

Recovery Times

A newsletter from Alcoholics Anonymous San Fernando Valley Central Office

VOL 31, NO. 1

JAN 2007

The Meaning of Money

Within a week of having my last drink, I found my way into a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous. Because of chronic alcoholism, I had lost my teeth, my ability to read, and control over most of my bodily functions. I couldn't stop shaking. I was at the end of the road; I had nowhere else to go, and despite my best efforts, I couldn't die.

I was welcomed at the doors of AA by a man who several years earlier had asked me to leave a rather shoddy bar because of my inappropriate behavior. I figured if it was all right with him, then I would probably be allowed to stay. I don't remember much about that meeting except that I was given hope that maybe I didn't have to drink again. No one told me to believe in God or tried to sell me anything. I was encouraged to just show up and use what I wanted. It had been a long time since I'd felt welcome anywhere; here were people who understood where I had been and where I was now. I did what was suggested, got a sponsor, and started on the road of recovery. My life changed.

During the initial meeting with my first sponsor, he asked if I had a Big Book. When I said no, he bought me one. I told him I'd pay him back, and he said he expected nothing less. The day I received my first paycheck from a not-so-good job, I did pay him. I also started contributing to the Seventh Tradition basket. I really wanted to be part of this thing. That first night, he told me I couldn't keep what I didn't give away and that I couldn't give away what I didn't have. He started me on my journey through AA's Twelve Steps of recovery and got me into group service as the greeter for the eight o'clock meetings.

Shortly afterward, I went to my first steering committee meeting and was astonished to learn that our treasurer had lost a great deal of the group's money. He had bought a new car and left the group. We were in severe financial trouble, but no one felt it was appropriate to seek legal recourse. The group members were concerned he might drink. They realized that they needed

to be more careful when electing trusted servants. They believed that they had let the man down by putting too much pressure on his short-term sobriety and had let the group down by not having the foresight to see potential problems. I thought they were just nice people; I had no idea that what I was witnessing was a greater understanding of a Higher Power at the group level. I came up with the incredibly wonderful idea of seeking help from a local charitable organization to get us through this dilemma. That's when my sponsor began teaching me about our Twelve Traditions. Once again, my life changed.

While studying the Seventh Tradition, I learned that self-support is more than money in the basket. It's the participation by individual members within the group as well as group participation by elected members in local service work and in AA as a whole. I found out that he who pays the bills calls the shots. At first, the most important thing to me was that our group was autonomous and made all our own decisions. As my mind cleared, I realized that with freedom there is responsibility, and that if the group didn't pay its way, no one would.

The Seventh Tradition became very important to me; it meant that I could belong. I could be a small part of a great whole, something I had never been before. It also meant that I could earn a living and start making financial amends in order to pay back the many debts that had built up through the years. It meant that I had a chance to be free one day.

I became involved in my home group and did service with our local Hospitals and Institutions Committee. I went to places I'd never dreamed of going to help carry a message of hope to the hopeless. The history of Alcoholics Anonymous became very important to me, as did serving this sober group of drunks that had given me life. I started to put Alcoholics Anonymous in front of my own wants and needs.

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Calendar Events

Upcoming Events

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

Burbank Group 60 Years of Love & Service

Sunday, February 11, 2007
8:00 AM - 10:00 PM
Burbank, CA

20th Annual Men's International Conference

March 29 – April 1, 2007
Las Vegas, NV
Website: www.iaamcvegas.org

30th Annual Spring Roundup

April 5 – 8, 2007
San Diego, CA
Website: www.sandiegospringroundup.com

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

Service Committee Schedule

- Jan. 15, 2006 **SFV H&I
THIRD MONDAY**
8PM Business Meeting
7PM Get Acquainted Workshop
5657 Lindley Ave.

- Feb. 5, 2007 **G.S. District #11
FIRST MONDAY**
6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30PM meeting
315 W. Vine St., Glendale

- Feb. 5, 2007 **G.S. District #16
FIRST MONDAY**
6:15PM meeting
15950 Chatsworth (church), Granada Hills

- Feb. 5, 2007 **G.S. District #17
FIRST MONDAY**
6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30PM meeting
5000 Colfax (church), N. Hollywood

- Feb. 6, 2007 **G.S. District #2
FIRST TUESDAY**
6:30PM, 4011 Dunsmore, La Crescenta

- Feb. 7, 2007 **G.S. District #1
FIRST WEDNESDAY**
6:30PM, 7552 Remmet, Canoga Park

- Feb. 7, 2007 **SFV Board of Directors**
6PM, Central Office

- Feb. 10, 2007 **G.S. District #7
SECOND SATURDAY**
Agua Dulce Woman's Club
33201 Agua Dulce Cyn Rd
Sharon G. (661) 951-0372

- Feb. 12, 2007 **SFV Intergroup
SECOND MONDAY**
6:30PM Orientation
7PM Business Meeting
St. Innocents Church
5657 Lindley Ave., Tarzana

Special Events

CENTRAL OFFICE

We wish for you and yours a
**Sober,
Happy,
Joyous and Free
2007**

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 (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 December 13, 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: Liz - 1 yr, Eddie - 3 yrs, Lisa - 5 yrs,
Dennis - 12 yrs, Di - 13 yrs.

