

ANONYMOUS SOUTHJERSEY

SOUTH JERSEY INTERGROUP

JANUARY 2013

H & I Committee

“A.A. is more than a set of principles; it is a society of alcoholics in action. We must carry the message, else we ourselves can wither and those who haven’t been given the truth may die.” – Bill W., on page 5 of the A.A. Service Manual.

Service, to many members, is what keeps them from picking up a drink—be it making coffee, taking a speaking commitment, or just talking to another alcoholic on the phone. At South Jersey Intergroup, there are a number of committees that coordinate service in the five counties served by SJIG (Burlington, Camden, Gloucester, Salem and Cumberland). One of the busiest is the Hospitals and Institutions Committee, often just called the H&I Committee. The name is a little old-fashioned, in that it refers to a time when the only treatment for alcoholics was to send them to a hospital to dry out or a sanitarium to die. Now, thankfully, there are other options.

“We do rehabs, mental health units (often called MICA units) and jails,” says H&I Committee Chair

H&I continued on page 4

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| 2 | <i>Step One continued</i> |
| 3 | <i>Who Am I?</i> |
| 3, 5 & 6 | <i>Tradition One</i> |
| 4 & 7 | <i>H&I Continued</i> |
| 5 | <i>Warning Shot</i> |
| 6 | <i>Editorial Policy & Question of the Month</i> |
| 6 | <i>Letter to the Editor</i> |
| 7 | <i>SJ Intergroup Contact Information</i> |
| 8 | <i>Fellowship Announcements</i> |

Relief from the Storm

After she landed in the hospital, she took the First Step.

I can’t recall the pivotal moment when I crossed the threshold from being a “normal” drinker to an alcoholic one, but I do recall my first drink with perfect clarity. By middle school I began to feel quite different from the other kids. While other girls my age were forging alliances that would last them for years to come, I wandered aimlessly on the outskirts of the social circles. My inability to find a place among any such groups caused intense feelings of inadequacy and resentment, which in turn mutated into full-throttle angst and depression.

At age fourteen, I began to seek escape from the way that I felt inside--that is when I found alcohol. From the very first drink, I loved the way it granted relief from the storm swells in my head. It was like the magic elixirs described in the fables I heard as a child.

It allowed me to blend in seamlessly with the world around me and it did not take long before alcohol became the axis upon which my entire life would revolve.

It allowed me to blend in seamlessly with the world around me and it did not take long before alcohol became the axis upon which my entire life would revolve.

By age 18, I had several run-ins with the police in the suburb I grew up in, the most serious of which landed me in jail overnight. In just four short years, my drinking had become a very serious problem. The legal troubles were only the tip of the iceberg. I began blacking out and doing and saying absurd and terrifying things. I also began nursing hangovers in the morning by drinking what was left over from the night before. I recall one such morning when I was so sick and shaking so badly that I drank in order to make it to my college sociology class for an exam.

It was during this time that I had my first experience with AA, but as a natural-born skeptic, I was leery. I was particularly disconcerted by the emphasis upon God, as I had not felt a personal connection with any cosmic, unseen force since

Step One continued on page 2

childhood. I wish that I could say that I immediately understood the implications of the illness I was dealing with and poured myself into AA and never drank another drop or experienced another self-inflicted crisis, but such was not the case. It was also during this time that I became entangled with a fellow alcoholic who would soon become the father of my daughter and my husband.

We dove right into the Steps. Things were tentative in the beginning. My sponsor was my higher power for a time and the best I could do was to believe that she believed.

Our daughter was born just a few months before my twentieth birthday and her arrival appeared to be a profound catalyst for change in my life, but my abstinence from alcohol was brief. I was drunk again before her first birthday. The years to follow were horrific. Against my better judgment, I married my daughter's father the year following her birth. Our relationship became increasingly toxic, with one or both of us being drunk a great deal of the time. We sought a geographical cure by moving 800 miles away from home. The effect of the move was opposite of our intentions: things became exponentially worse. We separated a year later, and I became extremely inebriated most of the time and landed in the hospital after a drunken, half-hearted attempt at ending my own life.

I was taken to the emergency room after I had ingested a large number of over-the-counter sleeping pills while drunk. This cocktail caused me to black out. I only recall several hospital staff having to restrain me so they could pump my stomach.

The following day I awoke with little recollection of what had taken place, it was evident by the large bruises on my arms that there had been quite a struggle. I was told that in addition to my violent refusal to being treated, I also did not know my own name or that of my precious daughter. My boss, who was surely at the end of his rope with all of my shenanigans, called me as I lay in my hospital bed when he heard the news. He was very kind and told me that he hoped that I would be able to "get it together." He asked, "But can you?"

