

Recovery Times

A newsletter from Alcoholics Anonymous San Fernando Valley Central Office

VOL 33, NO. 5 MAY 2009

When Anything Goes, Will AA stay?

I have attended discussion meetings wanting to help myself and others grow in sobriety, but left these meetings feeling that there wasn't much AA recovery in those rooms. When I spoke about it with my sponsor and other discussion group regulars, they said that there are no bad Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. Examine what I had taken to the meeting, they said, and think about what I had done to make it better.

Imagine my despair at the thought that I didn't fit in at the only place I fit in. Did this mean I wanted to drink? I was told it did.

I believe AA members should be allowed to bring up almost any topic—including what's bothering them—at a meeting. What happens next is what matters. If someone says, "I'm mad at my landlord," I don't think the discussion should then focus on bad landlord stories. It could take several directions: Resentment is the number one offender—how we can avoid it? What is your part in the transaction? Did you act with patience, love, and tolerance? Did you pray for guidance? Did you talk to your sponsor? In other words, are we looking to apply spiritual principles in all our affairs?

When I was asked to moderate a discussion meeting, I suggested the topic, "Can we improve our meetings by limiting discussions to AA principles?" The first comment came from a woman with twenty years of sobriety.

"Moderators used to keep the topic on Alcoholics Anonymous but that doesn't seem to be the norm any more," she said. I agreed. Some moderators called on people, told their own mini-leads, or commented after each member's share.

The next comment shocked me. "You are looking for the spiritual side of the program, but you won't find it

in a meeting because most people don't practice the Steps," a gentleman said. The meeting quickly shifted to the majority view: "People can say whatever they want. What is wrong with you?"

"I think you have a deep thirst for the spiritual side of things, so I strongly suggest that you join a church," was the final comment of the evening. I left more confused and despondent than I had been before my very first AA meeting. I felt like I had been yelling for rock and roll at a classical music concert—I could yell all I wanted, but folks came to hear classical music, they were happy with it, and had no desire to change.

I received a copy of the Grapevine and saw that I was not alone. In the March 2006 issue, an article, "Endangered," discussed a group with a dwindling attendance and how they improved.

"We decided that when anyone wanted to use the meeting just as a forum for 'how I'm feeling today' or 'where I'm at today,' we'd talk instead about the solution as outlined in the Big Book," the author wrote. I wasn't nuts, and my attitude wasn't wrong, but what should I do?

Today, I primarily attend speaker meetings and keep searching for old-fashioned meetings where AA principles are still discussed. When asked to moderate, I direct a meeting to the Steps. If I feel a meeting was bad because the group was happy just to hear where everybody was at today, that doesn't mean I am at fault. As my good friend Jim says, "If anyone says they haven't been to a bad meeting, he or she isn't going to enough meetings."

Red

Reprinted with permission of the A.A. Grapevine, Inc.

Calendar Events

Upcoming Events

25th Tri-State Round-Up

May 14 - 17, 2009
Laughlin, NV
Registration Info: 928-753-6035
Website: www.TriState-Roundup.com

51st ICYPAA

May 21 - 24, 2009
Atlanta, GA
Info: 770-364-7765
Website: www.icypaahost.org

19th Annual H&I Bike-N-4-Books

June 6, 2009
Van Nuys, CA
Website: www.sfvhi.org

A.A. Desert Pow Wow

June 18 - 21, 2009
Indian Wells, CA
Info: 760-321-6568
Website: www.desertpowwow.com

36th Annual Antelope Valley Round Up

June 26 - 28, 2009
Lancaster, CA
Registration Info: Marian G. 661-209-4642

17th Annual Foothill Roundup

July 30 - August 2, 2009
La Canada-Flintridge, CA
Email: jojopelli@gmail.com
Website: www.foothillroundup.org

13th Annual National AA Archives Workshop

September 24 - 27, 2009
Woodland Hills, CA
Info: George R. 818-378-4186, Mike S. 805-338-5140
Email: NAAAW09@aol.com, aaarchivesmike@sbcglobal.net
Website: www.aanationalarchivesworkshop.com

