

# RecoveryTimes

A newsletter from Alcoholics Anonymous San Fernando Valley Central Office VOL 30, NO. 1 JAN. 2006

## Honor Not Me - Honor AA and My Anonymity

In 1954, Yale University offered Bill W. an honorary degree of Doctor of Laws. The award was to be accompanied by a citation to read as follows:

"W... W..., Co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous. For twenty years this fellowship has rendered a distinguished service to mankind. Victory has been gained through surrender, fame achieved through anonymity, and for many tens of thousands the emotional, the physical and the spiritual self has been rediscovered and reborn. This non-professional movement rising from the depths of intense suffering and universal stigma has not only shown the way to the conquest of a morbid condition of body, mind and soul but has reinvigorated the individual, social and religious life of our times.

"Yale takes pride in honoring this great anonymous assembly of men and women by conferring upon you, a worthy representative of its high purpose, the degree of Doctor of Laws, admitting you to all its rights and privileges."

Bill declined the honor. He asked in a letter to Yale whether the university "could consider giving AA itself the entire citation, omitting the degree to me?" Bill explained: "It is only after much careful consultation with friends, and with my conscience, that I now feel obliged to decline such a mark of distinction."

"Were I to accept, the near term benefit to Alcoholics Anonymous and to legions who still suffer our malady would, no doubt, be worldwide and considerable. I am sure that such a potent endorsement would greatly hasten public approval of AA everywhere. Therefore none but the most compelling of reasons could prompt my decision to deny Alcoholics Anonymous an opportunity of this dimension.

"Now this is the reason: The Tradition of Alcoholics Anonymous—our only means of self-government—entreats each member to avoid all that particular kind of personal publicity or distinction which might link his name with our Society in the general public mind. AA's Tradition Twelve reads as follows: 'Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all of our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles above personalities.'

"Because we have already had much practical experience with this vital principle, it is today the view of every thoughtful AA member that if over the years ahead we practice this anonymity *absolutely*, it will guarantee our effectiveness and unity by heavily restraining those to whom public honors and distinctions are but the natural stepping stones to dominance and personal power."

Responding to Bill's letter, Yale said it could not give the award to AA because "honorary degrees are, like knighthoods, bestowed on individuals not on organizations."

After notifying Yale of his decision, Bill sent copies of his correspondence with Yale to the trustees of The Alcoholic Foundation, and said he hoped that in light of the correspondence the trustees would "agree that the right course had been taken." Not all of them did. Indeed, a majority thought he should have accepted the award.

Bill's decision to turn down the Doctorate of Laws proffered to him by Yale marked the culmination of a long philosophical and spiritual journey which began when he and Dr. Bob met on that fateful day, for them and for AA, in 1935. When Bill started the journey, he was then in his own words a "promoter." In the essay, "The Language of the Heart," which appeared in the Grapevine book, AA Today, Bill drew attention to some of the publicity-seeking members of AA who, in 1937, were more "enthusiastic or extravagant" in their cries than circus barkers. He added: "In fact, I can recall having done a great deal of the barking myself!"

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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](mailto:info@sfvaaconvention.org)  
Website: [www.sfvaaconvention.org](http://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 POWWOW

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

## SERVICE COMMITTEE SCHEDULE

- Jan. 16, 2006 **SFV H&I  
THIRD MONDAY**  
8pm Business Meeting  
7pm Get Acquainted Workshop  
5657 Lindley Ave.  
\*\*\*\*\*
- Feb. 6, 2006 **G.S. District #11  
FIRST MONDAY**  
6pm new GSR orientation, 6:30pm meeting  
315 W. Vine St., Glendale  
\*\*\*\*\*
- Feb. 6, 2006 **G.S. District #16  
FIRST MONDAY**  
6:15pm meeting  
15950 Chatsworth (church), Granada Hills  
\*\*\*\*\*
- Feb. 6, 2006 **G.S. District #17  
FIRST MONDAY**  
6pm new GSR orientation, 6:30pm meeting  
5000 Colfax (church), N. Hollywood  
\*\*\*\*\*
- Feb. 7, 2006 **G.S. District #2  
FIRST TUESDAY**  
6:30pm, 4011 Dunsmore, La Crescenta  
\*\*\*\*\*
- Feb. 8, 2006 **G.S. District #1  
FIRST WEDNESDAY**  
6:30pm, 7552 Remmet, Canoga Park  
\*\*\*\*\*
- Feb. 8, 2006 **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**  
6:30pm 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

### CENTRAL OFFICE

We at SFV Central Office  
wish for you and yours a  
Sober,  
Happy,  
Joyous and  
Free  
2006.

