

# Recovery Times

A newsletter from Alcoholics Anonymous San Fernando Valley Central Office

VOL 33, NO. 4 APR 2009

## Sponsors Pro Tem

At a group conscience meeting, talk around the tables ranged over a variety of topics, but always seemed to drift back to two very pressing issues that had plagued my home group for some time. The first problem was keeping newcomers coming back. Plenty of new faces were showing up at our meetings, yet, despite our efforts, the majority simply weren't sticking with the program. Typically, they would attend three or four meetings in succession, drop off to two per month, and then disappear altogether. We wouldn't have been so concerned if they had just preferred other meetings over ours; but it was becoming clear from our informal follow-up that many of those who needed help the most were dropping out of AA completely.

At this point, a longtime member of the group asked a question that struck right to the heart of the dilemma: "How many of those newcomers had sponsors?" I've never seen a more red-faced group of alcoholics than we were that evening. None of the people who had left had managed to get sponsors, a fact that helped us home in on our second problem.

As it turned out, sponsorship in our group had been handled only by a handful of senior members with long-term success in the program. Since they were doing the whole job by themselves, they were sponsoring so many people that they couldn't, in good conscience, take on anyone else. Others of us, though doing well in the program ourselves, were somewhat hesitant about shouldering the added responsibility of full-time sponsorship so early in recovery. The group as a whole was doing the best it could under the circumstances, but was certainly no substitute for "one person who understands fully and cares." We all remembered, only too well, what it felt like during those first meetings when we hadn't started working the Steps, and John Barleycorn had whittled our self-esteem down to toothpick proportions. No wonder the newcomers were having trouble hanging in there!

The question was: What were we going to do about the situation? Our Higher Power must have inspired two

other senior members, since they came up with a solution simultaneously: temporary sponsorship. The idea was that when newcomers showed up at meetings, they would simply be assigned temporary sponsors for their first sixty days in AA. Assignments would be made in chronological order from a list of volunteers compiled at group conscience meetings. Nothing would prevent the newcomers from finding new sponsors before the sixty days were up, nor continuing on a more or less permanent basis with their assigned sponsors after the initial period — assuming both parties were agreeable in each such case.

When used as described, temporary sponsorship has worked beautifully in our group, and it may be applicable in yours if you have a problem keeping newcomers coming back. Should you decide to discuss it at a group conscience meeting, you may want to mention the advantages we've discovered in using it. First, and most obvious, it provides the newcomer with a much-needed sponsor from day one — usually someone who has just been through early recovery and really understands a newcomer's problems. Second, it underscores, through concrete group action, the importance of sponsorship to continuing sobriety. Third, it provides a definite, limited orientation period for those wanting to try their hand at sponsorship, but hesitant about making an indefinite commitment to something they've never done before. Fourth, it lightens the load for old hands while providing them with a way to share their expertise at sponsorship: serving as consultants to new sponsors.

To me, though, the greatest and most lasting benefit of temporary sponsorship is that it helps far more of us take our minds off our own problems by extending a helping hand to others. Furthermore, it allows us to do this much earlier in our recovery than most of us anticipated. Such an opportunity can't help but accelerate our own growth.

*W. H., Edwardsville, Illinois*

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# Calendar Events

## Upcoming Events

### **28th Annual Hospital and Institution Conference**

April 24 - 26, 2009  
Orange, CA  
Registration Info: 714-593-0469  
Website: [www.socalhandi.org](http://www.socalhandi.org)

### **Easy Does It Weekend at Camp Seely**

April 24 - 26, 2009  
Crestline, CA  
Info: 818-429-0606  
Website: [www.easydoesitweekend.org](http://www.easydoesitweekend.org)

### **25th Tri-State Round-Up**

May 14 - 17, 2009  
Laughlin, NV  
Registration Info: 928-753-6035  
Website: [www.TriState-Roundup.com](http://www.TriState-Roundup.com)