Service Committee Schedule

May. 18, 2009	SFV H&I THIRD MONDAY 8PM Business Meeting 7PM Get Acquainted Workshop 5657 Lindley Ave. *****
Jun. 1, 2009	G.S. District #11 FIRST MONDAY 6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30pm meeting 315 W. Vine St., Glendale *****
Jun. 1, 2009	G.S. District #16 SECOND MONDAY 6:15PM meeting 15950 Chatsworth (church), Granada Hills *****
Jun. 1, 2009	G.S. District #17 FIRST MONDAY 6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30pm meeting 5000 Colfax (church), N. Hollywood *****
Jun. 2, 2009	G.S. District #2 FIRST TUESDAY 5:30PM, 4011 Dunsmore, La Crescenta *****
Jun. 3, 2009	G.S. District #1 FIRST WEDNESDAY 6:30PM, 7552 Remmet, Canoga Park *****
Jun. 3, 2009	SFV Board of Directors 6:30PM, Central Office *****
Jun. 13, 2009	G.S. District #7 SECOND SATURDAY 9AM, Agua Dulce Woman's Club 33201 Agua Dulce Cyn Rd *****
Jun. 8, 2009	SFV Intergroup SECOND MONDAY 6:30PM Orientation, 7PM Business Meeting St. Innocents Church 5657 Lindley Ave., Tarzana

**The Valley Central Office will be
CLOSED
for literature sales on
Monday May 25, 2009
for the Memorial Day Holiday.**

Normal sales hours will be in effect Saturday and Sunday prior to the holiday. Normal sales hours resume on Tuesday May 26, 2009.

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

San Fernando Valley Central Office Intergroup Representatives Meeting April 13, 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: Olivia - 3 yrs, Bernard - 15 yrs.
Motion to adjourn 7:16 PM
*The long form of the Intergroup Meeting Minutes
for April is available at Central Office
or at the Intergroup Meeting.*
*These minutes are pending approval on
May 11, 2009*
Next Meeting - May 11, 2009
Prepared and submitted by:
*Dawn H., on behalf of Di V., Recording
Secretary*

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

April 2009

Anonymous	11 years
Greg B.	15 years
Nancy B.	15 years
Eleanor D.	26 years
Jack L.	28 years
Mike E.	28 years
Bob F.	28 years
Grace M.	34 years
Reseda BB Study & Disc.	37 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.

Try It Standing Up

I'm very protective of my home group for the same reason that most alcoholics are: if the group doesn't survive, neither will I. A couple of months ago at a business meeting, my home group had a heated discussion over whether or not to say the Lord's Prayer at the end of our group's meetings. Saying it certainly seems to contradict AA's claim to have no affiliations with any sect or denomination. Furthermore, as a skittish newcomer, I remember being very uncomfortable sitting in a church basement saying a prayer that's a prominent part of Christian liturgy.

But my sponsor said, "Get over it." And I have to admit, it has never hurt me to say a prayer, especially one conceived by a loving teacher, teaching me to praise God's name, to wish for God's will to be done, and to remind myself I will be forgiven only to the degree that I forgive others.

The Lord's Prayer certainly feels paternalistic. (So, does that mean we should be saying the Hail Mary instead?) The Serenity Prayer may feel less sectarian, but it stems from religion, too. So in that case, rather than wishing to shut the door on our past, maybe we should acknowledge AA's debt to the Oxford Movement, Reverend Shoemaker, Father Dowling, and Sister Ignatia, just to name a few.

Have I managed to offend you yet? To get your juices going? Because that's what happened at our business meeting. We all got churned up and disagreeable. And afterward, there was a hangover, a lingering air of resentment. Now when we form a circle and join hands at the end of our regular meeting, we all feel the tension. A moment that used to exemplify our unity now underscores our differences.

The idea that issues and resentments generated in a business meeting are spilling over into the "real" meeting troubles me. I suppose without business meetings, resentments might smolder anyway, but I think we fanned the fire. I got the feeling that things were just going too smoothly for us drama-loving alcoholics, so we latched onto something controversial to add a little excitement to the proceedings.

To the extent that we were just "stirring the pot," we were following a longstanding tradition in AA. But not the Tradi-

tions of Alcoholics Anonymous. One Tradition calls for us to "practice a genuine humility" and to silence "the clamor of desires and ambitions whenever these could damage the group." For me, that clamor is the need to comment on everything, to throw in my two cents so you'll know just how smart I am. It's the urge to jump in and mix it up as if a business meeting were a barroom brawl. I need to practice some restraint, to emulate the example of the elder statesman in Tradition Two who "is willing to sit quietly on the sidelines patiently awaiting developments."

My friend G. had an interesting suggestion: why not hold our business meetings standing up? I know I'd pontificate less if I had to stand more. How often have I told myself, "If I have to sit through this meeting, then I should at least get to air my point of view, even if it's already been expressed by several others." Maybe our feet are better judges of when we've said enough than our minds.

And if business meetings were shorter and to the point, maybe more people would get involved. Since our group conscience is how the loving God expresses himself to us, the more conscience, the more God, right? Let the primary purpose of a business meeting be to make sure the rent is paid, the key positions are filled, and there's enough literature and sponsorship available to help the newcomer. Keep it simple. Tradition Nine says, "Alcoholics Anonymous needs the least possible organization." Save the controversy for a letter to the Grapevine. Our "meeting in print" has shown for over fifty years that it can handle controversy. It even thrives on it.

