

ANONYMOUS SOUTHJERSEY

SOUTH JERSEY INTERGROUP

DECEMBER 2012

The Christmas Tea Set

Sobriety gave one A.A. a relationship with her mother again, and the hard feelings that come with it.

I drank for many years, and all during that time, I was an angry woman. When I finally came into the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous, a lot of my step work focused on my close relationships. By then, I was estranged from my family: banned from holiday celebrations, not welcome in my mother's house. I wanted desperately to be back in her life.

My fourth step on my Mom was long and full of blame. To be sure, Mom had not been the "perfect mother." However, I had been disrespectful to her and had not adhered to the rules of behavior she had set for me. I not only had to make an initial amends, but an ongoing, living amends that encompassed a demonstration of the ladylike behavior she had taught me. In order to do that, I had to embrace fully the lessons of the Serenity Prayer. I couldn't change the past, and I couldn't change her or her standards of behavior for me; I had to be forgiven, and I had to learn to accept her for who she was before I

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Practicing These Principles

Step 12: "Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to other alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs."

Well, I have more than two years of sobriety...and I hope I carry the message to alcoholics whenever and wherever the opportunity arises. The SECOND part of this step...practicing these principles in all our affairs...I think I need to do more work on that.

Why do I say this? Well, I was at a meeting recently where the speaker talked about how he and his sister didn't get along, and how she reached out to him when they last saw each other. He described how he knew he should respond, but he just couldn't—and that maybe he still had some work to do on himself.

It was like a message directly from my Higher Power. See, I had just finished writing out my holiday cards, and I DELIBERATELY didn't send one to a sister that I'm feuding with right now. I thought, why send a card if I don't really mean it? This from the same person who would gladly give a ride to someone she didn't know if they needed to get to a meeting, who would talk to a stranger on the phone for an hour, helping them through an urge to drink.

It was like a message directly from my Higher Power. See, I had just finished writing out my holiday cards, and I DELIBERATELY didn't send one to a sister that I'm feuding with right now. I thought, why send a card if I don't really mean it? This from the same person who would gladly give a ride to someone she didn't know if they needed to get to a meeting, who would talk to a stranger on the phone for an hour, helping them through an urge to drink.

Yeah, I'd do all that—but wouldn't reach out to my own flesh and blood because...we're arguing. And I

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could fully enjoy spend time with her. I had to express love and tolerance for her as much as I wanted to receive it for myself.

Holiday celebrations at my house always featured eating wonderful food and trading jokes with friends and neighbors who dropped by. When I was finally able to rejoin my family, I loved the jokes and food, and treasured the traditions and warmth we shared. My family respected that I was no longer drinking, and I kept to myself the challenge of being around the wine and liquor. I was just glad to be back.

I began this process in a tangible way by acknowledging her strengths: she had an incredible wit, and was a remarkable hostess and housekeeper. I realized that I would probably never be the kind of housekeeper she was. My home is clean and comfortable, but I certainly don't do the work that she did in order to keep it looking that way. She played cards and almost always won; I wasn't interested in most card games at all. I accepted that we were different from each other, but I admired her drive to do what she did. She had overcome a great deal and was respected and admired in the community.

I then realized that some of my strengths were ones that were unique to me. I'm a good listener. I could laugh at her jokes and listen to her stories. I also didn't mind driving, and Mom tended to stay close to home, just getting around enough to accomplish simple errands. I resolved that I would spend Saturday mornings with her, doing whatever it was that she wanted to do.

Thus began several years of sacrifice and joy. Mom loved to take drives in the country. I would have preferred to take a direct route; Mom wanted a leisurely pace that meandered through old towns and past fields and farmhouses. She loved going to the diner, and she always insisted on picking up the check. We rarely went to the mall, but when we did, she would caution me against buying something that she thought was too "gitchy." I didn't have to ask Mom what that meant. One time, I went back to buy a "gitchy" sweater. I wore it once, and realized that it was falling apart. I returned it to the store and thankfully, got credit for it. Mom respected quality, and she wanted me to look my best as well.

Mom was frugal, too. As a child of the Depression, she always worked hard and bought sparingly, but purchased clothes, jewelry and home furnishings of high quality. When

I was young, she saw a china teapot with cream and sugar that was painted with holly and trimmed in gold. It sat on the shelf at the gift shop and she quietly admired it. It was still there after Christmas, marked half-price. Mom paid for that tea set at the rate of two dollars a week from household money. By the middle of February, it was hers. She treasured that tea set and displayed it lovingly year after year.

