

# Recovery Times

A newsletter from Alcoholics Anonymous San Fernando Valley Central Office

VOL 31, NO. 2

MAR 2007

## When Is an AA Meeting Not an AA Meeting?

EIGHTEEN YEARS ago, I thought I was the brightest newcomer who ever walked through the clubhouse door. In only a month or so, I was asked to be the chairman of a weekly AA discussion meeting. I was thrilled. I wanted to be different; I wanted to be outstanding. I made photocopies of some “tests” from a national magazine: “Do You Have a Temper?”; “Do You Feel Sorry for Yourself?”; “How Normal Are You?” I passed the copies around as the meeting started and announced we would all read the tests and discuss our answers.

Several older members of the Fellowship descended upon me like a swarm of angry bees. Of course, they were right, and their action preserved the integrity of that particular AA meeting. But at the time, I could not understand what I had done that was so wrong. I had thought my idea was an original, creative approach to Steps Four and Ten. I mumbled and grumbled to myself for a few weeks and then went out and got drunk.

Ten years later, I came back to the Fellowship. I had known and admitted that I was an alcoholic the other time. But now, I was no longer merely trying to avoid the horrors of advanced alcoholism; I had already experienced the worst. Now, I was fighting for my life. AA may seem the “wise” thing to do in the mind of a high-bottom drunk; but for me, AA was the last-ditch escape from death or insanity. Only then was I able to look back and understand why my psychological parlor games years before had been downright offensive to those members who were already tuned in to the reality of “sobriety or death.”

But times have changed. We now seem more tolerant of the occasionally half-baked schemes of the newly sober. Some of the escapades of members during their “pigeon period” that I have seen over the years back up this statement: Alcoholics may be superior in imagination and brainpower—but not necessarily in good judgment.

One of my peppier pigeons had a knack for going from one farfetched project to another. The one I liked best was his plan to start his own publishing company and sell greeting cards for AA birthdays. He thought ideas for messages to put on the cards would make an excellent subject for a discussion meeting.

Another time, a visitor at one of our closed meetings told us he had been released that very same day from a local treatment center. He said he felt right at home because our newly appointed chairman had decided to

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*“The only way I overcame despair was by trusting that AA would always be there for me.”*

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show educational films on alcoholism that night, and they were the same films our visitor had been watching for the past two or three weeks.

One of the newer members in our group was puzzled because I said that I thought an AA meeting was a sacred trust, not something to be tampered with. “Well, maybe,” she replied, “but why make such a big deal out of it? They meant well, and we aren’t supposed to engage in controversy or oppose anything, are we? It worked out all right; nobody got hurt.”

Anyone who wonders why I think AA meetings are so important has just never seen me drunk. I truly believed I was hopeless (and many others agreed with me). The only way I overcame despair was by trusting that AA would always be there for me. I came to believe that I could depend on AA, that AA would

*continued on page 7*

# Calendar Events

## Upcoming Events

### **22nd Ventura Round-Up**

March 23 – 25, 2007

Oxnard, CA

Registration Info: Kim C. (805) 485-2466  
or Lynnmarie S. (805) 223-2771

### **20th Annual Men's International Conference**

March 29 – April 1, 2007

Las Vegas, NV

Website: [www.iaamcvegas.org](http://www.iaamcvegas.org)

### **30th Annual Spring Roundup**

April 5 – 8, 2007

San Diego, CA

Website: [www.sandiegospringroundup.com](http://www.sandiegospringroundup.com)

### **23rd Annual Tri-State Round-up**

May 18 – May 20, 2007

Laughlin, NV

Info: Debbie A. (928) 681-2217

Website: [www.tristate-roundup.com](http://www.tristate-roundup.com)

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

## Opportunities for Service

Your Central Office needs  
**telephone volunteers**  
for the Late Evening (9 PM - 12 Midnight) shift  
and the Overnight (12 midnight - 9 AM) shift.

