

ANONYMOUS SOUTHJERSEY

SOUTH JERSEY INTERGROUP

JUNE 2013

I Drank At Dr. Bob's

Editor's Note: Every June we celebrate Founder's Day. I thought this story of a visit to Dr. Bob's home was a nice way to remember the day. If you haven't made this trip yet, consider doing it soon!

If you count the steps from the street to the front sidewalk of 855 Ardmore Ave., and then the steps from the sidewalk to the porch of the house, you'll come up with the number 12. Hmmm--12 steps up from the gutter. Ardmore Avenue. I didn't think about it at the time.

The Akron, Ohio, house is simple and unpretentious, much like its owners from 1916 to 1950, Dr. Bob and Anne Smith. When we walked in, it felt warm, inviting, safe--just what the first few members of Alcoholics Anonymous needed when they were sobering up in the early days of the movement.

Founder's Day continued on page 2

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Step Six Re-Examined

Step Six: Were entirely ready to have God remove these defects of character

This has been the greatest challenge I have had to face. Self-centered fear combined with resentment and anger shape a formidable triangle of self-obsession. The character defects I have are manifestations of this obsessiveness. One of my personal favorites is self-loathing.

I prefer this to self-pity as it satisfies a need for machismo and martyrdom. In order to pick up the tools of spirituality, I have to put down the weapons of self. This is a difficult and ongoing task for me. I choose the action I am learning as a new path of light. I committed to not drink or use drugs no matter what.

Then I knelt and prayed. I studied the literature of the program. I went to a meeting of AA and I fellowshiped with others.

A complete psychic change is what I must undergo, each day, for this is the only gift I am given. I must use discipline, communication, humility, compassion, and simplicity as tools to bolster my spiritual condition.

The Sixth Step is sometimes called "the last preparation step." For me, it is that and much more. It is also the road to happy destiny that passes beneath the arch of freedom from alcoholism. The archway is build of the preceding five Steps.

But this is just a small part of the Sixth Step. The more thoroughly I work this Step, the greater the fruits that are shown me—not just freedom and joy, but a happiness born of serenity. And a serenity born of living in the now—the most precious grace given me by my higher power.

I define "grace" as undeserved favor. This undeserved favor serves as a blueprint for an unconditional love necessary for true self-worth. Self worth, in turn, allows for living as I want to live, not as if I want to die. Self-worth allows for living life, enjoying life, and sharing my enjoyment of life.

—Jason C., Blacksburg, VA
(from May 2013 online edition of Grapevine Magazine)

Today the house is a National Historic Landmark, operated under the guidance of a foundation, keeping it separate from AA, which is never affiliated with any outside enterprise.

But it retains its homey charm of 1935 when the Smiths welcomed those first members to a new way of life.

Every recovering alcoholic who enters this "place where it all started" is likely to experience it in his or her own way, but common to many is a sense of truly "coming home." Over a third of first-time visitors, I've heard said, find themselves moved to tears upon entering and hearing the words, "Welcome home."

A volunteer named Scott uttered those words to this alcoholic, and I must admit it gave me the warm fuzzies.

But it was in the upstairs bathroom that I felt my special connection--when I saw the open laundry chute where Dr. Bob had creatively hidden many bottles from his wife during his drinking days.

We had something in common on that count, and I felt compelled to reach up into the ductwork--not to find a bottle, of course--but to know I had placed my hand in exactly the same space as had the co-founder of the program that had saved my life.

Such are the little moments for hundreds and thousands of visitors to this venerated site. At the kitchen table downstairs, my wife and I toasted each other for our camera with empty coffee cups, exactly as hundreds of other people had. When Scott offered a real cup of coffee, I happily accepted just so I could say, "I drank at Dr. Bob's house."

Volunteers help with ice and snow removal in the winter, normal home repairs in the summer, and guiding people through the home from noon to 3 P.M. every day but Christmas.

