

ANONYMOUS SOUTHJERSEY

SOUTH JERSEY INTERGROUP

NOVEMBER 2015

April in November—Vacation and Brews

I just returned from a fantastic 11-day adventure on the road. My boyfriend and I packed up my car, strapped on our hiking boots, and set out on a New England adventure to Cape Cod, the Maine coast, and White Mountains.

While we've taken weekend trips before, this was our first extended vacation. And while I love vacationing, it can sometimes be stressful and as a sober person in a world

where drinking is often considered a part of vacationing and relaxing, I knew I needed to be on the right spiritual ground to handle this vacation.

We started on a pretty good foot—we enjoyed fancy dinners, exploring new places, and taking in the local scenes. But once we hit football Sunday while we were away, things got a little hairy. I wanted to make sure my boyfriend had a good time

too and we both enjoy football, so I found a local tavern online that was sure to show the game and provide me with some yummy clam chowder.

But once we got there, I wasn't so thrilled. Instead of saying, "this place is a little divey for me, can we go somewhere else?" I just wasn't in the mood. Everyone was

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Practicing the Secret of Being Content

By Mike M.

Trying to find contentment is very hard, sometimes impossible for me to achieve. High and low emotions are like the ocean: sometimes serene and sometimes cresting high and powerful. Waves come at us without any warning.

Too often, we let our circumstances determine our attitudes. When life is good, I feel good about myself; but when life gets hard, my attitude towards life and myself begin to deteriorate. I need to practice the secret of being content.

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Step 11: Structure

Step 11: Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

Being a Professor of English, I am given to looking for the structure in a composition—meaning, what are its formal elements? There is a structure to Step Eleven and the Step itself tells us: "There is a direct linkage among self-examination, meditation and prayer." Exactly in what does that "linkage" consist of?

In one way or another, the Step indicates that meditation comes first. I quiet myself and try to clear my mind for meditation.

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Inside This Issue: Let God Go First, by Pat P. ♦ The Gift of Sobriety ♦ A Fond Farewell from the Editor
♦ Tradition 11 ♦ Newcomer's First Thanksgiving Sober
♦ Things To Do

25-Pound Turkey, 500-Pound Phone: A Newcomer Gets Through His First Sober Thanksgiving

Holidays, for me, were always fueled by alcohol. I used to like to say that if you shook my family tree, bottles would fall everywhere. However, it turns out that I was the alcoholic.

I started drinking when I was 15 and quickly fell into the abyss of alcoholism.

When I was 18, I came up with three “rules” so I wouldn’t be labeled as someone with a drinking problem: 1) never drink alone; 2) never drive drunk; and 3) never go to a bar by myself. Looking back, it seems strange that an 18-year-old would have created “rules” to drink by, especially since that someone (me) had no other life plans.

Holidays were joyous occasions in my family, and relatives would come over to my parents’ house. As I began to drink more, I became what I now call an “eve drinker.” On the eve of every holiday—Christmas, Thanksgiving, you name it—I would always be in a bar or drinking with my family or with friends at home. It didn’t matter where I was, as long as there was alcohol.

On Christmas Eve my family always went to a friend’s house for libations and food. I’d hang out in the kitchen all night with the caterers and drink vast quantities of beer, telling them what a fine job they were doing. Then I’d go home and pass out. Christmas was especially great because I would usually get a case or two of beer as a gift. My family and friends knew what I appreciated. In retrospect, I

used alcohol as a way to numb myself through the holidays.

By the time I was in my early 20s, I’d already been fired from two good jobs, and both times alcohol was involved. I wouldn’t actually show up on the



job drunk, but I had the “ism” of not feeling appreciated, and I would talk badly about other people. I was always thinking that I “deserved better than this.” I never did anything to earn praise or promotions. So when I went to my parents’ house for the holidays I would be filled with shame and guilt about how my life was turning out. Of course, my response was to turn to alcohol. I always ramped up my drinking during the holidays.

Then one day, after the July 4th holidays of 1993 were over, I finally decided I had had enough. On July 13, I put down the booze and walked into the Green House Group of AA in Winter Park, Fla. After about three months, I finally got a home group and a sponsor. But I still didn’t know what to do with myself. Getting sober was tough enough, what with the withdrawals, the mood swings and the night terrors and

all, but now I was about to face the horror of sober holidays. I had no concept of “one day at a time” yet. Imagine, I thought to myself, going through Thanksgiving and Christmas—much less New Year’s Eve—without alcohol!

I wasn’t calling my sponsor much because my phone (which I so freely used drunk) felt like it weighed 500 pounds when I would go to check in. But I made sure to go to a meeting on Thanksgiving eve, figuring that since this was a huge drinking night for me, I should be with fellow alcoholics. So far, so good. I was really nervous, but I never told anyone about my fear of the holidays.

