

Recovery Times

A newsletter from Alcoholics Anonymous San Fernando Valley Central Office VOL 29, NO. 12 Dec. 2005

HOMELESS BOB

Most of us called him Homeless Bob. The nickname wasn't meant as an insult, although deep down, in the only place he could call home, it probably felt like one. It was simply a means by which we could identify him. He said he didn't mind much what people called him, so long as they didn't call the cops. People frequently called the cops on Homeless Bob.

We had an abundance of Bobs in the early days of our group, which is called Attitude Adjustment, and we still do. There was Happy Day Bob, who was once our general secretary and has since moved to Nebraska. We had our own Doctor Bob, too. He still pops in, now and again, though his nickname has been updated to Bob 2000. In a place where so many go without last names, it's only natural that we would invent monikers for one another. Sometimes we're identified by our height, our job, or our disposition. Back when Homeless Bob called Attitude Adjustment his home group, we identified him by his address.

Bob was an early riser, gathering up his sleeping bag and belongings and stashing them in a trash can or under a bush, wherever he felt they might be safe from street thieves, though after a few drinks, it was common for him to forget where they were—and it was very common for him to drink before the 6:30 A.M. meeting. Bob was rarely less than drunk, or less than horribly hung-over. Occasionally he would manage to detox, committing himself to treatment, but he always ran off before sobriety could take hold. Bob hated sobriety. For him, sobriety hurt like hell.

But Bob loved AA meetings, and he particularly loved Attitude Adjustment, though his appreciation was generally buried deep under drunken sarcasm.

"Most of you guys are a bunch of assholes," he would say, "but you're the only people who don't throw me out and call the cops. Plus, you serve donuts!" Then he'd guffaw at his joke, his dull,

yellowed eyes momentarily showing signs of life.

At that time, Homeless Bob was a fixture in Davis; nearly everyone knew him by sight. He was the skinny guy in the worn-out blue parka and baseball cap, with a red vinyl backpack jutting from between his narrow shoulders. He'd wander the streets, rain or shine, searching for empty bottles and cans that he could convert into cash at the recycling center, using the money to buy full ones, like a perpetual motion machine. Few people knew him by name, though he had lived in the neighborhood for years. Those who did, avoided him, crossing the street before he could ask if they had a dime or a dollar to spare.

Even his street buddies left him alone, when they weren't rifling through his backpack for pocket change or the remainder of his half-pint when he passed out in the park after a hard day of drinking and playing frisbee golf, or searching thrift stores for secondhand Disney cartoon trading cards to add to his collection.

Like most of us, Bob was a loner. In meetings, he sat as far away from the group as the room would allow. He shared rarely, though sometimes we needed to remind him not to speak if he had been drinking. He'd saunter in long after the meeting had started, plop down in a chair at the back of the room, mumbling to himself as he slurped a cup of heavily sweetened black coffee. Then, just before the closing prayer, he'd hoist his backpack onto his fragile frame and head back to the streets.

One day Bob was moving even slower than usual and remained seated while we joined hands for the closing prayer. Ann T., a starry-eyed newcomer (whom we called Rainbow Ann so as not to confuse her with Ann R.), broke the grasp of the alcoholic to her right, and with a wave of her fingers and a smile on her face, she motioned for Bob to approach the circle.

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Calendar Events

Upcoming Events

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

PRAASA 2006

(Pacific Region AA Service Assembly)
March 3 - 5, 2006
Woodland Hills, CA
Website: <http://www.praasa.org>

A.A. DESERT POW WOW

June 15 - 18, 2006
Indian Wells, CA
Info: SherAli J. (760) 321-6568
Website: <http://www.desertpowwow.com>

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

Holiday Hours For Book Sales

**S. F. Valley Central Office
Holiday Schedule for Book Sales
will be as follows:**

**Saturday, Dec. 24, 2005
OPEN 9:00 AM - 1:00 PM**

**Sunday, Dec. 25, 2005
CLOSED ALL DAY**

**Saturday, Dec. 30, 2005
OPEN 9:00 AM - 1:00 PM**

**Sunday, Jan. 1, 2006
CLOSED ALL DAY**

**Normal hours will resume on
Monday, Jan. 2, 2006.**

SERVICE COMMITTEE SCHEDULE

- Dec. 15, 2005 **SFV H&I
THIRD MONDAY**
8pm Business Meeting
7pm Get Acquainted Workshop
5657 Lindley Ave.

