

Recovery Times

A newsletter from Alcoholics Anonymous San Fernando Valley Central Office VOL 30, NO. 7 JULY 2006

Sobriety is the Fringe Benefit

Becoming a better person will keep you sober

FOR SEVERAL years now, I've been hearing—and sometimes saying—from the podium that the important reward of working the AA program thoroughly is staying sober; and that the “fringe benefits” will come with time.

Speakers I heard as a newcomer seemed to feel that those fringe benefits were such things as getting back in “the big bed,” getting a better job, new car, new house, and new clothes, and making new friends. I could appreciate such aims only vicariously, since I had no complaints about my job, my car, my house, or my clothes and wasn't particularly interested in getting back into a particular bed. But I felt I was identifying with those speakers just by believing what they believed—that the desirable things in life, the fringe benefits of sobriety, would come to successful workers of the AA program in time.

It seems quite clear to me now, however, that sobriety itself is the fringe benefit; that one does not attain peace of mind, self-respect, gratitude, and love of one's fellow-men merely by staying sober. Exactly the reverse! It is *through* attaining peace of mind, self-respect, gratitude, and love of one's fellowmen that one attains the fringe benefit of sobriety.

Before you say “Nonsense!” (or whatever else you were going to say), pick up *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*. Wherever you start to read, the message is the same—not that staying sober will make you a better person, but that becoming a better person will keep you sober!

Those who cry, “Get well before you get good” have missed the point entirely. Well *is* good. And in order to stay well (remove the obsession to drink), you have to *try* to become good (a better person). We all know long-term AAs whose sobriety is still tenuous, despite their years in the program. Some still resent the fact that they can't drink almost as much as they enjoy the knowledge that they don't have to. For them, the Twelve Steps to remove the obsession to drink haven't worked yet. Or the reverse is true: In most cases, it turns out that those sour old-timers haven't worked the Twelve Steps. And it's a relief to have found that out, by asking many directly. To me, the knowledge that the Twelve Steps do work is important. I could not enjoy the kind of sobriety that let me stay the kind of person I was when I came into the AA program.

Today, I don't envy drinkers—even those who can drink in safety. I see alcohol as a depressant and a disorienter. I feel that those who drink it are losing, rather than gaining, something. And though they may feel that loss to be a pleasant, euphoric process, I don't have to agree with them.

What I do have to do is work at being a better person than I was yesterday. That in itself is the basic reward of working the AA program. And, as a fringe benefit, I'll gain another day of rewarding sobriety.

W. A., North Weymouth, Massachusetts
Reprinted from *The Grapevine*

Calendar Events

Upcoming Events

14th Annual Foothill Roundup

August 4 - 6, 2006
La Canada-Flintridge, CA
Website: www.foothillroundup.org

39th Annual District 22 Convention

August 25 - 27, 2006
Veterans Memorial Building, San Luis Obispo, CA
Info: 805-801-0057
Email: tommykeo@gmail.com

31st Annual Great Outdoor Beaver Meeting

August 31 - September 3, 2006
Beaver, UT
Info: Greg K. 818-890-0110, Russ 661-269-5349,
Joe C. 213-792-7715,
Email: jojopelli@gmail.com

55th Annual Southern California AA Convention

September 22 - 24, 2006
San Diego, CA
Info: 805-990-1964
Website: www.aasocal.com

18th Annual Soberfest

September 29 - October 1, 2006
Lake Isabella, CA
Info: Sandy 760-378-2108, Allen 760-379-6350
Email: sandynrick@mchsi.com,
allenalana@earthlink.net

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

SERVICE COMMITTEE SCHEDULE

- July 17, 2006 **SFV H&I
THIRD MONDAY**
8PM Business Meeting
7PM Get Acquainted Workshop
5657 Lindley Ave.