The next day, Thanksgiving morning, I went to take a shower. My partner and I were getting ready to go over to relatives for the big meal. Suddenly I was overwhelmed with the urge to drink. I decided I would indeed drink. I was strangely calm about my decision and was grateful that I would finally put this monster to rest. But as I stepped out of the shower, it suddenly hit me that I should call my sponsor and tell him about my great idea. To this day I have no idea why I had that thought. Was it divine intervention? I still do not know.

So with a towel wrapped around my waist and dripping water everywhere, I finally picked up that 500-pound phone and dialed my sponsor’s number. I told him I was going to drink. He said that he could not stop me from drinking,

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Gratitude for the Gift of Sobriety

As we celebrate Thanksgiving in November, I give thanks for the incredible, wonderful gift of sobriety. What brings this to my mind is the story "A.A. Taught Him to Handle Sobriety" on pages 554-561 of the third edition of the Big Book.

The story starts out with a quote: "God willing, we...may never again have to deal with drinking, but we have to deal with sobriety every day."

Then follows the opening paragraph: "When I had been in A.A. only a short while, an old-timer told me something that has affected my life ever since. 'A.A. does not teach us how to handle our drinking,' he said. 'It teaches us how to handle sobriety.'"

Later the author says, "I have come to realize that the name of the game is not so much to stop drinking as to STAY sober...."

"How do we do it? By learning--through practicing the Twelve Steps and through sharing at meetings--how to cope with the problems that we looked to booze to solve, back in our drinking days...."



"We learn how to level out the emotional swings that got us in trouble both when we were up and when we're down. We are taught to differentiate between our wants (which are never satisfied) and our needs (which are always provided for). We cast off the burdens of the past and the anxieties of the future, as we begin to live in the present, one day at a time."

I couldn't say it better. So I let this anonymous author in the Big Book say it for me.

Happy Thanksgiving reader. And thank you, God, for the incredible, wonderful gift of sobriety.

Pat P.

Contentment

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For such a life-changing attitude to grow, I must surrender my will and allow God's will to manifest itself in me. I have to understand that my wants and needs are different than what God has in store for me. My desire to run the show and control events is slowly replaced with a reliance on Him and His will for me.

This attitude becomes more appealing as I realize that fighting against my circumstances brings anxiety and other negative emotions. I need to trust my Higher Power in any situation. If I can learn to trust in that idea, than I can begin to experience true joy and contentment in my life.

ANONYMOUS SOUTHJERSEY

LET GOD GO FIRST

My sponsor tells this story.

When she was first sober, many years ago, her ex-husband decided to take her back to court to get his child support reduced. She was terrified, because she needed every cent to make ends meet.

Her sponsor offered to go to the court hearing with her, which she gratefully accepted. As they were sitting outside the courtroom, waiting to be called in, she sat there shaking with fear. At this point, her sponsor made a suggestion that changed her world.

"Gail," he said, "why don't you let God go first?"

The way she tells it now, she doesn't remember a thing that transpired during that hearing. All she knows is that she did indeed let God go first, and at the end, the judge chastised her ex-husband, and ordered him to pay more child support than he had been.

Ever since then, whenever she feels afraid, she lets God go first, and that calms her fears. Thanks to her, I have learned to do the same.

Pat P.



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Step 11

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I don't edit, I just see what thoughts come and go. I watch myself processing images and thoughts. Thusly, I am examining myself. I am looking and observing. I am not judgmental.

After a time, I propose to myself some things to pray for. Note that I do not pray for the things that I want to pray for, or the things that I think I should pray for; I just consider certain things to pray for. Of the things that I consider to pray for, I need to ask myself, are these selfish prayers? Are they things that I want or things that I think might be good for others? If they are, then I must discard them as prayers I want to address to my higher power. Why? Because the Step tells me that I am to pray only for knowledge of my higher power's will, not my own.

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Here is the "linkage" that the Step speaks of. In order to examine myself and my motives for praying, I must meditate first. Meditation clears the air, clears the ground for self-examination to take place. It is only within the confines and space of meditation that I can begin to see what my motivations for prayer are and where those motivations are different from what my higher power's will for me is. Wherever I suspect this difference, I discard the self-centered prayer and replace it with a prayer for knowledge of God's will.

Prayer itself is the last stage of the "linkage" in Step Eleven. Prayer is the outcome of the meditation and self-examination that have taken place prior to the

Tradition Eleven

Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films.

Tradition Eleven works on two levels: the group level and the personal level. On the group level, it means that AA as an entity, exercises great restraint in "promotion": it avoids self-advertisement and publicity generated by its own efforts. On the personal level, we, as members, remain anonymous; revealing our AA membership only when necessary to help another alcoholic.

