

# Recovery Times

A newsletter from Alcoholics Anonymous San Fernando Valley Central Office

VOL 33, NO. 6 JUNE 2009

## AA Lite

The speaker at our meeting last week told us that after leaving rehab, she got into the “program.” She said she now has lots of “program” people in her life who help her out by talking “program” to her.

As the years have gone by, I have been exposed to more and more of this language about the “program.” After wondering whether I was just being intolerant and repeatedly taking the Tenth Step on the question, I consulted old-timers, the Big Book, and the “Twelve and Twelve” and gave the whole thing some serious thought. I have begun to see a pattern. What we have here seems to be a separate agenda, a whole other approach to recovery, one which is slowly replacing the plain, simple, time-tested AA approach (which I express as: Trust God, Clean House, and Help Others).

For example, the “program” tells us to put our own names first on our Eighth Step list and declares, as if declaring an obvious truth, that we cannot love or forgive anyone until we love and forgive ourselves. I can’t find this sentiment anywhere in the Big Book; it is clearly derived from therapy. These notions may be useful. They may be comforting. But they are not AA.

The premises of the “program” concentrate not so much on recovering from alcoholism as on “feeling good about myself” and the acquisition of individual happiness not as a by-product but as the sole *purpose* of recovery. The “program” emphasizes ridding ourselves of anything that makes us feel bad (shame, guilt, etc.) by activating “self-love” in our lives.

The “program” says that “AA is a selfish program.” This AA slang is too easily misunderstood. Far from being selfish, our Fellowship is founded on humility; our basic text directs us to be rid of selfishness. The purpose of AA is a spiritual experience and service to God and others.

This “program” seems to be about self-powered recovery. The fact that we are powerless to produce our own recovery is ignored. What really convinced me that I was not making a big deal out of nothing was the fre-

quency of relapses and the pervasive discontent of newer members.

“Program” seems to be a kind of “AA Lite”—a generic, processed form of recovery, with one-third less pain. Certainly people with problems other than alcoholism are welcome to apply our twelve suggestions to their “issues.” But we in AA have one primary purpose, one responsibility, one Twelfth Step requirement. We cannot try to be “all things to all people.” It is simply not our duty, nor is it our right, to carry some other message in AA. We have plenty of work of our own to do.

AA does not claim to have a monopoly on recovery. But we do have a distinct message of our own and it is this we must carry and not some other approach—no matter how valid, useful, or appealing it may seem.

In my view, we are not a “program”; we are a fellowship. The only program we have is the Twelve Steps, which Dr. Bob summed up as “love and service.” Our way is to move out of self and into a great life, an empowering relationship with God as we understand him. Each of us may have our own understanding of certain spiritual terms, but our directions for taking the Steps are not matters for private revision. Our recovery requires forgiving others and making amends. Serving the needs of others is essential for our survival. In short, we need to actually get better—not merely feel better.

If even the Lord’s Prayer is not free from attempts to reword and improve it (I’ve heard, for example, “daily strength” for “daily bread”), then our lifesaving AA instructions are probably not safe from revision. But each of us, alone, in our groups, or with those we sponsor, can reexamine notions and sayings we may have taken for granted. Am I doing it my way? My therapist’s way? Some other Fellowship’s? Has AA become merely another self-help group? Am I carrying the AA message? Without the plain, genuine, spiritual principles of AA, where would I be today?

