

Recovery Times

A newsletter from Alcoholics Anonymous San Fernando Valley Central Office VOL 30, NO. 5 May 2006

Northern Lights

Referring to the “geographic cure,” page 101 of the Big Book states that if we go to the Greenland Ice Cap to try and avoid drinking, chances are that “an Eskimo might turn up with a bottle of scotch and ruin everything.” The irony in this for me is that whenever an Inuit person showed up at my door, I was the one giving them the booze, and it was never scotch. I am an alcoholic temporarily residing in eastern Canada. My home, however, is the Northwest Territories.

I grew up in southern Canada and have no doubt in my mind that I had the “ism” since the age of fourteen when I first decided to get drunk. For the next nineteen years, getting drunk was a regular part of my week. “A couple of beers” was never a part of my vocabulary; from the very start my passion was to get plastered out of my mind. Fridays and Saturdays were a given, but pretty well any night of the week was a possibility.

When I first moved north, I’d just received my professional certification, and on my brother’s invitation joined him and his family in Yellowknife, where he assured me I would be much better situated to find work in my field. I had decided at that time to “seriously cut back” on my drinking because I’d done something in a drunken craze that had left me feeling ashamed of myself for quite some time. Also, my brother’s and his family’s religious convictions about drinking were another good reason to abstain. I only got drunk a couple of times while I was there. The fact that I was broke and didn’t know anyone were probably bigger factors in my restraint than respect for someone else. After six weeks I finally secured a job in a remote Inuit community now called Kugluktuk, which is on the central Arctic coast in what is now the new territory of Nunavut. There were no bars or liquor stores, and the only way in or out was by plane. That’s how my booze came in.

I’ve heard it said that when an alcoholic stops drinking for a period of time and then takes it up again, he or she does so with a vengeance. I lasted without a drink for a month and when I took it up again the nature of my drinking had changed. I hardly ever used to drink alone. Now it was my practice to come home on a Friday night and drink until I passed out in front of the TV. Saturday night would be a repeat performance. I developed the habit of leaving social engagements early so as to go home and get drunk alone. Although alcohol was never mentioned, my contract was not renewed at the end of the year. I’ll always wonder if booze was the reason.

I soon secured what became a series of short-term contracts south of Great Slave Lake in the small town on Hay River. I was in heaven; there was a liquor store and about five places in town where I could go and get a drink. Because the work was easier, I didn’t have to confine my drinking to weekends. Friday and Saturday nights remained guaranteed blowout nights, but any night had the possibility for a good drunk. It was at this time that I began the habit of the Sunday night bottle of wine to taper off for Monday morning. Most of my drinking continued to be done at home, alone. This pattern continued for the next year, until I got into a relationship with someone. Now the pattern turned into the two of us getting drunk together.

One night she was supposed to come over for dinner and didn’t show up—no call, nothing. When I called her place, she picked up the phone and then hung it up without speaking. No stranger to depression, I found myself spiraling into that pit that alcohol had done such a good job keeping me out of for the previous nineteen years. I knew that it wouldn’t matter how much I drank, that alcohol wasn’t going to do the job for me that night. I pushed the glass away. I didn’t know at the time that would be the last drink I would ever take.

I was convinced that the root of my problem had to do with growing up in an alcoholic home. About a month earlier I’d purchased a couple of workbooks for adult children of alcoholics, and the first thing each one said was that if I wanted to honestly work on myself and I was drinking and/or drugging, I would have to stop.

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Calendar Events

Upcoming Events

12th ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL AA CONVENTION INGREECE

Ermioni-Thermissia, Peloponnese, Greece
May 18, 19, 20 & 21, 2006
Info: www.aa-europe.net/events/ermioni/ermioni2006.htm

22nd ANNUAL TRI-STATE ROUND-UP

Laughlin, Nevada
May 19, 20 & 21, 2006
RIVERSIDE RESORT HOTEL & CASINO
Info: www.tristate-roundup.com

5th ANNUAL BALI INTERNATIONAL ROUNDUP

Bali, Indonesia
June 9, 10, & 11, 2006
Info: www.aa-bali.org

A.A. DESERT POW WOW

June 15 - 18, 2006
Indian Wells, CA
Info: SherAli J. (760) 321-6568
Website: <http://www.desertpowwow.com>

33rd ANNUAL ANTELOPE VALLEY ROUNDUP

June 23 - 25, 2006
Lancaster, CA
Info: (661) 273-5575

Registration forms for most events
can be obtained at the Intergroup Meeting
or at Central Office

Valley Events

TO FIND OUT WHAT ELSE IS GOING ON
YOU CAN:

COME TO CENTRAL OFFICE

CALL US AT 818-988-3001

VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT <http://www.sfvaa.org>

SERVICE COMMITTEE SCHEDULE

- May 15, 2006 **SFV H&I
THIRD MONDAY**
8PM Business Meeting
7PM Get Acquainted Workshop
5657 Lindley Ave.