They approach their tasks with an attitude of gratitude and a sense of what Dr. Bob meant when he stressed that above all, a recovering alcoholic needs to keep things simple. They seem to be following his often-quoted summary of how to work the AA program: "Trust God, clean house and help others."

It's a simple formula for a complicated problem, but for countless numbers of recovering alcoholics, it still works.

It is truly a unique "welcome home," just 12 steps up from the gutter.

--Jim B., Macedon, NY
(from the July 2010 edition of Grapevine Magazine)

Dr. Bob's Home in Akron, OH, circa 1930s where Bill W. and Dr. Bob developed Alcoholics Anonymous.



Romantic Delusions

An AA considers commercials selling beer and liquor

Ever find yourself still enjoying beer commercials? I do. I can't seem to get over the most interesting man in the world ones that tell the story of one man's life adventures.

Here's an example of one such commercial. "He once walked past the fountain of youth, did not drink of it, because he was not thirsty...His charm is so contagious, vaccines have been created for it...He bowls overhand... His blood smells like cologne... He is, the most interesting man in the world". Then he says, "I don't always drink beer, but when I do, I prefer _____."

Wow, this guy's done everything! Well, I've done some pretty interesting stuff in my time of drinking as well. As a matter of fact I turned these commercials into a real life story of myself. I now consider myself the most interesting man in AA.

The following are real life stories of what happens to me when I drink. I decided to explain it in the context and format of those famous beer commercials. This really did happen to me.

"One day in 1984, decided to strip in front of the Hubbard High School football team ... On the 4th of July in 1985, he once blew 27 firecrackers off in his teeth, woke up the next day in a tree with gun powder all over his face ... He was actually arrested twice in one day ... He is, the most interesting man in AA. I don't always drink beer, but when I do, I pee the bed..."

Stay sober, my friends!

—Mikey U., Chicago, Ill. (from the May edition of Grapevine Magazine)

Importance of the Home Group

Editors' note: In the May newsletter, we asked readers to tell us why they chose their home groups. We were flooded with answers! Also, be sure to read Matt B.'s piece on home groups. Thanks to all for the wonderful submissions! – Patty and Angie

Why did you choose your home group?

"I was sold on the AA Big Book as the means for solving my drinking problem. Therefore, I made my home group a Big Book meeting. That was also the same as my sponsor's." – Jack C., Monday Night Collingswood

"I love the message I get from my home group, the people and comfort I get...I just LOVE it. Also, the time and the place are a plus for me. If you can't get there [to a meeting] it just doesn't work." – Penny E., Morning Glory Group

"I was looking for a meeting time that would fit my schedule; it also worked out to be a Step and Tradition meeting, which I really needed. I also like the balance that my home group offers." – Stephanie C., Last Mile Step & Tradition, Audubon

"Because of my work schedule I needed a weeknight meeting that was close to my home. It also fit the bill for me, being a Step and Tradition meeting. I've always felt comfortable here." – John F., Audubon Monday Night

"My first home group for some time was a Big Book meeting but I felt I needed a Step and Tradition meeting. I have remained here ever since. I was so honored to say "I love my home" in Minnesota as the Saturday night speaker some years back." – John K., Last Mile Step & Tradition, Audubon.

"My first sponsor suggested I start going to a Step and Tradition meeting. After a six-year coffee commitment and other service I have not had a desire to drink, nor looked for another home group since." -- Frank Z., Last Mile Step & Tradition, Audubon

"I felt at home the first time I walked into this group. They made me feel special that night and have ever since. Our group conscience is one of my highlights each month. Our elders are so respectful to everyone." -- Joe C., Last Mile Step & Tradition, Audubon

"Understanding early that I would need the Steps to live sober and being somewhat God-minded, I chose a Step meeting IN a Church hoping it would make me more comfortable. It worked." -- Charlie D., Last Mile Step & Tradition, Audubon

"It's well run and everyone is respectful. We all have a place and something to do before and after the meeting. I get a chance every Monday night to say "Hi everybody, I'm Brian and it's great to be at my home group tonight." -- Brian H., Last Mile Step & Tradition, Audubon

You too can contribute to our question of the month. Check out this month's question on page 6. Send answers to newsletter@aasj.org.

