

Recovery Times

November is Gratitude Month

A newsletter from Alcoholics Anonymous San Fernando Valley Central Office VOL 33, NO. 11 NOV 2009

Seventeen and Sober

I am an alcoholic and I am also seventeen—not surprising, because there are many teenage alcoholics. Half of them don't even know they have a problem. I'm one of the lucky ones; I found out in time.

I have been drinking since I was eight. Physically, it didn't take its toll until the last three years. But mentally, it affected me from the very first drink I picked up.

My story is a common one. I drank because I had problems—in other words, to cop out. I wasn't very happy at home. Although I was loved, I didn't feel wanted. The bottle was my friend. It helped me cope.

As the years passed by and my drinking progressed, I became obsessed with alcohol. I needed it to do just about everything. At about the age of twelve, I went from Scotch on weekends to drinking beer with my friends. They had discovered drinking, and now I didn't have to drink alone any more. We would walk up to the deli and get a couple of quarts apiece. But I was never satisfied with just two quarts. This was when I suspected something was wrong.

By this time, it had really caught up with me. I missed days from school, mostly Mondays and Fridays. No longer did I drink only on weekends. I drank on weekdays, too. I drank in the morning to calm my nerves and steady my shaking hands. Then the resentments and the fears set in.

At fourteen, I was contemplating suicide. I couldn't find any reason to live. I hadn't even begun to live, and I wanted to die. It was a vicious cycle of morning sick-

ness and shaking and night drinking. Drinking wasn't fun any more. I didn't enjoy the high as I used to. By now, I couldn't function without alcohol. I had lost everything—my self-respect and my will to live. I was embarrassing my family, and no longer was I the life of the party. I was a drunk. I knew what I was doing was wrong. But what was I going to do? I would try anything to stop.

I knew someone in AA and decided to try it. With no idea of what to expect, I went to my first meeting on January 16, 1976. I was afraid to talk. If anyone came near me, I started to shake. Through my sponsor and my Higher Power, I made it—but not right away. It took me a couple of months. Now, I know why. It was because I didn't open up. I wouldn't let anyone help me. Then I surrendered. It was the most important thing I had ever done. I just let go and let God.

The difference since I've been in AA is amazing. Before, I kept everything to myself, because I didn't think I needed anyone. I had forgotten how to smile, and laughing was a thing of the past. But since I've been on the program, it has helped me more than I can say. I'm learning to smile and laugh again, and I've even gotten back some of my self-respect. The friends I have in AA are the best friends I'll ever have. I still have problems, but AA has taught me how to handle them and not run from them. I am very grateful to AA for my new life. I believe God has given me a second chance. So I will carry the AA message to anyone who needs and wants it.

Anonymous, Richmond, New York

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Why Gratitude Month?

Many reasons. Your Central Office operates on the donations received from the Groups and their members. Central Office has a 24 hour-a-day, 365 days-a-year telephone Hot Line and all the up-to-date meeting information. Your donations make it possible for Central Office to keep a full stock of AA literature available *7 days a week!* The Meeting Directory is generated out of Central Office as well as this monthly newsletter, The Recovery Times. Our website, www.sfvaa.org, makes A.A. meeting information available online and is updated monthly. There is a Public Information Group that is always ready to assist the General Public with information on our organization through schools, health fairs, hospitals, etc. Convention flyers, upcoming events for the groups, and information regarding the passing of our members are all available at Central Office. And just so you know...

Gratitude Month is the *only* fundraiser for Central Office.

Calendar Events

Upcoming Events

22nd Annual Lake Havasu City Roundup
November 20 - 22, 2009
Lake Havasu City, AZ
Info: Tom R. 928-566-1230, Al T. 928-453-8986
Website: www.havasuaa.com

43rd Annual Las Vegas Roundup
November 26 - 29, 2009
Las Vegas, NV
Info: Joe C. 213-792-7715
Website: www.lasvegasroundup.org

20th Annual River Roundup
January 7 - 10, 2010
Laughlin, NV
Info: Matt 928-754-4090
Website: www.rcco-aa.org

35th Annual San Fernando Valley AA Convention
January 29 - 31, 2010
Woodland Hills, CA
Website: www.sfvaaconvention.org

Things We Cannot Change...

Jerry D. — Ala-Nest — 31 Years

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 sfvaaews@sbcglobal.net.

Valley Events

November is
**Gratitude
Month**

Service Committee Schedule

- Nov. 16, 2009 **SFV H&I
THIRD MONDAY**
8PM Business Meeting
7PM Get Acquainted Workshop
5657 Lindley Ave.