*Abe S., Belchertown, Massachusetts*

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# Calendar Events

## Upcoming Events

### **19th Annual H&I Bike-N-4-Books**

June 6, 2009  
Van Nuys, CA  
Website: www.sfvhi.org

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

June 18 - 21, 2009  
Indian Wells, CA  
Info: 760-321-6568  
Website: www.desertpowwow.com

### **36th Annual Antelope Valley Round Up**

June 26 - 28, 2009  
Lancaster, CA  
Registration Info: Marian G. 661-209-4642

### **8th Annual Tehachapi Mountain Roundup**

July 10 - 12, 2009  
Tehachapi, CA  
Info: Helen 661-823-1447, Kent 661-823-0518  
Email: tehachapi\_roundup@yahoo.com  
Website: www.tehachapiroundup.com

### **17th Annual Foothill Roundup**

July 30 - August 2, 2009  
La Canada-Flintridge, CA  
Email: jojopelli@gmail.com  
Website: www.foothillroundup.org

## *Things We Cannot Change...*

*William "Scotty" G.* — *31 Years*  
*Franz P.* — *33 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).

## Valley Events

Central Office will be  
**CLOSED**

for literature sales on *Saturday, July 4, 2009*  
for the Independence Day Holiday. We will  
be open on Sunday July 5th, 9AM - 5PM.

## Service Committee Schedule

- Jun. 15, 2009 **SFV H&I  
THIRD MONDAY**  
8PM Business Meeting  
7PM Get Acquainted Workshop  
5657 Lindley Ave.  
\*\*\*\*\*
- Jul. 6, 2009 **G.S. District #11  
FIRST MONDAY**  
6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30PM meeting  
315 W. Vine St., Glendale  
\*\*\*\*\*
- Jul. 6, 2009 **G.S. District #16  
SECOND MONDAY**  
6:15PM meeting  
15950 Chatsworth (church), Granada Hills  
\*\*\*\*\*
- Jul. 6, 2009 **G.S. District #17  
FIRST MONDAY**  
6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30PM meeting  
5000 Colfax (church), N. Hollywood  
\*\*\*\*\*
- Jul. 7, 2009 **G.S. District #2  
FIRST TUESDAY**  
5:30PM, 4011 Dunsmore, La Crescenta  
\*\*\*\*\*
- Jul. 1, 2009 **G.S. District #1  
FIRST WEDNESDAY**  
6:30PM, 7552 Remmet, Canoga Park  
\*\*\*\*\*
- Jul. 8, 2009 **SFV Board of Directors**  
6:30PM, Central Office  
\*\*\*\*\*
- Jul. 11, 2009 **G.S. District #7  
SECOND SATURDAY**  
9AM, Agua Dulce Woman's Club  
33201 Agua Dulce Cyn Rd  
\*\*\*\*\*
- Jul. 13, 2009 **SFV Intergroup  
SECOND MONDAY**  
6:30PM Orientation, 7PM Business Meeting  
St. Innocents Church  
5657 Lindley Ave., Tarzana

## AA Book Price Increase!

On July 1, 2009, all AA World Service Books will increase in price. The increases range from \$0.25 to \$2.00 per item. The increase includes the Big Book, 12&12, and all other World Service books.

AA World Service Pamphlets, Grapevine publications and other literature items are not included in this particular price increase.

## **To All Meeting Secretaries**

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

If your meeting has changed its Location, Time of Meeting, Meeting Name or Type of Meeting, please update this information *as soon as possible* with your Central Office. Updates can be completed by mail or in person during Literature Sales Hours at San Fernando Valley Central Office. Our address is listed on the back cover of this newsletter. Meeting updates *must* be completed in writing. Any questions can be answered by calling your Central Office at (818) 988-3001 and asking for a staff member.

# Service Opportunities & News

## Service Opportunities in the San Fernando Valley

### PUBLIC INFORMATION COMMITTEE -

Provides information to the general public about what A.A. does and does not do. Could always use volunteers, especially young people and Spanish speaking A.A.'s for health fairs and to speak at various schools and businesses. Contact Central Office (818) 988-3001.

### HOSPITAL AND INSTITUTIONS COMMITTEE -

Carries the message of Alcoholics Anonymous into hospitals, prisons & treatment facilities to those who are unable to get out to meetings. Meets the third Monday of each month 8:00 pm (Get Acquainted Workshop, 7:00 pm) at St. Innocent's Church, 5657 Lindley Ave, Tarzana, CA. For more information, contact Central Office at 988-3001.

