

Recovery Times

A newsletter from Alcoholics Anonymous San Fernando Valley Central Office VOL 30, NO. 11 NOV 2006

The Power of Letting Go

Since December 1998, I have lost three dear friends in AA, and this July my father passed away. I also have had my battles with self throughout my sobriety. But I finally have come to believe that the necessity of letting go of the things I cannot change is the single most important spiritual lesson I can learn. My late AA friends were good teachers of this principle.

Sue never once complained of her illness, and because of the wonderful Fellowship of AA, she was never alone during her last days and did not have to go to a hospice. When I visited her, she always wanted to know how I was doing and what she could do to help. She taught me acceptance and courage.

Then there was Dave. Dave was a doer. Despite physical handicaps that would have overwhelmed most people, he accepted his infirmities gracefully and lived a life of selfless service. He was always there to offer rides to anyone without transportation, to take a meeting into the local prison, and sometimes just to sit and listen. I miss him.

Charlie died with twenty-one years of sobriety soon after his last anniversary and a week before the International Convention in Minneapolis. As I remembered Charlie during the sobriety countdown on the last day of the Convention, I also recalled his often-repeated sayings that eventually imprinted themselves on my memory: "If you sit in a barber chair long enough, you're bound to get a haircut," and "It's a good day to live and it's a good day to die and my bags are packed." Charlie had vowed to do whatever it took to keep his invalid wife out of a nursing home, and while he lived, his wife rarely saw the inside of such a facility. He saw it as part of his amends to her for the years of hell his drinking had caused.

Then there was my dad. My dad was the most naturally humble person I have ever known. By sheer example, he taught me most of the principles of this program without realizing that AA had taken the time to number them. My dad suffered unspeakably in the last year or so of his long life and rarely complained. I was never good at expressing my feelings, but I did tell him that I loved him before and after he got ill. When he passed "beyond our sight and hearing," to borrow Bill W.'s lovely phrase, there were no unresolved issues between us, thanks to this wonderful program of love and service.

During my drinking days, I kept everything inside. I got so adept at hiding my true feelings that I soon denied having any. A counselor in rehab always wanted to know how I felt. All I could tell him was what I thought. When he pointed this out to me, I didn't understand what the difference between a feeling and a thought. Through practicing the Steps and with the help of a good sponsor, I have discovered that the spirituality of letting go can teach the difference. By denying how I felt about people and circumstances, I was giving them enormous power over my life. How could I face a situation I found frightening if I thought I shouldn't be afraid? Instead, I rationalized

Continued on Page 4

Calendar Events

Upcoming Events

16th Annual Burbank Group Thank-a-thon
November 23 & 24, 2006
3214A Winona Ave.
Burbank, CA

AA Movie Matinee (Free!)
Presented by District 1
Saturday, December 2, 2006, 1PM - 5PM
5657 Lindley Ave.
Tarzana California

17th Annual River Roundup
January 12 - 14, 2007
Laughlin, NV
Website: www.rcco-aa.org

32nd Annual San Fernando Valley AA Convention
February 2 - 4, 2007
Burbank, CA
Info: 818-734-0383
Website: www.sfvaaconvention.org

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

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. 20, 2006 **SFV H&I
THIRD MONDAY**
8PM Business Meeting
7PM Get Acquainted Workshop
5657 Lindley Ave.

- Dec. 4, 2006 **G.S. District #11
FIRST MONDAY**
6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30PM meeting
315 W. Vine St., Glendale

- Dec. 4, 2006 **G.S. District #16
FIRST MONDAY**
6:15PM meeting
15950 Chatsworth (church), Granada Hills

- Dec. 4, 2006 **G.S. District #17
FIRST MONDAY**
6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30PM meeting
5000 Colfax (church), N. Hollywood

- Dec. 5, 2006 **G.S. District #2
FIRST TUESDAY**
6:30PM, 4011 Dunsmore, La Crescenta

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

- Dec. 6, 2006 **SFV Board of Directors**
6PM, Central Office

- Dec. 9, 2006 **G.S. District #7
SECOND SATURDAY**
Agua Dulce Woman's Club
33201 Agua Dulce Cyn Rd
Sharon G. (661) 951-0372

- Dec. 11, 2005 **SFV Intergroup
SECOND MONDAY**
6:30PM Orientation
7PM Business Meeting
St. Innocents Church
5657 Lindley Ave., Tarzana

**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.'

**The Valley Central Office
will be
CLOSED
for literature sales on
Thursday, November 23, 2006
for the
Thanksgiving Day Holiday.**

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 October 11, 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: Barbara - 1 yrs, Denise - 2 yrs,
Corey - 3 yrs, Dawn - 3 yrs, Dave - 17 yrs.