- August 7, 2006 **G.S. District #11
FIRST MONDAY**
6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30PM meeting
315 W. Vine St., Glendale

- August 7, 2006 **G.S. District #16
FIRST MONDAY**
6:15PM meeting
15950 Chatsworth (church), Granada Hills

- August 7, 2006 **G.S. District #17
FIRST MONDAY**
6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30PM meeting
5000 Colfax (church), N. Hollywood

- August 1, 2006 **G.S. District #2
FIRST TUESDAY**
6:30PM, 4011 Dunsmore, La Crescenta

- August 2, 2006 **G.S. District #1
FIRST WEDNESDAY**
6:30PM, 7552 Remmet, Canoga Park

- August 9, 2006 **SFV Board of Directors**
6PM, Central Office

- August 12, 2006 **G.S. District #7
SECOND SATURDAY**
Agua Dulce Woman's Club
33201 Agua Dulce Cyn Rd
Sharon G. (661) 951-0372

- August 14, 2005 **SFV Intergroup
SECOND MONDAY**
6:30PM Orientation
7PM Business Meeting
St. Innocents Church
5657 Lindley Ave., Tarzana

Valley Events

TO FIND OUT WHAT'S GOING ON
YOU CAN:

COME TO CENTRAL OFFICE

CALL US AT 818-988-3001

or

VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT

<http://www.sfvaa.org>

The All Services - Almost Free Fall Festival

will be held

Sunday, October 1, 2006

11am to 3pm

at Woodley Park,

(Japanese Garden Entrance)

Picnic Area #1

(different site this year!)

Speaker at 1:30pm

Service Opportunities & News

Service Opportunities in the San Fernando Valley

PUBLIC INFORMATION COMMITTEE -

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

HOSPITAL AND INSTITUTIONS COMMITTEE -

Carries the message of Alcoholics Anonymous into hospitals, prisons & treatment facilities to those who are unable to get out to meetings. Meets the third Monday of each month 8:00 PM (Get Acquainted Workshop, 7:00 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 6:30 PM, Meeting at 7:00 PM. Contact: Central Office at 988-3001.

SAN FERNANDO VALLEY CONVENTION -

Volunteers are welcome to participate in the planning of the 2007 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 June 12, 2006

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: Dave - 8 yrs, John - 9 yrs, George - 11 yrs, Josh - 15 yrs, Don - 37 yrs.

Motion to adjourn 7:30 PM

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

These minutes are pending approval on July 10, 2006

Next Meeting - July 10, 2006

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

June 2006

K.M.	6 years
Kathleen H.	17 years
Roger P.	17 years
Doug R.	19 years
Lana T.	19 years
Tony R.	19 years
Linda V.	24 years
Robert O.	38 years
Anonymous	

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.

Is AA's Future Guaranteed?

Thirty-five years after the long form of the Traditions was printed in the Grapevine, a longtime friend of AA looks at our survival, past and future

THE TWELVE Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous are the “lessons of an incredible experience.” So says the explanatory text of the First Tradition.

The lessons evolved in a short span of time. It was the period from 1935 to 1945. In that brief interval, the Fellowship determined to: put our common welfare first; rely on the group conscience; open the Fellowship to any alcoholic who wished to join; proclaim that the groups were autonomous; carry the AA message as the primary group purpose; endorse no other causes; decline outside contributions; remain nonprofessional; stay unorganized; avoid public controversy; attract rather than promote; and observe anonymity.

Our Fellowship also determined not to die.

At the end of the first decade, our early servants paused long enough to record the lessons they had learned. These became the Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous. Co-founder Bill W. described them as the “distilled experience of our past.” They are also, I would humbly add, the fervent hope of our future.

The Twelve Traditions were first published in 1946. A shorter form of the Traditions emerged a year later. In 1953, the Traditions, as we know them today, appeared in the book *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*.

The Twelve Traditions were not an instant success in the Fellowship. According to Bill, “There was much apathetic indifference.” He found that “only groups in dire trouble took them seriously.” Other groups, especially those with their own rules and regulations, were openly hostile to the Traditions. They saw no use for “official” guidance from General Headquarters (forerunner of the AA General Service Office).

At this stage, Bill began to travel and talk in support of the Traditions. He reported that “the members listened, but were obviously bored.” From some, he received letters that said, “Bill, we would love to have you come and speak. Tell us where you used to hide your bottles and tell us about that hot-flash spiritual experience of yours. But please don’t talk anymore about those damned Traditions.”

Gradually, the Traditions began to take hold. As might be expected, the groups tried to do things their own way. When they found their own way wanting, they turned for guidance, sometimes as a last resort, to the Traditions. They discovered to their pleasure that the Traditions offered essential truths, which served the interests of the groups and the Fellowship. They then perceived that the Traditions were indeed the key to the unity that our Fellowship so vitally needed.

