

# Recovery Times

A newsletter from Alcoholics Anonymous San Fernando Valley Central Office VOL 32, NO. 12 DEC 2008

## More Like Twelfth Step Work

*“God does work in mysterious ways.”*

Last Christmas was going to be a bumner. I had separated from my husband in September. It was my second time sober at this season, and I was remembering the first time—a nightmare . . .

Having been in the program just four months, I was still on very shaky ground. My husband had no understanding about a recovering alcoholic, though he claimed he did. He read everything I had in the house on AA, but he disagreed with most of it.

He showed his “understanding” by getting bombed that Christmas, and as the day progressed, he became increasingly worse. As always, we invited our neighbors. Out of six, one was sober and one reasonably so. I got the usual “Have a drink. You’ve been off the sauce for a while—you can handle it.” I was sorely tempted. I was becoming more uptight and angry at my better half and his behavior. My old pattern had been to reach for a drink and keep drinking till I was in my own little world and the hurt couldn’t hurt me. Instead, I stuck to a full glass of orange juice and ice till the liquor ran out and the party was over.

One month later, I had a slip, though I really can’t call it that—I was well aware of what I was doing. It went on for a week, and it taught me several things:

(1) An alcoholic cannot take just one drink. I tried to make that first one last half an hour; within fifteen minutes, it was gone. I inhaled the second and third and so on till I blacked out. (2) When you start drinking after a length of abstinence, you continue right where you left off—it doesn’t become better, just worse. (3) I had been existing in AA, not living it. I had gone in with the wrong purpose—to sober up for my husband, family, and friends, everyone except myself.

With God’s love and help and my wise sponsor, I returned to AA after a week of living in hell . . .

Now, another Christmas was approaching, and I was filled with dread. One consolation was that I didn’t have booze around me this year. But I felt sadness for many reasons, as many of us do at this time of year.

I made up my mind that I was going to enjoy this Christmas, and I put on my thinking cap. Why not an open house for my AA family? The motives at the time were purely selfish: I wouldn’t be alone; surrounded by AAs, I would feel safe. After I passed the word around at various meetings, it looked promising. I was kept so busy preparing for the big day that I had little time for feeling despondent.

Christmas morning, the phone rang. Someone wouldn’t be able to make it. Well, okay, it was thoughtful of them to call. Half an hour later, another call—same thing. I was determined not to let this get me down, to keep happy thoughts! The next call was from my husband, wishing me a Merry Christmas. He asked me how I was doing. I told him “just great” and asked him if he’d like to come over in the evening. But he knew about my open house plans. When the conversation ended, I felt such a pang of loneliness and sorrow that I wanted to die. I asked God to get me out of this depressed feeling, and please make things better.

Within the hour, one by one, my AA family started to show up. (He does answer prayers.) In the evening, we all piled into cars and went to our usual Friday AA meeting. Afterward, my guests came back with me, and more joined us. The house was filled with love, laughter, and gaiety. What a difference a year can make, if you let it happen.

I thought I was being selfish but turned out to be anything but. One man’s wife had just had a baby the night before, and he and his son were at loose ends. Another friend couldn’t spend the whole day with her family, so she and her kitten joined us. I wasn’t the only one who needed to be with our AA family. My open house was not selfish, but more like Twelfth Step work, though I wasn’t aware of it at the time.

The day was coming to a close, and I wished it could go on. I hadn’t had a Christmas like that in years—a big family gathering. God does work in mysterious ways. This Christmas will be even better—the best is yet to come for those who believe.