Motion to adjourn 7:25 PM

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

These minutes are pending approval on November 13, 2006

Next Meeting - November 13, 2006

Prepared and submitted by:

Dawn H., Recording Secretary

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

October 2006

Xxxx X.	XX Years
Xxxx X.	XX Years
Xxxx X.	XX 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.

The Power of Letting Go (cont'd from Front Page)

my way around the issue for a while. Then the thing would come up again and again, and each time the fear would tell me to turn away, and each time the consequences would get harder to escape. The harder I pushed against something, the more it pushed back, until my only solution was to shut down emotionally, to deny that my problems affected anyone except me, and to take what little comfort I could in the false belief that I could take whatever pain I had to endure as long as I didn't have to face anything or anyone threatening. The problem was, everything and everyone became threatening—from the cashier in the supermarket to a drive through a tunnel on the Pennsylvania Turnpike. Of course, the only way to cure fears like these was to drink a lot of beer.

Then, one day, the beer stopped taking the fears away. I soldiered on out of habit for a few more years until the fear of remaining the same outweighed the fear of changing. I hit bottom after a three-and-a-half-hour blackout. What the counselors later called my "alibi system" came crashing down. I let go of the desperate desire to control my drinking. To this day, that desire has not returned.

I have let go of many other things since then, although I've left claw marks on every one of them. My efforts to fix a job situation in which I felt my boss wasn't doing his job properly went on for years. In this case, letting go consisted of praying for God's will to be done and the power to carry it out at work. My efforts at control definitely lessened, although I was not happy. Then, one day I got a call from another employer offering me the best job I have ever had. I now realize that I—who had been near the top of layoff lists in my drinking days—had done my best one day at a time for ten years, and a number of good people had noticed. Our AA literature talks about material progress never preceding spiritual growth. My experience confirms this.

Most recently, I have gone through some emotional ups and downs concerning my marriage. At a men's spiritual retreat, I was told bluntly, "You have a cross to bear." The cross is a lack of communication with my wife, which, as the years have passed, has grown into a lack of intimacy I have found hard to bear. This wise, friendly voice of advice went on to mention my many blessings, including a good relationship with my teenage son, many friends in the Fellowship, my wife's numerous good qualities, and most of all, a relationship with my Higher Power, which grows more fruitful each day.

On the last morning of the retreat I walked to a secluded and tranquil spot and did my best to empty my mind of those committee-room thoughts with which I am usually preoccupied. I prayed for acceptance and for my wife to be given all that I have received so abundantly and freely. A feeling of peace stole over me and I felt myself smiling. I walked to breakfast with a lightness of spirit I have seldom experienced. Of course, this "pink cloud" passed, but the memory of it is now always with me. That's how it is with a spiritual experience for me. Although the world will always force its way back in, I've been changed by the newfound awareness of letting go. I don't think I could go back to my desire to "fix" my wife if I wanted to, because this spiritual experience was real, and it will remain.

Since that day at the retreat, and with nearly twelve years in recovery, I have finally begun to love myself by giving myself permission to do so. As my friend at the retreat said, "So many people like you. Why can't you?" In the final analysis, my need to hold onto controlling attitudes and behaviors is rooted in a self-loathing that was at once unjustified and incredibly strong. Letting go of the people and things I can't change brings me face to face with the one person I can change with God's strength and guidance—me.