- Jan. 2, 2005 **G.S. District #11
FIRST MONDAY**
6pm new GSR orientation, 6:30pm meeting
315 W. Vine St., Glendale

- Jan. 2, 2005 **G.S. District #16
FIRST MONDAY**
6:15pm meeting
15950 Chatsworth (church), Granada Hills

- Jan. 2, 2005 **G.S. District #17
FIRST MONDAY**
6pm new GSR orientation, 6:30pm meeting
5000 Colfax (church), N. Hollywood

- Jan. 3, 2005 **G.S. District #2
FIRST TUESDAY**
6:30pm, 4011 Dunsmore, La Crescenta

- Jan. 4, 2005 **G.S. District #1
FIRST WEDNESDAY**
6:30pm, 7552 Remmet, Canoga Park

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

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

- Jan. 9, 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>

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 November 14, 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: Elizabeth- 1 yr, Whitney - 2 yrs,
Dennis - 9 yrs, Rosanne - 10 yrs, Dawn - 10 yrs.*

Motion to adjourn 7:30 PM

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

*These minutes are pending approval on
December 12, 2005.*

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

November 2005

Cindy A. 10 years
Rosanne L. 10 years
Sarah Lee P. 21 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.*

CLOSE SHAVE

In the fall of 1971, I was on my usual holiday drunk. It was the kind where I appreciated being able to go to a bar and not feel uncomfortable because I was shaking and looked like warmed-over death. A simple statement to the barkeep—"I really hung one on last night"—was enough to get a little sympathy and a double Bloody Mary. After about six o'clock, I'd start to get the eye, and it would be time to leave, but I was all right now.

After upsetting Thanksgiving dinner for my beloved wife and beautiful little daughter, I promised I would go to the basement rec room and get myself straight and give them a good Christmas. I lay on the couch with my wine bottles to help me taper off and went out the back door once a day to get more wine and a KFC dinner or such. Occasionally, my wife would stick her head down the stairs to see if I was still alive. After a couple of weeks of this, I started the usual process of not being able to sleep; I was shaking and puking. I tried drinking nothing but sherry wine very slowly and sipping warm beer but nothing would stay down. I knew if I could just get a little alcohol in my system I would stop hurting so much. Nothing seemed to work. As fast as it would go down it would come back up.

Sometime on the eighteenth of December, I apparently became psychotic and took a 32-caliber pistol and put a bullet into my right temple. It is probably the grace of God that I don't remember it, and an even greater grace that my wife and daughter were out doing some Christmas shopping. When they got home they found me with what appeared to be a scalp wound, so 911 was called. The exit wound was hidden by my thick hair. While in intensive care, the pressure in my head started building up and I was rushed to the operating room for emergency surgery. I was in a coma for almost a week. When my wife asked the doctor what the chances of my surviving were, he said I had a thirty percent chance—if I regained consciousness. When asked what the quality of my life would be, the doctors wouldn't even discuss it. I finally regained consciousness on Christmas Day.

For twenty-five years I've tried to find the words to express the emotional and physical pain that I felt that day. What does a drunk do when he hurts and wants a drink? I didn't have anyone I could call to bring me something to drink and I had no money. But my wife had left my shaving kit with a bottle of Old Spice shaving lotion in it. Don't scoff unless you've tried it. Two fingers of Old Spice

and four fingers of water and it will make up milky white, and it will do the job. Next, I needed to figure out how to get some more. I decided I could break the Old Spice bottle and then I'd be given another one. If you want to break an Old Spice bottle, you'd better get a sledgehammer. I banged it on the metal side of the bed and on the floor until I was exhausted. Finally, in sheer disgust, I threw it on the floor with all my strength. It hit the floor, bounced up to the ceiling and come down on some metal hospital chairs. One big racket! Since I was directly across from the nurses' station, they all came running. "What happened?" Nothing, I just dropped my Old Spice bottle.

Somehow, this is what it took for me to be reduced to the point of hopelessness and helplessness. In disgust and desperation I lay back on my pillow and cried into the darkness. "Lord God, if you are there, take this life of mine and run it." I knew nobody could make a worse mess of it than me. This is probably the only time in my life that I've been totally devoid of any ego. As I lay there, I began to realize that every time I'd been in trouble I'd been drinking. Every time I'd wrecked a car, been in jail, been in a psycho ward—I'd been drinking. Unbelievable. If I didn't drink I didn't get in trouble. Not that every time I drank, I got in trouble—in my youth I had a whole lot of fun. But somewhere along the line the gadget broke. And I spent years trying to fix it, to no avail.

Little did I realize that I had just taken the first three Steps of AA without reservation.