- Dec. 7, 2009 **G.S. District #11
FIRST MONDAY**
6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30pm meeting
315 W. Vine St., Glendale

- Dec. 7, 2009 **G.S. District #16
FIRST MONDAY**
6:15PM meeting
15950 Chatsworth (church), Granada Hills

- Dec. 7, 2009 **G.S. District #17
FIRST MONDAY**
6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30pm meeting
5000 Colfax (church), N. Hollywood

- Dec. 1, 2009 **G.S. District #2
FIRST TUESDAY**
5:30PM, 4011 Dunsmore, La Crescenta

- Dec. 2, 2009 **G.S. District #1
FIRST WEDNESDAY**
6:30PM, 7552 Remmet, Canoga Park

- Dec. 9, 2009 **SFV Board of Directors**
6:30PM, Central Office

- Dec. 12, 2009 **G.S. District #7
SECOND SATURDAY**
9AM, Agua Dulce Woman's Club
33201 Agua Dulce Cyn Rd

- Dec. 14, 2009 **SFV Intergroup
SECOND MONDAY**
6:30PM Orientation, 7PM Business Meeting
St. Innocents Church
5657 Lindley Ave., Tarzana

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 October 12, 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: Dave - 13 yrs, Ron - 20 yrs.

Motion to adjourn 7:16 PM

*The long form of the Intergroup Meeting Minutes
for September is available at Central Office
or at the Intergroup Meeting.*

*These minutes are pending approval on
November 9, 2009*

Next Meeting - November 9, 2009

Prepared and submitted by:

Dawn H., Recording Secretary

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

October 2009

Paul DeC.

9 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.

You Call This Unity!

*Tradition One - Our common welfare should come first;
personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity*

At a recent AA forum, I heard some distressing news. A member reported that some old-timers in his area are going “underground” because they don’t like the changes in AA and are frustrated by the problems. These underground meetings are open only to some AAs and allegedly have attendance requirements, such as having to be five years sober.

Just last night, a young man from my home group informed me that a similar practice has started in my area. Some AAs are starting meetings in their homes and “tapping” certain AAs to attend. The young man from my group said that he knew he didn’t come from the right socioeconomic group to get “tapped.”

Both of these instances caused me to reflect on our First Tradition, and to remember how I got introduced to its principles.

Early in my AA life, my sponsor insisted that I choose and commit myself to a “home group.” “You need to be part of a group,” she said, “in order to grow in sobriety and learn the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous.” So that’s how One Parkway became my original home group.

It was there I learned that “our common welfare” referred not only to my group, but to AA as a whole. I was told that it was important for me to learn all I could about AA and how it functioned. I was directed to a wide range of AA literature and encouraged to participate in a variety of AA activities.

Every month before our business meeting, we held a Traditions meeting. Regardless of which Tradition we happened to discuss, almost without fail someone would bring up Tradition One at the business meeting. In fact there was one old-timer who would always say, with much vigor, “If you can’t get Tradition One, then you can’t get any of them.” There was an amen corner that would chime in, “You’re right!” Then we would go about trying to figure out what was or was not good for our common welfare.

There was always talk about commitment. My group taught me that being a committed group member meant putting the welfare of the group before my own; they said learning to do this would ensure my sobriety and therefore my life. Most often, my group members were gentle in teaching me these lessons, but now and then when my ego got out of hand and I decided to do things my way (like taking it upon myself to change the group’s format), they loved the group enough and me enough to straighten me out on the spot and in no uncertain terms.

“Unity” was as difficult a concept for me to understand as was “common welfare.” I thought it meant that we should never disagree or argue about anything. Once at my group’s business meeting, in the midst of one of our usual heated debates, I angrily voiced this expectation. “You call this unity!” I shouted across the table at one of our old-timers. He smiled at me, looking rather amused, and said, “This is enthusiasm. We’re arguing about how we can better carry the message.” And so I was also taught that inherent in Tradition One is the idea that we each need to be willing to do our part for our common good and that we can only do that through participation.

The real demonstration of unity, I came to understand, was evidenced by what happened in the process of, and after, all that heated debate. Everyone got a chance to be heard. The group struggled to arrive at decisions that were for the “common welfare” of the group and AA as a whole. We held hands and recited the Serenity Prayer in unison at the end, knowing that, despite our disagreements, we were each coming back to the group and to AA because we needed it to survive. We each had a responsibility to make sure AA continued to be there for the next alcoholic coming in the door.