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At the end of the holiday last year, Mom gave me the Christmas tea set. "I want you to enjoy this now," she said. I was shocked – surely, she would want to continue to have it as part of her own decorations. I started to protest, but she was firm; she wanted me to have it.

I felt a sense of betrayal and many of the feelings I used to have about her when I drank came back and dominated my thoughts. I wondered whether the love and harmony I enjoyed with her was genuine, and whether she meant what she said about us kids inheriting her things. I had and have many unanswered questions. Once again, I have returned to my step work, prayer, frequent contact with my sponsor and attendance at meetings in order to restore my serenity.

Mom died this past summer after a brief, intense illness. Her passing has been hard on all those she left behind. Mom had made certain promises to us kids: this bank account will be split between the three of you; she wanted me to have her jewelry. While going through her things, I discovered that most of the jewelry I remembered was missing. The bank account she spoke to us about contained a substantial amount of money, but it did not list a beneficiary. The funds are now tied up along with other issues in her estate. We were all shocked and hurt that my mother left her affairs in such seeming disarray.

I felt a sense of betrayal and many of the feelings I used

Tradition Twelve

"Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities."

Reading this tradition reminds me that this program isn't about me. Sure, at first, it is about me quitting drinking, developing a relationship with my Higher Power, and helping my fellow alcoholic, but as I read the Big Book and talk to my fellow A.A.s, I realize that it really isn't about me at all. I work the twelve steps of Alcoholics Anonymous to be released from the bondage of self, so I can better do God's will. My alcoholism fettered me to a narcissistic and self-absorbed way of being. It had to be about me getting drunk. I had an obsession to drink, a craving beyond my control. My drinking demanded I pay attention only to me.

As I sobered up and began to exist within the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous, I began to get out of my own way, to stop putting myself first, to reach out my hand and ask someone how they are doing, work in service without recognition or kudos about how incredibly generous I am. When I do service for my fellow A.A., I do it to maintain this fellowship for the next suffering alcoholic. Sometimes that suffering alcoholic is me.

Getting a home group and attending business meetings, I think, is an incredibly important part of our sobriety. Though this tradition is applied to many aspects of our fellowship, I'd like to talk about this aspect. In our home groups, we learn how to have reasonable, productive disagreements with people. We learn how to be accountable. We learn how to be responsible to ourselves and our fellows. Through running the home group, we learn how to run our own household. We learn how to let go, and forgive. And hopefully, we learn how to put principles over personalities. From my experience, home group business meetings serve as a way to really put principles over personalities. There has been more than one occasion when I have had the fleeting thought, "What a jerk. I am leaving this home group and never coming back." But then I remember this tradition, and think about what happens when I put personalities before principles. We are made of groups of people from all walks of life. Anonymity in that sense helps equalize us. The man with twenty years has the same number of votes as the person with twenty days. We allow group conscience to have the last say. And we remember that our home group's survival depends on our disagreements and resolutions. When we learn how to put the needs of the whole above the needs of the individual, we learn a valuable way of living. When I stop making everything about me, particularly at the group or district level, I make anonymity my spiritual foundation. It is not about me. It is about us. What a beautiful program this is.

--Anonymous

know she's hurting and would like to make up but I'm just not ready. So much for my spiritual awakening!!!

I shared my story at the meeting and said suddenly, "I'm going home to write her a card! Tonight!" and guess what? The speaker pulled me aside after the meeting and said he was going to do the same with HIS sister.

What was great about this experience for me was that I realized it was okay that I wasn't perfect, but I AM making progress, even if I don't always realize it. I might not have sent that card if I hadn't gone to the meeting. And I haven't heard back, and I might not, and that's okay. Maybe I'll send her a Valentine's Day card. Couldn't hurt.

Happy holidays, everyone! Send the card, make the call...treat everyone in your life as if they are in the rooms.

--Anonymous

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to have about her when I drank came back and dominated my thoughts. I wondered whether the love and harmony I enjoyed with her was genuine, and whether she meant what she said about us kids inheriting her things. I had and have many unanswered questions. Once again, I have returned to my step work, prayer, and frequent contact with my sponsor and attendance at meetings in order to restore my serenity.

The holidays are here now, and my family just shared the Thanksgiving meal. There were fewer places set at the table, but we all had a good time and the food, again, was delicious. As I began preparing for Christmas, I started getting my decorations out of storage. There was a box that I initially did not recognize, and as I opened it, I discovered Mom's Christmas tea set. I had forgotten that gift. As I held it in my hands, I realized that this was one valued possession that she truly wished for me, her daughter, to have and enjoy. I remembered how much she treasured the tea set, how hard she worked for it, and all the memories from the past. My Mom loved me as best she could, and her wanting me to have the tea set was my proof that she forgave me and trusted me to enjoy beautiful things.