- June 5, 2006 **G.S. District #11
FIRST MONDAY**
6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30PM meeting
315 W. Vine St., Glendale

- June 5, 2006 **G.S. District #16
FIRST MONDAY**
6:15PM meeting
15950 Chatsworth (church), Granada Hills

- June 5, 2006 **G.S. District #17
FIRST MONDAY**
6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30PM meeting
5000 Colfax (church), N. Hollywood

- June 6, 2006 **G.S. District #2
FIRST TUESDAY**
6:30PM, 4011 Dunsmore, La Crescenta

- June 7, 2006 **G.S. District #1
FIRST WEDNESDAY**
6:30PM, 7552 Remmet, Canoga Park

- June 7, 2006 **SFV Board of Directors**
6PM, Central Office

- June 10, 2005 **G.S. District #7
SECOND SATURDAY**
Agua Dulce Woman's Club
33201 Agua Dulce Cyn Rd
Sharon G. (661) 951-0372

- June 13, 2005 **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 29, 2006
for the Memorial Day holiday.**

**Normal operating hours will be in effect Saturday and Sunday prior
to the holiday. The office will resume normal hours on
Tuesday, May 30, 2006.**

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 2007 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 10, 2006

Michael F. 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: Greg - 12 yrs, Jen - 22 yrs, Bob - 25 yrs,
Harley - 27 yrs,*
Motion to adjourn 7:30 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 May 8, 2006
Next Meeting - May 8, 2006

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

April 2006

Anonymous	16 years
Jack L.	25 years
Mike E.	25 years
Bob F.	25 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.

Northern Lights (cont'd from page 1)

Naturally I assumed that message was for people other than myself, people with alcohol problems, not people like me who just wanted to be happy. I puttered about with the exercises in the books, but continued to drink and drug. Shortly thereafter a friend lent me a book on learning to love myself, and the first thing it said was the same thing—if I wanted to work on real-life issues, I would have to quit the booze and drugs. But I was sure I was different and continued on. I began to see a counselor and one thing she said that stuck with me was, “What happened to you as a child you have no control over. But how you choose to deal with that as an adult, you do have control over.”

After I'd met with this counselor a couple of times, she had to leave town for an extended period. Her replacement was very different. He wanted to talk about my drinking, and also wanted to know if I had any beliefs about God. He told me that he himself was a recovering alcoholic and that my problems might have more to do with my own drinking than my parents. Lending me a copy of the Big Book, he suggested I read the first five chapters, with an emphasis on the chapter to the agnostic. It was then suggested that I attend an open meeting of AA “just as a visitor.” Interestingly, the books I'd been reading had suggested the same thing. The next Sunday morning, I attended my first AA meeting. The people were nice, but in all honesty, I don't remember anything that was said; I was too preoccupied with the fact that I was at an AA meeting.

The next week I met with my counselor again. “Look, enough books and meetings,” I said to him, “tell me in twenty-five words or less what an alcoholic is.” How he responded will stick with me the rest of my life.

“My definition of alcoholism is when there is an emptiness here,” he answered, pointing to his chest, “and the only thing that fills that emptiness is alcohol.”

“Then I'm an alcoholic,” I replied. It was that simple. What I needed was for someone to explain alcoholism to me in language that made sense to me, and those were the words that did it. I went back to that meeting the next Sunday and kept going back until I left Hay River.

At six months' sobriety, I went to a treatment program in Inuvik where I attended every single AA meeting in town for the twenty-eight days I was there. I got to know the group there very well and they helped me in working the Steps. One member's wife described me as “the white guy from Hay River.” I still laugh at that. I did my Fourth and Fifth Steps with a member there. It was while working on the Fourth that I read on page 53 of the “Twelve and Twelve” a passage that described me perfectly: “The primary fact that we fail to recognize is our own total inability to form a true partnership with another human being.” Few quotes from AA literature have come close to hitting me with the force that one sentence did. Every time I read that sentence I am reminded why I go to meetings and work the Steps.

