

# Recovery Times

A newsletter from Alcoholics Anonymous San Fernando Valley Central Office

VOL 34, NO. 2

FEB 2010

## A Few Things I Want To Say

*“Even when we think they aren’t listening,  
our sponsees hear the message”*

I received an email from a sponsee who recently relocated to a new town. When I saw the subject line – “A Few Things I Want To Say” – I immediately thought the worst. For some reason, she’s going to give me a piece of her mind. Instead her simple message touched my heart:

« « « » » »

December 2009

Dear Dawn: Don’t know if you remember some of these things:

You used to bug the sh\*t out of me to join you for fellowship after the meeting on Wednesday nights. Now if I’m not there, I’m picturing all of you, every Wednesday night. Thank you.

You used to make me go to the stupid movies. I hate the movies. I hate finding a parking spot in stupid Burbank. I went so that you’d shut up about it. And now I miss it. Thank you.

You asked if I’d join you for the stupid convention planning meetings by driving to stupid Tarzana from Burbank at the height of the rush hour, into the sun, in the summer, with no air conditioning. You listened to all this and said try to get there around seven. I did. Thank you.

You told me there was a pool party at the house of someone I didn’t know. I said I don’t go out in the sun and I don’t wear a bathing suit. You said bring a salad. I did. Thank you.

You had a Fourth of July party. I went early so I could leave early. I didn’t want to go at all. I was the first one there and the last to leave. Thank you.

I went to your house for Thanksgiving because I was still nervous around my family and I didn’t want to get sh\*t from you for not showing up. I had no idea how many people had no where else to go and were so grateful to be there. Thank you.

And the panels I was afraid to do but you thought might be a good idea. I thought you were being mean to me. Thank you.

And oh goody! Let’s all meet at the metro and take it downtown to see Joe & Charley...the whole freaking weekend! Shoot me now. Then I began to understand that stupid book and even learned the Fourth Step wasn’t a novel or an essay test. Thank you.

There are so many more memories. I’ve been thinking about this because we had a really messed up newcomer at the meeting last night. And because of you, when someone’s annoying as Hell, I ask myself why? And the answer is, he’s just like I was. Thank you.

« « « » » »

I share this because every one of the points for which my sponsee gave me credit were suggestions that were passed on to me first by those of you who walked before me. I vividly remember my first potluck with new sober friends, or my first sober holiday season, or my first trip to the movie theater without a drink concealed in my purse. For my part, I was only passing along the message to my sponsee. But her message of gratitude says it all. Even when we think they *aren’t* listening, our sponsees hear the message. The message still gets through...

*Di V.  
December 2009*

# Calendar Events

## Upcoming Events

### **38th Annual ACYPAA Round-Up**

February 11 - 14, 2010  
San Diego, CA  
Website: [www.acypaa2010.org](http://www.acypaa2010.org)

### **33rd Annual San Diego Spring Round Up**

April 1 - 4, 2010  
San Diego, CA  
Info: Michael S. (619) 972-3763 - [hellojenil@yahoo.com](mailto:hellojenil@yahoo.com)  
Website: [www.SanDiegoSpringRoundUp.com](http://www.SanDiegoSpringRoundUp.com)

### **22nd Annual Indian Wells Valley AA Roundup**

April 16 - 18, 2010  
Ridgecrest, CA  
Email: [iwvroundup@gmail.com](mailto:iwvroundup@gmail.com)  
Website: [www.orgsites.com/ca/iwvroundup](http://www.orgsites.com/ca/iwvroundup)

### **34th Annual Springtime in the Ozarks**

April 15 - 18, 2010  
Eureka Springs, AR  
Website: [www.nwarkaa.org](http://www.nwarkaa.org)

### **Miracles Happen 2010**

April 30 - May 2, 2010  
Laguna Beach, CA  
Website: [www.miracleshappen.org](http://www.miracleshappen.org)

### **26th Annual South Bay Roundup**

May 28 - 31, 2010  
Torrance, CA  
Website: [www.southbayroundup.org](http://www.southbayroundup.org)

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

June 3 - 6, 2010  
Indian Wells, CA  
Info: SherAli J. (760) 321-6568  
Website: [www.desertpowwow.com](http://www.desertpowwow.com)

## *Things We Cannot Change...*

*Michael C. — 25 Years*

*Ben H. — 33 Years*

*Don G. — 40+ 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 [sfvaanews@sbcglobal.net](mailto:sfvaanews@sbcglobal.net).

