wisconsin and British Columbia. From seven other states (as of press time) have come individual Birthday contributions direct to General Service Headquarters, many of the accompanying letters inscribed "with love to AA": Florida, Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, Missouri, New Jersey and West Virginia.

Ab A., Tulsa, OK (Grapevine, May 1956)

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 \$ _____

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 _____