I didn't know it at the time, but the Inuvik group would continue to play a big part in my sobriety for a long time. A few months later I started a new job in another remote Arctic community, Aklavik, fifty air miles from Inuvik. I immediately set out to make contact with the local AAs—all two of them. New faces would come and go, but in my two years there, it was the three of us who kept the meetings going. Many times I'd set up the room, put the coffee on, and read AA literature for an hour because I was the only one there. But the doors were open and the coffee was hot, and if someone had reached out, the hand of AA was there for them. It certainly kept me sober. Some of the other things that helped keep me sober were e-mails from an AA friend in the south, the Grapevine, and an occasional trip to Inuvik—where a meeting of ten to fifteen people was like a roundup in comparison to my home group.

Having left the north almost two years ago to take advanced training in my field, I will be returning in the fall. I had the opportunity to retrace some of my early steps in sobriety this past summer while on a research trip to Yellowknife. I was able to take in a Labor Day weekend roundup there before heading back east. Coming back to where I was staying on the last night of the roundup, I stopped to watch the Northern Lights dancing above Yellowknife Bay and said a prayer. How many times had I walked through the woods of Hay River almost four years earlier, wondering at the beauty and majesty of the aurora borealis as I came to believe that a power greater than myself would restore me to sanity. My creator has continued to bless me in so many ways, but I must always remember the first blessing which makes all the others possible: my sobriety. For that I say the words that the Dene people of the Northwest Territories use to express gratitude: Mahsi cho.

Anonymous, St. John's, Newfoundland

It's All In The Timing

Looking out my window on sparkling Cape Cod Bay, I say in a very loud voice, "Dear God, thank you, thank you, thank you." My sobriety is a dear and precious gift. I treasure the moments when I feel intense, deep gratitude.

I'm particularly grateful to Step Three. I counted on this Step recently for two huge decision-making events in my life. A year ago, I'd been praying for over two years to know whether or not to retire from teaching. I was stalling because it was such an enormous decision, and I hadn't received a clear message from my Higher Power.

The answer came not on my timeline but on my Higher Power's schedule. Everything happened so smoothly that I had to acknowledge it was being orchestrated. Unexpectedly, I found a house on Cape Cod without searching for it. My house in New Jersey sold three days after it was put on the market. The complex retirement process went smoothly; even Social Security kicked in like clockwork. My two cats, Mei Li and Moxie, adjusted quickly to the new post-and-beam home; they think that cavorting on the rafters is great sport!

A few years ago I used to look repeatedly at my watch to determine how long I should—or could—wait to have a respectable first drink. On Sundays, I claimed one could start sooner than on weekdays. Today I can be home on a Sunday, enjoying coffee and reading the newspapers because I care about local, national, and world news (during my drinking days, I was scarcely aware that a war was going on in Southeast Asia). If the doorbell rings, I can answer it rather than hide in a closet. My words won't slur when my daughter calls. I won't have to spend the entire morning obsessing over whether I should drink scotch or gin or beer with a chaser. I also plan to be conscious rather than "asleep" to watch the Sunday night TV movie. Chances are I won't gag when I awake tomorrow morning.

I am thrilled with my twenty-one years of freedom from all the pain and grief that twenty-seven years of alcoholic drinking caused me. Joining the AA Fellowship was the most important event of my entire life. Contentment was something that used to sound boring to me; it was also something that eluded me for my whole life until I got sober. Now I'll take contentment anytime—that exquisite feeling of quiet inside myself. Nothing in this world could convince me to give up the life I lead today.

Barbara H.



Co-founder Quotes

Leadership in A.A.

No society can function well without able leadership at all its levels, and A.A. can be no exception. But we A.A.'s sometimes cherish the thought that we can do without much personal leadership at all. We are apt to warp the traditional idea of "principles before personalities" around to

such a point that there would be no "personality" in leadership whatever. This would imply rather faceless robots trying to please everybody.

A leader in A.A. service is a man or woman who can personally put principles, plans and policies into such dedicated and effective action that the rest of us naturally want to back him up and help him with his job. When a leader power-drives us badly, we rebel; but when he too meekly becomes an order-taker and he exercise no judgment of his own – well, he really isn't a leader at all.