If you have one year or more of continuous  
sobriety, you can sign up to do a shift  
(from your home!) once per month and  
help your fellow alcoholics.

*"Our very lives, as ex-problem drinkers,  
depend upon our constant thought of others  
and how we may help meet their needs."*

*(Alcoholics Anonymous, top of page 20)*

## Service Committee Schedule

- Mar. 19, 2006 **SFV H&I  
THIRD MONDAY**  
8PM Business Meeting  
7PM Get Acquainted Workshop  
5657 Lindley Ave.  
\*\*\*\*\*
- Apr. 2, 2007 **G.S. District #11  
FIRST MONDAY**  
6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30PM meeting  
315 W. Vine St., Glendale  
\*\*\*\*\*
- Apr. 2, 2007 **G.S. District #16  
FIRST MONDAY**  
6:15PM meeting  
15950 Chatsworth (church), Granada Hills  
\*\*\*\*\*
- Apr. 2, 2007 **G.S. District #17  
FIRST MONDAY**  
6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30PM meeting  
5000 Colfax (church), N. Hollywood  
\*\*\*\*\*
- Apr. 3, 2007 **G.S. District #2  
FIRST TUESDAY**  
6:30PM, 4011 Dunsmore, La Crescenta  
\*\*\*\*\*
- Apr. 4, 2007 **G.S. District #1  
FIRST WEDNESDAY**  
6:30PM, 7552 Remmet, Canoga Park  
\*\*\*\*\*
- Apr. 4, 2007 **SFV Board of Directors**  
6PM, Central Office  
\*\*\*\*\*
- Apr. 14, 2007 **G.S. District #7  
SECOND SATURDAY**  
Agua Dulce Woman's Club  
33201 Agua Dulce Cyn Rd  
Sharon G. (661) 951-0372  
\*\*\*\*\*
- Apr. 9, 2007 **SFV Intergroup  
SECOND MONDAY**  
6:30PM Orientation  
7PM Business Meeting  
St. Innocents Church  
5657 Lindley Ave., Tarzana

## 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 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](mailto:sfvaaews@sbcglobal.net)

### **San Fernando Valley Central Office Intergroup Representatives Meeting February 12, 2007**

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: Dan - 1 yr, Mike - 4 yrs, Laura - 7 yrs.

*Motion to adjourn 7:27 PM*

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

*These minutes are pending approval on  
March 12, 2007*

*Next Meeting - March 12, 2007*

*Prepared and submitted by:*

*Dawn H., Recording Secretary*

## **HAPPY BIRTHDAY!**

### **February 2007**

**Brian M. 16 Years**

**Reseda  
Big Book Disc. a lot of Years**

**Learning to Live  
Men's Stag 188 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.*

# Are We Really Willing to Change?

## *Step Six:*

*Were entirely ready  
to have God remove  
all these defects of character*

THE FIRST STEP was a cinch for me. I had run out of options, and the results of my drinking had been devastating; so self-debate about drinking simply didn't exist. I knew I couldn't drink safely. I did the First Step at the moment I entered a hospital for detoxification, and I have never questioned it since.

It then took several weeks to get to the Second Step, but it became apparent that I hadn't stopped drinking on my own. A Higher Power had obviously intervened, so the Third Step was understandable and necessary.

My sponsor pushed, shoved, and tugged, and I eventually did the Fourth and Fifth Steps. From that point onward, I made immense progress. Even the Ninth Step was faced with resolution and courage. I made the appropriate amends and experienced the feeling of liberation that my sponsor had promised. The other Steps were the logical extension of the program for me. I became active in Twelfth Step work and enjoyed the rewards.

Still, something was missing. There remained lingering feelings of vague discontent. The personality flaws I had uncovered in doing the Fourth and Fifth Steps had diminished—but were still there. And they started up the same old process that had produced feelings I had when drinking—impatience, irascibility, quick temper, and an unforgiving attitude toward others. I didn't like the way I felt, so I had dinner with my sponsor and discussed my situation frankly with him.