My Dear South Jersey Friends,

The answer to this month's question cannot be summed up in a brief sentence. It can only be shared through my experience, strength and hope.

I moved back to my home state of Michigan in February of 2012. It was a Friday and, as with most moves, there was a bunch of emotion that went with it. So, grabbing the spiritual tools I had been freely given, I went to a meeting as soon as possible, on Saturday at a local Alano club. Aaaahhh, a piece of home. Not the home where we grew up, but the home where we grew. I went through the rest of the day and most of Sunday unpacking and thinking off and on of the program of AA, and the statement, "If you don't have a home group, you're homeless." Coming from the best home group in South Jersey, I had been taught well the purpose of the triangle.

Monday came and I was anxious to find a home group, because my home group in S.J., a 12 and 12 study, meets on Monday nights. Searching in my old meeting book (7 years old) led me to a Big Book study, right up my alley! In anticipation of this 8 o'clock meeting, I wanted to arrive a little early to have "the meeting before the meeting." I left home an hour before, and on my short drive I called a home group member from S.J., and talked to him of my anticipation of finding a home group on that same night.

As I pulled into the parking lot, I could see exactly where the book said the meeting was: AA on the Parkway, 3rd floor conference room. Wow: three walls of floor-to-ceiling glass overlooking - you guessed it - a parkway. But the meeting was well under way! Now, what to do? Go in? Find another

Home Group continued on page 6

Tradition Six

Tradition Six: An AA group ought never endorse, finance or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.

When I was in rehab, I started looking through the meeting lists available to see which meetings were nearby my home. I noticed that there was a section that had “clubs” and a notation that these clubs were not part of AA. I asked the staffer why it was explicitly noted that these “clubs” are not related to AA, yet they appeared on the meeting list. He explained that the clubs don’t belong to AA and AA can’t endorse any clubs, because of tradition six. Not knowing what a tradition was, and not really caring since I was still less than 30 days sober, I accepted his answer with the statement “that’s stupid.”

Now that I am more than a year sober and learning more about the fellowship of AA, I am beginning to understand the real purpose of tradition six. The message in this tradition is how AA keeps tradition five intact. Tradition five – each group having but one primary purpose – to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers -- is the reason AA works. If AA engaged in the business of buying property, supporting other organizations or getting into corporate financing, then the “business” would become the primary purpose and helping another alcoholic would take a backseat. Even at the group level, if part of the meeting was dedicated to dealing with finances or maintaining property, then the alcoholic who comes to the meeting to listen to the message of sobriety may be disillusioned by the focus on money.

The other component to this tradition – lending of the AA name – also plays an important role in maintaining the integrity of the fellowship. To remain effective, AA must stand alone. As soon as it endorses another organization, or financially supports another organization, a diversion from its purpose arises. Should AA support XYZ Company because it helps alcoholics in prison? Or should ABC organization and AA put forth a campaign to help decrease teen alcoholism? What about supporting the regional rehabilitation center? Wouldn’t that be helping to carry the message to the alcoholic still suffering? All of these endeavors are laudable, yet deciding who AA should support and with how much money, would detract from its primary purpose. Thinking about it, I could only imagine the politicking and infighting that would ensue when a bunch of alcoholics tried to decide who got what and when.

So now that I am sober and learning about the traditions, I better understand why AA can’t endorse clubs and don’t think that the reason why it can’t is “stupid” anymore.

-- Andrew P., Daily Reflections, Haddonfield, NJ

Happy Birthday, Sweet Sobriety!!

The Sweet Sobriety home group was founded in June 1989. It is an open speaker discussion meeting held on Wednesdays from 6:30pm-7:45pm. This group originated due to lack of meetings in the area. Their first meeting location was at Campy's Ice Cream Parlor in Blackwood, NJ, and their current location is at Grenloch Presbyterian Church, on the corner of Lake and East View Avenues in Grenloch, NJ.