### **51st ICYPAA**

May 21 - 24, 2009  
Atlanta, GA  
Info: 770-364-7765  
Website: [www.icypaahost.org](http://www.icypaahost.org)

### **A.A. Desert Pow Wow**

June 18 - 21, 2009  
Indian Wells, CA  
Info: 760-321-6568  
Website: [www.desertpowwow.com](http://www.desertpowwow.com)

### **17th Annual Foothill Roundup**

July 31 - August 2, 2009  
La Canada-Flintridge, CA  
Info: 213-792-7715  
Website: [www.foothillroundup.org](http://www.foothillroundup.org)

## Service Committee Schedule

- Apr. 20, 2009 **SFV H&I**  
**THIRD MONDAY**  
8PM Business Meeting  
7PM Get Acquainted Workshop  
5657 Lindley Ave.  
\*\*\*\*\*
- May. 4, 2009 **G.S. District #11**  
**FIRST MONDAY**  
6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30pm meeting  
315 W. Vine St., Glendale  
\*\*\*\*\*
- May. 4, 2009 **G.S. District #16**  
**SECOND MONDAY**  
6:15PM meeting  
15950 Chatsworth (church), Granada Hills  
\*\*\*\*\*
- May. 4, 2009 **G.S. District #17**  
**FIRST MONDAY**  
6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30pm meeting  
5000 Colfax (church), N. Hollywood  
\*\*\*\*\*
- May. 5, 2009 **G.S. District #2**  
**FIRST TUESDAY**  
5:30PM, 4011 Dunsmore, La Crescenta  
\*\*\*\*\*
- May. 6, 2009 **G.S. District #1**  
**FIRST WEDNESDAY**  
6:30PM, 7552 Remmet, Canoga Park  
\*\*\*\*\*
- May. 6, 2009 **SFV Board of Directors**  
6:30PM, Central Office  
\*\*\*\*\*
- May. 9, 2009 **G.S. District #7**  
**SECOND SATURDAY**  
9AM, Agua Dulce Woman's Club  
33201 Agua Dulce Cyn Rd  
\*\*\*\*\*
- May. 11, 2009 **SFV Intergroup**  
**SECOND MONDAY**  
6:30PM Orientation, 7PM Business Meeting  
St. Innocents Church  
5657 Lindley Ave., Tarzana

## *Things We Cannot Change...*

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](mailto:sfvaanews@sbcglobal.net).

## 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>.

## **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.

# 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 2010 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](mailto:sfvaanews@sbcglobal.net)

### **San Fernando Valley Central Office Intergroup Representatives Meeting March 9, 2009**

Josh S. 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: Rick - 17 yrs.*

Motion to adjourn 7:20 PM  
*The long form of the Intergroup Meeting Minutes  
for March is available at Central Office  
or at the Intergroup Meeting.*

*These minutes are pending approval on  
April 13, 2009*

*Next Meeting - April 13, 2009*

*Prepared and submitted by:  
Di V., Recording Secretary*

## **HAPPY BIRTHDAY!**

### **March 2009**

<b>David S.</b>	<b>1 year</b>
<b>Belinda T.</b>	<b>4 years</b>
<b>Greg B.</b>	<b>15 years</b>
<b>Bonnie H.</b>	<b>18 years</b>
<b>Tony M.</b>	<b>22 years</b>
<b>Maggie M.</b>	<b>25 years</b>
<b>Learning to Live Men's Stag</b>	<b>124 years</b>

#### 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.*

# Where is God in all of this?

## *What we think . . . is probably not even close*

Often, in a meeting or in conversation, especially when things are tough, we hear this question, “How do we know where to look for God?” How do we know when we actually find Him in our often too busy lives? What are we looking for and where should our search start?

We share our experience, strength, and hope in AA so that those around us can benefit from our trials and errors, and so that our sponsors and the other old-timers always have something to laugh about! Rest assured though, they are not laughing *at* you, they are laughing *with* you. Actually, that is a lie, they *are* laughing at you, just as their sponsors laughed at them. All that aside, I want to share an experience that allowed me to have an encounter with God. One of a few I have had in over eighteen years of sobriety.