*D. S., Deer Isle, Maine*

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# Calendar Events

## Upcoming Events

### **19th Annual River Roundup**

January 8 - 11, 2009  
Laughlin, NV  
Website: [www.rcco-aa.org](http://www.rcco-aa.org)  
Info: Hildy 928-754-4613

### **34th Annual San Fernando Valley A.A. Convention**

January 30 - February 1, 2008  
Woodland Hills, CA  
Info: 818-734-0383  
Website: [www.sfvaaconvention.org](http://www.sfvaaconvention.org)

## **S. F. Valley Central Office Holiday Sales Schedule:**

Wednesday, Dec. 24, 2008  
OPEN 9:00 AM - Noon

Thursday, Dec. 25, 2008  
CLOSED ALL DAY

Friday, Dec. 26, 2008  
CLOSED ALL DAY for Inventory

Wednesday, Dec. 31, 2008  
OPEN 9:00 AM - Noon

Thursday, Jan. 1, 2009  
CLOSED ALL DAY

Normal hours will resume  
on Friday, Jan. 2, 2009.

## Service Committee Schedule

- Dec. 15, 2008 **SFV H&I  
THIRD MONDAY**  
8PM Business Meeting  
7PM Get Acquainted Workshop  
5657 Lindley Ave.  
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- Jan. 5, 2009 **G.S. District #11  
FIRST MONDAY**  
6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30pm meeting  
315 W. Vine St., Glendale  
\*\*\*\*\*
- Jan. 5, 2009 **G.S. District #16  
FIRST MONDAY**  
6:15PM meeting  
15950 Chatsworth (church), Granada Hills  
\*\*\*\*\*
- Jan. 5, 2009 **G.S. District #17  
FIRST MONDAY**  
6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30pm meeting  
5000 Colfax (church), N. Hollywood  
\*\*\*\*\*
- Jan. 6, 2009 **G.S. District #2  
FIRST TUESDAY**  
5:30PM, 4011 Dunsmore, La Crescenta  
\*\*\*\*\*
- Jan. 7, 2009 **G.S. District #1  
FIRST WEDNESDAY**  
6:30PM, 7552 Remmet, Canoga Park  
\*\*\*\*\*
- Jan. 7, 2009 **SFV Board of Directors**  
6:30PM, Central Office  
\*\*\*\*\*
- Jan. 10, 2009 **G.S. District #7  
SECOND SATURDAY**  
9AM, Agua Dulce Woman's Club  
33201 Agua Dulce Cyn Rd  
\*\*\*\*\*
- Jan. 12, 2009 **SFV Intergroup  
SECOND MONDAY**  
6:30PM Orientation, 7PM Business Meeting  
St. Innocents Church  
5657 Lindley Ave., Tarzana

## *Things We Cannot Change...*

*Frank D. — 26 Years*

*Jim B. — 27 Years*

*Dale D. — 27 Years*

*Eddie E. — 27 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).

## **To All Meeting Secretaries**

***Help us keep your meeting information up to date.***

Updates can be completed by mail or in person during Literature Sales Hours at San Fernando Valley Central Office.

## **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>.

# 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 2009 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:sfvaanews@sbcglobal.net)

### **San Fernando Valley Central Office Intergroup Representatives Meeting November 10, 2008**

Rick A. 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: *Sal – 1 year, Dave – 2 years,  
Melisse – 4 years, Dawn – 13 years,  
Jason – 13 years, Marilyn – 17 years,  
Carey – 18 years, Ron – 19 years,  
Bryan – 21 years*

*Motion to adjourn 7:20 PM*

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

*These minutes are pending approval on  
December 8, 2008*

*Next Meeting - December 8, 2008*

*Prepared and submitted by:*

*Dawn H., Recording Secretary*

## **HAPPY BIRTHDAY!**

### **November 2008**

<b>Cynthia B.</b>	<b>9 years</b>
<b>Anonymous</b>	<b>11 years</b>
<b>Anonymous</b>	<b>18 years</b>

#### 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.*

# Tolerance of Intolerance

One of the toughest things that a newcomer has to face in AA is the sad fact that being human, we do not always extend the practice of tolerance to those who are intolerant. We come into AA hoping to find an answer to our big problem—drinking too much. We find the answer and then we begin to find a few other things. Maybe we put AA to work for ourselves and we stop drinking. In a few weeks we think we know the Program “by heart.” We almost wish they hadn’t been in such a hurry to write the Book because we have a few ideas too that should have been included. And certain parts of it maybe we could have written even a little better. We admit we are alcoholics but we don’t accept the fact too gracefully. Then maybe we figure we know the Program so well that we could risk a little controlled drinking. We assure ourselves that if we have any trouble, we know right where to go. We know the answers now so maybe it’s safe to fool around with a drink. We have the drink and we learn the hard way (if we’re lucky enough to get back to AA, and there have been plenty who never had the second chance) that the First Step has a lot of meat in it.