After my release from the hospital, I knew right where

I needed to go and that was back to AA. I had played around with the idea for so many years, but was only then ready to get down to business. Suddenly, I realized everything that I stood to lose if I continued tumbling down the path I was on. I knew that I was going to lose everything and I was going to die, and at just 23, I wasn't ready to die.

I had been in and out of meetings since I moved, but upon my return to AA I asked the woman I was most frightened of to be my sponsor. What was so daunting about this woman was her demeanor. She was stern and fearlessly honest, and she believed unwaveringly in the program of Alcoholics Anonymous.

We dove right into the Steps. Things were tentative in the beginning. My sponsor was my higher power for a time and the best I could do was to believe that she believed. Her insistence upon prayer had me on my knees morning and night. The hang-up that I had with the idea of God slowly melted away as I began to have experiences that were the tangible proof that I needed and became the foundation upon which I was able to nurture a new relationship with a higher power of my understanding.

I had read the Big Book on and off since my first introduction to AA and had read about all of the miraculous things that happen when you take the Steps. I thought it all sounded fantastic but never did I believe that these things would come to fruition in my very own life, but they absolutely did and that is nothing short of a miracle.

Before I knew it, my obsession with alcohol had been lifted just exactly as was promised. I had read the Big Book on and off since my first introduction to AA and had read about all of the miraculous things that happen when you take the Steps. I thought it all sounded fantastic but never did I believe that these things would come to fruition in my very own life, but they absolutely did and that is nothing short of a miracle.

Today I have a beautiful sober life and my daughter, who is now eight, has no recollection of the drunk I was when she was very small. I still have the same job. God continues to bless me in ways both large and small and my sobriety is the most important fact of my life. Helping other women, the way my sponsor helped me, is a responsibility that I am passionate about. AA has given me something invaluable, something I will never be able to repay. The best I can do is try to pay it forward by sharing my experience, strength and hope with another alcoholic.

—**Kristen C., Mountain Home, Arizona (from the January 2013 online edition of Grapevine Magazine)**

Who Am I?

Through working the steps, one alcoholic learns how to look at himself with compassion and humanity.

I never asked myself this question, until recently. When I was in the active throes of my alcoholism, I avoided any self-reflection concerning my individual identity. There were a number of acts that I had performed in my life of which I was deeply ashamed. Accordingly, any thoughts of "who I was" were quickly squelched; the less I thought of my serious misdeeds, the better off I would be (or so I thought!) Had I been forced to describe myself to others, I would have noted my ethnic background, my racial heritage, my religious practices, and for quite a few years, my identity was closely tied to the job I did for my living.

It has only been since my welcome entry into the program and fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous that I have gained an interest in considering who I am in relationship to you, and to the God of my understanding. Completing steps four and five of the AA program were hugely beneficial to me in this search for my identity. I learned through the working of those steps that I was not fatally flawed because of my serious sins against others. Instead you told me that I was just another humanly flawed individual (as we all are) and that there is no such thing as an "original" sin. I did these steps with my sponsor and he shared some of his own "bad stuff" with me--and I sure didn't feel as bad or as alone and unique a sinner as I had before.

I experienced the removal of the load of moral bricks I had been logging around all my life during this process. I came to believe that God had forgiven me for all my sins, and if He could do so, who was I not to forgive myself? I came slowly to accept myself for who I really was with all my human faults and failings, but also knowing that I was and am a good person. When I can act on God's will in that regard I can be of maximum use to God, to you and others, and to myself. Hey, I know not that I am not a bad person trying to get good. I'm a sick person trying to get better. And when I can act on that thought my actions create a smiley-faced ripple effect. Doing something nice for another person and so it goes. When I can share myself with others in that manner, I know that my God smiles back to me in multiple and myriad ways.

I am so happy to have been blessed with the gift of Alcoholics Anonymous. The Twelve Steps have, for me, been transformed from words on the page to rules for living. Thank you all for being my teachers, my friends and my fellow participants on this daily journey to sobriety.

--A Thankful Alcoholic in Recovery

Tradition One: The Motion Fails

Tradition One: Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity..

When I came to AA in 1981 in Guelph, Ontario, the Lord's Prayer was recited to close the meeting, but there was no holding of hands. I was a bit leery of saying the prayer, as I was an agnostic, although I'd said it in public school growing up. I was relieved that we didn't have to hold hands, as I didn't trust anyone—men or women.

