

Recovery Times

A newsletter from Alcoholics Anonymous San Fernando Valley Central Office

VOL 32, NO. 3 MAR. 2008

Beyond Sanity

Step Two - Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

“There are those, too, who suffer from grave emotional and mental disorders, but many of them do recover if they have the capacity to be honest.” That quote from the Big Book describes me. I have a mental disorder—severe clinical and chronic depression—but I am in recovery. The program works.

When I first came into the Fellowship, I was in a depressive state, and a few days later was hospitalized for the fifth time. In the hospital, I learned about the illness of alcoholism: the mental obsession and the physical compulsion. When I was released from the hospital a month later, I began attending AA meetings in earnest.

At first, staying sober was not as difficult as I had envisioned. The physical compulsion had left me while I was in the hospital, and though I was left with an occasional thought or desire for a drink, there was nothing upon which I had to act. Within a short time, I began to notice some benefits of sobriety that were special to me and became self-reinforcing. Without ingesting alcohol, which was a depressant, my depression finally had a chance to improve. It wasn't over yet, but through the grace of God, I could see change. More than that, sobriety seemed to coincide with freedom from the hospital. I had stopped attempting suicide (something I'd only done while drinking). And now, thirty-seven months into sobriety, I haven't been back in the hospital.

Taking the First Step was easy. Hospitalizations and drunk driving citations had clearly made my life unmanageable, and I knew I was powerless: that the first drink would get me drunk.

It was the Second Step that I eyed with intense interest: “Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.” Did that mean that my Higher Power would eradicate my mental illness? That is what I believed and prayed for. If the God of my understanding could offer me recovery from alcoholism, could he not offer me recovery from this other illness as well?

As I continued to attend AA meetings and listen carefully, I heard experiences with the Second Step that didn't quite apply to me. One common definition of insanity was “doing the same thing (i.e., drinking) over and over, expecting different results.” That definition fit me as far as my alcoholism went, but was too narrow to help with my mental illness. I resigned myself to a continuing mental illness.

However, I also continued my journey with the Steps. Doing each to the best of my ability, with painstaking care, I completed all twelve, until in the end I found a new definition of sanity. It was bigger than any definition I had heard concerning Step Two, but it was also bigger and better than my wildest imaginings. This sanity offered serenity, a feeling of wellness or well-being, possession of a center of balance from which to operate, and a feeling that my place in this world was just right. The sanity I've received through work on the Steps is far more than I could have hoped for.

Now I'm not only a recovering alcoholic but have truly been “restored to sanity,” and am forever grateful.

Doreen C., Bowie, Maryland

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Calendar Events

Upcoming Events

31st Annual San Diego Spring Round Up

March 20 - 23, 2008

San Diego, CA

Website: www.sandiegospringroundup.com

23 Annual Orange County Convention

March 21 - 23, 2008

Costa Mesa, CA

Website: www.oacaac.org

5th Annual Spaghetti Dinner with AA Speaker

to benefit the Santa Clarita AA Convention

March 29, 2008

Newhall, CA

Website: www.scvaaconvention.org

5th Annual Round Up

April 25 - 27, 2008

Pahrump, NV

Info: 775-253-0338

Email questions to: earthart@teknnett.com

24th Annual Tri-State Round Up

May 16 - 18, 2008

Laughlin, NV

Info: 928-753-6035 Website: www.tristate-roundup.com

23rd Annual AALA Roundup

May 23 - 26, 2008

Burbank, CA

Info: 310-285-3272

Website: www.aalaroundup.com

18th Annual Bike-N-4-Books

June 7, 2008

Woodley Park Picnic Area #2, Van Nuys, CA

Info: 818-346-4812

Website: www.sfvhi.org/BN4B.html

A.A. Desert Pow Wow

June 12 - 15, 2008

Indian Wells, CA

Info: 760-321-6568

Website: www.desertpowwow.com

Service Committee Schedule

- March 17, 2008 **SFV H&I**
THIRD MONDAY
 8PM Business Meeting
 7PM Get Acquainted Workshop
 5657 Lindley Ave.