## Service Committee Schedule

Feb. 15, 2010	<b>SFV H&amp;I THIRD MONDAY</b> 8PM Business Meeting 7PM Get Acquainted Workshop 5657 Lindley Ave. *****
Mar. 1, 2010	<b>G.S. District #11 FIRST MONDAY</b> 6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30pm meeting 315 W. Vine St., Glendale *****
Mar. 1, 2010	<b>G.S. District #16 FIRST MONDAY</b> 6:15PM meeting 15950 Chatsworth (church), Granada Hills *****
Mar. 1, 2010	<b>G.S. District #17 FIRST MONDAY</b> 6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30pm meeting 5000 Colfax (church), N. Hollywood *****
Mar. 2, 2010	<b>G.S. District #2 FIRST TUESDAY</b> 5:30PM, 4011 Dunsmore, La Crescenta *****
Mar. 3, 2010	<b>G.S. District #1 FIRST WEDNESDAY</b> 6:30PM, 7552 Remmet, Canoga Park *****
Mar. 3, 2010	<b>SFV Board of Directors</b> 6:30PM, Central Office *****
Mar. 13, 2010	<b>G.S. District #7 SECOND SATURDAY</b> 9AM, Agua Dulce Woman's Club 33201 Agua Dulce Cyn Rd *****
Mar. 8, 2010	<b>SFV Intergroup SECOND MONDAY</b> 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.



# Must we always say “Yes” to AA?

Our speaker at the Friday night meeting didn't look like himself. He had a gray complexion and drooping eyelids. Reeling with exhaustion, all but falling asleep on his feet, Mark began to speak.

“Maybe I, ah, shouldn't have come t'night,” he admitted. “Oughta stayed home and slept. Been workin' sixteen, eighteen hours a day all week. I'm about wore out. But when Clem ast me to speak tonight, I hadda come. I never say ‘No’ to AA.”

Whereupon Mark put himself and his audience through fifty minutes of agony while he tried to give a talk he was in no condition to make. And how we wished he *had* said “No” to AA that time!

Like many of us, I find something at every AA meeting, and that one was no exception. I didn't learn much about the AA program, but I came away with an enduring conviction: There are times, in AA as in all things, when “No” is the right answer.

It is hard to understand how this one inoffensive little word ever got such a bad press in AA. Granted that the Twelve Steps outline a very positive course of action, the foundation of all our spiritual growth. But the ultimate purpose of AA itself can be expressed in one entirely negative statement: “Don't drink.”

An even more specific negative injunction, “Don't drink today,” is what kept me sober through weeks of brutal craving for alcohol and brought me to my approximately 11,500 days without drinking. “I won't drink today,” I told myself when the desire for alcohol became almost unbearable. “If the sky falls or the roof caves in or my face turns green with purple spots, I won't drink today. If I want a drink this badly tomorrow, maybe I will, but I won't drink today!” And day after day I didn't drink, and after a while the desire left me.

Since we regard “No!” as having enormous respectability when it comes to our drinking, is it logical that so many of us treat it as repulsive in all other AA affairs? Mark was far from being the only AA member I have heard declare—boast—that he never said “No” to AA.

I can hear rumblings of disagreement: “The two things are so different you can't even compare them. Not taking a drink is something you can do for yourself. All the others are things you do for AA. You can't decide whether to make an AA talk on the basis of whether it's good for you!”

Well, I think maybe we can—and should.

Suppose we try a new measurement about our activity in AA, from taking a drink to everything else: giving talks, attending meetings, doing our share in service work, being

a sponsor. When we have a mental conflict about whether to do something, we can settle it with just one question: “Will doing this be good for me?”

What we want to do isn't the point. A lot of things we want to do aren't good for us and a lot of things we once hated the very thought of (like many years of total sobriety) prove to be very good for us indeed. Also, many of our choices are between two things we want, but can have only one.