Of course, I should have a bit more faith in my group's ability to weather contentious business meetings. What doesn't kill us makes us stronger. In which case, I have just made much ado about nothing. I probably should have written this standing up.

*J.W.
Maplewood, New Jersey*

Reprinted with permission of the A.A. Grapevine, Inc.

Getting to Know You

“Not to embarrass you but so that we can get to know you and talk to you after the meeting, will those with less than thirty days of continuous sobriety please raise their hands?”

How many times have we heard those words? They’re standard fare at all our meetings, and are, of course, intended to welcome the new person coming to AA, who’s scared or shaking or perhaps belligerent and anxious. The newcomers will inevitably get a round of applause to let them know we care. But to what extent do we really intend to go beyond that cursory introduction and applause? To what extent do we really want to “get to know you” after the meeting or any other time? Do we “walk as we talk”—a phrase we so often use?

Beside me sat Dick N., a brother in alcoholism, but a brother-in-law by marriage. It was his first meeting and he was nervous and apprehensive. I was glad to see how willingly his arm went up both at being an alcoholic and at having less than thirty days of sobriety. I watched Dick from time to time out of the corner of my eye. He seemed to

be identifying with the speakers. A couple of times he caught me looking at him and he’d look over and nod appreciatively with a real but somewhat wry smile.

After the Lord’s Prayer, I felt grateful that we were able to offer hope, and that those who spoke had shared that fact. I took my coffee cup over to the trash and began to wander out to the parking lot. I was talking to some people when I realized that Dick hadn’t followed me out. I looked around and didn’t see him anywhere. I waited patiently but suddenly felt a little uneasy; maybe *he* was looking for me.

As I walked back into the now empty meeting hall, there stood Dick, all by himself. I walked up and as if talking to a four-year-old said, “Dick, the meeting’s over.” He turned to me and said, “Oh, I thought they wanted to talk to me after the meeting . . .”

*Lou S.
Burbank, California*

Reprinted with permission of the A.A. Grapevine, Inc.

What’s the Big Deal?

The writer of “Has Singleness of Purpose Become Narrowness of Purpose?” (*Grapevine, May 2004*) states that he came to AA “before singleness of purpose became a big deal.” The principle of singleness of purpose is not new to AA. The reason it became a big deal in recent years is that increasing numbers of people with problems other than alcohol came to closed AA meetings, identified themselves as other than alcoholics, and talked about problems other than alcohol. The effect, understandably, was very divisive.

As alcoholics, nearly all of us have problems other than alcoholism. Singleness of purpose is not becoming, and never has been, narrowness of purpose. On the contrary, our single purpose is as keenly focused as ever, and as broadly all-inclusive as ever. Our membership includes *all* who suffer from alcoholism.

Bruce B., Duluth, Minnesota

Reprinted with permission of the A.A. Grapevine, Inc.



*Co-founder
Quotes*

Bill W.

If we examine every disturbance we have, great or small, we will find at the root of it some unhealthy dependency and its consequent unhealthy demand. Let us, with God’s help, continually surrender these hobbling demands. Then we can be set free to live and love; we may then be able to Twelfth Step ourselves and others into emotional sobriety.

*Reprinted with permission of the A.A. Grapevine, Inc.
January 1958*

When Are We Ready?

Tradition Three – The only requirement for AA membership is a desire to stop drinking.

“It is part of the cure, to wish to be cured.” So wrote Lucius Annocus Seneca more than 2000 years ago.

It is a common general attitude as a result of our experience that, unless the alcoholic has a genuine and determined desire to stop drinking, our chance of helping him is nil, or at the very least reduced to a minimum. In the absence of a consistent demonstrated desire we often say, “He is not ready,” and that is quite sound on the basis of our experience.

Yet, it is my notion that none of our wisdom from experience should constitute dogma. There are exceptions to almost everything our experience has established. Although we have “come of age,” we are still very young. Our Fellowship has only suggestions—earnest, wise suggestions based on the sharing of our experience, strength and hope—but only suggestions. It is my belief, based upon my own experience, that so long as the alcoholic keeps exposing himself to AA, we should not dismiss him from our most alert attention, or withhold any effort we might make to help him, simply because we state to ourselves and each other, rather easily too, that “he is not ready.”

To begin with, who among us feels justifiably competent to determine this question of readiness? The mere fact that the person keeps exposing himself through coming back to meetings or keeping in touch with some of us, or even one of us, may very well indicate a basic, underlying desire to stop drinking. And when the superficial reservations pass away, possibly with our help, that basic desire will assert itself. Possibly, our attitude and the quality of our intended help will make the difference between his ultimate success from this point, or his descent to a lower gutter.

