

ANONYMOUS SOUTHJERSEY

SOUTH JERSEY INTERGROUP

DECEMBER 2014

A 10-Year Sobriety Coin is the Right Gift for This Newcomer

My name is Derrick, and I'm an alcoholic.

My biological father is estranged to me. I have not seen him since I was about six or seven years old, and the last time I saw him, I didn't know it would be the last time. The truth about his relationship with my mother, sister and I, is mired in myth, lies and legend.

My two sources of information (my mother and grandmother) have conflicting stories as to what kind of man he was. Without taking the inventories of either of them, I can only assume this is due to resentment and pain he caused, and the strained relationship between the two matriarchs of my family. I know this much to be fact: he had another family, a wife and kids; he was not always truthful in the stories he told.



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Undreamed Rewards

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

I had "suggested" to my sponsee that it was time for him to give serious consideration (translation: "get moving!") to sponsoring others. He nodded somewhat tepidly and I noticed the look of apprehension in his eyes. He was afraid of something; but what?

After casting about in my thoughts for what he might be afraid of, I hazarded a guess: he was afraid that, in devoting his sobriety to another, he might lose some of it himself. Not that he would get drunk, but that some of the wisdom he had worked so hard to accumulate these past years, might, in the process of sharing with another, leave him. He was afraid that, in devoting his sobriety to another, he might lose some of it himself.

What my sponsee didn't realize, and what I myself didn't realize when I started to work with others, was that, through the "divine paradox" mentioned in Step Twelve, the more time spent working with another alcoholic, the more (not the less)

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A Recipe for a Sober Holiday

The holiday season always poses special problems for we who are avoiding the Yuletide sauce. If we are working our program one day at a time, each of these days should be considered the same as any other, I know. But as I make meetings in early December, the ominous question on many lips, especially newcomers', is "How am I going to get through the holidays?"

My first Christmas sober was a tough one, and may be for others, too. So I'd like to pass on my favorite holiday recipe for a sober Christmas: Take a lot of meetings; mix generously with some finely grated Easy Does Its; add a day at a time; simmer over a few well-seasoned remember-whens.

For me, meetings are an essential key to any success in the AA program. Those members whom I see putting one sober day at a time back to back also seem to be making lots of meetings. I don't think it's a coincidence. How many meetings one should make is surely an individual matter, but if the holidays pose special problems, as they always do for me, "too many" simply doesn't exist. If I'm uptight over any situation anytime during the year, meetings offer at least a start, and often a solution, to getting loose.

I think Easy Does It gives sobriety some durability. I'm inclined to be an intense person, and remembering not to take myself so seriously also keeps me loose. It can be hard to live a day at a time when advertisers are hitting us from mid-November on with nearly 800 messages daily that there are only so many days till Christmas. They have their own program to work, but I have to be careful not to let the pressure and expectations of the season lead me to blow my cool.

"A day at a time" is a great philosophy of life, in addition to being the only way I can stay sober. My first year in AA, I was wondering on Thanksgiving Day how I'd get through an office party in mid-December. (How futile!) Sometimes it's even necessary for me to break the day down to a few hours or even a few minutes at a time. (I've often imagined myself as Grapevine's Victor E., thinking, "One beer commercial at a time.") The nice thing for me is that every minute, hour, or day gained makes the hump that much easier to get over.

When I remember Christmases past, I have a tremendous temptation to rationalize all the "wonderful times" the liquid season brought to my otherwise dreary life. Christmas always broke the routine of drowning my sorrows alone. Police officers were more understanding. Tavern-owners (already wealthy on my daily contributions) were generous and bought for the house. And of course, didn't everyone get a little tight for Christmas?