At times, I have fallen short of the ideals implicit in Tradition One. Sometimes it’s simply because I don’t stop and think long enough to realize the ramifications of my actions. Last summer my husband (also an AA) and I took a cruise that docked in a small town in Mexico. A nice lady whom we had met on board ship at a “Friends of Bill W.” meeting (attended by alcoholics and nonalcoholics as well) told us about an AA meeting in the town. I knew the lady was not an alcoholic and that she had attended the “Friends of Bill W.” meeting because of a problem other than alcoholism. But partly because I didn’t want to hurt her feelings and partly because it was convenient for me, I accepted her offer to take us to the local meeting and attend it with us. I could have talked with her about AA and our Traditions, but I chose not to.

At the local meeting that night, my husband and I found out that the group was really struggling for survival. It was the only AA group in town and its few members had never been exposed to AA anywhere else. They were so grateful to have AAs from the United States, where it all started. There was an American woman there who had gotten sober in this small town and a man who was in his first few months of sobriety. They didn’t know the woman with us wasn’t an alcoholic and called on her to share. She shared at length on a problem that had nothing to do with alcoholism. During her sharing, a local drunk came and stood in the doorway,

continued →

You Call This Unity!

continued

apparently approaching AA for the first time. With horror, I realized that without thinking I had put my needs and desires first. What seems like an insignificant action could in reality mean signing the death certificate of the alcoholic who still suffers.

*“You call this unity?”
He smiled and said,
“This is enthusiasm!”*

The experience in Mexico reminded me that like the Steps, the Traditions require vigilance and work on my part if I am to grow in my ability to practice these principles.

I believe that the need as well as the desire to maintain our unity in AA hasn't really changed that much. I think what's changed is that we've gotten bigger and therefore the job and the responsibility have gotten greater. AA has taught me that being “a small part of the great whole” carries with it a responsibility and that there is always something that I can do to contribute to “our common welfare.” When my sponsor told me that I needed a group to grow, she also told me that I wouldn't grow by running away and that I had a responsibility to show up.

I pray that leaving AA or going “underground” never looks like a good alternative to me. I hope instead to remember the lessons that the One Parkway Group, my sponsors, and fellow AAs have taught me. I've learned that I can strive to make my home group the best AA group in the world, which of course means one that conforms to our Traditions. I have learned that I can strive to be the kind of sponsor who tries to pass on all of AA to the newcomer, our three legacies of Recovery, Unity, and Service, and not just what I think the newcomer wants or can handle. I have learned that I can and need to be of service to my group and, where possible, to AA as a whole.

Our literature reminds me that great love and great suffering are our disciplinarians, we need no others. I have no doubt that I suffered as much as I could stand from active alcoholism, but I am not sure I have learned to practice loving Alcoholics Anonymous as well as I believe is possible. I certainly have not yet learned to practice Tradition One perfectly. But I have enough love to try to grow in my ability to place our common welfare first. I am convinced that my life depends on it. I pray that I may continue to grow in unselfishness, enough to care about the lives of all alcoholics, wherever they may be, those that are with us and those yet to come.

Dorothy H., Piscataway, New Jersey

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*Co-founder
Quotes*

Bill W.

A clear light seems to fall upon us all—when we open our eyes. Since our blindness is caused by our own defects, we must first deeply realize what they are. Constructive meditation is the first requirement for each new step in our spiritual growth.

*Reprinted from As Bill Sees It, page 10,
with permission AA World Services, Inc.*

In All Our Affairs

Words have a way of taking on an entirely new significance when we enter into the new world opened up to us by AA sobriety. We all know how the first apparent clichés of our simple formulas change and become a vital part of our daily life. We discover after a time, for example, that we never really had an inkling of how *practically* useful “think” is until we accept how very long it has been since we really understood it. “Humility” came, with a bit more sobriety, to take its place as a lovely, living word, a quality of acceptance of our limitations, most devoutly to be searched for; the most desirable member of our family of words—humility.

“Gratitude,” that much abused sister, also altered her face and was transformed into a joyful appreciation of our miraculous recovery. We grew to know that without daily gratitude our personal miracle would lose its lustre, and in time it could cover our shiny new world with a dull-for-granted-taking that would lead us inevitably away from the fellowship and equally inevitably to our most welcoming enemy. We might drink if we became careless with our “gratitude.”

“Pride” by a peculiar shift in syntax became the most active and omnipotent devil of a word, perhaps the most dangerous of all, and yet, while unresolved pride can lead us quickly to the bottle, we are tremendously proud that we are a part of AA.