He gave me one of his knowing smiles, but said nothing. "Well," I demanded, "what's your solution to this problem?"

"You really think you've done all the Steps, don't you?" he asked. I assured him, somewhat indignantly, that I had. Hadn't I done the Fourth and Fifth with him? Had he not seen my Twelfth Step activity with his own eyes? Wasn't he aware of how faithfully—in my mind—I was doing the Tenth Step?

"All very true," he said, "but what about the Sixth Step?"

That came like a bolt from the blue. Of course, I was willing to change and have my Higher Power remove my defects of character, wasn't I? . . . Was I?

If I was sincerely willing to change, why did I remain so much the same? I realized that I had been paying lip service to the Sixth Step. Compared to most of the other Steps, the Sixth is apparently simple. I believed this, because no overt action seemed required. There is none of the dramatic confrontation that exists when we do the Ninth Step, nor is there the feeling of accomplishment that comes with the Twelfth. The Sixth is not dramatic. There are no enthusiastic witnesses to rush up and shake one's hand. It's a rather solitary affair and hence seems simple.

The Sixth Step means facing ourselves, and that is often more difficult than being honest with another person. I have found it difficult to lie to others but still easy to lie to myself. When I say, all too swiftly, "Of course, I'm willing to change," I now ask myself, "Really? Who's kidding who?" The fact that I am now questioning my willingness to change has increased my ability to be increasingly willing. I simply don't take the process as lightly as I did before. I can't learn anything unless I'm sincerely willing to learn. Nor will making myself promises to change have any significance until the willingness factor is developed.

My sponsor intervened again with a few of his pointed questions. "You played football in college, didn't you?" he asked—knowing full well that I had. He reminded me that I had told him I absolutely hated the practice, "getting all those lumps and bruises for no good reason." And he also reminded me how I had said I loved the actual game, especially the applause when I did something very well.

"You know," he said, "no one gets all excited about the practice. It has no flash to it. It's the game that counts. But a good game performance requires hard practice. And the Sixth Step can be compared with football practice. If you're going to continue to make progress in the program and with the other eleven Steps, you have to really work on the Sixth Step. Don't stand around on one foot waiting for applause. There won't be any. But you'll play a far better game."

What my sponsor told me carries an important moral lesson. It's one I'm working diligently to learn, because I now—finally—see the true value of the Sixth Step.

R.B.  
Manhattan, New York

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# Why Bother with the Big Book?

AROUND THE TABLES just the other night, a guy said to me, “You’re hung-up on the Big Book. There are other books and other ways to work the program. Remember, those guys who wrote the Big Book didn’t have much sobriety when they wrote it.”

The first part of this statement, I considered a compliment. The last part perplexed me, because I had been thinking how wonderful it was that the Big Book had been put together at all by the pioneers, during what must have been trying and terrifying times. I had just reread Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age, which is poignant, to say the least.

So I am hung-up on the Big Book. Honesty compels me to admit it. For me, the Big Book is a tool to be used, and so I keep my copy in A-number-one shape through reading and rereading it. Since using the Big Book makes each day joyous for me, I’ll stay hung-up, thank you.

The Big Book needs no defense. Its obvious merit is conclusive. One of the most ironic twists of the alcoholic mind is demonstrated night after night by some members’ underrating of the Big Book. Just buying a copy of it isn’t the key to sobriety. Yet I have heard again and again at meetings remarks like “Never have read it” or “Read it once when I first came in” or “Why bother with the Big Book?” or “It’s not relevant today.” Whether the remarks focus on the short-term sobriety of the authors or on the book’s nonrelevancy, the criticism seems to advocate “half measures” that might lead someone back to the horror chamber.