Anonymous

Sober Ideas & Suggestions

Travelers in need

A month ago, I stayed in a hotel near the airport of a large city. I was flying out early the next morning and felt the need of a meeting. Although new in AA, I had called AA in other cities and been picked up and taken to a meeting. This time, I called AA, but despite their best efforts, the fellows who answered didn't know the airport area and couldn't help me. I couldn't afford to explore possibilities by taxi, so I went to the hotel desk for help, but to no avail.

So if you attend a meeting within ten miles of an airport, here is an opportunity for service: make a list of meetings to which you or a friend could take someone who's staying at an airport hotel. You might even print cards describing this service to leave at hotels. This could be a lifesaver to needy travelers.

Peter B., Gravenhurst, Ontario

From self to service

I recently went to my home group meeting and found everyone locked out. No one in attendance had a key. I suggested meeting outside because there was a beautiful area with benches and trees, but the general consensus was to go for breakfast. I really needed, and wanted, a meeting, and as everyone drove off, I was working on a resentment. My first reaction was to leave. I had my car in reverse when I remembered what my sponsor told me earlier that week: be of service. This particular meeting was notorious for having members show up late, knowing that it was a safe place to come, no matter how late. So I put my vehicle in park and sat on the rocks out front, saying, with tears, "Okay, God. This is your day." Finally, however, someone showed up needing a meeting and the two of us sat outside and had an awesome meeting—one that I would have missed had I stayed self-centered that day.

My first sponsor had set an excellent example for me. Every year, when we had a conference, my sponsor would stay back at the meeting room, so that someone would be available for the newcomer who had no idea there was a conference going on.

Today, I understand the gift she gets every year by being of service. Today, I understand "I am responsible."

Irene P., San Antonio, Texas



Co-founder Quotes

"Perfect" Humility

For myself, I try to seek out the truest definition of humility that I can. This will not be the perfect definition, because I shall always be imperfect.

At this writing, I would choose one like this: "Absolute humility would consist of a state of complete freedom from myself, freedom from all the claims that my defects of character now lay so heavily upon me.

Perfect humility would be a full willingness, in all times and places, to find and to do the will of God."

When I meditate upon such a vision, I need not be dismayed because I shall never attain it, nor need I swell with presumption that one of these days its virtues shall all be mine.

I only need to dwell on the vision itself, letting it grow and ever more fill my heart. This done, I can compare it with my last-taken personal inventory. Then I get a sane and healthy idea of where I stand on the highway to humility. I see that my journey toward God has scarce begun.

As I thus get down to my right size and stature, my self-concern and importance become amusing.

An Embarrassment of Riches

I once heard at a local meeting that coincidence is God's way of remaining anonymous. When I hear this kind of "miracle" story at AA meetings, I always credit it to childishness, grandiosity, and magical thinking. So the story I am about to tell is embarrassing. But there's no getting around the facts.

Twenty years of drunken enthusiasms delayed my lifelong dream of being a working writer. Ten years sober, I graduated from a well-known writing program, started submitting manuscripts to different markets, and also started nosing around for a day-gig to keep my bills paid while I was beating a path to the best-seller list. I'd worked the AA program one day at a time long enough to know I already had more than I needed, and contented sobriety did not depend on getting what I wanted. But what I wanted was worth working for, and I needed a reliable paycheck until fame and fortune came calling.

So I shopped for an interview suit, picturing myself hawking high ticket appliances or electronics in one of the local mega-stores, something that wouldn't require much more than being affable in exchange for good commissions. People needed and wanted these things. I needed a paycheck and time to pursue my passion. It seemed like a righteous enough exchange at the time.

Gnawing doubts set in when I brought home my new clothes, along with a few newspapers carrying the classifieds. Knocking on doors with résumé in hand never contributed much to my self-esteem. One step at a time, I told myself. And easy does it. If necessary I'd make the phone calls tomorrow. Hanging up my new threads, I took a deep breath to quiet my heart, but was swept by a wave of dread about waiting in lines to get the third degree from people I didn't like for a job I didn't really want.

I was too smart, too well-educated, too promising to have to humble myself for a paycheck. It was the old tunnel vision of fear and pride that had run my life for years. I was viewing the world through the wrong end of a telescope. I knew this. I'd done several Fourth and Fifth Steps. So I got down on my knees and asked God to help me not act on what I knew to be character defects.