Maybe we didn’t quite understand it. Far from knowing the whole Program, we learn that we haven’t even got the first step yet! So we come back, feeling sheepish, and keep our lips buttoned and our ears pinned back and we begin to learn. There are a few members who now look down their noses at us. We are labelled “slipper” and it irks us. If we are unfortunate enough to slip several times we become aware that in some circles we are ostracized. They accuse us of “kicking it around.” We get sore and get drunk again. Why can’t the narrow minded so and so’s show a little of the tolerance they talk so much about?

Well, the answer is that AA is made up largely of humans. And being human they are not perfect. They are occasionally intolerant. It has ever been thus. Roger Williams was banished from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts by the elders of the Church because he preached some doctrines that varied slightly from their own. The elders had forgotten that they had left England a short while before, to escape a religion forced upon them by the State. Yet they saw no reason why they should not do the same thing now that they were the “State.”

Newcomers will be helping themselves to a big piece of AA if they can grow to accept the intolerance of others. They themselves can learn to be tolerant. That means tolerant of others who think differently, talk differently and live differently. To put it simply, they can learn to be tolerant of intolerance. They don’t have to do this. They always have the free choice of getting burned up and maybe getting drunk. But why make it tough for yourself? Easy does it sometimes means “Do it the easy way.”

This difficulty isn’t confined solely to newcomers either. Sometimes an older member deeply resents the fact that a certain newcomer on whom they have been literally “beating their brains out” is intolerant of their handling, intolerant of questions and opinions that were given only to help them get sober. They too can learn that everyone gets AA in his or her own way. There are no musts. You can’t help a newcomer by twisting his arm and making him yell “uncle.”

No older member means to be intolerant. He is so anxious to help others in return for the help he got that he may be a little too anxious to show you the steps he took that helped him get free of alcohol. His intolerance is not vicious. So try to overlook it and latch on to somebody else whose ideas may seem more acceptable to you.

And no newcomer means to be intolerant either. His thinking is bound to be pretty shaky for a few weeks or months and if he doesn’t seem to like your brand of AA help him find somebody else who practices the Program a little differently than you do. This may be just what the doctor ordered and you will have really helped him to sobriety by giving up.

“Tolerance of Intolerance” may sound a little like the sequel to a colossal D.W. Griffith movie but it may be worth thinking about if you are being annoyed by someone in AA.

*C. C., Bronxville, New York*

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## Humor from the Grapevine

A drunk, fired because he loafed on the job, sought a letter of recommendation from his ex-boss. The employer, though eager to be honest, didn’t want to hurt the worker’s reputation. Having given it a good deal of thought, he finally wrote the following:

“Dear Sir, You will be lucky if you can get this man to work for you.”

« « « » » »

An A.A. member was trying to get ketchup to come out of the jar. During her struggle, the phone rang. She asked her four-year-old daughter to answer it.

“It’s the minister, Mommy,” the child called to her mother. Then she added, “Mommy can’t come to the phone to talk to you right now. She’s busy hitting the bottle.”

« « « » » »

# Spiritual Life 101

When I was early in my recovery, a fellow AA member in my home group said that if we wished to keep and maintain our sobriety, we had to learn to live something called a “spiritual life.”

I immediately remembered how, as a child, I was required to complete a rigorous program of religious education to become a member of my parent’s church. I therefore assumed that I was once again in need of formal training in order to follow such a path.