### SAN FERNANDO VALLEY INTERGROUP -

Elected Intergroup representatives maintain and develop policies for Central Office, and inform other IG Reps about Alkathons, fund raisers, etc. Meets second Monday, monthly, St. Innocent's Church, 5657 Lindley Ave, Tarzana, CA. Orientation 6:30 pm, Meeting at 7:00 pm. Contact: Central Office at 988-3001.

### SAN FERNANDO VALLEY CONVENTION -

Volunteers are welcome to participate in the planning of the 2010 Convention. The Committee meets the 3rd Tuesday of each month (except February and March); 7 pm at St. Innocent's Church, 5657 Lindley Ave, Tarzana, CA.

## Central Office News

### San Fernando Valley Central Office is On the Web

The SFV Central Office website is now available for Internet browsers. On the website, you can find a map to our office in Van Nuys, a listing of upcoming events in the Valley, service organization information and links to other cool A.A. websites. Our meeting schedule is also accessible on the website. Meetings are listed by day, Sunday through Saturday.

Check it out: <http://www.sfvaa.org>

### Do you have an article for the Recovery Times?

Email it to us at: [sfvaanews@sbcglobal.net](mailto:sfvaanews@sbcglobal.net)

### **San Fernando Valley Central Office Intergroup Representatives Meeting May 11, 2009**

Josh S. Chairperson – Meeting opened at 7:00 PM  
Treasurer's Report: See Insert  
*Service Committee information - see page 2 and 3  
of the Recovery Times for more information*  
Old Business: None.  
New Business: None  
*Birthdays: Matthew - 1 yr, Bryant - 3 yrs,  
Lloyd - 6 yrs, Scott - 6 yrs, Carolyn - 14 yrs,  
Andrew - 16 yrs, Susan - 23 yrs.*

Motion to adjourn 7:21 PM  
*The long form of the Intergroup Meeting Minutes  
for May is available at Central Office  
or at the Intergroup Meeting.*

*These minutes are pending approval on  
June 8, 2009*

*Next Meeting - June 8, 2009*

*Prepared and submitted by:  
Dawn H., Recording Secretary*

## **HAPPY BIRTHDAY!**

**May 2009**

<b>Deborah L.</b>	<b>2 years</b>
<b>Sophia T.</b>	<b>10 years</b>
<b>Steve M.</b>	<b>27 years</b>
<b>Grace M.</b>	<b>34 years</b>
<b>John C.</b>	<b>36 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.*

# How It Looks to a Sponsor

## *Notes on some mischances — and some rewards — along the sponsorship trail*

First off let's distinguish between sponsorship and many other functions and attitudes that are often loosely called sponsorship. The first contact a new member has is the message carrier. If this is an AA member rather than the written word or an outside referral, the carrier may or may not become a sponsor. After listening, talking enough to establish his identification as an alcoholic, taking the prospect to some meetings, I believe the messenger has a responsibility to inform the "new man" (when he's sober enough to hear) that he should choose his own sponsor. That so frequently the initial contact does, in fact, become a sponsor is either a minor miracle or attests to our innate immature tendency to hero worship (dangerous to both sponsor and sponsoree).

Then there is the baby-sitting bit. After the bars close and the participating drunk no longer has a hired ear, he'll often remember from some prior contact with AA that, in AA, "they're supposed to listen to me." If you have the time and inclination for this sort of thing, more power to you. No doubt it's humane and occasionally even productive. Under baby-sitting, too, I classify the call from the mate who has to go to work and "poor Charlie is nervous. Won't you come over?" This bit is frequently worthwhile but I don't think it's sponsorship.

Then there is the taxi routine. How often we load up the car with good folks who need a ride—good for all of us and no special problem. But then there's the joker who lives on the other side of town, declines to make friends with near neighbors in AA, wants to get out of putting the kids to bed, and won't leave off berating his mother-in-law long enough to talk AA. This one I can do without with a good conscience after three or four tries. It took a few years to get this callous, but I'm comfortable about it now.