As a newcomer, I decided to stay in AA because I felt the warmth and acceptance of the Fellowship, although the members at my meeting didn't care about hurting your feelings. They only cared about you staying sober and made no bones about it. I was told, "To drink is to die!" But I began to grow worried about this God thing and spoke to old-timers after the meeting. They told me not to worry about it, and to work on another Step instead.

Often at meetings I would hear the phrase, "If AA dies, it will be from within, not from without." When I heard this, I would feel afraid, wondering how I'd ever make it sober without AA.

Often at meetings I would hear the phrase, "If AA dies, it will be from within, not from without." When I heard this, I would feel afraid, wondering how I'd ever make it sober without AA. I would wonder, too, what would happen to those who came later if AA disappeared? The members discussed the importance of following the Traditions, and many times during meetings someone would hear something and say, "That's an outside issue!"

As I continued to attend meetings, I learned how each member is responsible to ensure that AA is always here (the Responsibility Declaration). I realized this meant I needed to speak up if our common welfare was being compromised. I didn't like having this responsibility, because I was a very shy person and was worried about hurting peoples' feelings.

Eventually, I joined a group in northern Ontario and got active in service work at the group level. One

Tradition One continued on page 5

Scott P. Sixteen years sober, he's been working on the committee for just over a year. He says you don't need an arrest record or a stint in rehab to qualify for this type of service.

"I've never been in jail or rehab, but I still have something to offer. Whatever facility I go to my story is that I suffered from alcoholism, then I came into the rooms and they offered me a solution. Because of the steps, I want to give back to A.A. as much as I can. The H&I Committee's job is carrying the message to everyone, no matter what their circumstances..."- Scott

"I've never been in jail or rehab, but I still have something to offer. Whatever facility I go to my story is that I suffered from alcoholism, then I came into the rooms and they offered me a solution. Because of the steps, I want to give back to A.A. as much as I can. The H&I Committee's job is carrying the message to everyone, no matter what their circumstances. Everyone gets an equal chance of recovery. The difference between me and someone on the inside is that I did a lot of the same things they did, but wasn't incarcerated for my actions. No one's different. We all have the same problem—alcohol. I try to share what works for me."

Co-chair Becky P. agrees; she was arrested during her drinking days, and says going to a commitment at the women's jail has really opened her eyes to where she could be now. "It's really brought home the reality of my alcoholism to me. All those "I nevers" could easily have happened to me. The progression of my disease could have been so much worse. I truly believe I spared myself 10 or 15 years of hell." She's been sober for 5 years.

There are two types of H&I commitments—you can be a "host", which basically means you open the meeting, or you can be a speaker. This is at any facility that H&I has on its schedule. However, you do need to go through a background check if you want to take part in a prison meeting, and Scott says a record won't necessarily keep you out. (In fact, you can share about your jail experience at the meeting.) He does stress, however, that you need to be honest on your application.

"Because this is an honest program, we encourage anyone who applies to put down everything in their past. If they aren't sure, we add a statement to that effect on

the application." If you are accepted, you will be added to the roster for jail visits, which are scheduled quarterly.

There is a real need for women to volunteer at the jails, says Becky. But does she feel safe?

"The first two meetings in jail I was nervous hearing the gates close and the buzzer on the door, but it's actually one of my favorite commitments. The security guards are really nice. We bring literature in, and a lot of the women there know they have a problem but they don't have a way out. There is hope that they can change their lives. And they don't have to be back here (in jail) again. It's really rewarding to take it to people who are new. Give them a chance to start over, or at least suggestions on what they can do when they get out. And I've seen women at meetings when they get out. It brings me back to where I was when I first came in."

"The first two meetings in jail I was nervous hearing the gates close and the buzzer on the door, but it's actually one of my favorite commitments...a lot of the women there know they have a problem but they don't have a way out. There is hope that they can change their lives." --Becky

Scott says he trusts in his higher power to keep him safe—and if there's not much in the way of danger, there can be some indifference. "Some people come to meetings to get out of normal activities in the jail. Sometimes they come to get coffee. But there are individuals who take it seriously and who do want to be in recovery. "

The other major occupation of the H&I Committee is to get A.A. literature into the hands of people who need it. Scott says they work with Area 45 to make sure there's an even distribution.

"Big Books, Step Books, Daily Reflections, meeting books. Depending on the location, they might take Grapevine materials. Certain locations require no staples, etc. Others we can take whatever we think might be helpful. We also use Living Sober, Came to Believe...books like that."