In 1950, the Fellowship established the Twelve Traditions as the foundation upon which AA would rest. Five years later, the Fellowship adopted the Conference Charter, under which the Twelve Traditions may not be changed without the written consent of three-fourths of all the AA groups in the world. It is safe to say that the Traditions will stand for a long time to come.

Though of utmost importance to us, the lessons in the Twelve Traditions are hardly unique. Most can be found elsewhere: in Shakespeare and in Plato and surely in the Bible. The difference in our case is that we were forced to learn them the hard way—in our struggle for AA’s survival.

The book *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* tells us: “Over the years, every conceivable deviation from our Twelve Steps and Traditions has been tried. That was sure to be, since we are so largely a band of ego-driven individualists. Children of chaos, we have defiantly played with every brand of fire, only to emerge unharmed and, we think, wiser. These very deviations created a vast process of trial and error which, under the grace of God, has brought us to where we stand today.”

Bill saw the Traditions as a “confession that our Fellowship has its sins.” To him, the Traditions were “a guide to better ways of working and living” and “an antidote for our various maladies.” The Traditions, as Bill viewed

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Is AA's Future Guaranteed? (cont'd)

them, called for personal and group sacrifice in ways that make the Traditions, in his words, "the greatest force for unity that we know."

In his book *AA Comes of Age*, Bill created a composite member of the Fellowship named Mr. Grassroots, who lived in the imaginary city of Centerville, U.S.A. Here is a portion of what Mr. Grassroots had to say:

"... I found those Twelve Traditions still on my mind. Each of them I saw is an exercise in humility that can guard us in everyday AA affairs and protect us from ourselves. If AA were really guided by the Twelve Traditions, we could not possibly be split apart by politics, religion, money, or by any old-timers who might take a notion to be big shots. With none of us throwing our weight around in public, nobody could possibly exploit AA for personal advantage, that is sure.

"For the first time, I saw AA's anonymity for what it really is. It isn't just something to save us from alcoholic shame and stigma; its deeper purpose is actually to keep those fool egos of ours from running hog-wild after money and public fame at AA's expense. It really means personal and group sacrifice for the benefit of all AA. Right then, I resolved to learn our Twelve Traditions by heart, just as I had learned the Twelve Steps. If every AA did the same thing and really soaked up these principles, we drunks could hang together forever."

Do other members of the Fellowship see the Traditions the way the imaginary Mr. Grassroots does? No one can say for sure. AA members are free to think as they please. There are no classrooms in which the Traditions are taught nor tutors who teach them. Moreover, no one can force the Traditions upon groups or members. By our own design, neither the Traditions nor anything else in AA is enforceable.

The Twelve Traditions offer important lessons for the survival of the Fellowship. The lessons were learned in the crucible years during which the Fellowship was forged. In the words of the early members, those were harsh, painful, fearsome, and harrowing year—years in which the fate of the Fellowship was put into daily doubt. I hope we shall never see such years again.

Because I am dedicated to the preservation of our Fellowship, I am intellectually and spiritually bound to observe and abide by the Twelve Traditions. They are my shield against the unknown dangers of an uncharted future. They permit me to look forward with confidence that the Fellowship will continue to endure.

Michael Alexander



Co-founder Quotes

The Fellowship's Future

"It seems proved that A.A. can stand on its own feet anywhere and under any conditions. It has outgrown any dependence it might once have had upon the personalities or efforts of a few of the older members like me. New, able, and vigorous people keep coming to the surface, turning up where they are needed. Besides, A.A. has reached

enough spiritual maturity to know that its final dependence is upon God."

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Clearly, our first duty to A.A.'s future is to maintain in full strength what we now have. Only the most vigilant caretaking can assure this. Never should we be lulled into complacent self-satisfaction by the wide acclaim and success that are everywhere ours. This is the subtle temptation which could render us stagnant today, perchance disintegrate us tomorrow. We have always rallied to meet and transcend failure and crisis. Problems have been our stimulants. How well, though, shall we be able to meet the problems of success?

Go Forth Without Fear

HOWEVER it is sliced, thick or thin, one thing is paramount in my life: there has been some sort of progress. And something has just been added.