--Gail V.

Alcoholism and Recovery on the Big Screen

Ever since I stopped drinking, I find it interesting to go back and watch movies about alcoholism, most of which I've seen before. I am looking for both insight and mistakes—do the “meeting” scenes ring true, do they talk about the steps, do the characters go through the same struggles? It might seem like a strange hobby but in case you're interested, we at SJ Anonymous thought we'd put together a list of movies that deal with alcoholism (and other addictions) that you might want to rent or even buy. We'll add to this list over the next year, and feel free to offer your own suggestions! Please remember our views are our own and do not reflect the views of South Jersey Intergroup or Alcoholics Anonymous.

—Patty H.

28 Days (2000) – This movie stars Sandra Bullock as a boozing, pill-popping New Yorker who is sent to rehab after she crashes a limousine into the living room of a house (a long story) while driving drunk. This film is tricky because it tries to blend humor with some very serious issues, and this writer feels like it succeeds on most levels. Bullock is a very likable actor, so her wise cracks and arrogance when she first arrives at rehab don't grate on you much. (Plus you kind of remember that arrogance, don't you? That feeling that you might drink a lot but you don't belong *here*.) Her character, Gwen, is the younger of two sisters who spent their early years with an alcoholic mother who thought it would be fun to slide down a snowy hill on an upside-down coffee table...stopping just short of passing cars on the street. She passes out so regularly on the floor that the little girls have started slapping her awake as they leave for school. (As I said, it mixes humor with some sad images, especially if you grew up with a parent like that.)

There are other kinds of addicts at this rehab, and there's a kind of hilarious scene when Gwen first arrives and her fellow rehabbers try to guess what her “gateway” drug is—the winner gets everyone's piece of cake. (“This is not a nice game,” one of the characters says, shaking her head.)

Watching this movie after two years of sobriety, I think it gets a lot of the A.A. message across without preaching. Gwen's counselor, played by the great actor Steve Buscemi, uses a lot of the slogans we all know so well—and he also tells a harrowing tale of his own addiction to a large group, ending with a sentiment we can all relate to: “I said to myself, man, this isn't a way to live...this is a way to die.” Buscemi also hangs a sign around Gwen's neck that I myself probably need—it says CONFRONT ME IF I DON'T ASK FOR HELP.

The only criticism I have is that Gwen and her sister have a breakthrough/reconciliation that seems rushed—but on

the other hand, it's a movie and we've got to get these things wrapped up, right? Overall, I give this movie four stars because it will make you think—and laugh.

(And maybe cry, but I don't want to give anything away.) -- Patty H.

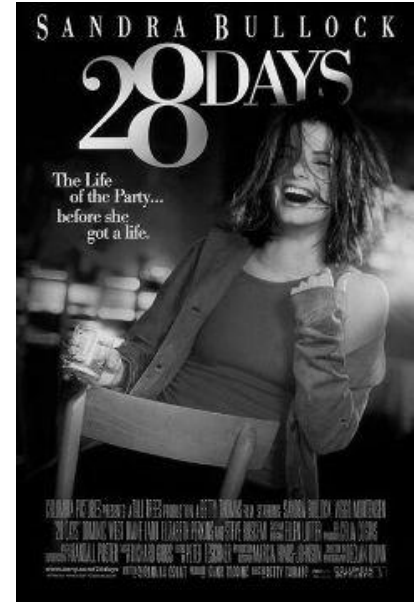
When a Man Loves A Woman (1994) – The first time I saw the 1994 film, *When a Man Loves a Woman*, I probably was drunk. At the time, I was certainly single, childless, and living in a two-bedroom apartment in the city where I watched movies and read books about alcoholic women in my free time. Though I didn't identify as alcoholic, something rang very true for me, even back then.

Many years later, re-watching this movie in sobriety, I identified with nearly every emotion in the movie and some of her actions, even if they were not my own. I identified with her irritability, her restlessness, her discontentedness.

The movie is set in San Francisco. Meg Ryan's character Alice, married to pilot Michael (Andy Garcia,) quits drinking after passing out alone with her daughters. The movie chronicles her fun drinking, her ugly drinking, her promises, her inability to stop drinking, the way her drinking and NOT drinking affected her family. After rehab, Alice grapples with life on life's terms, and Michael wrestles with his own co-dependency. When she separates from Michael, she learns about sobriety, herself, and the great love between her and her husband.