Some get this program easily, but for some of us we have to go the hard way. Now, after all these years, I am the most blessed man alive. In spite of the fact that doctors cannot find the right medication to control the seizures, the loss of balance, and the sleep apnea, I've had the opportunity to give my wife and daughter that good Christmas I promised them. And I've had the chance to be the loyal, faithful, and loving husband to the best of my ability, and a real father. Through many years of carrying this message to the local jail, I've had the joy of seeing several men really put their lives back together and become productive, law-abiding sober citizens. Not my works but God made them responsive to the message. Thank God and this program, which makes it all so simple. If I do not drink, I do not get in trouble!

*Anonymous, Fairfax, VA
Grapevine, Volume 55 Issue 7*

HOMELESS BOB.... (cont'd from front page)

"Why don't you join us, Bob?" she said.

"Nah!" he replied, clutching his bag and rushing to leave. "I gotta go."

"C'mon, Bob! Join us," the group responded, unanimously.

Ann grabbed his hand and gently guided him into the circle, and when the prayer was finished, she pumped his left arm vigorously and told him, "Keep coming back. It works!"

Bob kept coming back. Someone gave him a mini-Big Book that he put in his back pocket, and someone else gave him a coat. One woman gave him a thick pair of wool socks for Christmas, and another gave him a muffler for his neck. He had become part of the group.

It would be great to say that Bob heard something in our meeting that transformed his life; to suggest that he became one of the many Bobs who frequent our meeting; that he got a job, an apartment, and took a commitment and works with newcomers to this day. That would be a terrific AA story. Most of us have seen that happen. The impossible becomes possible in Alcoholics Anonymous, and the uncommon, commonplace.

But that is not this Bob's story.

Less than a week had elapsed before Bob gave his Big Book to some drunk he thought needed sobering up. Another guy punched him in the

stomach, then stole his coat and socks. That's what he told us, at any rate. But later, when he thought back on it, it seemed he might have lost his things as a wager in a game of frisbee golf. He wasn't sure.

Homeless Bob never did get sober; not for a minute. He died a few years ago from acute alcoholism and cirrhosis of the liver, alone under some bushes in the park. It came as no surprise. He and everyone else knew that alcohol would eventually kill him. When his body and meager belongings were shipped to the midwest home of his family, Cary H., better known as Little Cary, circulated a condolence card through the morning meeting. When everyone had signed it, she mailed it to his mother, whom Bob hadn't spoken with in years. Touched by the gesture, Bob's mom wrote a letter to the group expressing how comforting it was to know her son had been among friends.

It's odd how one person, especially one as crusty, cantankerous, and apparently useless as Homeless Bob, can have such a lasting effect on so many people. What was it about him that moved us so? It could be that Bob represented us all. Homeless Bob was the epitome of raw, naked alcoholism, unfettered by possessions. This is what the disease looks like when it's not wearing a freshly pressed shirt or headed for a meeting with a business partner or college dean.

Paul B., California Grapevine 2002



Co-founder Quotes

"We now see that in twelfth-stepping the immediate results are not so important. Some people start out working with others and have immediate success. They are likely to get cocky. Those of us who are not so successful at first get depressed.

"As a matter of fact, the successful worker

differs from the unsuccessful only in being lucky about his prospects. He simply hits newcomers who are ready and able to stop at once. Given the same prospects, the seemingly unsuccessful person would have produced the same results. You have to work on a lot of newcomers before the law of averages commences to assert itself."

All true communication must be founded on mutual need. We saw that each sponsor would have to admit humbly his own needs as clearly as those of his prospect.

OTHER TROUBLES APPEARED TO DISTURB ME

I drank to excess because I would not or could not take responsibility for my life. I did not use alcohol as a means of “escaping from myself,” but as a means of avoiding the pain of taking responsibility for myself. Previously I had wanted people to take the responsibility for my resentments, intolerance and egocentricity. When they refused, I turned to alcohol in an attempt to obliterate these self-created maladjustments. And so, I became an alcoholic.

But merely coming into AA and stopping drinking, I found, did not mean that I had taken responsibility for my life. Although the bottles I had hidden around the house gradually were discovered and disposed of, many of the hidden character traits that had caused my drinking were not to be so easily dealt with or eliminated.