Asking for help on my knees was nothing new. I did it and still do it every morning. And I still don't have any idea Who or What I'm asking. I just feel better after, and my life sometimes works out in ways that mystify and delight me. Nothing even close to Bill's mountain-top epiphany, which I've always envied. But I do have what he called, "a mighty good life" in which all the promises have, to a large degree, come true.

There was nothing special about getting down on my knees this time either. I just wanted a calm sense of direction and purpose. But no sooner had I gotten to my feet than the telephone rang.

Now we get to the spooky part. Something like this had happened a few weeks earlier, when, after being awarded a summa cum laude for my graduate work, I'd received a handful of rejections from publishers all on the same day. "What I really want right now," I shouted at my wife while waving the rejection letters in my fist, "is for somebody besides a bunch of college professors to appreciate my work."

Just then the phone rang. It was an AA friend. He wanted to tell me how much reading my article in a local paper meant to him at this difficult time in his life. We talked; I thanked him, hung up, and told my wife. "Did you get that?" she said and laughed. "Are you paying attention to what just happened?"

Well, maybe. But that wasn't my idea of how God worked. And anyway where was the paycheck? We were supposed to be self-supporting, weren't we?

A few weeks later, just after I'd hung up my new interview suit, dropped to my knees, and asked for help, the telephone rang again. It was the manager of the housekeeping department at the local hospital where I'd worked between semesters to pay my bills. The department was short-staffed. If I was available, they could work out something favorable to me.

Now remember, first I asked for help, then they called me. Next morning I went in and told the manager the days I was available, the hours that would be best for me (allowing time for meetings), and how much I needed to make. "That's great," she answered. "Can you start tomorrow?"

Continued on Page 7

An Embarrassment of Riches (cont'd)

Like I said, I'm not comfortable with other people's ideas about a Higher Power being some kind of cosmic lottery or heaven-sent welfare program. My idea of spirituality is steady practice, faith, hard work, creating opportunity, and keeping an open mind. Whatever success I've had seems to have come more from saying yes to opportunity than from making things happen or doing things my way.

So this time I said, Yes, I'll do that. I'll be a janitor. If that will provide the time and money I need to live the life and do the work I most want to do, then Yes. And thank you, Lord, for thy will in my life. My plan was to keep that job for, at most, two years—time enough to get two big manuscripts that I'd been working on to market.

Well, I'm closing in on ten years at that job, and planning to don my little-used ten-year-old job-interview suit once again, this time for interviews at social service agencies for a job for which I am now completing my second professional degree. Nothing about the life I planned for myself coming out of grad school ten years ago has worked out the way I wanted. All my best work has been rejected many times over. My résumé has been shredded in several hundred offices. And I know as much about cleaning floors and disinfecting contaminated rooms as I do about staying sober, because it's experiential knowledge.

In addition to being educated almost two degrees beyond my intelligence, I still have less than I want, but more than I need. And being a janitor with a Master's degree for ten years has—along with practicing the AA program—taught me more about service, surrender, and humility than, at times, I wanted to know. But the most important gift has been learning that life's greatest rewards come from simply doing the work before me as best I can, from taking the time and trouble to be kind when the opportunity arises, and from saying yes to life: Yes, I am willing. Yes, I will do that. Yes, I wish to be of service.

A sober life, a fellowship, a program, great friends, a sober wife, and a miraculous job taught me how to admit it when I made mistakes and how to ask for help when I needed it. What I've learned in going back to school is that patience, tolerance, and compassion are limited only by my fear and lack of imagination.

I also think I now know the meaning of that bumper sticker that says, "God isn't through with me yet." I've found deep contentment in incremental progress, and in providing needed services for a steady paycheck because I'm not chasing the best-seller list any more. These are miracles enough for me.

So no more phone calls, okay, Big Guy? You got my attention with that last one. It just took me this long to put it all together. Another ten years sober in AA, and who knows? Maybe I won't even be embarrassed talking about this stuff. Just the same, I think this time I'll remain:

Anonymous

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

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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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