My desire to drink was accompanied by an even fiercer desire to stay sober. I could drink, or I could not drink. I couldn't do both. Alcohol could deprive me of my marriage, my career, even my life, if I ever stopped saying “No!” to a drink. There was never any doubt about which choice was good for me.

Under the circumstances of Mark's exhausted state, his agreeing to make an AA talk was not good for him, and not good for AA, either. No one got the AA message from him that night. He couldn't have lifted it, let alone carried it. Perhaps he did no harm to anyone, but the possibilities are many, and frightening.

Did a new person, hearing that rambling discourse, decide AA was not for him? Did someone, hoping to hear the words that would encourage him to hang on for one more sober day, fail to hear them? Did anyone's heart sink at the thought that AA members were required, or at least expected, to perform every AA task asked of them, even when in the shape poor Mark was in?

I think we will find that, when carefully evaluated, any AA task which is not good for us will not be good for AA, either.

Most of us have known AA members who plunged into AA activity as if the whole Fellowship must collapse if they didn't do five people's work. A while back, the Grapevine carried an article by a member who had gotten into that situation. She held offices in several groups, spoke, organized, volunteered, chaired committees, for hours every day. She was neglecting her family, wrecking her health, and endangering her sobriety. When she realized how bad for her this was, and limited herself to what she could and should do, she was better off and so was AA.

Overtired, overscheduled people can't do good work. AA was better served by the fresh, enthusiastic members who promptly took on the jobs she relinquished. Her zeal to do it all had deprived them of proper service opportunities.

I learned the danger of trying to decide what was good for me in AA without adequate information when I was several years sober. Because of an unhappy period in a group ruled

*Continued on the next page →*

## “Yes” cont.

by an absolute dictator, I decided I wanted no part of service. Let others hold the offices and make the decisions. Finally, though, I could no longer refuse to serve my greatly loved new group as General Service Representative. So I reluctantly entered the AA world of service—and loved it! I wouldn’t have missed a minute of it! It was marvelously good for me, but there was no way of knowing this until I tried it.

A friend of mine, on the other hand, gave service a thorough trial and decided it was not good for him. He is conscientious and capable, so when he became GSR he faithfully attended all meetings, accepted a service committee responsibility, and made it an outstanding success. And he didn’t like any of it. The meetings bored him. The discussions exasperated him. He felt his patience being stretched too far. He decided, I think rightly, that to a person of his temperament, a continuing service commitment was not good, either for him or AA.

When asked to do anything in AA most of us, like Mark, want to say “Yes.” That is usually the right answer. But not always. Sometimes we need to consider things like our family and work obligations, our health, our schedule, whether at this time and under present circumstances we can take on another task and do it well.

Then, the crucial question: “Will doing this be good for me?”

If the only intelligent answer is in the negative, we can say “No,” politely, but ever so firmly, serene in the certainty that we are serving AA very well indeed.

*Elizabeth E., Tulsa, Oklahoma*

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## Grapevine Humor

*A True Story:*

During my first weeks in AA, I brought my seven-year-old daughter to a meeting with me. At this meeting, if newcomers are present, they are invited to introduce themselves. Happily, I sang out, “My name is Lynn and I am an alcoholic.” My daughter sat beside me, coloring quietly.

The other newcomers, who were usually present, weren’t. Surprised, I said, “What? I’m the only one?”

The meeting began.

The first person to open the meeting introduced himself: “Hello, my name is so-and-so, and I am an alcoholic.”

My daughter patted me gently on the arm and whispered, “See, Mom? You’re not the only alcoholic here.”

« « « » » »

Jack, the son of the town drunk, was sent to the principal’s office for using a curse word at school.

The principal scolded Jack, “We do not use that word here. Besides, you don’t know what that word means.”

“I do, too!” Jack replied. “It means the car won’t start.”

« « « » » »

Did you hear about the drunk who was sent to the store by his wife to buy a bottle of Cheer and came home with a fifth of Old Granddad?

« « « » » »

Then there was the doctor who told the lush that he had arthritis when the drunk told him he got stiff in a different joint every day.