I had been in AA for about two years when I became aware that whereas I no longer had a specific drinking problem, other troubles appeared to be disturbing me. It seemed to me then that my family, my friends and associates and just people were again becoming more intolerant and less understanding, and that I, apparently because of this change in attitude toward me, was becoming alarmingly restless, dissatisfied, bored and filled with vague fears and doubts about myself. And soon the world was again out of step with me almost to the extent it had been when I was drinking. Fear for my sobriety led to observance and the conclusion that for months I had been attending meetings in much the same spirit that I would attend a Rotary Club luncheon or a social evening at the lodge. In line with AA Tradition I had “retired,” I had stepped down, to let the newcomers take over. You see, I had assumed that I was cured, that I no longer needed the Program merely because I was not drinking. True, I was not too cocky, I was not over-confident. I knew with all my heart that only one drink stood between me and a drunk—and complete oblivion. But I did not realize that Steps 2 to 11 inclusive in our Program “suggest” that it wouldn’t be a bad idea if we endeavored to assume responsibility not only for our alcoholic lives in their entirety—our proper share of responsibility in all our relationships with ourselves and others.

More of the significance of this obligation was brought home to me when a farmer member of our group spoke of an incident of which he had good reason to feel proud. It seems, he said, that while milking a cow, “she stepped on my foot.” Following his former alcoholic pattern, he picked up the stool to give her a good belt, but restrained himself and gave his training in AA credit for controlling *his resentment*. But the fact remains that he had been resentful at the cow for stepping on his foot.

It occurred to me then, and it has been a splendid object lesson ever since, that there would not have been any resentment whatsoever if, instead of “she stepped on my foot,” he had said, “I didn’t pull my foot out of the way in time.” The resentment arose from his inference that the cow had *deliberately* stepped on his foot with intent to cause him great bodily harm and severe mental anguish.

Consideration of this homely but typically human incident has been helpful to me in giving an entirely new meaning to *continued to take personal inventory* and *practice these principles in all our affairs*.

As I approach my fourth year in AA, I am, I hope, beginning to learn that our Program offers far more than alcoholic abstinence or alcoholic sobriety. After long delay, it is giving me the

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OTHER TROUBLES (cont'd from page 6)

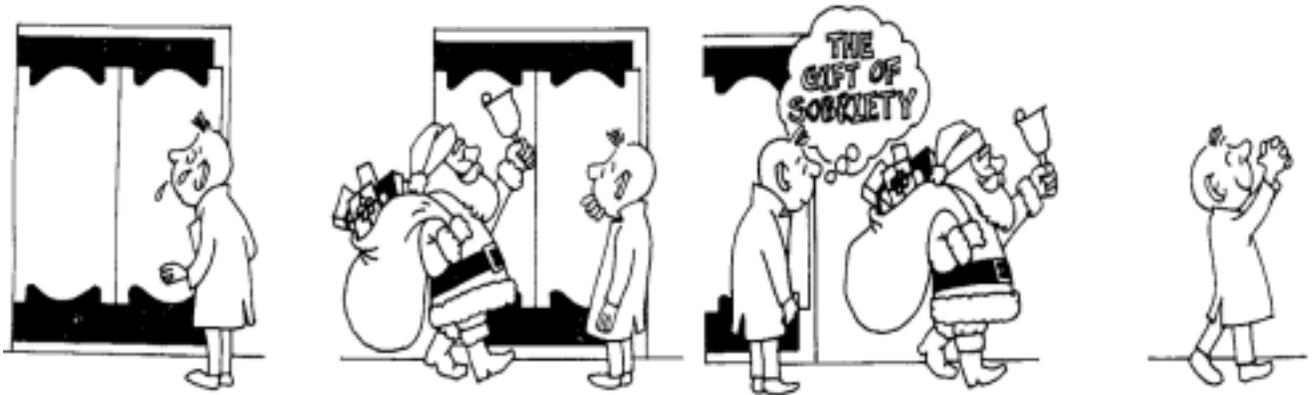
opportunity to take a little more responsibility for my *entire life*. And it is this opportunity for deeper, more satisfying relationship with myself and others that "brought me back" into AA, a more humble and a more attentive member.

The key to relief of all our alcoholic and non-alcoholic problems is, in my humble opinion:

1. The ability to laugh at ourselves—or at least gradually to view ourselves with less solemnity.
2. The ability to assume a greater measure of emotional responsibility with ourselves and others.
3. The knowledge that our Program offers relief from all emotional disturbance, both alcoholic and non-alcoholic and with which all people are afflicted in varying degree.

Only the first of our 12 Steps deals with our personal alcoholic problem. All the remaining 11, it seems to me, are aimed toward achieving greater emotional maturity.

P.M.B., Bennington, Vermont Grapevine, Volume 6 Issue 11



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

Current Information

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Renewal

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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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Address _____

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