By an encounter with God, I am referring to one of those times in my life where I can say, without reservation, that God has touched me and I have witnessed evidence of His presence in my life. My first came on August 18, 1990, though I was unaware of it at the time. Perhaps my most powerful experience, it came during the Great Outdoor Beaver Meeting in Beaver, Utah.

When you think of Beaver, Utah, your mind may see a picture of the Bryce and Zion National Parks and the physical beauty of such places. It *is* spectacular! My encounter, however, came in the picnic pavilion in the Beaver City Park on Friday night during the dance. On Main Street, no less! What a town! There was a day not so very long ago when I might have been arrested for dancing on Main Street, but now they welcome us to dance the night away! We even had a live band this year!

I digress. My story began when some friends from my home group showed up in a motor home. Since I see myself as a seasoned Beaver veteran, I wanted them to experience all that the GOBM had to offer! Naturally, since there were attractive young ladies among the group, I included the Friday night dance in my list of must do events. Selfishly of course, I even asked one of these lovely ladies to promise me a dance. She agreed, and I spent the time until Friday night looking forward to our dance.

I got to the pavilion a short time after the dance had begun. (I had to change my clothes after umpiring the softball game. Hot, sweaty and stinky didn't seem a great first impression!) The young lady was already there, and was on the dance floor with her daughter. Having no desire to interrupt the two of them enjoying the music and their dance, I talked with friends and watched for a short time. Since I didn't know this young lady well, I'd had no idea that she

had a daughter. Eventually I went and asked if I could dance with them both. They seemed to be having such a great time together. Suddenly my selfish, self-centered wishes had taken a back seat. I somehow felt that dancing with both of them was right.

I was introduced to the daughter and immediately understood that she had special needs. It was very clear why mom was taking such care with her, trying to keep her out of the way of the other dance guests. Her mom told me that she loves music, so I asked her if she would dance with me. There was no real connection at first, and I kept a little distance to allow her a comfort zone. I know so little about autism; everything I know about it could be written on the head of a pin with a can of spray paint! I just knew, call it instinct but I'll call it God, that I could not get too close too fast.

After our first dance, she walked over and sat on a bench with her mom and had a sip of water. When the next song started I asked her if she would like to dance again. She got right up and started dancing, so I took that as a yes. Part way through our second dance she looked at me and said “Ready?” Now, I know nothing about autism, but I like to think I still know how to play, so I said “Ready!” She got a big smile on her face and pretty much screamed “SET!” Not being entirely cement headed, I returned her “SET!,” to which she yelled “GO!” When I returned her “GO!” she began to dance around with her arms in the air, so I began to dance around with my arms in the air as well.

For the next hour and a half she shouted “READY? SET! GO!” Since I was now familiar with the rules of our game, I found myself dancing crazily around the pavilion and shouting right along with her. We, mom and I, did our best to keep her clear of the other dancers, and every once in a while we tried to make her rest. In all honesty, I probably needed the rest far more than she did. By the time we had been doing this for over an hour, she was losing her voice and her eyelids were getting a little heavy. But as long as she wanted to go, I was ready and willing to go with her.

So, where was God in this? God was there in the heart and in the eyes of that little girl. I know, because I saw Him there. I know because when she finally got too tired to go even one more dance she looked me right in the eyes. (Even now as I write this, I get tears thinking of the beauty, trust and innocence I got to see that night.) I know because that little girl let me hold her hands while we danced one last dance. I know because after mom got her into the motor home and in bed for the night, she came back to thank me

*continued* →

and I felt that I should be the one thanking her. I know because that night that little girl taught me how important it is to give my love and my time, even when that is all I have to give. I know because as I lay in bed that night saying a long prayer of thanks I cried tears of gratitude for twenty minutes. Mostly I know because even today, over a year later, whenever she sees me she yells “Ready?” and she hugs me and looks me in the eye. And I thank God.