Shortly after being reborn in AA I began to be called upon to relate my lurid life at the bottom of a bottle. In relating my escapades, the stops were pulled out: I stomped, waved my arms, ranted, quoted the Bible, held aloft the Big Book of AA, pounded the podium. All the while I stayed “humbly” away from the subject of reviving self-respect and returning dignity, such as they were at the time.

Or, if I did dwell on self-respect and dignity, I did it with a servile aspect, terribly direct, low-key. I was commended for my sincerity. Not that I didn't mean everything I said; I did, but the thought hounded me that unless I convinced people of my humility they might misinterpret me, and ascribe to me vaulting ego, bigshotitis. Actually, I was holding on to my former life-long feelings of inadequacy, inferiority, of being a no-goodnik, “different.”

Last week I was asked to speak before a group. A friend of mine on hearing of the event remarked, “Give ‘em hell!” This set me to pondering. All my life I'd caught hell, expected it, and wasn't too disappointed when it came. I shall not “Give ‘em hell”—I shall do my best to “give ‘em hope” as they gave me hope when I shuffled out of the old drunken world and became a member of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Until recently, it scared me to even think about guys and gals with fifteen, twenty years on the program being present when I spoke! Horrors, what can I ever say that they haven't heard before, and better?

It was succinctly pointed out by my sponsor that the best way to get through to “them” was to get through to myself. It never occurred to me that unless those so-called old-timers were getting something out of a meeting, they wouldn't be there in the first place. They were getting the hope, a recharge. They were getting the same hope I receive every day of my AA life.

Recently, it has come upon me that I am literally a product of AA. AA has given me self-respect and dignity I never had; it's given me direction and a concreteness of purpose I never thought possible; it has opened vistas of a future I never dreamed of. My life is no longer morose and terrible—a matter of sickness and death. It has now an increasing ease of conscience, an awareness that God gave me a good mind to use with greater and greater clarity.

My humility now is measured in “go forth without fear,” doing what I think is God's will for me, to the best of my ability; carrying the message of hope, not only in AA meetings, but in my daily life and contact with others. It is remaining aware of the pitfalls of ego, resentment and self-pity, over which I might momentarily stumble. It is continuing to question; to discuss with others how they adjust to living with unsolved problems.

Whereas before my contact with all human beings was tenuous and strictly on my terms, it has now taken on the character of something warm, living, real; something to be savored. My humility is now the confidence that the AA way of life has given me to meet everyone on an equal footing, to stop recoiling, to stop withdrawing into my old loneliness.

A couple of weeks ago I spoke before a group of 410 inmates of a state rehabilitation facility. They had been marched in by the deputies, seated, and watched over. When I arose I identified myself and for a moment my heart quailed, my thoughts began to scatter. I looked out over sullen faces that resented what was happening to them. I said a little quick prayer. Immediately, the word picture flashed into my mind, “Go forth without fear.” At once I felt easy, at home. I was talking to my friends who were in trouble—I was talking to me. I was talking from the confidence and hope AA has given me, and I shared it. As the saying goes, I tried to give it away and, by doing so, I could keep it.

It might not have done any one of the 410 any good, but the 411th got something from it: I gained more AA strength.

My confidence, dignity and self-respect rest in the hearts and minds of members of AA, who are its soul.

Dick W.

Once Over Lightly

Sense and nonsense on the road to recovery

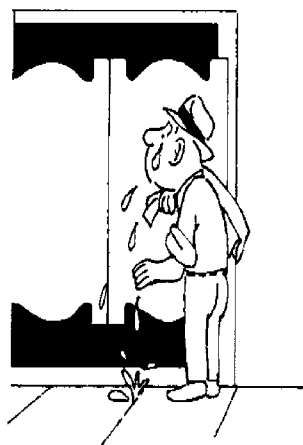
NOW, AS A CHANGE, here are some things that were said at AA meetings:

A speaker once defined happiness as "Finding someone else's bottle when you're hiding your own."

An old-timer in our own group was discussing the topic of accidentally breaking anonymity. He is an industrial alcoholism counselor and was speaking to a high school group, but not as a known member of AA. Finally, a student asked what the treatment for the problem was. "I usually advise them to join Alcoholics Anonymous," said our friend.

"What's AA all about?" asked the student.

"Well," began our member, "we have Twelve suggested Steps."



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

Current Information

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Address _____

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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.

Former Address

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Address _____

City _____ St _____ ZIP _____