On the group level, we leave it to others to spread the word about our existence and our activities. If news or social media organizations wish to write about us, we pose no obstacle to this; however, we do not break our anonymity for the benefit of the "spotlight." We believe that it is far better for potential AA's to come to us; to seek us out. Thus, "attraction" not "promotion."

As a group, we also ask news organizations and social media outlets, to respect our policy of anonymity. Most do, and have been doing so since 1935. Tradition Eleven tells us that GSO did make an effort to communicate with the "major" news outlets to inform them of our policy and that most agreed and have been holding good to that request. Is it time for another outreach effort? That is a question we might well consider in the coming months.

On the personal level, we avoid the "spotlight" also. We find that it does little good to allow our names and reputations to be publicly associated with AA. This avoids harming AA as a whole

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prayer. At this stage, the prayers that I actually make to God have been "filtered" through meditation and self-examination and are the kinds of prayers that the Step envisions.

Thusly I maintain and improve my conscious contact with my higher power. My higher power (here I speak only for myself) is witness to my efforts to meditate (not an easy practice by any means) and then to my self-examination: to my efforts to sort out the difference between what I might want and what my higher power intends for me. The Step is fairly clear: I am seeking knowledge only and nothing more, except the power and courage to carry out God's plans for me.

--Masonville Marty

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@asj.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

From Your Editor

Thoughts on Passing It On

I was going to wait until December for this “swan song” but the time seems right just about now. My commitment as your editor is coming to an end this year and it's time to turn the stewardship of this Newsletter over to some fresh blood. There are of course, so many people to thank for their help, assistance, and commitment in making this a truly first-class publication. Those people know who they are because I thank them each and every month when we make our deadline.



Together, we've tried to make this Newsletter truly reflective of the writing talent we have here in South Jersey. Since the beginning of my commitment, our effort has been in getting local people to write for us. When we started, something like 70% of the space in the Newsletter was filled by Grapevine reprints. For the last 18 months, only about 20% (max) of our column space is devoted to Grapevine reprints; the rest is all original work from writers here in South Jersey. People have answered the call to submit their articles and I am thankful to all of them who did.

My experience with Intergroup and with the upper reaches of AA as a non-organization, organization, has been most rewarding however it has left me with some concerns. For example, I am worried that, in this high-tech, fast-moving world, AA is in danger of going too “corporate.” I felt that at the few area conventions I attended as well as the International convention. Thousands of people seemed involved and eager to participate in these mass events however and at the same time, I hear that many groups are having trouble getting coffee-makers and Intergroup representatives. In other words, there seems to be convention-type get-togethers galore, but no “boots on the ground” at the level where the real work of AA gets done; i.e., at the ‘actually getting people sober level.’

I mean, don't get me wrong, it's swell to have

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Tradition 11

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protects us against others using our personal example (good or bad) as a symbol of AA's success or failure.

We do and can tell another person about our AA membership and work when to do so would encourage that person to attend a meeting or to seek out help for their own drinking. We also express to that person, our own wish for anonymity. That way, we reinforce the message that AA is about "principles" and not "personalities."

Balancing these approaches, the personal and the group, can be a tricky business in our age of technology and social media. We live in an age where the boundaries between the personal and the public, seem to be rapidly disappearing. We need however, to make the effort to maintain some boundaries, lest we risk losing the precious gift of anonymity altogether. Each day and each advance in technology, brings new challenges for us as recovering people. I am confident however that, with our resourcefulness and our trust in spiritual principles, we will find our way.

Your Editor

Vacation

(From page 1)

drinking and yelling, my boyfriend had a beer (which unfairly got me extra annoyed at him), and I was over it. And I sure didn't hide it. I then managed to ruin my time, and my boyfriend's—all because I didn't just speak up when I felt I wasn't in the right position to be sitting in a bar. Never was I tempted to drink, instead, I was just annoyed at everyone around me and let it get under my skin. We left the bar around half time and ended up having a not so fun vacation discussion with my boyfriend. He's always supportive and understanding and he called me out on not speaking up when I wasn't comfortable. And he

was right. Why wouldn't I just say, "you know I thought this was a good idea but now that we are here, I'd rather go somewhere else?" He wouldn't have judged and I would have saved our evening. I learned from that for the rest of the trip though.

When we were in the mountains we found a local brewery and I was completely fine going there for dinner to check out the local spot and encouraged him to try a beer. I was in the right mindset and knew it would be a restaurant and scene I could handle. In fact, I learned that several of the local breweries in Maine and New Hampshire brewed fresh root beer! So instead of getting beers, both my boyfriend and I got hooked on trying different root beers around town.