Though I am not a biblical scholar, I think I am safe in saying that Moses came down with the Ten Commandments some goodly number of years before Ezekiel started writing. But Ezekiel doesn’t say Moses was all wrong when he transmitted the Commandments. Ezekiel doesn’t say, “Don’t read Exodus—you know, Moses only had a few years of recovery when he wrote down the Commandments.” Nothing of the sort; Ezekiel reaffirms Moses, because what Moses wrote down was good for all ages. I believe the Big Book was divinely inspired and that it is a book for all ages.

Some time in the late 1930’s, Bill W. wrote the portion of the Big Book including (on page 85) these words: “It is easy to let up on the spiritual program of action and rest on our laurels. We are headed for trouble if we do, for alcohol is a subtle foe. We are not cured of alcoholism. What we really have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition.” That statement is as true today as it was then. Reading the Big Book and using it as a guide for spiritual progress has freed me to develop and grow.

Yeah, I’m hung-up on the Big Book. But then, I’m hung-up on the “Twelve and Twelve,” the Grapevine, As Bill Sees It, my wife, my son, my home, my clients, and you. And I think I have found a dandy, peachy-keen way of life just because some clowns with only a couple of years’ sobriety decided to write a book. Thank God they didn’t wait!

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## Co-founder Quotes

### More on Emotional Sobriety

In the first six months of my own sobriety, I worked hard with many alcoholics. Not a one responded. Yet this work kept me sober. It wasn’t a question of those alcoholics giving me anything. My stability came out of trying to give, not out of demanding that I receive.

Thus I think it can work out with emotional sobriety. 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.

*Bill W.*

### Behind the Eight Ball

The fact that my sobriety has been maintained continuously for thirteen and a half years doesn’t allow me to think that I am necessarily any further away from my next drink than any of you people. I’m still very human, and I still think a double Scotch would taste awfully good. If it wouldn’t produce disastrous results, I might try it. I don’t know. I have no reason to think that it would taste any different--but I have no legitimate reason to believe that the results would be any different either. They were always the same. I always wound up back of the dear old eight ball.

*Dr. Bob*

# Sponsorship

AROUND THE TABLES, the arrival of an active alcoholic who comes alone for help is an event. But the fortunate one comes in tow, brought by one or more AAs. He already has an AA contact, a sponsor—more often than not, a person who was a stranger but a few hours ago.

Think back to those terrifying early days. This stranger says, “We’ll be there at seven,” and at seven, they are there. A guy presses a blue-jacketed book into your hands, saying, “Read it. Tomorrow night, we’ll take you to the X Group.” The sponsor is helping, sharing his experience, introducing you to this new way of life. Days, weeks, months pass by, and you are neatly dressed, clean-shaven, saying to some sick devil, “I was just like you.” And you help him down the steps to the room where there are friends and a heavenly coffee aroma. Think back, you lucky ones.

I was so sick, terrified of what waited inside that meeting place. How did I make it? I know now, it was prayer—and the people at what is now my home group. They gave me phone numbers. And so, weak, sick, terrified, and confused as I was, I came back again and again and again.

When I had been around about six or seven months, another newcomer roared in, and he was a lulu. I sure wouldn’t have wanted to sponsor him! I was barely making it myself. He stuck around, and five months later, he wrote a note to me while I was in jail. When I got out, we began to call each other every day. Now, we go to a lot of meetings together, and we share with each other, and when I write one of these little essays, I read it to him. He will soon be celebrating his second anniversary. We aren’t exactly sponsors to each other, but man, does it help to have an AA buddy!

I correspond with another member who can’t be considered a sponsor in the narrow sense, either; but oh, how important she is to me! She wrote, “Although I did not have a

sponsor per se, I came to believe that it is one of the most vital of AA activities. Perhaps it is the beginning of responsibility for most of us. It was for me,”

I looked up “sponsor” in Roget’s Thesaurus. One aspect is under “duty,” and the other is under “security.”

