

Recovery Times

A newsletter from Alcoholics Anonymous San Fernando Valley Central Office VOL 32, NO. 11 NOV 2008

Step Four: The Other Man's Inventory

A member experiments

Step Four: Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves

"Don't take other people's inventory!" chides an AA sponsor to an AA sponsee, sometimes gently, sometimes fiercely. As champions at figuring out the faults of others, we alcoholics in recovery often have to be reminded to look at our side of the equation. "The inventory was ours, not the other man's," says the Big Book on page 67. On the other hand, it is a time-honored axiom that we often see the faults in others that we ourselves have, so perhaps when we take someone else's inventory, we are really taking our own. I decided to test out this proposition, with remarkably good results.

As an experiment, I decided to deliberately take the inventory of a fellow member of AA, then put my name on it. I wrote down exactly what bothered me about that person: he wore his religion on his sleeve, he thought he had practically invented AA, he talked endlessly about politics, even in meetings. My anger toward this person was exacerbated by the fact that his politics and religion were virtually the opposite of mine. I typed up a neat list of his defects of character on my computer. Then, I erased his name from the top of the list and typed in my own. I printed the list and carried it in my schedule book for two weeks, reading it daily. Each day, I saw my name above a list of his defects. The first few days, I told myself these were really his defects, not mine. But after four or five days of reading the list, some insights into my own behavior appeared. I saw that I also talked too much about religion and politics around the meetings and sometimes even in the course of my sharing at meetings. I had offended lots of people doing that, but I had always blamed them, saying to myself that they just didn't like me. I had not looked at how my own

behavior might be the cause of their rebuffs and scorn. I saw that I also tended to pontificate at meetings, as if I were a very knowing old-timer who really knew how to work the program. By the end of the two-week period, I knew whose defects I had listed: my own.

More important than even the insight into my own character that this exercise provided, was the change in my relationship with that fellow AA member. Before starting the experiment, I could not be in the same room with him without feeling a great deal of rage. I often avoided his presence for that reason. However, I was involved in a new meeting that he had started, so it was actually necessary for me to interact with him on certain days of the week. During the course of the experiment, I suddenly lost my anger. I felt absolutely no emotion whatsoever toward this individual. I accepted him precisely as he was, neither approving nor disapproving. I was too busy concentrating on the list of defects, which I was beginning to own as mine. By the end of the two weeks, he had changed toward me as well, congratulating me on a fine sharing here, asking for my advice on something there, and generally being an all-around good fellow. It was truly miraculous.

Since that experiment was successful, I have tried the technique twice more when I found myself extremely angry with someone. It has worked just as well as the first time. In each case, I discovered some unpleasant truths about myself, was able to accept the other person without judgment, and made changes in my own behavior and attitudes that have greatly improved my growth in the life of the spirit.

*John B.
San Jose, California*

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Calendar Events

Upcoming Events

Yosemite Summit Conference 2008

November 21 - 23 2008
 Yosemite National Park, CA
 Website: www.serenityyosemite.com
 Email: ysc@sti.net
 Info: 209-966-8300

42nd Annual Las Vegas Roundup

November 27 - 30 2008
 Las Vegas, NV
 Website: www.lasvegasroundup.org

19th Annual River Roundup

January 8 - 11, 2009
 Laughlin, NV
 Website: www.rcco-aa.org
 Info: Hildy 928-754-4613

34th Annual San Fernando Valley A.A. Convention

January 30 - February 1, 2008
 Woodland Hills, CA
 Info: 818-734-0383
 Website: www.sfvaaconvention.org

November is Gratitude Month!

**This is the
 ONLY Fundraiser
 for Valley Central Office.**

Service Committee Schedule

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

- Dec. 1, 2008 **G.S. District #11
 FIRST MONDAY**
 6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30pm meeting
 315 W. Vine St., Glendale

- Dec. 1, 2008 **G.S. District #16
 FIRST MONDAY**
 6:15PM meeting
 15950 Chatsworth (church), Granada Hills

- Dec. 1, 2008 **G.S. District #17
 FIRST MONDAY**
 6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30pm meeting
 5000 Colfax (church), N. Hollywood

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

- Dec. 3, 2008 **G.S. District #1
 FIRST WEDNESDAY**
 6:30PM, 7552 Remmet, Canoga Park

- Dec. 3, 2008 **SFV Board of Directors**
 6:30PM, Central Office

- Dec. 13, 2008 **G.S. District #7
 SECOND SATURDAY**
 9AM, Agua Dulce Woman's Club
 33201 Agua Dulce Cyn Rd

- Dec. 8, 2008 **SFV Intergroup
 SECOND MONDAY**
 6:30PM Orientation, 7PM Business Meeting
 St. Innocents Church
 5657 Lindley Ave., Tarzana

To All Meeting Secretaries

Help us keep your meeting information up to date.