Eager to begin my first lesson on how to live a “spiritual life,” I sought the advice of an elder member. How could I begin the practice of a spiritual life? He proceeded to answer my questions in a manner that simplified this subject.

The old-timer first asked me, “Did you pray today, and did you, to the best of your abilities, turn over all your worries and problems to the God of your understanding?” I replied “Yes.”

Then my friend asked me, “Have you been, to the best of your abilities, the most honest person you could be today?” I was able to once again answer yes.

“Did you show concern for, or were you, to the best of your abilities, useful to another human being today?” After recalling a good deed I had willingly taken part in earlier in the day, I said, “Yes.”

Finally my friend asked, “Most important of all, did you, to the best of your knowledge, harm anyone today, and if you did, did you do all you possibly could to make amends and keep your side of the street clean?” “Yes,” I answered.

“Then,” my friend said, “from the sound of things, you’ve just answered your own question. If you have the ability to accomplish these four things in one day’s time, and not take a drink, then what you are living is a spiritual life as it’s described in the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous.”

Enlightened by my friend’s words of wisdom, I understood that AA truly is a program of action, and that the only way to obtain a spiritual life is to live one. Class dismissed!

*Tracey B.  
Williamstown, West Virginia*

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## *Co-founder Quotes*

### **Bill W**

“Honesty with ourselves and others gets us sober, but it is tolerance that keeps us that way.

“Experience shows that few alcoholics will long stay away from a group just because they don’t like the way it is run. Most return and adjust themselves to whatever conditions they must. Some go to a different group, or form a new one.

“In other words, once an alcoholic fully realizes that he cannot get well alone, he will somehow find a way to get well and stay well in the company of others. It has been that way from the beginning of A.A. and probably always will be so.”

*Reprinted from As Bill Sees It, page 312,  
with permission AA World Services, Inc.*

# Making Amends

## *The Twelve Steps give us a way to repair and rebuild the past*

Do any of the following remarks sound familiar? “The one I hurt the most when I drank was myself.” “I make amends by staying sober.” “When I wrote the list of people I had harmed, I put my name at the top of the list.”

Those remarks turn up often in AA meetings when Steps Eight and Nine come up for discussion. However, like much of the conventional wisdom in our Fellowship, they have no connection at all with the AA program.

Significantly, the Steps say nothing about forgiveness, either divine or human. They say nothing about “making amends to myself.” Nowhere is there talk about “forgiving myself.” Far more to the point, the Twelve Steps provide me with specific instructions on a way to repair and rebuild the past so that I *feel* forgiven.

And that works!

Forgiveness is a commodity I heard about frequently in the religion of my youth—divine forgiveness, that is. To my growing despair, however, no one showed me how to experience forgiveness. I never learned how to feel forgiven. There was no method that would remove the growing load of guilt and acute discomfort I carried.

Believing in nothing by the time I arrived in AA, I heard, for the first time in my life, about “God *as we understood Him*.” With a nearly audible sigh of relief, I saw that nobody in AA argued about whose Higher Power was higher. My new friends said, “Just approach God on the basis of *your* understanding.”

Moved by their interest and love, I began to live with a newfound hope and direction and slowly started to work with the Twelve Steps. A written inventory after a year of sobriety, then a Fifth Step, and I experienced an awareness of God that was new and strengthening. Halting efforts with Steps Six and Seven seemed to make some improvements in me. My relationships with God and with other people were on different ground, and my life was demonstrably better.

Waiting as long as I possibly could, I finally went from there into the amends Steps: Eight and Nine. Apologizing has never been my favorite activity. Rather, I’ve been influenced by the person who exclaimed, “I may have my faults, but being wrong is not one of them.”

Pain, my most effective motivator, finally moved in and made the decision for me. I made a list of those I had harmed. In my opinion, that list should be written and should include *everyone* ever harmed, whether they are

alive or dead, whether or not it is possible to find them, whether or not amends “would injure them or others.” I think we should write the complete list first, then begin deciding what to do in each case.