Motion to adjourn 7:25 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 8, 2007*

Next Meeting - January 8, 2007

Prepared and submitted by:

Dawn H., Recording Secretary

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

December 2006

Jim L. 12 Years

Paul D. 13 Years

**Valley Action
Spkr/Part. a lot of 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 Meaning of Money

(cont'd from Page 1)

In addition to giving much of my time, as I was able to secure better jobs I began to put more money in the basket at meetings. Sometimes, I was rather showy in my contribution. However, maturing through service and living within the principles embodied within the last three Steps, I realized that if the Seventh Tradition were just about money, the haves could, and certainly would, support the have-nots. Then we would likely become a society wracked with perilous wealth and power, and the voice of Alcoholics Anonymous would not be heard through group participation but only through those who, in Bill's words, "paid the freight." The Fellowship had to be supported through a broad base of groups, and the group had to be supported through a broad base of individual members. Therefore, I should give my fair share but not more.

I learned that I would serve best as an example of leadership, not as someone filled with the false pride that comes with carrying the group, either financially or through self-appointed positions of importance. I came to realize this was a Fellowship made up of the dregs of society who have found freedom and happiness in a power greater than themselves through the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. Serving it and trying to carry its message would be the highest goal I ever attempted.

In the early days of Alcoholics Anonymous, the groups of newly sober men and women came up with all kinds of ideas to bring money into the Fellowship. Most ideas involved relying on ways to squeeze even a few pennies from former spendthrifts who became miserly once they got sober. Great amounts of money were dreamed of and sought after, so that the miracle of Alcoholics Anonymous could be spread as quickly as possible.

It took time and wisdom for Alcoholics Anonymous members to see that the Fellowship must be self-supporting or the entire movement could be lost forever. As AA grew in numbers and maturity, it became apparent that what we had was truly a gift from God. One of the surest ways to maintain the existence of our marvelous Fellowship was to ensure that it remain self-supporting and refuse outside gifts, no matter how compelling the need or how loving the offer.

In 1937, during discussions concerning possible financial support from the Rockefeller Foundation, Albert Scott, an early friend of Alcoholics Anonymous, asked, "Shouldn't we be most careful not to do anything, which might lead to a professional or propertied class within your ranks?"

This profound statement is one of the cornerstones that has kept our Fellowship in the unique position of actually practicing corporate poverty, out of harm's way. When all was said and done, the Rockefeller Foundation had helped in a very minor financial way, but its spiritual contribution was immense. It became evident that we would have to make do with our own efforts. Shortly afterward, as the members of the media saw that we ex-problem-drinkers were making self-support part of our foundation of recovery, they became some of our most valued friends.

Throughout those early years and after the inception of the General Service Conference, discussions of the wise use of funds have continued. These talks have offered us some of our greatest opportunities for spiritual growth. Sales of literature have always been key in paying for needed services. Occasionally it appeared that group contributions would support all our services except for the cost of publishing. There have been times when we have gone to great lengths to accomplish that goal, but the concept has thus far stayed out of our reach. Maybe it should remain that way since literature pricing can be the throttle that keeps us on an even keel while we attempt to maintain a balanced operation of the Reserve Fund. We need to encourage groups to continually contribute to our various service entities, not only to ensure that those services will be adequate, but also to afford the freedom of each group the benefits of our Second Legacy.

In November 1957, Bill wrote in the Grapevine that "our spiritual way of life is safe for future generations if, as a society, we resist the temptation to receive money from the outside world. But this leaves us with a responsibility—one that every member ought to understand. We cannot skimp when the treasurer of our group passes the hat. Our groups, our areas, and Alcoholics Anonymous as a whole will not function unless our services are sufficient and their bills are paid."

With this commentary, Bill makes it clear that the Seventh Tradition is money in the basket, but it's also participation at the group and area service levels.

Self-support is the very essence of Alcoholics Anonymous. As the result of paying our own bills, the Fellowship will be here for all the years to come when hopeless drunks walk into AA meetings looking for sobriety and a new way of life.