# 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 December 12, 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: Eddie - 2 yrs, Steve - 2 yrs, Maggie - 2 yrs,  
Peter - 10 yrs, Dennis - 11 yrs, Di - 12 yrs, Cheryl - 23 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  
January 9, 2006*

## **HAPPY BIRTHDAY!**

**December 2005**

**Jim B. 15 years**

**Cheryl M.-A. 23 years**

**Learning To Live**

**Men's Stag ?? 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.*

## Honor Not Me - Honor AA and My Anonymity (cont'd)

In his struggle to resist personal acclaim, Bill was fortunate to have the example and support of his cherished friend, Dr. Bob, co-founder of AA. Unlike Bill, Dr. Bob was a conservative, not a promoter. In an October 1945 article in the Grapevine, acknowledging the vital contribution that conservatives, such as Dr. Bob, had made to the well-being of AA, Bill said, "The point is obvious. If these vital matters had been left to promoters like me, we surely would have gone hog-wild and spoiled everything. Had these affairs been left exclusively to the conservatives, it is probable that few of our present membership would yet have heard of AA. So it seems clear that sound policy can only be made by rubbing the conservatives and promoters together."

Although Bill steadfastly declined honors for himself, he graciously and gratefully accepted them for AA. In so doing, he said, in effect, honor not me—honor AA and my anonymity. He also provided a primer on the practice of anonymity.

In 1949, the College of Steubenville, Ohio, offered Bill an honorary medal for his work in AA. Bill asked the college to give the medal to AA, not to him. The college agreed and wrote to Bill as follows:

"The awarding of the Poverello Medal to Alcoholics Anonymous appears to have been a major stroke, and we have received nothing but commendation for the selection of the first recipient of the Medal. You yourself, of course, must receive credit in great measure for the suggestion that the award be given to the Fellowship or to all the members living up to the program of Alcoholics Anonymous."

To this Bill replied on January 5, 1950: "From the AA point of view, an interesting and helpful precedent has been established. We shall be able to say with confidence when other donors put in an appearance that they would do quite as well, even better in fact, if they chose to honor the Society of Alcoholics Anonymous rather than any of its founders. As I told you, this concept was not mine at all. It really came from the Founder of your own order, St. Francis of Assisi, whose example and spirit have already done so much for me and for AA."

Two years later, in 1951, the American Public Health Association offered Alcoholics Anonymous a Lasker Award, described as "the highest recognition in the American public health field and one of the primary honors in the medical field." In a sensitive and thoughtful memorandum to the trustees of The Alcoholic Foundation, Bill asked whether AA should accept the award. He noted that the award is always followed by "worldwide publicity—press, radio, television and magazine," and he added that "the immediate benefit to AA, especially our struggling foreign groups, seems beyond question." He expressed concern, however, over the possibility that (1) "We might find ourselves in the dilemma of choosing some but rejecting" other awards and (2) "Wouldn't some of the acclaim be bound to brush off in my direction?" He also circulated a letter among the delegates of the newly formed General Service Conference asking whether AA should accept the award.

The trustees and delegates apparently did not share Bill's concerns because AA went on to accept the award, followed by the wide acclaim that Bill anticipated. The formal award noted AA's success and concluded with this passage:

"Historians may one day point to Alcoholics Anonymous as a society which did far more than achieve a considerable measure of success with alcoholism and its stigma; they may recognize Alcoholics Anonymous to have been a great venture in social pioneering which forged a new instrument for social action, a new therapy based on the kinship of common suffering, one having a vast potential for the myriad other ills of mankind."

It is not likely that Bill, the self-proclaimed promoter, would have avoided honors directed to him for his work for AA, were it not for his devotion to the need for humility and anonymity. In a 1954 letter to his good friend, Jack Alexander, Bill wrote:

"I suppose that the implacable, compulsive, and quite unrealistic urge to distinction, and thence to power, has always been my most destructive phobia. The whole AA Tradition is, in a sense, a record of my gradual deflation and adjustment to reality. If you have looked at the stuff about my proposed Yale degree, you can sense that the power urge has been pretty much subdued, in fact, sublimated. I say sublimated because when the time to take this step arrived, I found little resistance inside me against it. Five years ago, I might have done the same thing but only after an exhaustive battle with myself. Ten years ago, I would have elatedly taken the honor and I would have found a damned plausible reason, too, for doing so. Therefore, it's no longer a virtue to decline distinction because the desire for it has evaporated. That's real adjustment, permanent release—and for me, it is progress."