“Honesty—” I heard an AA friend say at a meeting that he had heard a dictionary definition of honesty given by a rural postman at a country meeting in the middle-west. This old boy was sick of hearing this sensible word kicked around so he had gone to the County Court House and looked it up in “that big old dictionary there.” It was good enough for him, it’s good in any man’s life. “Honesty—is the absence of the intent to deceive.” Only what does “intent” mean?

Now I find that with all my new found confidence in the validity and importance of semantics, I have been retarded and stifled by periodic waves of doubt and despair because of my blindness concerning the meaning of the key word to our entire program.

It occurs with perfect rightness in the Twelfth Step... “awakening.”

Some hidden closet in my mind had failed to open. To me spiritual awakening meant an absolute conviction of and close relationship to a God everyone seemed to understand but me. I felt, in this untidy recess of my brain, that, without this revelation of spiritual grace, I couldn’t begin to “carry the message” adequately and, of even greater importance, I was continually unsuccessful in handling “all my affairs.”

I finally looked up the definition of awakening. It means to

quicken, to stir, to wake up. It doesn’t say anything about a great white light or an aura of divinity, in my dictionary.

Well, now I know without any more fuss or feathers, that I, like every other member of AA have had a very tangible spiritual awakening. My belief in a Higher Power is as strong as it was when I went to my first AA meeting and accepted the first and second steps as simply and trustfully as a child accepts its mother’s milk. And certainly AA with its never ending procession of miracles, has deepened and made tangible the evidence of the workings of that Higher Power. So what on earth was I looking for? I just don’t know. I guess I wanted a little Tinker Bell all my own to show me the right and only way out of every situation.

In my peculiarly alcoholic way of creating difficulties, I discovered this semantic truth in the most involved way. Recently I was confronted with a work project that should have presented no particular difficulties, and yet it did. I blocked and blocked and couldn’t rationally get around why I was procrastinating, fearful, unable to come to grips with it. I was thinking resentfully that in this year and a half in AA the only departments of my life that had become remotely manageable were my AA activities. I had no feelings of guilty inadequacy after I had been secretary of my group. I met my Grapevine deadlines. I spoke frequently at open and closed meetings. I had done everything requested or required of me without any anxiety as to the perfection of my performances. Why was I having so much difficulty in the other areas of my life?

Quite suddenly and without any warning bells, the simple solution came to me. I had surrendered to only one thing: my alcoholism. I accepted divine and temporal help in everything that had to do with my disease with complete humility but I never had extended this wonderful freedom from pride, resentments, envy and need for perfection and competition, into “all my affairs.”

So it finally came to me in this time of really deep need: I had had no understanding of the meaning of spiritual awakening. And because I accepted all things in AA as natural and just and healthy and good, I was only permitting an unconscious use of my spiritual awakening in AA areas. And I had never brought it out and looked at it before.

Now I hope and pray I can indeed carry to all my affairs the conscious use of surrender and humility and gratitude, employing them with the knowledge that, if I do, my affairs, under God’s direction have a better chance of reaching a daily truth.

H. W., Westport, Connecticut

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A Letter From Your General Service Office

New Pamphlet – A request for submissions

August 2009
Dear A.A. Friend,

The 2009 General Service Conference, which is the group conscience that approves A.A. literature, has asked us to begin development of a recovery pamphlet for newcomers, or perspective members of A.A., who may have special needs.

We hope that some of you may consider sharing your experience, strength, and hope by submitting your story for consideration. Please keep in mind the following when preparing your manuscript:

Your story is for the newcomer to A.A.—to help alcoholics with special needs to identify.

Approximately two or three pages or 500-800 written words, double spaced. Attach your name and the address where we may contact you on a separate piece of paper.

Please describe, as our Big Book says “in a general way what we used to be like, what happened, and what we are like now.”

Some experiences you might include in your story are:

Any barriers you may have had to overcome to receive the message of A.A.

Any literature, other tools, or efforts by other A.A. members that may have been helpful to you in receiving the message of A.A.

The anonymity of all authors will be observed, whether or not that individual’s story is selected for publication.

Suggested deadline: December 15, 2009.

Please send to:

Special Needs Coordinator
General Service Office
P.O. Box 459
New York, NY 10163

We are deeply grateful for your willingness to share in this way.

Humor from the Grapevine

I was lurching outside with my new co-workers, including the man who’d hired me, when one of them asked, “What does that symbol with the triangle in the circle on your bike mean?”

Caught by surprise, I panicked, then replied, “I’m half Jewish.”

It worked.

« « « » » »

The still-functioning alcoholic went for her annual physical. “Well, Doc, how do I stand?” she asked. “That’s what puzzles me,” the doctor replied.

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Van Nuys, CA 91405

Current Information

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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.

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City..... St ZIP

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