When I first watched *When a Man Loves a Woman*, I certainly identified out of that storyline. I never would hit a kid, hide a bottle of booze, or yell at Andy Garcia. But then

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Resolutions for 2013

AA members make at least one resolution every day of the year, but this is the time for thinking ahead and maybe (at least in my case) promising to work a little harder to correct character defects in the New Year. Our roving reporter Joe C. was kind enough to gather up some resolutions for us. Happy reading and we wish you serenity and happiness in 2013! – Patty H.

"Try and quiet the disturbance when it occurs."

-- Stephanie C

"Try and cut back on my smoking so I can live healthier." --
Eddie C.

"Try and brush my teeth more often." -- Eric H.

"Make a real effort to watch the caffeine intake, especially the
Monster-size ones." -- Joey H.

"Don't drink and make meetings. Yep, that sounds like a good
idea to me." – Doug

"Stay on top of my mail (emails not the box one), and be careful
on Facebook." -- Joe C.

"This year be more careful playing in the yellow snow. Really." -
- Steve C.

"Be more mindful of still taking others inventory." -- Dunkin Dan.

"Remind myself more often to be good to myself." -- Mike M.

"When speaking to others give them time to speak as well." --
Walt P.

"Work on getting to more meetings and treat them like the after-
work rituals I once had; that would be great!" -- Anonymous.

"Work harder on balancing AA with the rest of my life." –
Anonymous.



YOU (The Fellowship)

*When life was at its lowest
And there was nothing left to do
For reasons that I can't explain
I was introduced to YOU*

*YOU told me I was welcome
And to "Keep Coming Back"
"It Works If You Work It"
There is nothing you will lack*

*YOU knew that I was nervous
For you had been there too
I'm sure I had a look that said
Okay, now what do I do?*

*YOU asked my name, told me yours
Then stretched out you hand
I noticed something different about you
It's probably the way you stand.*

*YOU told me 'bout this fellowship
Where everyone's the same
But how could you help me
You don't even know my last name*

*YOU said to "Keep It Simple"
And take it day by day
And when I think of where I'd been
I have but one thing to say*

*I know I'm just beginning
And the feelings I have are new
But with God as my witness
I owe it all to YOU*

--Joe K.

*Joe was gracious enough to share a poem he
wrote during his first holiday season in
sobriety--December 1990. If you have poetry
about sobriety and recovery, please send it to
us at newsletter@aaaj.org.*

Editorial Policy

Anonymous South Jersey is a monthly newsletter published by and for members of South Jersey Intergroup (although we welcome readers from other areas!). Opinions expressed herein are NOT to be attributed to A.A. as a whole, nor does publication of information imply any endorsement by either A.A. or South Jersey Intergroup. Quotations and artwork from A.A. literature are printed with permission from A. A. World Services, Inc., and/or The A. A. Grapevine, Inc.

Contributions from readers are encouraged—you can write about your experience, strength and hope in general, or you can focus on one of the steps or traditions. You can also write about something that touched you at a meeting, something that bothered you at a meeting, or some service commitment you especially enjoy. Submissions are edited for space and clarity. Contact information is required and anonymity is respected.

Due to space limitations, we are unable to publish flyers for events in this newsletter. However, we are happy to include your gathering in the general list of fellowship announcements.

Send your submissions to:
newsletter@asj.org.

Question of the Month

For next month's issue, we'd like to get your response to this question:

What would you like to see covered in the newsletter?

Please email your replies no later than Wednesday, January 9, to
newsletter@asj.org.

again, I didn't have a kid to hit, anyone to hide my booze from, or an Andy Garcia to yell at. Many years later, re-watching this movie in sobriety, I identified with nearly every emotion in the movie and some of her actions, even if they were not my own. I identified with her irritability, her restlessness, her discontentedness. I identified with her hypersensitivity after rehab and her alienation from her marriage when she got sober. Meg Ryan really does a great job of humanizing Alice, making her likable and damaged. Andy Garcia does a great job of being a doting, loving husband while showing his own powerlessness.

The movie portrays A.A. as a place of recovery, unconditional love, and support, which is nice. Alice mentions her sponsor, her meetings. She talks about wanting to drink constantly, and how hard it all is. I relate entirely to the way Alice connects with her fellow A.A.s. She says to her husband, "The truth is I really need these people." And I uttered those own words to my husband in early sobriety. Leaning into the fellowship, there is a desperation and alienation to her day-to-day life that requires time in recovery. You see the character's subtle shifts from day 29 of sobriety until she hits six months.