In my case, there were reservations and only a conditional surrender. I came in to save my livelihood, my professional standing, my family and many other things. With me, it was a case of either join AA “or else.” And in a month I was drunk. The circumstances were so completely humiliating to me that this final stage perfected my tailor-made gutter. The AA people were so completely kind, understanding and forgiving, despite this mortifying insult to them on my part, that I loved them as I had never loved before. And their advice, suggestions and requests became commands for me which I followed with great eagerness until finally I absorbed enough truth and knowledge to understand that I was here with these wonderful people because I belonged here, and that I was fighting for this sobriety to save myself alone.

My point here is that the sincere desire to stop drinking is an absolute qualification, but it is an element that may be developed as an alcoholic goes along in his early days in this Fellowship, and many might be saved by our refusal to dismiss them easily as “not being ready.” I was so saved many years ago when the Fellowship was much younger and smaller, collectively much less wise, perhaps, and surely less able from the standpoint of numbers to give as much dedicated personal attention. Yet through the understanding, love and alert attention of a half-dozen dedicated emissaries of God’s grace, my enjoyment of this sobriety was made to stick.

*Anonymous
Cleveland, Ohio*

Reprinted with permission of the A.A. Grapevine, Inc.

Humor from the Grapevine

When the administrator of a county jail learned that a container of home brew had been found in Dormitory A, he dispatched this memo:

Dear Dorm A,

Roses are red, violets are blue, nice try, guys, but you don’t get the brew.

He thought the matter was settled, until he walked into his office the next morning and found this reply:

Dear Administrator,

Roses are red, violets are blue, you found one; we made two.

« « « » » »

A True Story:

The other day the siren from an emergency vehicle was blaring so loudly, it stopped our AA meeting. The response from the back of the room was swift: “Anyone call for a taxi?”

« « « » » »

Bumper-Sticker From Homer, Alaska:

Homer—a small drinking village with a fishing problem.

Fear and the Fourth Step

Step Four – Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

How often have you heard, “I know I should start on my Fourth Step, but I’m terrified!”? I know guys in the Fellowship who, when active, were flat-out reckless. But take these very same go-for-broke guys, and suggest it’s time to do a Fourth Step and you’ve never seen such cagey deliberation, such wariness, such humorless, frozen-faced fear.

Where does this terror come from? Have we somehow unknowingly fostered this fear? Have we turned the Fourth Step into something that bears almost no resemblance to the original process?

At other times, we seem to let our disease come up with palliatives to put off doing a Fourth. For instance, when a newer member tells her sponsor she’s afraid of tackling the Fourth Step, this well-meaning sponsor tells her with the best of intentions not to worry, or to hold off for a couple of years. Why? To stay irritable, restless, and discontented for two more years?

Sometimes, we make the Fourth Step just about impossible to do. Where did the suggestion “Write your life story” come from, for example? Very few of us have time to write an autobiography. And even if we did, how much of it would actually contain an inventory of the resentments, fears, and guilt that we have to get rid of? Then there are those recovery publications that peddle twenty-page inventories or guides. Are we writing federal legislation or doing an inventory?

Here’s another new twist: “Don’t forget to put down your assets, too.” Why? Has anyone you know ever gotten drunk over an asset? Has anyone ever wanted to get rid of his or her assets?

Does Step Five say to share the exact nature of our assets? Is it possible that our disease has come up with yet another way to water down this Step?

Shouldn’t we stick to the original analogy Bill W. used? He chose the word “inventory.” He did not choose “balance sheet.” Assets go on balance sheets. On one tape recording, Bill W. said that part of the reason for publishing the Big Book was to “nail it down in black and white so the drunks couldn’t wiggle out of it.” Nowhere in the Fourth Step section of the Big Book does it even once mention the word “asset.” Could it be that we drunks are trying our best to “wiggle out” of this simple process?

Remember the classic scene from old gangster movies? The setting is an interrogation room at the police station. The veteran detective wants information from the nervous suspect, and in a tired, I’ve-been-here-before voice, says: “Okay, Louie. We can do this one of two ways: the hard way or the easy way.” It’s the same with the Fourth Step. We can do it one of two ways. The easy way is between pages 63 and 71 of the Big Book.

Ted D., Teaneck, New Jersey

Reprinted with permission of the A.A. Grapevine, Inc.

Newsletter Subscription: If you wish to receive your copy of the Recovery Times at your home, please complete this form and return with a check (\$7 donation to cover delivery cost) to:

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

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

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Non-Profit Org.
**U.S. POSTAGE
PAID**
PERMIT NO. 82
Van Nuys, CA
91405

*Your Name and Address Here to
have the Recovery Times sent to
your home. \$7.00 for 1 Year.
Subscription Form on Page 7.*