# K.I.S.S.

In January 2003, I celebrated fifteen years of sobriety. (I'm not sure what day because my blood alcohol was .495, and alcohol poisoning is .300, plus I probably wasn't legally sober until five or six days after my last drink.)

Over the years, I've grown in the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. A few of the things I have learned over the years from the Fellowship, my sponsor, and the Big Book have saved my life. I'm a big advocate of the K.I.S.S. philosophy of recovery: Keep It Simple, Stupid. This program was designed for the blithering idiot. Our complicated minds sometimes find it hard to comprehend something simple and think if it's too easy, it probably won't work.

I work a simple, four-part program every day: 1) Don't drink or do drugs. 2) Go to meetings. 3) Read the Big Book. 4) Make contact with some sort of Higher Power. Awfully simple, huh? It is, till you add people, places, and things to the equation. Then the equation doesn't add up. Look, I'm not an idiot. Some people say I'm smarter than I look. I've been through the Big Book several times over the years, and Chapter Five has How It Works, but I still haven't found the chapter on why it works. Over the years, I've worked with a fair number of alcoholics, new or returning to AA. And like myself when I was early in my recovery, they kept trying to find out why it works, because if we could figure out why it works, we could control our drinking. Unfortunately, after over fifteen years in recovery, the insane side of my brain still hopes that a cure is on the horizon. Unfortunately, the insane part of my brain still gets miffed at God when he throws a little manure in my life. Unfortunately, the insane side of my brain doesn't think I need to go to meetings. As strange as it may sound, I wouldn't have it any other way, because that is what makes me like you. I'm a part of, rather than apart from. Fortunately, the sane side of my brain is in control most of the time.

In my younger days, I tried to work the perfect program. Today, I just work the program the best I can. I try to pray twice a day. In the morning, I thank God for letting me wake up, and at night, I thank God for another sober day. (I don't get on my knees because at my age, it's too hard to get up.) I try not to ask for anything, although in my subconscious there's a list a mile long. He knows what I want and gives me what I need. I may not like it, but I accept it. The longer I'm sober, the shorter my story gets. By the time I die, I hope the epitaph on my marker reads: HE DRANK, HE GOT SOBER, HE DIED.

Don Q., Iowa



## Co-founder Quotes

### *Learn in Quiet*

In 1941, a news clipping was called to our attention by a New York member. In an obituary notice from a local paper, there appeared these words: "God grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, the courage to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

Never had we seen so much A.A. in so few words. With amazing speed the Serenity Prayer came into general use.

### *Spirituality and Money*

Some of us still ask, "Just what is this Third Legacy business anyhow? And just how much territory does "service" take in?"

Let's begin with my own sponsor, Ebby. When Ebby heard how serious my drinking was, he resolved to visit me. He was in New York; I was in Brooklyn. His resolve was not enough; he had to take action and he had to spend money.

He called me on the phone and then got into the subway; total cost, ten cents. At the level of the telephone booth and subway turnstile, spirituality and money began to mix. One without the other would have amounted to nothing at all.

Right then and there, Ebby established the principle that A.A. in action calls for the sacrifice of much time and a little money.

## **THE EARLYBIRDS**

The bartender poured me another shot of whisky and placed another bottle of beer on the bar in front of me. It was 6:30 on a Friday evening and I was nothing but an earlybird to her, trying to get a jump on the weekend celebration. Little did she know I was about to step across the threshold into another world—a world of sobriety and AA.

The bar had a pool table, and I fancied myself a sharpshooter. Unfortunately, my game lacked a little after a couple of beers and I couldn't seem to sink anything but the cue ball. So I'd sign my name up on the chalkboard along with the other earlybirds, slide up to the bar and order another shot and a beer, waiting for my turn to play again and lose. Then I could sign my name up on the chalkboard along with the other earlybirds so I could play another game and lose. It was like walking on a treadmill, round and round.

It was my second bar of the evening. I had stopped off earlier on my way home from work—not to get drunk, just to have one beer. But then, once I'd ordered I thought, what's the point of having just one beer, so I ordered up a shot to go along with it. That started the ball rolling, and before too long I was slurring my words, ogling any woman who walked in, and already planning my next move. So, off I went to my local bar, the bar around the corner from my house, the bar with the pool table.