Re-watching this movie was like revisiting early sobriety. It kept it green for me in a way that helps me have compassion for myself in those early months. Alice shares her Experience, Strength, and Hope after 184 days of sobriety. And when she talks about passing out in front of her daughter, she says "All of my life, I will never really know what I did to her." It is a haunting admission that reminded me of the remarkable honesty of this program.

--Angie Y.

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SJIG holds its monthly meetings on the third Wednesday of the month at 8pm
at St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church
989 Route 70 East
Cherry Hill, NJ

Fellowship Announcements and Things to Do



December 24 - December 25 - SJIG Christmas Alcathon hosted by 482 Club. 8:00 PM-8:00 PM. New meeting every hour. 7550 Route 130, Pennsauken, NJ 08109.

Saturday, December 29 - "Tools of Sobriety" will celebrate their anniversary starting at 4:00 P. St. Stephen's Church Hall, Rt. 45, North of Chatham Lane, Mullica Hill, NJ.

Monday, December 31 - New Year's Eve Party. New Beginnings Club, 101c Rose Ave., Runnemede, NJ. 8:00 PM - 1:00 PM. \$25.00/pp. Catered food, DJ & Karaoke.

Monday, December 31 - Absecon Atlantic Intergroup Unity Comm. will host a New Year's Eve Party @ United Methodist Church, 100 Pitney Rd., Absecon. Doors open 6:30 PM - dinner and dance in main hall @ 8pm - open meetings downstairs at 7, 9, 10:15 & 12:15 Tix: \$20. More info call: Cris 609-437-6188.

December 31 - January 1 - New Year's Alcathon hosted by the Men's "I Am Responsible" Group. 400 Club, 42 Berlin - Clementon Rd., Clementon, NJ. Monday 6:00 PM - Tuesday 6:00 PM. Volunteer FOOD & SPEAKERS call Tom: [856-287-2763](tel:856-287-2763) (cell) tdmnz101@comcast.net

Monday, January 14 - Candlelight Spiritual Growth Group 26th Anniversary. 7:00 PM. 2 Speaker Meeting. F-F-F. Temple Lutheran Church, Rt. 130 & Merchantville Ave., Merchantville, NJ

Monday, January 14 - Shiloh Serenity Group 13th Anniversary. Shiloh 7th Day Baptist Church, 116 East Ave., Shiloh, NJ. 7:00 PM Speakers: Bill M. (Pennsville Sun High Kickers) & AIAnon Family / Sobriety Countdown. Pizza Appetizers.

Wednesday, January 16 - The 1- 2- 3 Beginner's Step Meeting's 10th Anniversary. Christ Episcopal Church, 128 Prince St., Bordentown, NJ. 7:30 PM: Desserts - 8:00 PM: Meeting with Cholly K of Mixed Nuts - Hamilton, NJ as speaker.

Sunday, January 20 - Moorestown Spiritual Growth Group 33rd Anniversary. Trinity Episcopal Church, Main & Church Sts., Moorestown, NJ. Pizza & salad - 7:00 PM. AA Speaker - 8:00pm.

Sunday, January 27 - Primary Purpose Group Annual Gratitude Meeting. 6:00 PM: EAT / 7:00 PM: Speaker: Sr. Maurice D. (The Bronx) 1st Baptist Church, Sussex & Monmouth Sts. @-Broadway, Gloucester, NJ. John: [856-220-2496](tel:856-220-2496).

Monday, January 28 - Second Anniversary of The Other Twelve Group at the New Beginnings Clubhouse on 101c Rose Avenue in Runnemede, NJ. (GPS address 1001 Rose Avenue). 5:30 PM. Focus on the First Tradition, followed by food and fellowship.

February 22- 24 - NERAASA 2013. \$20 Registration to PO Box 303, Langhorne, PA, 19047 [800.233.0121](tel:800.233.0121) www.lancasterhost.com \$120/night "NERASA" 2300 Lincoln Hwy East, Lancaster, PA 17602. Area 59 Roundtable Discussion: NE Region Spring GS Conference.

South Jersey Intergroup's H&I Committee need your help at JFK Hospital's Psych Unit on Fridays 7:00 - 8:00 PM, at Chapel Avenue and Cooper Landing Road. This is a One Host and One Speaker Commitment. Interested persons please contact: Scott 215-410-8499 or Becky 609-969-2327