- April 7, 2008 **G.S. District #11**
FIRST MONDAY
 6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30pm meeting
 315 W. Vine St., Glendale

- April 7, 2008 **G.S. District #16**
FIRST MONDAY
 6:15PM meeting
 15950 Chatsworth (church), Granada Hills

- April 7, 2008 **G.S. District #17**
FIRST MONDAY
 6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30pm meeting
 5000 Colfax (church), N. Hollywood

- April 1, 2008 **G.S. District #2**
FIRST TUESDAY
 5:30PM, 4011 Dunsmore, La Crescenta

- April 2, 2008 **G.S. District #1**
FIRST WEDNESDAY
 6:30PM, 7552 Remmet, Canoga Park

- April 9, 2008 **SFV Board of Directors**
 6:30PM, Central Office

- April 12, 2008 **G.S. District #7**
SECOND SATURDAY
 9AM, Agua Dulce Woman's Club
 33201 Agua Dulce Cyn Rd

- April 14, 2008 **SFV Intergroup**
SECOND MONDAY
 6:30PM Orientation
 7PM, Business Meeting
 St. Innocents Church

Opportunities for Service

Your Central Office needs **telephone volunteers** for **all** shifts, especially the Overnight (12 Midnight - 9 AM) shift.

If you have one year or more of continuous sobriety, we invite you to join us and help your fellow alcoholics. You can sign up in the office or online at <http://www.sfvaa.org/involve.html>.

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 2009 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 February 11, 2008

Rick A. Co-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: Cass - 1 yr, Roger - 2 yrs, Liz - 3 yrs,
Zach - 4 yrs, La-Li - 11 yrs, Rick - 12 yrs,
Myheir - 33 yrs, Hal - 36 yrs.*

Motion to adjourn 7:27 PM
The long form of the Intergroup Meeting Minutes for January is available at Central Office or at the Intergroup Meeting.

*These minutes are pending approval on
March 10, 2008*

Next Meeting - March 10, 2008

*Prepared and submitted by:
Dawn H., Recording Secretary*

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

February 2008

Greg B.	14 years
In Honor of Roy G.	15 years
In Honor of Allen A.	18 years
Gus D.	21 years
Maggie M.	24 years
Myheir H.	33 years
Hal S.	36 years
Life's in Session	20 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.

So That's a Spiritual Experience!

*Not always a flash of light,
but being capable of doing what we couldn't do before*

I can remember, early in my sobriety, feeling depressed because I had not had a spiritual experience*. I was sure that I alone had not undergone a sudden change of heart.

This impression came from listening to some other members describe their spiritual awakenings. They described them simply and honestly. There had been, they said, no flashing lights, no burning bushes. But there had been a moment when they experienced total surrender, a sudden change of attitude. It was, they said, an experience that immediately changed their lives.

I assumed (erroneously, I later found) that all AA members had undergone a similar experience. I was sure that those who did not speak of their moment of truth were too modest to describe it. And I was also sure that I was the only one, even among the new members, who had not experienced an instantaneous change.

I believed that my entry into AA had been different. I had come in reluctantly, and had stayed reluctant for as long as possible. Only gradually, over a period of months, did I realize that I had no place else to go. There was never any sudden, joyful acceptance of recovery. There was, instead, a gradual, sad admission that I could choose AA or die. Not what I would have called a "spiritual" experience.

Fortunately, there was a small group of us who were all new to the program and very close. It was among them that I made a series of discoveries.

First, I discovered that I was not alone. All of us agreed that, whatever a spiritual experience might be, we certainly hadn't had one. We had all been waiting for it to happen, and by now, most of us were convinced that it probably never would. We were different. Unlike the older members, we had been too "sinful" in the past and were too secular in the present to be worthy of anything "spiritual."

Our second discovery was more exciting. We discovered that most of the other members had not undergone an instantaneous change, either. We learned, by listening at meetings and talking to our sponsors, that the majority of those we admired had undergone, like us, a gradual change. We still didn't know what a spiritual experience was, and we were still pretty sure that we hadn't undergone one. But we had all experienced gradual change. So we weren't inferior. We were with the majority.

The third discovery was a blockbuster. One of us read Bill W.'s discussion of the Twelfth Step in *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*. There, he explains that there are many kinds of spiritual experience. Some are like the conversions of the great religious leaders of the past; others seem purely psychological. Some are sudden or instantaneous; others are a gradual learning experience. But all of them, whatever form they take, have one effect: They make a person capable of doing something he could not do before.

As Bill puts it, "When a man or a woman has a spiritual awakening, the most important meaning of it is that he has now become able to do, feel, and believe that which he could not do before on his unaided strength and resources alone."

For all of us, this was an important discovery. I was now capable of doing things that had been impossible for me before; I could not deny it. The obvious example was staying sober—by this time, I had been dry for several consecutive months. Before AA, several consecutive days had been impossible.

But there were other important changes, which were harder to describe. My feelings of fear and guilt were slowly being replaced by feelings of hope and self-respect. And most important, that which had been impossible before—a trust in something or Someone other than myself—had now become possible.

In other words, I had been undergoing a spiritual experience without knowing it. My confused questioning about a Higher Power, my changed mental attitude, and even my physical recovery had all been part of a spiritual awakening. Without knowing it, I had been in contact with the source of life, whatever or Whoever that might be.