But then I have to pause and realistically remember when my children's father spent the holidays in fluid drive. I have to be honest and remember those "wonderful times" at our house: the

Those members whom I see putting one sober day at a time back to back also seem to be making lots of meetings. I don't think it's a coincidence.

loans to pay for the presents, to cover the guilt of never being a parent; the loans to pay "the electric bills" (when I knew all the time that the money would go to pay the bar tabs); the last-minute shopping that ended with "just one quick one" on Mahogany Ridge and only a \$1.98 hat for a wife who had waited all day for me to come home; the used watch purchased from the bar-room therapist in the white apron (who would, of course, put it on the tab); the "wonderful" sense of accomplishment I felt on Christmas Day watching my four children open their gifts, as I nursed a big head and a weak stomach and wondered how I'd repay the loan that had paid for the presents that were bought to pay for the guilt of taking the loan; and the hope that in the whole deal I'd bought some respect and given some love.

Boy, those were "wonderful times"! I found it really tough to give all that up. But now it's much more pleasant to think of the four great Christmases my family and I have enjoyed in sobriety.

Looking back, I see that my recipe lacks one vital instruction: It should be baked 365 days a year in an oven of gratitude. The deep gratitude I have for the AA program and the life it has opened for me is beyond expression. There must be a Santa Claus—or something!

—Ray S., Snyder, N.Y.

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The Paradox of Giving It Away to Keep It

My sponsor taught me about the four paradoxes of AA. They are: we surrender to win, we suffer to get well, we die to live, and we give it away to keep it. These come from the story "The Professor and the Paradox" found in the second edition of the Big Book.

In this season of giving and receiving, I will focus on the last.

One of my favorite passages in the Big Book (third edition) is on pp. 128-9: "Like a gaunt prospector, belt drawn in over the last ounce of food, our pick struck gold. Joy at our release from a lifetime of frustration knew no bounds. Father feels he has struck something better than gold. For a time he may try to hug the new treasure to himself. He may not see at once that he has barely scratched a limitless lode which will pay dividends only if he mines it for the rest of his life and insists on giving away the entire product."

I don't know at what point I realized in my sobriety that AA's spiritual program of the 12 Steps really was a limitless lode--probably when I had solved problem #127 by working one or more of the steps--I just know I gradually had the dawning realization that this spiritual program really had depths I would never totally plumb, and that I could live life on life's terms and have a real and rich and deeply satisfying life. Not a life based on fantasies, those grandiose dreams I dreamed while drunk, but a life doing the so-called "small things"--cleaning the house, paying bills, going for a walk, celebrating a friend's birthday, making a holiday dinner,

etc., etc., etc. And yes, the sadder things--tending to an ill loved-one, going to a funeral, sending a sympathy card, calling on a bereaved one. All the "little things" that make up the tapestry of life.

I read about the Famous People--those who have made such a difference in the world--the architects, artists, scientists, educators--and I realize I won't be in that elite cadre of people. My contribution is to be a loving friend, a supportive family member, a volunteer to my community. All the things I couldn't do drunk--but can sober. This is part of the "limitless lode" for me.

And what about the "giving it away in order to keep it"? Well, that's the volunteering, offering and giving help and support to loved ones, doing service work in AA. And on and on and on.

Isaac Newton said in his famous PRINCIPIA MATHEMATICA: "For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction." He further went on to say they happen simultaneously, and one cannot happen without the other. I believe that's true of giving and receiving. Every time we give, we receive the gift of giving. Every time we receive, we give the opportunity for another person to receive the gift of giving.

It's like that parable of the difference between heaven and hell. In hell everyone's arms are too long to feed themselves--so they sit at a table full of food and starve. In heaven, same scenario, only everyone is feeding each other. We give it away in order to receive it.

--Pat P.

A Different Perspective:

Staying on Guard During the Holidays

With the holiday season upon us, we should take a long look at ourselves and be on our guard against *over-jubilation*. We really should avoid taking credit for our good deeds or our accomplishments, as if these are of our own doing, and remember that these have been given us by the Grace and the Mercy of our Higher Power.