There were so many people there that night who didn’t get to see what I got to see. They were so busy. Busy thinking about tomorrow and worrying about whatever they left at home. I wish they had all taken the time to let God show them what He showed me that night. Any of them could have joined us, and it would have made the whole game that much better, but they just were not willing. Maybe they were just not able. Maybe they just didn’t notice we were there, but we were *so* loud!

I guess my point is that what we think is going to bring God, might not. Where we think we will find God probably isn’t where He is. What we think God will look like is probably not even close. But, if we are willing, and we open our hearts when God shows us a direction we didn’t know was there, He will kiss our hearts and allow us to feel His love. God loves you.

Ready?

*Kane C.*

## Humor from the Grapevine

Most Sundays, my wife, kids, and I get together with other AA members for breakfast. At breakfast a few weeks ago, my wife wore a shirt with “Serenity” printed across the front.

One of the kids admired the shirt, read the word out loud, and asked, “What is that — Serenity?”

My AA friend had a quick reply and answered, “We don’t know.”

« « « » » »

A newcomer asks her sponsor what the Big Book has to say about sex. The sponsor gets her numbers mixed up, and instead of saying page 69, directs the newcomer to page 96, where she reads, “Do not be discouraged if your prospect does not respond at once. Search out another alcoholic and try again. You are sure to find someone desperate enough to accept with eagerness what you offer. We find it a waste of time to keep chasing a man who cannot or will not work with you.”

« « « » » »

A drunk was experiencing some marital tension at home. Naturally, he went to the bar to find a solution. At the pub, he complained to another buddy. In the course of their conversation, his friend declared,

“You know, I think God speaks to us through our spouses.”

The drunk considered the statement, shook his head in amazement, and said, “Wow. I didn’t know God used that kind of language.”



*Co-founder  
Quotes*

### **Bill W.**

Moments of perception can build into a lifetime of spiritual serenity, as I have excellent reason to know. Roots of reality, supplanting the neurotic underbrush, will hold fast despite the high winds of the forces which would destroy us, or which we would use to destroy ourselves.

*Reprinted from As Bill Sees It, page 173, with permission of A.A. World Services, Inc.*

# It Doesn't Apply To Me

## *The difference between defiance and defeat*

My sponsee, Tom, is fond of saying, “It doesn’t apply to me.” He usually says this during a conversation about how a specific Step might shed light on his latest bout with unmanageability. The first two years that I sponsored him, I took the position that, yes, the Step did apply and that it was up to him to figure out how to apply it. Needless to say, he didn’t apply what didn’t apply to him, and, as a result, he got drunk twice in those two years.

I’m one of those defiant, self-sufficient drunks the Big Book talks about. I came around in the early 1990s, beaten physically and emotionally (and spiritually, though I didn’t know it at the time). I attended meetings for two years every single day and drank between most of those meetings. I confused cravings for a drink with a desire to drink, and drank. One night after a meeting, after I had started drinking and had quite a load on, I got a phone call from a member of my home group. We had spoken before on the phone, but that night some combination of words on his part and open-mindedness on my part led to my willingness the next day to not drink.

Three years went by, two of them filled with regular attendance at meetings and a growing sense of confidence. I had heard of the Steps but didn’t pay them too much mind, as everything seemed to be going well without them. Some time in my third year I began to work longer hours at my job, attend fewer meetings, and become more sure of myself, so by the time my third anniversary came around, the idea of going to a liquor store was firmly implanted in my head but had yet to be acted upon. It was only a matter of time.

Fast forward through a two-year relapse, depression, remorse, blackouts, lies, manipulation, fear, and self-loathing — until the day I bought my daily bottle, brought it home, stuck it on the kitchen counter, but didn’t open it.