If your meeting has changed its Location, Time of Meeting, Meeting Name or Type of Meeting, please update this information *as soon as possible* with your Central Office. Updates can be completed by mail or in person during Literature Sales Hours at San Fernando Valley Central Office. Our address is listed on the back cover of this newsletter. Meeting updates *must* be completed in writing. Any questions can be answered by calling your Central Office at (818) 988-3001 and asking for a staff member.

**The Valley Central Office will be
CLOSED**

**for literature sales on Thursday, Nov. 27
 and Friday, Nov. 28, 2008.
 Normal sales hours will resume on
 Saturday, Nov. 29, 2008.**

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>.

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 October 13, 2008

Rick A. 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 - 12 yrs, Ron - 19 yrs,
Bryan - 21 yrs.*

Motion to adjourn 7:15 PM
*The long form of the Intergroup Meeting Minutes
for October is available at Central Office
or at the Intergroup Meeting.*
*These minutes are pending approval on
November 10, 2008*
Next Meeting - November 10, 2008
Prepared and submitted by:
Dawn H., Recording Secretary

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

October 2008

| | |
|--|--------------------------|
| Theresa | 1 year |
| Jane J. | 18 years |
| Kay W. | 22 years |
| Reseda Big Book Study and Disc. | a number 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.

Vital Signs

“I have some guidelines for taking the vital signs of a healthy home group...”

Today I'm a member of the Flathead Valley Serenity Group in Whitefish, Montana, one of the two best home groups in the world. In early sobriety, I was fortunate to have been surrounded by a group of women who wanted to give me everything they had been given when they came to Alcoholics Anonymous. They wanted me to experience all the promise and potential of this Fellowship. They wanted me to be a part of and not apart from. They gave me a family. They taught me to be able to answer four basic questions for myself at any time: Who's my sponsor, what Step am I working on today, what's the name of my home group, and what service position do I hold?

The women in my sponsorship lineage talk about sponsors and grand-sponsors, about sisters and aunts in sobriety. It feels good. It feels secure. This family encouraged me early in sobriety to meet the other extended family members and to commit to a home group. I'm grateful for the experience of finding my first home group under their watchful eye. They showed me a healthy way to find such a group. They taught me that there is a difference between being a group member and going to meetings.

I've moved a number of times in sobriety, and I've been able to take with me their experience, strength, and hope as I look for a new home group in my new hometown. When I arrive at my destination, I have some guidelines for taking the vital signs of a healthy home group—that place where I will accept responsibility, where I'm willing to be present and be honest, and can commit to relationships. My home group is the strongest bond between me as an AA member and the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Vital signs are terms most generally used in the medical profession. Numerical readings and observations give indications as to whether the stress of illness is increasing or subsiding, whether a fit condition is intact or whether certain measures need to be taken to restore health. I can do the same observations with a home group. Although I don't come up with numerical readings, I have clear indicators of “fit spiritual condition.”

First of all, I check for alertness. Much as a patient might be asked, “Do you know your name? Do you know what day this is?”, I can ask questions that test the alertness of the group: Who's the GSR of your group? When is your group's business meeting? How does this group utilize its Seventh Tradition? Healthy home groups are filled with members who have learned that it is the responsibility of the

group to link to AA as a whole. The uninvolved group can get every bit as sick as the individual member going it alone.

After checking for basic alertness, I check on the health of the three legacies of Alcoholics Anonymous. I take the blood pressure of the group. At the very core, pumping life into each member of the group, should be the legacy of Recovery as outlined in the basic text of our Fellowship. Do I hear solutions? Are references made to the uniform literature of Alcoholics Anonymous? Are members sharing their own experience, strength, and hope? I might see a few “bleeding deacons” with high blood pressure and some members with what appears to be low blood pressure. Yet most members of a healthy home group address recovery through actively sharing, one alcoholic to another. How is the group's temperature? The legacy of Unity can be read through the warmth of the group. How does this group treat newcomers or perhaps just those folks they haven't yet had a chance to meet? What about the pulse of the group? Is the legacy of Service apparent in the heartbeat of the group? Are folks happy, joyous, and free as they give away what was so freely given to them? Is the pulse of service stronger because the principle of rotation keeps adding to the chorus of that heartbeat?