We also have to be always on our guard in the way we celebrate with family and friends; and this goes whether we have one day, one month, or many years of sobriety. Our friends and family will appreciate our recovery efforts and realize that we have put forth those efforts and continue to put forth those efforts every day. Perhaps in the end, our Creator will say to us, "Job well done."

God bless all of us for getting through another Holiday season without taking a drink.

Big Mike

The Right Gift

(From page 1)

Much of what I know about my father I now refer to as “the myth and the legend.” He told my mother he was a Vietnam veteran—a statement she doesn’t truly believe. Apparently he told her many things, and did not tell her many things, about his past. My mother and father dated for many years, and had two children: my younger sister and myself. It wasn’t until a few years after my sister was born that my mother found out he had another family.

When I was 21, still at college and drinking alcoholically (though I wouldn’t come to admit I was an alcoholic until I learned to identify in the Rooms), I set out on a quest to find him. I was plagued with feelings of inadequacy, and with the idea that without ever knowing who my father was, I would never know how to be a man, or worse, be doomed to repeat the patterns of his mistakes.

My family was originally from California, and I was able to track down his other family there. They were gracious and sympathetic. His wife was incredibly sweet on the phone, wishing me luck in my search, and I was actually able to speak to and later receive a visit from my half-brother. The myth and the legend continued, however; I was told that nobody had seen or heard from him in fifteen years—then later told that he

might be living in Arizona, working as a dog trainer.

When I was young, my mother gave me three trinkets and a dozen photographs of he and I, and this is how I’ve remembered him. The trinkets include a gold pocket watch, his dog tags, and a coin for military service. These

The coin – I held it in my hand and my heart stopped. Tears welled in my eyes. This was not a coin for military service. It was a ten-year sobriety coin.

were all given to her when they dated, and as I grew up, she thought it better that I have them as a way to remember him. I carried them with me as we traveled and relocated, occasionally reminiscing with the pictures, but never spent much time missing him. He was absent even when he was in my life, to the point that when I was young, I didn’t realize until I visited with friends that fathers typically live with their families.

My father didn’t appear on my fourth-step. I had “forgiven” him long ago, when the quest to find him resulted in a dead-end. I’ve also come to believe that my resentment was too cunning and deep to surface on the writing of my first fourth-step. However, he has given me a gift that can only be explained as an act of God in my life.

I had been sober for exactly one month and about to leave my apartment for a meeting when I decided to again open up the box of his trinkets. The gold pocket watch would not open. The dog tags showed his name, religion, blood-type. The coin—I held it in my hand and my heart stopped. Tears welled in my eyes. This was

not a coin for military service. It was a ten-year sobriety coin. I had handled this coin several times as a child, wondering what he had done to earn it, but never realized what it was. My father is an alcoholic.

I asked my mother about the coin. She said that he had told her it was a coin for military service, and being completely in love with him, she had never questioned it. I told her what it truly was. Then as she thought back, she could remember only once when they had gone out to a fancy dinner had he ordered a cocktail—but she could not remember him drinking it.

I do not question why he might have lied about that coin, or how he could have lived a double-life while attempting to practice these principles in all of his affairs. I’m blessed that resentment does not fill me with the desire to be angry at his shortcomings—those are between he and his Higher Power.

As I marked my first thirty days on this spiritual journey of sobriety, I

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Editorial Policy

Anonymous South Jersey is a monthly newsletter published by and for members of South Jersey. 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@aaaj.org.

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SJIG holds its monthly meetings on the third Wednesday of the month at 8 pm at St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church 1989 Route 70 East, Cherry Hill, NJ

HAPPY HOLIDAYS

"The Trustees and Committee members of the South Jersey Intergroup want to extend their heartfelt thanks to all our readers for supporting Intergroup throughout the year and their warmest wishes for a New Year filled with sobriety, joy and sharing."