He will be chair till the end of this year, and then Becky will take over. She came up through the ranks, first serving as her home group's H&I rep. "One of the women in my group that I really respect suggested it. I didn't

H&I continued on page 7

time I got the bright idea of bringing some non-AA-approved books to our meeting and displaying them on our table. I'd figured they could be as beneficial to others as I had found them to be. One night, a group of old-timers from Elliot Lake came to the meeting. Before it started, Bernie B. picked up one of the books and asked me, "What's this stuff? This isn't AA-approved literature!"

When I told Bernie why I was resentful, he put it simply to me and asked, "What if this was your first meeting? We're supposed to carry the AA message, not our own or any other message." In an instant I understood, as I thought back to my first meeting. What would have become of AA if it had gotten watered down by outside interests, my common welfare, and others' personal welfare?

I instantly formed a resentment and hashed this over during the meeting. I was going to storm out, but forced myself to go up to Bernie and shake his hand instead. This was a suggestion I heard in Guelph as to how to handle resentment toward another member. When I told Bernie why I was resentful, he put it simply to me and asked, "What if this was your first meeting? We're supposed to carry the AA message, not our own or any other message." In an instant I understood, as I thought back to my first meeting. What would have become of AA if it had gotten watered down by outside interests, my common welfare, and others' personal welfare?

This experience helped me to be ever mindful of the newcomer and to ask if I'm carrying the message of AA or something else, or if my group or AA as a whole is carrying our message. And now I'm

Warning Shot: Some Thoughts on Being a Sponsor

Yesterday I received a letter from a young friend. He started out by thanking me for my friendship and support. Then he apologized for having become so distant. Finally, he wrote: "I owe it to you to tell you that I decided to leave AA and that last week I had a drink--actually, two drinks--but they were no problem at all. So try not to worry about me."

Last night I had a vivid dream. I was at what felt like a camp--a beautiful camp, high on a hill, with lush greenery, birds, animals, music, and crystal-clear views in every direction. I felt comfortable and safe, surrounded by good friends, and having much to do. The next thing I recall, it was dark and I was in my bunk listening to the sounds of crickets and familiar voices wishing me a good night's sleep. Before drifting off, I heard a gunshot. I immediately knew it was sniper fire, and I jumped out of bed and looked down into the valley. I could see my young friend, who had strayed far away from camp, into what seemed to be a minefield. I could see him holding his injured, bloody shoulder. I yelled for him to get back to camp. He called up to me, "Don't worry, it's only a flesh wound." I replied, "Get back to camp. It's too dangerous." He strayed farther and I could no longer see him in the dark. I remember thinking that it wasn't safe for me to venture out to find him. Then I heard an explosion and I knew he was gone.

I awoke at four A.M. feeling sad and worried. I rarely have such an easily understood dream. The camp was my sober life, my AA group, my spiritual haven. The sniper was the first drink. The minefield represented people, places, and things. And the mine itself--the explosion--was alcoholism.

Is sponsorship too frustrating, too painful? I have received many gifts through sponsorship, the first and foremost being continued sobriety. The unique gift of simply being able to listen to another alcoholic with understanding and compassion has not only resulted in my being less judgmental of others, but also of me. As I approach my seventeenth anniversary, working through the Steps with others continues to renew my appreciation of the gift of recovery. My concern for my young friend is real. The feelings are real. My compassion for alcoholics is real. These are good qualities that I have found within myself in my sobriety. I am grateful for the willingness to be of service to my fellow alcoholics and for the gift of being passionately involved in AA. I have found that it is possible to maintain peace and serenity in the midst of difficult situations, if I am willing to use the tools of recovery and above all, to turn to the Third and Eleventh Steps.

I am increasingly grateful for my sober life. I will keep my young friend in my thoughts and prayers and in my heart, with the hope that he someday finds his way back to camp. --David T., Philadelphia, PA
(from the January 2002 edition of Grapevine Magazine)

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—write to us at newsletter@assj.org. Contact information is required and anonymity is respected. We edit for space and clarity only.

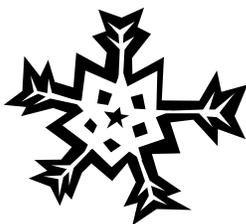
Due to space limitations, we are unable to publish flyers for events in this newsletter.

Question of the Month

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

Why did you choose your sponsor?

Please email your replies no later than Wednesday, February 13, to newsletter@assj.org.



Letters to the Editor

We love hearing from our readers! Please feel free to write about anything related to A.A., whether it's something that happened at a meeting or your own experience, strength and hope. Or just say hi! Write to us at newsletter@assj.org.

Hi,

I'm Eric H. I was born in Richmond, Virginia, and I'm an Alcoholic. I drank to suppress a lot of feelings.

I didn't like myself that much. I went to a special school and I was labeled and I was ostracized; that is what drove me to drink, I felt singled out.