As Bill Sees It, pg. 224

. . . Who Has Thoroughly Followed Our Path

I never shed many tears in my life, until I first stumbled into the program of Alcoholics Anonymous more than six years ago. Then the tears poured out. Sadness opened the floodgates in those early days. I cried out, because my disease had hurt so many people, including me. I cried out in desperation, for I had little hope, so much fear, and no place to hide.

Soon the tears dried up. Not because I began to recover as I worked the Twelve Steps. No, I wasn't ready to be honest or open or willing. The tears went away because my disease is such that it allowed me to forget just how much pain I'd been in. And that set me up to repeat the insanity of the past, expecting different results.

Once an alcoholic, always an alcoholic. That simple phrase is easy to understand when I'm at the very bottom of a relapse worse than the one before. That's what happened to me several times. Each time, the pain and desperation were more acute. There were more tears, too.

Last year I nearly died in a relapse. But God wasn't ready to let me go. Finally I was ready to let go and let God do for me what I was unable to do for myself. The Big Book says this is a simple program. All I had to do was give myself to it without hesitation.

Recently my journey through the Twelve Steps took me to Akron, Ohio, for a weekend-long celebration marking AA's 60th anniversary. It was here that Bill W. and Dr. Bob first met and AA was born. And here I arrived, unprepared for what would happen to me on that Saturday night.

The university gymnasium was packed to the rafters with about 10,000 people. The air conditioning couldn't keep up with all those bodies, and it was warm and sticky inside. But nobody seemed to care. An electric current surged through the crowd. The time for "the countdown" had arrived. Everyone stood up. The speaker started calling off days, months, then years of sobriety, and people sat when the number equaled their time in sobriety. I, with eight months sober, was back in my chair pretty fast. But on and on the countdown went, as the months became years, then decades, then many decades.

Suddenly this tremendous feeling of gratitude and humility rushed over me. "I should be dead," I thought to myself, "I shouldn't be here." And then I started crying, right in the midst of thousands of cheering people. But I didn't care. For the first time in my life, my tears sprang from hope and joy and love. God had saved me, while the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous were my chance to live life sober.

I kept crying while more people sat down and the number of years kept rising. Then I too was riveted as there were fewer and fewer old-timers still standing among the masses. All of us clapped and cheered when only two people were left. The runner-up sat with fifty-one years; the other finally took his seat when the number fifty-three was called.

Fifty-three years, or eight months, or one day. Stringing time together in sobriety does count. But for me, what counts even more is sharing in the experience, strength, and hope that are only possible through the program of Alcoholics Anonymous.

*William M.
St. Paul, Minnesota*

It's Green in Shangri-la

The other day while sorting through laundry, I glanced out the small window in our bathroom and thought, "Beyond my wildest dreams!" I stopped what I was doing and let out a sigh. Yes, it certainly has been.

Newly retired from our workaday worlds, Jim and I moved from our sleepy little Pennsylvania farming community this past spring to a hustle-bustle summer resort town on an island along the coast of Maine. We found a lovely little cottage nestled among soft ferns, fragrant pines, and striking oaks and cedars. It's a cabin, really. Our lobster-claw-shaped island has been described by more than one visitor, and without much exaggeration, as Shangri-La.

The biggest decision Jim and I face most days is which carriage road to visit or what meeting to hit the road for that evening. During the summer, when all the restaurants are wide open again and brimming with hungry visitors, where to have a quick lunch or dinner poses a brief dilemma.

While settling in this summer, just after the AA International in Minneapolis, I celebrated an anniversary of my own. As I usually do each year, I took a long look back and again was hit with gratitude. How had I gotten from that exhausted, incoherent, and terrified woman on that icy bathroom floor to being in this cozy little spot where I'm able to see colors, feel and want hugs, and join in laughter?

Change is good. Some days I get scared, scared I won't find "home" here in Maine as I did in Pennsylvania. I get lonely, too, for heart-to-hearts with the folks I share long memories and histories with. Every so often I feel heartsick, especially after a good visit or a long absence from back home. I get torn about not being there with my family and friends and needing and wanting to be here, too. Then I go downtown to an AA meeting and I feel better. I remember I don't have to do this alone. With God and the fellowship of AA, we can do and face anything together.

Change is good. It keeps me unself-centered. It keeps green my dependence on God. When I remember and trust this, I know I'll be all right. And that's a promise.

Kathy M.
Bar Harbor, Maine

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*

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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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