Opportunities for Service

IDRC in Vineland needs Spanish Speaker

The Intoxicated Drivers Resource Center (IDRC) is in need of a Spanish speaking A.A. member to give IDRC participants basic information about Alcoholics Anonymous. The commitment is not for the purposes of telling your story of recovery but rather, to give participants a basic idea of what A.A. is and what it can offer the problem drinker.

The person selected may choose to speak on the third Wednesday or Thursday of the month between the hours of 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. at the IDRC in Vineland.

If you are interested or know someone who might be able to perform this service, please contact Gail V. at 856-858-4556 or make email contact at publicinfo@aaaj.org.

Step 12

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wisdom one gets to accumulate and keep. Thus the saying, 'you cannot keep it, unless you give it away.'

Of course, part of this "paradox" (and this is perhaps what makes it "divine") is that one usually doesn't really believe it until one tries it for himself. The initial reaction is, how could this be? How could you get to keep (and even increase) something, by giving it away? The only answer is to encourage one to try it and see. There is no logical explanation for the phenomenon and again, this is what makes it "divine."



Step Twelve tells us that "even the newest of newcomers finds undreamed rewards as he tries to help his brother alcoholic." And this works, the Step tells us, "whether his brother has yet received anything or not." Thus, the second thing I tell my sponsee: don't get discouraged if the first two, three or six people you try to

help, don't get better. Just keep going (remember, Bill W. and Dr. Bob combed through hundreds of alcoholics before finding "the man on the bed").

It will take the experience of helping others and working on a long-term basis with others, before the fear of losing one's own sobriety is replaced by the joys of gaining more sobriety than one had before and before "he somehow knows that God has enabled him to make a mighty beginning, and he senses that he stands at the edge of new mysteries, joys, and experiences of which he had never dreamed."

--Masonville Marty

The Right Gift

(continued from page 4)

held his coin and wept. Like sobriety, it is a gift that I could never have imagined for myself. All of the promises, all of the healing, all of the open-hearted forgiveness that A.A. encompasses seemed to be pressed into this piece of metal. It was as if every missed birthday and Christmas that had ever passed between us since some time in 1992 had been delivered in my discovery of this coin.

I am thankful that I did not discover the coin until I had reached my first month of sobriety, for I am certain I would have used it as an excuse to drink (reasoning: I'm an alcoholic, like my absent father, and now I'll be the self-fulfilling prophecy). Just like my relationship with my Higher Power, the coin was there all along, but I did not know what it was, or how to appreciate it.

I still do not know where my father is. I hope he is well. I hope he is not drinking. My only desire is that

he somehow know I do not have a burning resentment toward him, that we are together in the fellowship of the spirit, and that he has helped me along the road of happy destiny. I pray that he may have serenity.

When I told my sponsor about the coin, he said, "Hold on to that, and one day, have someone present it to you on your ten-year anniversary." So long as I continue on the spiritual path, work the steps, do my best to practice the principles, don't drink, go to meetings, be of service and call my sponsor, I fully intend and believe that this coin will be presented to me one day. And perhaps one day, before he dies, I will be able to help my father in some small way, and be able to give back the magic of this coin, and the gift of the fellowship that was so freely given to me.

Thank you for allowing me to share.

--Derrick



The Seven Gifts of AA

Pat P.'s The Seven Gifts of AA has helped all of us count our blessings. To celebrate, here are some new lyrics to an old holiday song. (Sung to the tune of *The 12 Days of Christmas*).

The first gift of AA

my Higher Power gave to me:
A life of sobriety.

The second gift of AA

my Higher Power gave to me:
two just-for-today's;
and a life of sobriety.

The third gift of AA

my Higher Power gave to me:
three free choices;
two just-for-today's;
and a life of sobriety.

The fourth gift of AA

my Higher Power gave to me:
Four Big-Book meetings;
three free choices;
two just-for-today's;
and a life of sobriety.