Under “duty,” we find the concept of responsibility carried out “at one’s own risk or peril.” When a poor fellow stumbles in out of nowhere, I feel a keen sense of responsibility toward him, to give him the tools of the program, to offer opportunities, to be there when he has questions—to assume some risk. What risk? The risk that I’ll have to do something, to put myself out, to take on the problems of another. In other words, to accept the responsibility of the AA program, and help him. If he doesn’t want me or finds another more to his liking, fine! But in the meantime, I’ll be around.

Under “security,” the idea is provision of a guarantee. Accepting responsibility, however, does not mean that I am guaranteeing his sobriety. It means only that I’ll help to the best of my ability. As I rise to greet the newcomer, if I am trying to practice the program, the Fellowship is sponsoring me. That is, the collective experience of AA is guaranteeing that the outcome will be right.

Sponsoring a newcomer can never hurt the sponsor if the sponsor is truly practicing the program. The sponsor can only be helping himself. So, in doing our duty toward a newcomer, we have the security offered by the Fellowship that will aid us in our own progress along the way. AA is a program of growth; but today, as the Fellowship expands, one of the means for growth—namely, sponsorship—is too often overlooked. Think about the magnificent chance you have when next some alcoholic like me stumbles in. Please help him.

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## Availing Yourself of a Sponsor

“Not every AA member has had a sponsor. But thousands of us say we would not be alive were it not for the special friendship of one recovered alcoholic in the first months and years of our sobriety.

“In the earliest days of AA, the term ‘sponsor’ was not in the AA jargon. Then a few hospitals in Akron, Ohio, and New York began to accept alcoholics (under that diagnosis) as patients—if a sober AA member would agree to ‘sponsor’ the sick man or woman. The sponsor took the patient to the hospital, visited him or her regularly, was present when the patient was discharged, and took the patient home and then to an AA meeting. At the meeting, the sponsor introduced the newcomer to other happily nondrinking alcoholics. All through the early months of recovery, the sponsor stood by, ready to answer questions or to listen whenever needed.

“Sponsorship turned out to be such a good way to help people get established in AA that it has become the custom followed throughout the AA world, even when hospitalization is not necessary.”  
*Living Sober*, page 26

# AA Meeting...

*cont. from Pg. 1*

never let me down; and this belief enabled me to turn my overwhelming fear into faith. I still believe today that without AA I would probably not be able to stay sober.

"I am responsible" (along with you and you, that is). "When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of AA always to be there." As the saying goes, "You may be the only copy of the Big Book that another person will ever see."

I am not only responsible to the newcomer as a way-shower to sobriety, but also responsible to older members as a part of the foundation necessary for them to maintain and protect their sobriety. When an alcoholic needs a meeting, he or she doesn't need a movie, a sales talk, a sermon, or any gimmick. The collective experience of AAs everywhere has been that only an alcoholic can really understand another alcoholic, whether that alcoholic is still drinking or has attained some continuous sobriety.

I now attend AA meetings to help support the group and to make myself available in case someone who is still suffering happens to come through the door wanting hope. But first, above everything else, today the same as yesterday, I attend AA meetings for me, because I am powerless over alcohol, and without help, it is too much for me. So please don't mess with my meetings.

B.M.  
Huntington, West Virginia

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# Ham on Wry - humor from The Grapevine

Marriage involving a drunk is difficult, at best.

The first year the drunk speaks and the spouse listens.

The second year the spouse speaks and the drunk listens.

The third year they both speak and the neighbors listen.

*Richard M.*

« « « » » »

A drunk with a three-foot tall parrot on his shoulder stopped at a watering hole and took a seat.

"My goodness!" exclaimed the bartender, when she looked up. "Where in heaven's name did you find that?"

"Just stop at any bar around here and you'll find dozens of them," replied the parrot.

*Pat M.*

« « « » » »

How can you tell the difference between a sponsor and a therapist? The only time a sponsor uses the word "closure" is before the word "mouth."

*Andrew D.*

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**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

Renewal

Additional Contribution \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**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 \_\_\_\_\_