### Co-founder Quotes

#### Bill W.

Perhaps you raise the question of hallucination versus the divine imagery of a genuine spiritual experience. I doubt if anyone has authoritatively defined what an hallucination really is. However, it is certain that all recipients of spiritual experiences declare for their reality. The best evidence of that reality is in the subsequent fruits. Those who receive these gifts of grace are very much changed people, almost invariably for the better. This can scarcely be said of those who hallucinate.

*Reprinted from As Bill Sees It, page 182,  
with permission AA World Services, Inc.*

# Unity Seldom Means That We All Agree

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

That night I left my home group business meeting in tears, after what I saw as a bitter quarrel. I was surprised to realize that what I was feeling was not anger, but fear—that this group, which had shown me love and acceptance during my first shaky weeks, might break up over minor disagreements. What would happen to me then?

Walking into the coffee shop where members of the group often met after meetings, I was startled to see those who had been most vocal in their disagreement sitting together, talking amicably, and apparently the best of friends.

Was their disagreement resolved or forgotten? Not at all. They were practicing the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous. They were placing their recovery before their personal disagreement. While they disagreed regarding what was best for the group, they were willing to allow the process of arriving at an informed group conscience to work, and then to accept that group conscience. They were able to set aside their differences while this happened and continue to care for one another and for their sobriety.

I'd like to say that I learned this lesson and was able to put it into practice immediately, but that was not the case. As usually happens, it took repetition and some sustained personal discomfort for me to learn something about unity. There inevitably came a time in my sobriety when I felt strongly about problems which I saw in my home group. Suddenly I found myself at the center of a controversy, feeling that I must defend my position and convince others that what I wanted was in the best interests of the group. After all, this was a matter of principle. I was certain that not only was my will right for me, but essential to the survival of the group (maybe even AA as a whole)!

When the group reached a decision which I believed was wrong I went through fear (what will happen to my group?),

anger (how dare they do this!), guilt (I should have done more to convince them), and self-pity (they didn't vote for this because they don't like me). I wanted to run away because that had always been my response to uncomfortable emotions. But through the example of others I was able to sit still and wait.

Much to my surprise, the group didn't fail, AA as a whole didn't appear to be affected by the decision, and we all continued to stay sober. Some time later the group reversed itself and decided to change direction, handling group business in a way that I believed was more in keeping with our Twelve Traditions. Life and recovery went on and the group flourished.

What I've learned is that unity seldom means that we all agree on everything. Nor is unity served by setting aside our concerns and conforming to the majority opinion (or the vocal minority). My experience has been that unity is best achieved by a full hearing of all points of view, followed by some time for all of those involved to step back from emotional responses to the issue, as well as careful consideration and prayer for that which will best serve the group or Alcoholics Anonymous as a whole. I've also learned that when a decision is reached which doesn't work for the good of the group it can be changed. Nothing is set in stone, and we have the ability to learn from our mistakes in sobriety.

When we need to make a decision it's important for me to allow the group conscience to work and to trust in the process of applying the Twelve Traditions in making our decisions. When I'm able to do this, I feel that I'm a part of this Fellowship and that we are united in our common disease, our common solution, and our common purpose.

*Mickey H., Springville, Utah*

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## Muddling the Message

What has happened to strong sponsorship, secretarial leadership, and a commitment to focus the talk at meetings on the subject of alcoholism? Old-timers are leaving First-Step halls in droves, and newcomers are battered with the language of misery. In our willingness to be everything to everybody, we have opened our meetings to opinions instead of spiritual solutions, which offer the message of hope.

It's not so much that we need rules; we do need strong spiritual leaders who are unwilling to let our meetings turn into moaning sessions or discussions of the romance of drugs

and prisons. How long will we sit back and grin to ourselves while alcoholic-addicts muddle the clear message of the book? Our success rate is falling with every long share on outside issues having nothing to do with why we drink, or precisely how we recover.

Is there anyone out there willing to stand up for Alcoholics Anonymous?

*Gabby H., Sacramento, California*

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# Nothing Is Forever

## Steps Six & 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 A.M.; 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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