Enough of what is not sponsorship—let's get to the subject.

When the new member is dried out enough to see beyond his immediate disabling illness, he finds he's fallen in with many diverse personalities. He'll be attracted to some more than others, naturally. He's about ready to choose his first sponsor. Chances are that the appearance of stability, serenity, personal organization, and that ephemeral thing called "strength" will influence his choice at this stage. However, as his growth progresses, he may need to add other sponsors. Perhaps his need for a companion in spiritual growth is not met by Number One. I suggest he take on another whose qualities of spirituality attract him—the same may be

true in the phases of AA philosophy, ordinary sociability and AA service. Do you begin to see why I think it's a miracle if any one person matches another's needs? Then too, let's face it, not infrequently the sponsoree has the ability to grow much faster than his initial sponsor. In this situation, moving on is highly desirable.

And what does a good sponsor do? Primarily listen—objectively if possible. Wise counselors rarely lay down the word, but rather allow one to ventilate his thinking and arrive at his own conclusions.

Second in importance is probably example. This is a tough lick since all of us have ebb and flow in our own emotional life. Rather than trying for an impossibly high plane of performance, there may be greater value in allowing a sponsoree to see that the sponsor, too, has rough days which have nothing to do with taking a drink.

In AA's current development, it must fall in the province of the enlightened sponsor to get the service message across. An attitude of gratitude practically guarantees sobriety, but demonstrating gratitude is pretty foreign to our natures by the time we're ready for AA. Most groups have a hard core of old-timers who resist any mention of service, money, organizational chores, or the many other things that AA, as a growing entity, must face realistically. So often, the newcomer is denied the privilege of hearing, at meetings, how he may help in the larger field. These reactionaries stifle such information with the well-known "let's get back to AA" hue and cry. Since they are frequently respected older members who are diligent in their personal AA work, their opinion carries considerable weight. Another responsibility of a sponsor, particularly of the fairly new member, I think, is to encourage the new man to try a few decisions for himself. Too great a dependence can blight both parties.

Sponsorship is a never-ending need for most of us. In spite of a dozen years of sobriety in the Fellowship I've found I gain strength—and God knows I need it—from the effort to reinforce another member in times of stress.

The interpersonal relationship of sponsor and sponsoree can be greatly rewarding but never static. We sometimes miss, but the growth is all in the trying.

*Anonymous*

*Rochester, New York*

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# Rotation: A Step Forward in Growth

*Spiritual anonymity in AA means that we forgo personal prestige for any AA work that we do in order to help other alcoholics.*

I will never forget my first experience with rotation. I'd been the secretary for my group, and I believed I'd piloted my little women's group with perfection for six months. "They have never had it so good!" I thought. But they did not seem to think so. They kept asking me when we were going to hold elections for a new secretary. After all, my six month term was almost up, and I had not once mentioned holding elections. Secretly, I was hoping they would tell me that, since I had done such a great job, they wanted me to continue. Certainly they could see that no one could possibly improve upon what I had been doing. I even fantasized how they would implore me to continue and then give me a standing ovation. It didn't happen. They elected someone new, and I was devastated. But I learned, and I have grown through many more rotations. Rotation is one of the most beautiful spiritual principles that we observe in Alcoholics Anonymous.

All of us trusted servants will rotate from the jobs we are doing, and other people will come in to take our places. One door closes and another one always opens if we are spiritually on track, keeping our recovery programs strong and practicing the principles of love and service in all our affairs. Rotation allows us to grow in God's grace as we move on to other opportunities and permit others to share in the joys of service in Alcoholics Anonymous. It prevents us from becoming the experts that we once thought we were and from being so entrenched in a job that we get stale and unenthusiastic. Problems based on personalities are prevented; no power or prestige gets built up; no individual gets taken advantage of and imposed upon; and the great blessings of giving service are shared by more and more members.