To follow on with the medical analogy, I look into the eyes of the group members. Those windows to the soul tell me about the health of Tradition One. There is a look in the eyes of alcoholics attentive to the common welfare of Alcoholics Anonymous. What's being talked about before and after the meeting? Is there a strong sense of Tradition Five as the purpose for gathering? Is the group's message based on Traditions One, Two, Three, and Four? Is there a sense of wholeness that comes from seeking and following the will of our ultimate authority?

Disease might still crop up in any home group, but strong vital signs checked on a regular basis indicate a group constitution able to meet the difficulties. Watching for vital signs is ongoing. We can take them often in our own home groups, and we should always pay careful attention to the readings that day. When the doctor takes your vital signs, he doesn't want to know if you *ever* had a pulse or a temperature. It matters right now. How are the vital signs of your home group?

Robbie S., Whitefish, Montana

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Anonymous Giving

Tradition Seven: Every AA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

When I was new to AA, Tradition Seven seemed very straightforward. The meetings I attended had refreshments and literature available, and it made sense to me to pass a basket to pay for these things. I attended the meetings and ate the refreshments, and it was only fair that I should help pay for them.

When I learned more about AA, I understood the importance of being self-supporting. In this way AA could be independent and not controlled by grants or gifts. No one could place restrictions on who could be helped or in what way that help should be given. No group, individual, or organization could cut off the funding. I really thought I understood Tradition Seven.

At some point I realized that although my earlier thoughts regarding Tradition Seven had validity, they were just a part of the truth. I'd missed the more important point—that this Tradition was about responsibility, my responsibility as an individual and the responsibility of the Fellowship as a whole. I'd been immature and irresponsible and so this was an important lesson in living for me. Now, surely I knew what Tradition Seven was really about.

Today I have a different idea regarding Tradition Seven. At this point in my journey along the road of happy destiny, I think Tradition Seven is about giving.

During my drinking years I thought I was a generous person. What I didn't realize was that whenever I gave time, money, attention, or things, it was always with the thought of what I would receive in return, like admiration or attention or support. I wanted other people to like me, or at least tolerate me. If I did enough for them, they might even take care of me. When there was absolutely nothing I could get in return, I cherished my own self-righteous feeling of superiority.

Giving through the Seventh Tradition was a completely new experience, because it was anonymous giving. No one knows what I give or even whether I've given at all. No attention is paid to what each individual gives, only to whether the overall amount is sufficient for the needs of the group. This was my first experience of giving without thought of reward. Substantial individual gifts are not discouraged in AA: they are refused.

My experience with this Tradition parallels my experience with all of the Steps and Traditions—my understanding broadens and deepens with time and with my experience in trying to apply these principles. I eagerly await the next level of understanding which will be revealed.

Mickey H., Springville, Utah

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Co-founder Quotes

Bill W

“We now see that in twelfth-stepping the immediate results are not so important. Some people start out working with others and have immediate success. They are likely to get cocky. Those of us who are not so successful at first get depressed.

“As a matter of fact, the successful worker differs from the unsuccessful only in being lucky about his prospects. He simply hits newcomers who are ready and able to stop at once. Given the same prospects, the seemingly unsuccessful person would have produced almost the same results. You have to work on a lot of newcomers before the law of averages commences to assert itself.”

*Reprinted from As Bill Sees It, page 165,
with permission AA World Services, Inc.*

A Good Reason

P.O. Box 1980

Recently, I finished giving a talk about relapse at a treatment center. An older man lingered, wanting to talk to me. As I gathered up my things, he began to speak. It took my breath away.

He told me that, until two weeks ago, he had been sober for forty-two years. I asked if he had been going to AA meetings. “Oh, yes,” he said. “I went for thirty-nine years. I stopped three years ago.”

I asked why. “Oh,” he said, “I moved and didn’t like the meetings. Figured I didn’t need them after thirty-nine years. I heard all that I was going to hear and learned all that I was going to learn. But I don’t know what happened that made me take that first drink. I was having an ordinary day. A couple of things went wrong—little things—and I decided I would feel better with a drink. Off to the liquor store I went. That first day I only had a couple, but the next day I drank until I passed out. I disappeared for two weeks and my grandkids came looking for me. They found me passed out in a closet and they brought me here.”

Again and again, I have heard stories like this in the sixteen years I’ve worked in a treatment center. The disease of alcoholism is progressive, chronic, and terminal. Sobriety relieves the symptoms, but it does not cure the disease.