Jim M., Shingletown, California

Ham on Wry - short takes from The Grapevine

“An alcoholic is a man with two feet firmly planted in mid-air.”
Intergroup, New York, New York, July 1944

“The surest way to lose your health is to keep drinking to other people’s.”
Long Island, New York, July 1944

“In taking the Fifth Step with an understanding (and close-mouthed) friend, don’t shilly-shally. Plunge right in, worst things first.”
January 1963

Definition of an alcoholic: A man who, when he goes to a wedding, wants to be the bride; when he goes to a funeral, he wants to be the corpse.”
April 1946

Heard at the big meeting in Chicago: “Some blackouts are better left forgotten.”
November 1946

A likely prospect lurched into a downtown New York open meeting and sat down heavily. “Boy,” he said, “it’s drunk outside!”
November 1958

Two drunks found themselves walking along a railroad track. “Sam,” said one, “I believe this is the longest flight of stairs I ever saw.” “Never mind the stairs,” said his pal. “It’s this low handrail that worries me.”
Hazel D., Virginia, November 1958

It’s the first drink that gets you drunk. It’s the last one that gets you sober.”
John R., Bronxville, NY, August 1959

“I want to remind you,” said the judge, “that you’re here for drinking.” “Fine!” enthused the prisoner. “Let’s get started.”
November 1959

J.W. tells us, from Reading, Pennsylvania, that she wasn’t crazy about drinking whiskey, but it was something to do while getting drunk.
March 1963

According to the News-Palladium, of Pana, Ill., a hangover is something to occupy a head that wasn’t used the night before.
July 1963

The other morning a radio commentator told about the problem drinker who was advised to try yoga exercises as a remedy. The guy did. Six months later his wife met a friend on the street. “How’s Charlie doing?” the friend asked. “Fine, the wife replied, “he can get soused now standing on his head.”
July 1963

A futurist who drank his way from the Thinktank to the Drunktank still keeps an eye on 2001. Picking up a bunch of grapes recently he marveled, “Ah, wine capsules!”
Homer S., Morehead, Kentucky, September 1992



Co-founder Quotes

Faith and Action

Dr. Bob did not need me for his spiritual instruction. He had already had more of that than I. What he did need, when we first met, was the deflation at depth and the understanding that only one drunk can give to another. What I needed was the humility of self-forgetfulness and the kinship with another human being of my own kind.
A.A. TODAY, P. 10

« « « » » »

Your prospect may belong to a religious denomination. His religious education and training may be far superior to yours. In that case he is going to wonder how you can add anything to what he already knows. But he will be curious to learn why his own convictions have not worked and why yours seem to work so well. He may be an example of the truth that faith alone is insufficient. To be vital, faith must be accompanied by self sacrifice and unselfish, constructive action. Let him see that you are not there to instruct him in religion. Admit that he probably knows more about it than you do, but call to his attention the fact that however deep his faith and knowledge, he could not have applied it or he would not drink, Perhaps your story will help him see where he has failed to practice the very precepts he knows so well...
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, P. 93

Lemons & Lemonade

When I first came into AA, few things boiled my blood more than sayings like “When life gives you lemons, make lemonade.” I hated a lot of things as drinker, and positive thinking was at the top of the list.

Out of all the positive-thinking people who shared, I was most annoyed by the ones dealing with their DUI experiences. “It was the best thing that ever happened to me,” a woman once said at my regular Sunday morning discussion meeting. One old-timer speaking at my home group said, “I am so grateful to that police officer for arresting me that I send him a card every year on my anniversary and thank him.” Over and over, I heard people claim that their DUI arrests were blessings bestowed upon them by their loving Higher Power. These people, I thought, arms crossed over my chest, are either liars or idiots. If arrests are blessings, please shower me with curses.

Over the six weeks between my first AA meeting and my court date, my attitude started to change. I went to meetings, got a sponsor and a home group, and read the literature. I went without a drink for days, weeks, and then over a month, and I started to allow a positive little thought to creep into my head—maybe, just maybe, it was a good thing that I got caught. I needed the wake-up call before something much worse happened.

Then one day I was at a speaker meeting and a man stood up and explained how he had come to AA right after getting arrested for what would have been—if he were convicted—his third DUI. “I really worked the program,” he said, “and my Higher Power rewarded me because when I went to court I got off on a technicality.”

That’s it, I thought. It all made sense to me. I was well on my way to exceeding ninety meetings in ninety days. I had read the Big Book twice. I even had a coffee commitment. How could my Higher Power not come and bail me out? That had to be my reward for sobering up and working a good program.

My sponsor cautioned me. He pointed out the page in the Big Book where it mentions that we are still accountable for the mistakes we made while drinking. Sobriety, he said, doesn’t remove accountability. He also mentioned the Third Step, and the idea that I should be doing what was right without expecting anything in return. “We don’t pray for things,” he said, quoting the literature, “but only for the knowledge of [God’s] will for us and the power to carry that out.”

I heard him, but didn’t really listen. I preferred the idea that my Higher Power would conjure up a technicality and get me off for the DUI. It happened for that other guy, I reasoned. Why not for me?