Stepping out of an AA office that you love very much can be a real step forward in growth—a step into the humility which

is the spiritual essence of anonymity. Spiritual anonymity in AA means that we forgo personal prestige for any AA work that we do in order to help other alcoholics. Rotation helps to bring us spiritual rewards far more enduring than any fame. With no AA status at stake, we have complete freedom to serve as we are needed, and we don't have to compete for any titles or praise. AA jobs aren't arranged upward like rungs on a ladder; they are all on the same level, the base of which is service to others—the foundation stone of our recovery through God's grace.

Service is to be shared willingly and gladly with others, but sometimes people do need help in learning to really step down. We remember that these people were often great servants; and whatever they did, they did out of love and devotion to the Fellowship. We should not forget our gratitude to them but should pry them loose gently if we can. And gently or not, we pry them loose anyway! This is a service that we owe to Alcoholics Anonymous. Each year, I believe more absolutely in the spirit of democratic idealism which shines throughout our Fellowship, and I realize that an important way to sustain this shining spirit is to pass on the torch of service to other hands.

Rotation is a catalyst for personal growth, a chance to learn again to surrender, with grace, to the wishes of our Fellowship. It symbolizes our Twelfth Tradition's reminder to always place principles before personalities, thus ensuring that the circles of love and service in Alcoholics Anonymous are ever widening.

*Diane O.  
Cupertino, California*

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## *Co-founder Quotes*

### **Bill W.**

We treasure our "Serenity Prayer" because it brings a new light to us that can dissipate our oldtime and nearly fatal habit of fooling ourselves.

In the radiance of this prayer we see that defeat, rightly accepted, need be no disaster. We now know that we do not have to run away, nor ought we again try to overcome adversity by still another bulldozing power drive that can only push up obstacles before us faster than they can be taken down.

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March 1962*

# Wrong Turn

## *Step 10: Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.*

The first question I had about Step Ten was: How soon do I have to admit when I am wrong? “Promptly” seemed so vague. The answer from an AA old-timer was: “How long you been sober?” Annoyed, I asked back: “What has that got to do with it?” The answer was: “The longer you are sober, the shorter the ‘promptly’ gets!”

The next thing I had to learn about Step Ten is that it doesn’t say anything about being “sorry.” When I was drinking I had a constant stream of “Sorrys.” Now that I have been free of the booze for a few thousand days, I rarely have to say I’m sorry, but I often have to say that I was wrong. There is a big difference.

I’ve been taught that if I say “I’m sorry” and then leave it like that, it means that I am leaving a lot unsaid that should be said. I am really asking for forgiveness or some sort of “general absolution.” But that’s not what this alcoholic usually needs.

What I need to say is how I was wrong and where I went wrong (thinking of the exact nature of my wrongs, Step Five). And, thinking of Step Nine, how I was going to make it up to the person or set things right. What are my amends here? No empty promises of “I’ll never do it again!” No begging for forgiveness. An amends makes me work to put things back to the way they were before my wrong was committed.

To say I was wrong is also part of that AA medicine of ego deflation at depth. I’m not sorry because you are hurt but rather I am admitting that I am wrong because *I* did something to harm you. Big difference in my book!

I have spent time figuring out what exactly I was wrong about, and I have spent time figuring out a proposal of how

I am going to straighten things out, since that too is my responsibility and not yours. But I am going to confer with you about this and not impose my solution on you. I may offer several options for you to choose from. I am going to continue a radically honest (but calm and tactful) dialog with you in whatever way is appropriate.

Another thing I had to learn about this Step was that it means that I only take responsibility for when I was actually wrong. If I wasn’t wrong on one part but was wrong on another, I say so. I cop it sweet for the parts that I was wrong about but not for the rest of it.