On the question of someone who deserves amends but can’t be found, an AA friend of mine in Chicago has a precise answer. He asks, “If he owed you money, do you think you could find him?”

Early in my sobriety, I made a substantial production of looking up some people in other parts of the country I owed money to from my drinking years. I paid them and basked in their complimentary responses to the repayment. As with many things in my life, I created a mild tumult about this and managed to mention it to most AA friends of mine, regardless of what we were discussing.

In making my amends list, however, I assiduously overlooked those who were close to me, those who had put up with me when no one else would, those who had bought me out of trouble, who had been shriveled by my sarcasm, frightened by my anger, and appalled at my complete lack of concern for anyone else. I was so busy “making amends to myself” and “being good to myself” that I ignored the most important amends of all.

Eventually, after two years of not drinking, I was unable to continue lying about my failure to work the program in this critical part of my life. Inner pain overpowered my talent for self-deception. I gave up, once again, and began to follow directions. With immense reluctance but with no other options, I made those amends, and wonderful things began to happen. I started to experience the promises on pages 83 and 84 in the Big Book.

Another important change appeared. Where before I could pray but never quiet my thoughts for meditation, I could now sit still and meditate for twenty minutes in the morning and fifteen minutes at night. In a few months, this grew to half an hour in the morning and twenty minutes in the evening. Healing those relationships had dissolved a block that had prevented meditation.

While I might talk endlessly about my contact with God and my spiritual growth—and I frequently have—the best measurement for my relationship with God is the condition of my relationships with other human beings. If they’re in bad shape, then my lofty spiritual talk is just empty conversation. At that point, what I need to do is repair my part in the damaged relationships. Without that, my chances of growing closer to God are nil. It’s all connected. →

# Making Amends

*continued*

A Big Book discussion of amends (page 82) spells it out: "The alcoholic is like a tornado roaring his way through the lives of others. Hearts are broken. Sweet relationships are dead. Affections have been uprooted. Selfish and inconsiderate habits have kept the home in turmoil. *We feel a man is unthinking when he says that sobriety is enough.*" (The emphasis is mine.) "He is like the farmer who came up out of his cyclone cellar to find his home ruined. To his wife, he remarked, 'Don't see anything the matter here, Ma. Ain't it grand the wind stopped blowin'?' "

Precise and specific, the message is clear. I don't make amends by staying sober. I hurt many other people badly and far worse than myself when I drank. Unfortunately, I've done this sober, too. Steps Eight and Nine are not limited to what I did while drinking. They are concerned with bad behavior, drunk or sober.

Nowhere in the AA program do we read that we're supposed to make amends to ourselves or put our names on the Eighth Step list. The program says nothing about forgiveness, either divine or human. It simply guides us in the direction that enables us to feel forgiven. *We experience* forgiveness by using the Steps to make amends for the past. We are healed by our effort to repair the damage we caused others, and this, in turn, repairs the damage within us, damage created by our heedless, totally selfish actions.

We *can* change the past. The Twelve Steps give us a highly effective technique for rebuilding the past as we repair damage caused by our dishonest, self-centered living. It works. In my experience, the spiritual life has little to do with talk about God and everything to do with working the Steps. Each Step of the twelve is equally spiritual.

Again and again, AA members sober for years and suffering from such symptoms as depression, anxiety, fear, hostility, boredom, and apathy lose those crippling conditions when they clean up the past. Time after time, AA's who have been unable to stay sober find the strength to refuse the first drink as a result of rebuilding the past.

Through the wisdom of the program, we have a simple, powerful prescription for freeing ourselves from the consequences of dishonest, selfish living. It's simple and basic. Without this kind of cleaning job with the Steps, the past still controls us. On the other hand, when we face and admit our wrongs and make direct restitution wherever possible, we're suddenly free. With today no longer a hostage of yesterday, we begin to live with the freedom and joy God intended for us.

*P. M.,  
Riverside, Illinois*

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