Here are some AA "fun facts" for this month from the Archives page on our Intergroup website: www.aasj.org:

June 6, 1940: Richmond, VA's first AA group was founded.

June 15, 1940: Baltimore, MD's first AA group was founded.

June 21, 1944: The first issue of AA Grapevine was published.

--Jenn C., Archives Chair



Answered Prayers

All he had left was desperation. It was all he needed.

December 21, 2002 was the day I died. I was homeless and soulless. My friends and family had disowned me but all I cared about was drinking anyway. I built my life around alcohol and now I found it stopped working.

I was 40 years old, alone, confused and afraid. I begged God to let me die. To me it was the easier softer way out. God had another plan. He sent an old friend I hadn't seen in 20 years. That night, he and my brother checked me into a Coney Island detox.

On the morning of December 22, I awoke trembling, nauseous, and weak. It was my first morning sober. That's how my journey began—with a prayer for God to let me die. It changed my life. All I had left was desperation. It turned out to be all I would need.

I was born in Brooklyn, N.Y., the fifth of six children. I loved and admired my big brother, wanted to be just like him. But when my younger brother was born, instead of thinking, "Now I can be a big brother," I thought, "You're only good enough until something better comes along."

I was an emotional train wreck. Life was intimidating and frightful. I was very solitary—it was often just me and my thoughts. At 14, I got drunk for the first time. Alcohol freed me from my prison. But yet, slowly it made me its slave.

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Many years later, and 33 days sober, I flew down to Florida to live in a halfway house. During the flight, the gentleman next to me ordered a beer.

I was told in rehab I was a pickle and could never be a cucumber again. He sat enjoying his beer. I had my face pressed against the window repeating to myself, "I'm a pickle, I'm a pickle, I'm a pickle!"

I made it through the flight without a drink. When I got to the halfway house, the place to me looked like an alcoholic Sesame Street.

Soon after arriving I was beset with the obsession to drink. Day after day I could almost taste a beer. I couldn't understand it and I scrutinize the 12 Steps on the wall, like they were an eye chart. Why did I want to drink, was I nuts?

One night, after lying in bed all day, I'd had enough. I decided to go to my beginners' meeting and say goodbye and just go drink again. It seemed that anything was better than the way I felt. That night, I shared for the first time. I said, "I need a drink before I have a nervous breakdown." As I was leaving the meeting, a man came up to me and said, "You're dying of untreated alcoholism." At that moment, the obsession to drink was gone.

The next day my sponsor and I went to the park with Big Book. I started the plan of recovery. He took me through the book page by page. He had a 1938 dictionary so I could look up what I didn't comprehend. I began to lose my hopeless state of mind and body. We went to meetings. He was always there for me and thanked me for keeping him sober. It was the first relationship based on love and trust I ever had. As a result of AA, a kinship grew before me.

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I'm no longer afraid of life. I'm not in charge of it, God is. God heard my cry of despair, and because of his grace, I was born into a new life.

—Thomas B., Boca Raton, Fla.
(from the June online edition of Grapevine Magazine)

meeting? Go home? I had over 5 years of sobriety; maybe I would be fine. NO - thanks to this program I heard, "I did not know I needed a meeting till I got here." Besides, you're only late to your first meeting. (Or if you miss the prayer at the end!) I grabbed my Big Book, crossed the parking lot and headed up the hospital elevator. I came into the meeting as quietly as possible; the room was full and the books were open. I was welcomed and gazed upon like chum in the water. (Good sign) I found a chair along the wall.

As the meeting progressed, I learned of a group conscience meeting afterwards. The chair (later to be my sponsor) announced that they would meet to vote as to whether shut the meeting down, or as he said, "finally to put a bullet in it." My heart sank and right away I started a dialog with my God. What's this about? Where to now? I need to be in service! I need to be a member of a home group!