For instance, I often have to say something like: “Son, I want to tell you that I was way out of line by raising my voice and yelling at you like that. It was wrong of me to do it in a public place and in front of your friends because that is not only embarrassing but also rude and insensitive. In the future I propose to take you aside or wait until we are away from your mates. I will work on getting my volume and impulsive anger under control. Can you help me by telling me that I am yelling or that I am embarrassing you if I forget? On the other hand, I believe that what I said was correct. What you were doing was risky and a bit dangerous. I stand by my statement but was wrong to yell and embarrass you. I’ll make it up to you by. . .”

Lastly, I’ve been taught that this Step contains the most important word out of the 200 (count ‘em) words in all of the Steps. That word is “continued.” Makes a nice word to meditate upon.

*Chuck F.  
Canberra*

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## Humor from the Grapevine

Feeling lonely, this guy decides life would be a lot more fun if he had a pet. So he goes to a pet store and tells the owner he’d like an unusual animal. “I’ve got just the thing for you,” says the store owner, and proceeds to give the guy a centipede in a little white box for its house.

Delighted, the guy decides to celebrate. He bends down to the centipede’s house and asks: “Would you like to go to Frank’s with me and have a beer?” But his pet doesn’t answer.

So a few minutes later, he asks again: “Would you like to go to Frank’s with me and have a beer?”

He waits, but again, there is no answer. So this time, the man puts his face right up to the centipede’s house and shouts: “Hey, in there! Would you like to go to Frank’s place with me and have a drink?”

Finally, a little voice comes from the box: “I heard you the first time! I’m putting on my shoes.”

« « « » » »

At an AA meeting the other day, a woman said she wanted a husband. Seven of the next eight women who spoke offered theirs.

# The Cement That Binds Us

*Tradition Five: Each group has but one primary purpose – to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.*

It seems to me, after attending meetings for the past thirty-four years, that Tradition Five has been gradually chipped away by individuals having problems other than alcoholism. Many of the meetings I have attended have discussions about other drugs; occasionally, there is not even a mention of alcohol or recovery from its grasp. At a recent convention in California, the main speaker at the big Saturday night meeting spent forty-five minutes talking about his cocaine use and never mentioned alcohol or the Twelve Steps of recovery. I find this to be more common than not nowadays.

Why is our primary purpose becoming diluted? Well, having discussed this with many young AAs, I'm told that most AA members now are "dually addicted." There seems to be a common statement issuing from most of those individuals: "I know this is an AA meeting, but drugs are a part of my story so I'm going to mention them too." And they do! Now, it can be rationalized that if "each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers," then maybe that particular group's message concerns drugs other than alcohol. But what, then, is "the message" the group carries to the *alcoholic* who still suffers?

Few AA members, old-timers and newcomers, have ever read the third paragraph of the dust cover of the Big Book, wherein it tells that the AA message is to be found in the text of that book. I've noticed that many AAs read the Big Book but few study it, and fewer still follow its suggestions.

It is not uncommon to hear a member state, "I work my own program." In my home group, on Tuesday nights, we discuss the written program as it is in the Big Book and how it has helped each of us to a better way of life. We have a caveat in our opening message before the Preamble asking that only alcoholics share at our meeting. But we say that all are welcome. This seems to work pretty well and as a result we have good AA discussions certainly helpful to our newcomers.

My home group's primary purpose is to carry the AA message to the alcoholic who still suffers. Some of those have much sobriety, because the alcoholic who still suffers is not necessarily a newcomer. However, when newcomers do show up at our home group we try to focus our discussion on what's in the Big Book and how it can help them if they are willing to follow some simple suggestions.

I think that without Tradition Five there could not be an AA program. I believe that the Twelve Traditions are the cement that binds us together into a cohesive society. For my part, I hold an informal study group at my home for newer members of my home group. We study the program so that all of us can better fulfill our "real purpose" as it states on page 77 of the Big Book.

*Tom H.  
Paso Robles, California  
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