Then, on the day of my court appearance, my lawyer told me that the prosecutor had me dead to rights and urged me to plead guilty. “If you plead guilty, the judge will go easier on you,” he said. “If you don’t, he probably won’t.”

I didn’t argue. I knew I was guilty, and it looked after all like my Higher Power would not intervene. No miraculous technicality had appeared to save me from the consequences of my actions. I plead guilty and got my sentence.

That night, at my regular discussion meeting, it seemed that everyone had some joy to share. One man spoke about getting his family back after quitting alcohol. A woman talked about buying her first house. Another gushed over the fact that she’d just landed her dream job. Finally, a guy with time addressed me and the rest of the newcomers. “I used to be like you,” he said. “I had nothing. I was miserable. Now, I have a big house, a car, and a beautiful family, all because I work a good program.”

I could feel my face turning red with anger, my head starting to pound. I wanted to say that sometimes people worked good programs and didn’t get material rewards, but when the leader called on me I started spouting lies. “I am really glad I came tonight,” I said. “It’s great to hear how well everyone is doing. It gives me a lot of hope.”

I went home and stewed, feeling I had some angry, betrayed feeling I had always felt toward my Higher Power. Other people were being showered with blessings, and I had to pay the DUI fines and live without a license for six months. Where were the joys of sobriety for me?

I started riding my bike to work each morning—it was a ten-mile round trip—and I couldn’t help but notice how reckless and dangerous so many of the drivers seemed. “But they,” I thought, angrily directing my thoughts toward my Higher Power, “never have to suffer any consequences for their actions.” Morning after morning, I left convinced that I would probably get hit by a truck and become paralyzed, and then I would spend the rest of my life in a wheelchair, listening to happy people tell me about the lemons and the lemonade.

I wallowed in my anger and resentment, though I knew it was both irrational and dangerous. Irrational because I knew I was guilty and deserved the punishment I had received. Dangerous because I had read in the Big Book that resentment sent more people out on drinking binges than anything else.

I started telling people how I really felt before, during, and after meetings. “I haven’t gotten anything from sobriety,” I would say. “My life sucks more now than it did when I was

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Lemons & Lemonade (cont'd)

drinking.” The answers I got all came down to about the same thing: You’re right where you ought to be. Don’t drink and go to meetings. It gets better.

At one beginner’s meeting, I told the leader that I didn’t really believe in Step Three, turning our lives and our wills over to a Higher Power. I pointed to the crucifix on the wall in the church classroom we used for our meeting. “Jesus said ‘thy will be done,’ and look what happened to him.” The leader told me that I should pray for acceptance. I asked him if he had heard me when I had told him that I didn’t trust God. He told me he had once felt the same way and that prayer had worked for him. “Try it,” he said.

Try it? I didn’t have any better ideas, so I began to pray as I rode my bike to work—or I tried to pray. At first, my prayers would often dissolve into angry screeds, with me once again railing against God.

Gradually, I found myself more and more making the trip in a state of serenity, repeating the Lord’s Prayer and the Serenity Prayer, or sometimes thinking about people I knew who seemed to be suffering and asking that God remove their suffering. Because I had to get up so early to pedal to work, I started to notice the sunrise, and—pedalling along the streets, rocks popping under my wheels—the flaming colors of fall leaves all around me. One particularly beautiful morning a thought popped into my head: This sure beats waking up with a hangover.

I lost fifty pounds in the first two months of riding.

What had been restless nights since the time I had started drinking suddenly became restful as the stress that used to harass me all night long burned away during my rides to work.

One day, a woman I worked with who commuted fifty miles from New York to New Jersey each day, saw me getting on my bike and getting ready to ride home. She said, “I wish I could ride to work every day. You’re really lucky.”

As I rode home that afternoon, the headlamp on my bike flickering along the sidewalk in the now dusky fall evening, I started laughing at myself. I had spent so many mornings feeling sorry for myself, telling myself that working the program had been such a total waste of time, and here was someone who, getting into her car for the fifty mile commute through brutal North Jersey traffic, looked at me and my bike and thought, “Boy, that guy is really lucky. He gets to ride his bike to work.”

It brought it all home to me. What I saw as a negative, others saw as a positive. Riding the bike to work wasn’t a good or bad thing in and of itself; it was what I decided to make of it. My punishment had, in fact, become something of a blessing, just as I’d been told it would—as long as I worked my program.

I wish I could say that from that point on I enjoyed total serenity and acceptance, but the program doesn’t work that way for me. I am new and still have my ups and downs, days when I lose faith and take my will back. I make sure to share when I am feeling frustrated or down at meetings because I want the guys with less time than me to know that sobriety isn’t a blissed-out fantasy life where we never suffer or doubt.

But I also like to share about the positives that have happened for me during my time in the program, especially how one time when I gave myself lemons through my drunk driving, the program made them into lemonade—despite me.

Richard D., New Jersey

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

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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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