For twenty-eight years, my family has known me as a responsible person. They can count on me and I can count on me. I have never heard a reason for going to a meeting as compelling as that. So, I am going to AA until the wheels fall off.

*Sharon S.
Auburn Hills, Michigan*

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Humor from the Grapevine

A sober father was raising his young son with the help of AA slogans and sayings. If the boy was angry or agitated, his dad would say, “Easy Does It.” If the boy was sad or unhappy, his father would counsel, “Let Go and Let God.” This plan backfired one day when the boy asked to go to the toy store.

“Absolutely not!” said the father.

“Aw, c’mon Dad,” said the boy. “Bring the body and the mind will follow.”

« « « » » »

The Lord’s Prayer revisited: A newly sober father peeked in to see whether his young son had corked off for the night. He found the child kneeling and saying, “Our Father, who art in heaven, how did You know my name?”

« « « » » »

One day two factory workers start talking on the job. It’s still pretty early in the morning, but one of them is totally looped.

“I think I’ll take some time off from work,” says the straight guy.

“How are you going to do that?” asks the drunk. The straight guy proceeds to demonstrate—by climbing up to the rafters and hanging upside down.

The boss walks in, sees the worker hanging from the ceiling, and asks him what on earth he is doing.

“I’m a light bulb,” the guy answers.

“I think you need some time off,” says the boss. With that, the man jumps down and walks out of the factory. The drunk begins walking out, too.

“Hey!” calls the boss. “Where do you think you’re going?”

The drunk hiccoughs and answers, “Home. I can’t work in the dark.”

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Things We Cannot Change...

*Mike C. — 16 Months
died sober*

Obviously, the staff of Valley Central Office cannot know all the members of the local fellowship. If you have knowledge of the passing of one of our members, please notify us here at Central Office during literature sales hours or mail us the obituary from the local newspaper. You can also email us at sfvaanews@sbcglobal.net.

The Uncertainty Principle

If I don't believe in a God, what is my Higher Power? How can I apply the Steps? What is it that helps me, an agnostic, get sober and stay sober? I gave up searching for an understanding of my Higher Power. Call it a character defect if you will, but I simply cannot believe. So how do I apply the principles of AA? How do I stay sober?

Strange as it may seem, I am helped mostly by Steps Three and Seven. I turn my will and my life and all things over to the care of anything but me. Instead of going against the stream of life, running my head against walls, trying to do the impossible, I turn the outcome of my endeavors to the natural flow of things. I constantly remind myself that I cannot control my fellow humans. Their lives are controlled by the laws of nature, just as mine are. I remind myself, whatever I do, that I never have all the facts affecting the outcome. I do the best I can with the data available, but I can't plan on the outcome. In physics there is something called an "uncertainty principle." Chance and the unknown play too much a part in my daily life to insist on a certain outcome.

But this "turning over" is essentially an act of nonaction. Nonaction in the past was my downfall; it led to my concentrating on myself and my problems. So what else must I do? The key here lies in the recognition that the worst problem for an alcoholic is self-centeredness. The solution to that problem is concentration on others. What keeps me sober and serene is the very act of letting go of resentments, self-pity, fear of others, and whatever else keeps my thoughts going in circles about myself. While I'm occupied with paying attention to the needs of others, I'm

free of myself. I don't mean to imply that I shouldn't take care of myself. My natural needs must be met. But no more is required.

Step Seven, which asks the Higher Power to relieve me from all defects that stand in the way of my usefulness to my fellows, is the active complement of Step Three. In the Seventh Step prayer I see that the believer simply asks to be a good person. A "good person" is a person who does no harm to others, a person who helps others. As long as I'm a good person, I need not fear others. As long as I take care to know what acts of mine might harm others, I'm not concentrated on myself, but on others. I stay sober. In Steps Four, Five, and Six, I've learned what defects of mine tend to hurt others. Constant vigilance against these defects keeps me on my toes, keeps me away from getting stuck in the rut of self-pity, fear, and resentment. I practice the opposite of the defect. Instead of letting fear of failure lead me into procrastination, I practice doing difficult things *first*. Instead of letting impatience bring my brain to a boil, I practice patience. It's easy to fall back into bad habits. By practicing the opposite, I practice and acquire good habits. Still, I need Step Ten to avoid falling back, and meditation in Step Eleven to learn more of what is required of me to stay happy and serene without a drink.

My Higher Power? The laws of nature—those I know of, and those I don't know of.

*Oktavia C.
Galveston, Texas*

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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