My parents divorced when I was in foster home in Doswell, Nigeria. It was a farm and I had some good times. My dad remarried and he took me to Florida to live with him. I had a good time and saw a lot of new stuff, palm trees, and big fish in the ocean.

Now that I am in Alcoholics Anonymous, I try to do this every day: improve myself. I will live in the moment. Accept what is. Not obsess about the past, or future. Not dwell on thoughts that depress me. Stay out of myself. Be more grateful for what I have.

-- Eric H., Haddon Heights, NJ

Tradition One continued from page 5

responsible, as all other members are, to keep this in the forefront.

Recently I brought up a motion at our group's business meeting that we close our group's meeting with the Responsibility Declaration rather than the Lord's Prayer—or any other prayers. I mentioned that at AA's International Conference in San Antonio in 2010, only a moment of silence was used to close the big meetings in the stadium. I also talked about how AA is now worldwide, and it is a spiritual program, not a religious one. I talked about how the newcomer of today might feel at their first meeting at our group. Group conscience prevailed, and my motion died.

A few months later a young person who had attended a couple of meetings mentioned to me that they felt uncomfortable with the prayers said in meetings and weren't sure if they wanted to continue in AA. I suggested they bring this up as a topic at the meeting. It brought me back to my discussion with Bernie.

Then the words of our co-founder, Dr. Bob, rang in my ears: "Let's not louse this thing up. Let's keep it simple." My life, and the lives of those yet to come, depends on AA unity. - **Linda H., Cutler, Ontario, Canada (from the January 2013 edition of Grapevine Magazine)**

H&I continued from page 4

know much about it. I started going to monthly meetings and started asking questions. After a few months of being there...Scott and (the former H&I chair) Priscilla asked me to help. It was the best thing I ever did, getting involved that way. The sad part is the same people take (the commitments) over and over again. We need to get people who are new to bring their message."

So if someone is reading this and wants to help, what should they do?

Scott says you can go to the SJIG website, which is www.aasj.org, and get information about the H&I Committee. You can also email Scott at handichair@aol.com, or Becky at handicochair@hotmail.com.

Becky suggests that if you are new, try going with someone from your group who has taken an H&I commitment. Just watch and see what happens at the meeting, and if it's for you. If the meeting is a location like Maryville, which is out of the way for many but that really needs volunteers, organize a road trip with several people. Be a host, and bring people with you to share. Scott and Becky recommend having 90 days before signing up as a speaker; if you are under 90 days sober you can host a meeting by reading from approved A.A. literature.

– Patty H., Newsletter Chair

H&I's Open Hosting Commitments

The host is similar to a chairperson for a basic AA meeting. The host opens the meeting and, if for any reason, the speaker(s) do not show they are there to share their experience, strength and hope.

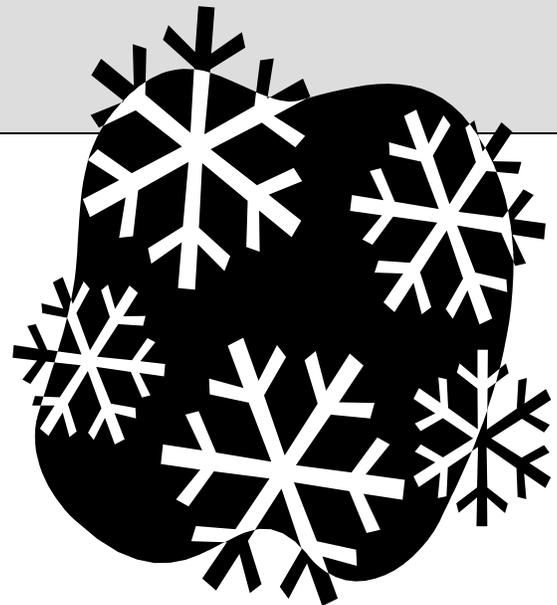
Maryville **Women** Sunday 2 - 3pm 5th week

Maryville **Women** Wednesday 8 - 9pm 5th week

Maryville **Men** Thursday 8 - 9pm 5th week

Ancora Thursday 7 - 8pm 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th & 5th week

Maryville **Women** Friday 8 - 9pm 1st, 2nd, 4th & 5th week



CONTACT INFORMATION FOR SJ INTERGROUP:

South Jersey Intergroup Association, Inc.

PO Box 2514

Cherry Hill, NJ 08034

Office/Literature Sales: 1-856-486-4446

Email: info@aasj.org

Website: www.aasj.org

24 Hour Hotline: 1-856-486-4444

Toll Free Hotline: 1-866-920-1212

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