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The meeting ended with the Lord's Prayer, and after some goodbyes by some and introductions by others, we commenced with the group conscience meeting. As it progressed, all the stories of meetings where only 2 or 3 people would show up, and all the other reasons why the group should disband, came out of previous chairs.

Then it struck me like a lightning bolt (HAH! I would love the credit) that God does for me what I cannot do for myself. I AM HOME. They were about to call for a vote and my hand went up. I was called upon, and I told them of my sobriety date, my service and that I would be willing to be a responsible member of the group to ensure that I or someone else was there to carry the message.

Since that time, all my needs have been met. Even though I have moved a considerable distance from this meeting, I continue as an active member of the group as its G.S.R. This meeting is now thriving again, carrying the

message, and is active in the area. I will soon rotate out of this service position, and will look for a new home group closer to where I live. It is because of God that this group thrives; I have been just a servant to His will.

So, "Why did I select my home group?" I will close with the combined wisdom of the first 100:

"Yes there is a substitute and it is vastly more than that. It is a fellowship in Alcohol Anonymous; there you will find release from care, boredom and worry. Your imagination will be fired. Life will mean something at last. The most satisfactory years of your existence lie ahead. Thus we find the fellowship, and so will you."

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"How is that to come about?" you ask. Where am I to find these people?"

"You are going to meet these friends in your own community. Near you, alcoholics are dying helplessly like people in a sinking ship. If you live in a large place, there are hundreds. High and low, rich and poor, these are future fellows of Alcoholics Anonymous. Among them you will make lifelong friends. You will be bound to them with new and wonderful ties, for you will escape disaster together and you will commence shoulder to shoulder your common journey. Then you will know what it means to give of yourself that others may survive and rediscover life. You will learn the full meaning of "Love thy neighbor as thyself." (Alcoholics Anonymous p. 152-153)

In gratitude,

Matt B., Canton, Michigan (formerly of Audubon, NJ)

AnonymousSJ always welcomes letters and long responses to our monthly question. Please see page 7 for the June Question of the Month.

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 AA as a whole, nor does publication of information imply any endorsement by either AA or South Jersey Intergroup. Quotations and artwork from AA literature are printed with permission from AA World Services, Inc., and/or The AA 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.

Please send your submissions to newsletter@asj.org.

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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

Letter to the Editor

Hi.

I'm Eric H. I'm happy the warm weather is coming. I'm looking forward to the picnics. I have good memories of Church picnics in Doswell, VA. There was a long picnic table with abundance of food and cakes under the sun and moon. I like it when the moon was up over the trees, I was small and tried to envision more light in the sky.

Thank you for letting me share.

If you have a letter to share about something in this issue, or any issue of AASJ, please send your thoughts to newsletter@asj.org

Announcements

The chair and co-chair of the newsletter committee (and many others) will be rotating out at the end of the year. Now is your chance to get involved in service at the Intergroup level. If you think you might be interested in taking over the newsletter, we're happy to help you make a smooth transition. Please contact Patty or Angie at newsletter@asj.org for more information.

Question of the Month

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

What convinced you that you had a problem?

Please email your replies no later than Friday, July 12, to newsletter@asj.org.

DEADLINES FOR SUBMISSIONS

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|--|-----------------------------|
| <i>July, Step and Tradition 7</i> | <i>Friday, July 12</i> |
| <i>August, Step and Tradition 8</i> | <i>Friday, August 16</i> |
| <i>September, Step and Tradition 9</i> | <i>Friday, September 13</i> |
| <i>October, Step and Tradition 10</i> | <i>Friday, October 11</i> |
| <i>November, Step and Tradition 11</i> | <i>Friday, November 15</i> |
| <i>December, Step and Tradition 12</i> | <i>Friday, December 13</i> |

For each month, we'd love to get your submissions on the step or tradition that corresponds. We are always looking for AAs to share their Experience, Strength and Hope (ESH) in print.