Paradoxically, the realization that even I had experienced something spiritual was in itself a spiritual experience, and I am only slowly understanding its implications. What happened in the past, without my knowledge, is probably continuing now. And in the future, when tomorrow becomes today, it can go on and on. All that is required is a desire to stop drinking, and to stay stopped.

Ed O.
York, Pennsylvania

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*You can read more about the terms "spiritual experience" and "spiritual awakening" in Appendix II of the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*.

You Mean There's Already a Solution?

As the AA Steps contain the message of recovery, so the AA Traditions contain that of unity. I knew this fact in spirit sometime before my head caught on to it. While still very much a newcomer to the Fellowship, I first became aware of the Traditions while observing the running of meetings. Despite my newcomer's confusion I could sense that the chairman and secretary had little power to get people to do anything—other than their power of persuasion through their own sober example. It soon seemed clear, too, that their only guidelines were the Traditions, which at most meetings hung in full view for easy reference. I noticed that the Traditions guided the groups in the many small jobs necessary to make each meeting available as scheduled. My curiosity about the Traditions was sparked and kindled a little at a time. There were not many Step meetings then—and no Traditions meetings—so we depended mostly on osmosis to absorb these principles.

Over the years this situation has altered considerably since AA practices have changed, much as I have grown in sobriety. Nowadays Step meetings in many communities have become our most important topic discussion meetings—well attended and deeply interesting. The principles in the Step under discussion at these meetings cast an uncanny light on our day-to-day problems in sobriety and guide us on the path to an AA way of living. However, although the message of unity remains as vital as ever, and possibly more crucial than in simpler days when AA was less popular, Traditions meetings are hard to find. Even when one can find such a meeting one often is besieged by downgrading, trivializing remarks beginning with, “If I'd remembered that this was Traditions night. . .” And, too, the speakers, often as not, are inexperienced in AA service where the Traditions can be seen at work.

A local group which I attend with some frequency recognized some years ago when it was about six years old the need for a weekly Step meeting—one Step per meeting, rotating from Step One through Twelve. It was also decided

that a Tradition would be the topic for discussion at the end of each cycle of Steps. For several years the group has held four Traditions meetings a year—enough to remind members that the Traditions exist, but not enough to raise an informed consciousness. In another instance my home group holds a Step meeting every week except for the last meeting each month, which is devoted to consideration of the Tradition numbered the same as the month. From its inception this meeting has been a vital and dynamic study of AA principles applied to individual daily sobriety. Often, personal problems are looked at through the spiritual insights peculiarly available in AA's Steps and Traditions. The leaders for the Traditions meetings are selected by our GSR (general service representative) from amongst his or her service contacts so that we are sure to have someone knowledgeable to direct our thoughts to the principles contained in the Tradition at hand. Each year we complete the entire cycle. As yet in our district there is not a weekly Traditions meeting, but in our general service area there are several, reminiscent of the state of Step meetings when I came into the program in the early '70s,

Certainly, when one gets involved in service beyond the group level, one gets into the Traditions at work whether one is group GSR at district meetings and assemblies, or working with the local central office or intergroup, or taking meetings into institutions, or speaking to groups of nonalcoholics for public information. However, clearly there are principles of such overriding importance to individual sobriety in our Traditions that the more concentrated look that one gets in a discussion meeting is of great benefit. Every committee and assembly meeting and even every group business meeting is an example of the Traditions in operation, from which we learn practical application. However, there is a great need for Traditions meetings on a regular basis in our local groups.

Boyce B., Brooklyn, New York

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Co-founder Quotes

Dr. Bob

Dr. Bob, on working with newcomers:

“ ‘No,’ he [Dr. Bob] said. ‘Those men showed you what will happen if you pick up a drink. They did you a favor. And when they don't pick up a drink, they show you how the program works. Either way, they do you a favor.’ ”

Reprinted from Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers, page 226, with permission of A.A. World Services, Inc.

On the telephones at Central Offices...

Just Show Up

Working the telephone for Seattle's intergroup office keeps me in contact with many styles and types of people. No sooner do I think I have heard all the stories there are, than the practicing drunk manages to come up with a new one, designed to baffle and confound.

We learn about the ingenuity of the alcoholic mostly from the spouses who call up with questions like, 'My husband tells me he's been on the waiting list for two years now. When is his name going to be called?' or "It's been eighteen months and I just can't seem to save the \$750 initiation fee. Can I make monthly payments?" These are the times to be a "fly on the wall" when we have finished talking to these harried spouses.

And then there was the call from the woman asking for a visit by an AA member. She qualified her call for help by telling us of her sorority and giving us an exclusive address. "Need I say more?" she asked. I remember wondering if AA would be good enough myself.