The fifth gift of AA

my Higher Power gave to me:
Five grateful attitudes;
four Big-Book meetings;
three free choices;
two just-for-today's;
and a life of sobriety



The sixth gift of AA

my Higher Power gave to me:
Six reasons for hope;
Five grateful attitudes;
four Big-Book meetings;
three free choices;
two just-for-today's;
and a life of sobriety.

The seventh gift of AA

my Higher Power gave to me:
Seven drunks a sharing;
six reasons for hope;
five grateful attitudes;
four Big-Book meetings;
three free choices;
two just for today's;
and A LIFE OF SOBRIETY!

--Steve W. Masonville

**Happy Holidays from Your Friends at
the Newsletter Committee. Keep Coming Back!**

Fellowship Announcements and Things to Do

December 2014

Friday, November 21 – The Threshold Group will celebrate their 38th Anniversary at Virtua Hospital Conference Room 175 Madison Ave., Mt. Holly. Food at 7:00 PM and Speakers at 7:30.

November 21-23 – Waves of Sobriety 8th Annual Roundup at The Grand, 1045 Beach Avenue, Cape May, NJ. Cape Atlantic Intergroup will present a weekend of recovery. Cost: \$30. More Info: www.WavesRoundup.com.

Wednesday, November 26 – Thanksgiving Alcathon, Kiss Club, 818 N. Broad St, Woodbury, NJ. Starts at 6:00 PM and goes to Thursday, Nov 27th 6:00 PM. Speaker meetings every hour on the hour. Food and beverages. For info contact Jim M: 609-970-2483. Food donations appreciated. NEW

Thursday, November 27 – Thanksgiving Alcathon. 482 Club, 7550 N. Crescent Blvd.(Rt. 130), Pennsauken, NJ. 856-356-2852. Meetings every hour from 12:00 PM – 9:00 PM. NEW

Saturday, November 29 – A Double Birthday. Magnolia Saturday Night celebrating 43 years and *Grapevine* celebrating 70 years. A dessert meeting with one anniversary speaker and two *Grapevine* speakers. 8:30-10:00 PM. Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Evesham and Warwick Roads, Magnolia. (bldg. in the rear).Dessert Contributions Welcome. NEW

Sunday, November 30 – Bordentown Gratitude Dinner. Christ Episcopal Church, Prince Street, Bordentown, NJ. Dinner at 6:00 PM. Speakers @ 7:00PM. Join us for a Pot Luck dinner and two speakers who will share their story on the topic of Gratitude. Pot Luck dishes will gratefully be accepted. NEW

Monday, December 1 – Egg Harbor City "The Harbor Lights Group" will celebrate their 35th Anniversary at 7:00 PM – food. Guest speaker 8:30 PM. Paul McQ. Zion Lutheran Church, 312 Philadelphia Ave., Egg Harbor City, NJ (parking 351 Cincinnati Ave under the water tower) - appetizer & dessert donations welcomed. NEW

Sunday, December 6 – Traditions Workshop 2:00 – 5:00 p.m. 482 Social Hall, 7550 North Crescent Blvd., Pennsauken, NJ. **Topics:** How the traditions are applicable to you; connections between steps and traditions; how groups relate to other groups and to the world at large; what we sacrifice for unity. Presenters: Ed J., Bev A., Al B. Call Amy S. for more info. (856-404-0237).

Sunday, December 21– Sunday Big Book 25th Anniversary. St. Bart's Episcopal Church, 1989 Rt. 70 East, Cherry Hill. Pizza & Refreshments. Guest speaker from 7:00 – 9:00 PM.

Saturday, January 17 – Woodstown Group will celebrate their 60th Anniversary. Eating begins at 6:30 PM. Speaker to follow at 8:00 PM. NEW

Saturday, January 24 – Woodstown District 13 will be having an AA workshop @ 46 Auburn St. Woodstown, NJ 8:30 AM – 1:00 PM. NEW

If you have any changes or any new items that you feel would benefit our fellowship, please let me know, so we can get it out to the people. Wayne: 856- 534-0104 or wcp714@verizon.net