Hours passed — hours filled with the growing certainty that, if I took a certain action I had heard about countless times at meetings, I wouldn’t open that bottle. Late that night, after once again walking through the kitchen and looking at the unopened container, I came to a dead stop in the hallway, took a deep breath, and for the first time in my life said, “God, I don’t want to drink. I can’t do it by myself. Please, don’t let me drink.”

Over five years have passed since that night. I never did open that bottle; I ended up dumping it down the drain the

next day. With help from my sponsor and other members of my home group, I learned to distinguish between early sobriety alcohol withdrawal versus a desire to drink and managed to stay sober despite myself. I decided that Step Two was a conclusion that I had to believe in and that faith was something that would come in its own time by working the other Steps. I listened to and acted on suggestions my sponsor made, even if it meant getting out of bed and turning the light back on to read that AA literature I had forgotten about. The Steps became the most important part of my recovery. I read them, attended and chaired meetings about them, discussed them with others, argued about them, and tried to fit each of them into my life to the best of my ability on a daily basis.

In my second year, I started sponsoring others. Without knowing it, I equated self-sufficiency with humility and decided early on that I would never fire a sponsee. I had more than enough patience and tolerance to help my sponsees; all they had to do was do what I had done and they wouldn’t drink. All was well until Tom came along. While my other sponsees stayed sober, worked the Steps, tentatively figured out a Higher Power, and attended meetings, Tom did his own thing: used meetings as an opportunity to meet up with his girlfriend, hung out with people who were still drinking, and told me that the Steps didn’t apply to him. The more he defied the program — defied me — the more I pressed. Some time after his second relapse, I fired Tom after yet another conversation in which the idea that “it doesn’t apply to me” came up.

Then a funny thing happened. Without any conscious intention on my part to do so, I found myself making amends to Tom. I apologized for firing him and told him that I had been holding on to his sobriety way too tightly and that I had forgotten to let go and let God. He thanked me, and we went our separate ways. About two weeks later, Tom asked me to be his sponsor again. I said yes. The other night, Tom and I were talking on the phone. He had had a chaotic day. I asked him whether a specific Step applied to the situation. He said no, he didn’t think it did.

I’ve decided again that I’ll never fire another sponsee, but this time for different reasons. A specific Step may not apply to them, but it applies to me.

*Anonymous,  
Pennsylvania*

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# Nothing Is Forever

## *Steps Six and Seven*

The most valuable lesson I learned from my sponsor, Bob, was to do every Step the same way we do the First Step — especially Steps Six and Seven: We stay away from alcohol, one day at a time. The next morning, we reevaluate: Is life better without drinking? Are we better without drinking? Do I choose to avoid alcohol today, just as I did yesterday?

Quite simply, I can't give up anything forever. When I gave up drinking for the rest of my life — which I did a thousand times — I had a zero percent success rate. But, since I found out that I have to give up drinking only for today, my success rate has been 100 percent, and I expect that to continue indefinitely — as long as I focus definitely on one day and not on an indefinite future.

I can't commit to anything "forever." Please do not reveal this to my wife of thirty-five years. I recommit to our relationship every morning. And please don't tell my pastor that I decide every day whether belief is worth it or not.

So, how do these principles and my psychology apply to Steps Six and Seven?

I find it quite hard — impossible in practical terms — to become entirely ready to have God remove all my defects of character — especially if it's for all time. Maybe three years from now I'll miss one of them, my sick little mind tells me.

But I can become entirely ready for today to say farewell to all my defects, even the ones I'm especially fond of. I can always reevaluate in the morning — or three years from now.

Likewise, I don't care to think about never losing my temper again. I get quite mad contemplating that one, but I can ask God to help me not lose it today. And I'll reevaluate in the morning; maybe tomorrow going into a rage will make my life more manageable.

We alcoholics are fragile people, and I find that tentative steps are better than giant strides. If I am constantly a "beginner" at Steps Six and Seven, I can make some progress today and worry about perfection tomorrow.

*Paul L., Detroit, Michigan*

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