In the office we learn to appreciate the fact that it is the families who sometimes suffer more than the drunk. Thank God for Al-Anon. I remember scorning that organization once but I now know it serves a very real need.

So many of our calls can be answered by just repeating the AA Preamble. "The only requirement for Membership is a desire to stop drinking" has convinced many an alcoholic that we are not some religious organization. We find ourselves say-"All you have to do is show up. You don't have to make an appointment." Then we hang up and start

praying that the group really *does* have a greeter at the door, that it really *does* have the meeting schedules, as we promised.

Volunteering in the office is rewarding and has helped in the revolution that has changed my whole attitude toward life, toward my fellows, and toward God's universe—just as the Big Book says.

Anonymous, Seattle, Washington

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If They're Ready. . .

I was a volunteer at our central office early in my sobriety. After receiving a particularly distressing call for help one day, I expressed my concern to our office manager about whether or not I had reached this caller. Had I said the right thing? Should I have said something differently?

In turn, she shared her experience, strength, and hope with me in this way: "If they're ready, you can't say anything wrong. If they're not ready, you can't say anything right."

That has helped me time and time again when working with others. I have learned that if I do my best at the time and share what is in my heart, I cannot go wrong.

Sharon H.

San Leandro, California

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Humor from the Grapevine

A tale from the *Silver Dollar* concerns an AA member, several years sober, who decided to go into politics. One evening, after making a rather dull campaign speech, he offered to answer questions from the audience.

A hand went up in the back of the room, and a voice asked, "Who else is running for the job?"

« « « » » »

Item from a weekly newspaper explaining of why the edition was two days late:

"It all began years ago in a cornfield. The corn ripened, was mashed, fermented, and distilled. Then it aged in the wood for a year and finally reached the fellow who sets our type."

Two alcoholics were sipping in a saloon. One looked dejected and told his friend, "You know, for a few days last week, I lived the life of Riley—stayed in the best hotel, ate in the best restaurants, and drank top-shelf liquor. But then it all ended."

"What happened?" asked his buddy.

"Bad luck," said the first. "Riley reported his credit card missing."

« « « » » »

The lush said to the grasshopper, "Did you know that they have a drink named after you?"

"Really?" chirped the grasshopper. "They have a drink named Howard?"

On the telephones at Central Offices...

We Don't Win Them All

It was a quiet night at the central office, since I was the only phone volunteer for the 7 to 10 night shift. Most of the calls had been from people wanting to know where the nearest AA meeting was, and as the hour neared 8 PM—when most of the meetings in the area started—I anticipated a somewhat dull two hours coming up.

Not so. The phone rang and I gave the traditional greeting: “Alcoholics Anonymous, may we help you?”

“Are you going to trace this call?” asked a young-sounding woman’s voice. “If you are, I’m going to hang up!”

Uh oh, a wet one. Time to be very, very careful. No mistaking that slurred speech at the other end of the line. I made it very clear that we do not trace phone calls. I went into a short talk about the AA Tradition of anonymity for all. She seemed to hesitate, then it all poured out about how she was drinking to drive away the fears, though they always came back, and that she was in pain and she needed help, and “. . . are you sure you’re not trying to trace this call?” But this time the question was not as fearful as the first time.

I again reassured her about the AA Traditions concerning anonymity, and then began to draw her out. Did she want to stop drinking? Did she want the help of AA to stop drinking? She asked me if I was really an alcoholic, and I gave her a brief qualification mixed in with more comments about anonymity.

How well those old-timers knew about the importance of anonymity as a protection for the fearful newcomer!

I have no hard and fast rules about dealing with a still-suffering alcoholic. Every case is different, and sometimes you just have to guess what the best method will be to use over the phone. But his time I spent a good ten minutes on anonymity, as well as the other Traditions. She was now at the point where she expressed an interest in talking to another AA about the program.

That is, of course, what I had been slowly leading up to, since our usual procedure is to get the caller’s name, city, and phone number and then to find a Twelfth Step worker in the same area and of the same sex to talk to the newcomer.

Then, at the other end of the phone line, I heard a door open and close and a faint voice asked, “Who are you calling?” My caller hung up at once, and that was that. I waited two and a half hours, but she didn’t call back. Sorry folks, but we don’t win them all. In fact, we win very few.

But maybe I was able to plant a mustard seed in her mind, thanks to the anonymity Traditions of AA. Maybe she will try AA again. So, if you see a newcomer at your meeting, be gentle with her and remember the Traditions of AA, since she might be my caller.

H. A., Torrance, California

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

Current Information

Name

Address.....

City..... St ZIP

New Additional Contribution

Renewal \$.....

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