But, lo and behold, by the time 7:00 rolled around I was already out of money and working my way into a blackout once again. There was a saving grace, however. There was money at home. Money earmarked for the rent and the electricity bill, but money now with which I could continue to drink. As I sat there in the bar, the world starting to spin around me once again, everything suddenly became clear. My path was set. I was going to leave that bar, go around the corner to my house, get the money I was saving to pay the bills, and come back out and drink. I knew for a certainty that this was true. This is what was going to happen. Along with that thought came another thought, a darker, more sinister thought, a thought loaded with fear and despair. I was probably going to die that night—it wasn't quite as clear just how, perhaps stepping in front of a bus on the street drunk, or being in the wrong place at the wrong time and taking a slug in the head, or maybe getting into my car and driving it into a wall. But the darkness was just as sure as the fact that I was going to leave that bar, go around the corner, get the money, and come back out. And in that moment—it was just a single moment sitting at a bar in the heart of Manhattan, staring at the bottles along the back of the bar, lost in the wavering images in the mirror—I accepted my fate entirely, admitted my powerlessness, and left that bar to get the money so I could continue to drink.

In that one moment, I was on the threshold of a new and wonderful world. The bartender gave a little wave as I staggered off. She figured she'd see me again.

On the corner of the block where I live, just as I was about to turn down my street, I ran into an old acquaintance I hadn't seen for some time. It was someone I used to drink with, someone with whom I'd shared a harrowing incident a couple of years before when I saw a lady fall out of a building and land on the concrete in front of me. She was dead on impact and I stood there in the street, half drunk, half dazed until the police and the fire department, the ambulance, and the press had all come and gone. I found myself in my local bar that night—the bar with the pool table—drinking the image out of my mind, talking to anyone who would talk to me, telling them my tale of woe. This acquaintance was one of those—it turned out he had seen the same thing that day, had been one of the onlookers drawn to the scene. We drank together that night, comrades in disaster, and always had this special bond between us whenever we met.

So, it was he who I ran into on the corner of my block. Usually we'd bump into each other in the neighborhood or at the bar, but I hadn't seen him there for some time. He greeted me. I greeted him back, hoping this wouldn't take too long since I was on a mission to get back to the bar as soon as I possibly could.

"Where ya goin'?" he said to me.

"I'm goin' home," I replied. And then, as if to end the conversation, I shot back, "Where are you goin'?"

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## THE EARLYBIRDS (cont'd)

He looked at me with a piercing glance, head cocked to one side, as if turning something over in his mind. He paused, leaned his head down close to me and said, almost in a whisper, "I'm goin' to an AA meeting, do you want to come?"

In that moment, it's as if a door opened up, I stepped inside, and the door closed shut behind me. Sitting at the barstool just minutes before, I had admitted for the first time in my life that I was powerless over alcohol, that I couldn't possibly control it, that I was fated to leave that bar to get more money only to return and quite possibly to die.

I said yes to my friend Russell. We walked together down the avenue—the money, the bar, the darkness, forgotten in an instant. We got to the meeting well before it started, and I sat in the back, with some of the other earlybirds, waiting for my life to begin.

I don't recall anything that was said at that meeting, though I do remember that at the break the chairperson asked if there were any newcomers that night. Not being one to miss an opportunity and still feeling the effects of all those shots and beers, I raised my hand, stood up, and launched into a brief monologue about alcoholism, creativity, my mother, and the nature of things in general until I felt a set of hands on my shoulders, gently urging me back down into my seat, and I heard the words directed at me, "It's gonna be alright." With those words, and the gentle guidance of those hands, something inside of me crumbled, shattered. For the first time in my life I felt truly safe; safe enough to admit to myself that it wasn't all right, that it hadn't been all right for a long, long time.

I left that meeting in a blackout. I have no idea how I got home. But I woke up in the morning with a meeting list in my pocket, with an afternoon meeting circled, and the request of my friend Russell reverberating in my mind: "Why don't you meet me there?" I slowly got dressed, sat down in a rocking chair in my apartment, and waited in the dark for two hours till it was time for the meeting to start. Why I didn't get up and go down to the corner delicatessen for a quart of beer, I'll never know.

Or maybe I will. "We admitted that we were powerless over alcohol and that our lives had become unmanageable." For me, those words had become the hinges upon which the doorway to a new life opened.

I was twenty-three years old; my life had finally ended and just begun.

Anonymous, New York, N.Y.

**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 \_\_\_\_\_