As soon as I changed my attitude, I actually stopped and saw that there was something for me there. My poor boyfriend is often on the receiving end of me trying out and failing at different social situations where drinking is involved. He's always been supportive though and I love that with that one misstep and conversation, we then turned everything around and I got to discover something I may not have before! And while he liked to have a beer a few times on our vacation, he was just as happy trying the different root beers with me—even saying "this is like our thing now." Five years ago if you told me I would be thrilled drinking bottled root beer (and even buying some as a souvenir!) I wouldn't have gotten the point. But now we have a new thing to check out in local towns and after having our frank conversation and turning it around, I'm loving our new root beer tradition!

April E.



Passing It On

(From Page 5)

conventions, but how meaningful are they when like 50% of all individual AA groups don't have an Inter-group Rep and don't contribute money to Inter-group, to the Areas, or to GSO? Shouldn't some of that convention energy be redirected to the plain old, non-glamorous, grass-roots building of AA from the ground up? In other words, is the "top" in danger of losing touch with the "bottom"?

These few "gripes" aside (I know; I have to talk with my sponsor), it has been a great experience having worked with this Newsletter. I know that I was not going to mention individuals for thanks but there must

be one exception. The guy without whose help this Newsletter just doesn't get done; Steve W. He has truly been the "rock" for all of us connected with this Newsletter and he is the real driver here. Thanks so much Steve.

Finally and thankfully, this Newsletter has found two new "parents" to shepherd it into 2016 and 2017. I wish them all the best in continuing to breathe new life into this effort from month-to-month. I will leave it to them to introduce themselves when they feel it to be appropriate. Thanks again to everyone who has helped me these past two years.

Your Editor,
Marty P.

Grapevine

but before I did why didn't my partner and I come to his house and have some Thanksgiving dinner? I agreed, thinking I would go, stay a little while, and then go get drunk. So I called my family, canceled my participation in their meal, and trundled off to my sponsor's home. I wish I could say I was happy, but I was not. The urge to drink was very strong, and to admit defeat was not in my language that day. But I kept driving until I got to his house.

When we walked in, there stood several members of my home group, with my sponsor and his wife, who is also in the program. We all looked at each other and smiled. They greeted me with genuine hospitality and warmth. Everyone in that house was sober. And I was sober. It turned out to be a really special day.

What I learned that day is that in order to stay sober I have to take action. Driving, phone calls, whatever it takes to not take a drink. I also learned that I have to continue to ask for

help; it's not a one-time deal. I don't necessary know how to run my life, and I need to keep asking for help.

On that Thanksgiving Day in 1993 I saw that together with other members of Alcoholics Anonymous, we can stay sober rather than fight a losing battle by ourselves. That has been the greatest gift I've received in AA, and one that I'm thankful for 365 days a year, not just on Thanksgiving Day.

—John W., Wayne, Pa

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Fellowship Announcements and Things to Do

November 2015

Monday, October 26 — Audubon Last Mile Step and Tradition Group will be celebrating it's 22nd Anniversary. Desserts will be served at 7:00 pm before the two speakers. We are located on the corner of Wyoming and Graisbury Aves. in Audubon, NJ. United Methodist Church.

Wednesday, October 28 — The Sisters in Sobriety is having their 29th Anniversary with food at 6:30 PM with a speaker to follow. First Presbyterian Church, 494 Beverly – Rancocas Rd. Calvin Hall.

Saturday, October 31 — Bordentown 2nd annual Section 1 Halloween Event at Christ Church, 130 Prince St. Bordentown, NJ Reg. @ 6:00 PM. Workshop on the 7th Tradition with skit & speaker. Ken T - Pot Luck dinner at 7:30 w/ a dance to follow. Costume contest w/ prizes - \$5 suggested donation. Info call Ted: 609-668-3936. **NEW**

November 5- 8 — 5th Annual Jersey Shore Roundup will be held at the Ocean Place Resort and Spa in Long Branch, NJ. All the rooms have ocean views. Great lineup of speakers The weekend includes the Conference, Friday night ice cream social, Saturday night buffet dinner, Sunday morning buffet breakfast, Saturday night dance with DJ Frank and entertainment with Hilary R. from Dallas TX. www.jerseyshoreroundup.com Register online. **NEW**

Tuesday, November 10 — 7:00 PM : “The Social Event of the Season”. Come celebrate Tuesday Night Maple Shade Group’s 53rd Anniversary. Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Fork Landing Road and Helen Street, Maple Shade. A dish or dessert would be welcome.

Wednesday, November 11 — West Deptford "Happy Hour" will celebrate their 32nd anniversary - starting at 4 pm with food and 2 great speakers to follow. New location : 11Griscom Ln. West Deptford, NJ (one block from the Hollywood Diner Rte. 45)

Sunday, November 15 — Area 45 Fall Election Assembly – 8:30 am Registration, 9:00 am New GSR/DCM Workshop, 10:00am VOTING BEGINS followed by Assembly Meeting and Committee Meeting. Free Continental Breakfast and Lunch. Gibson House, 533 East Main St., Marlton, NJ.

Tuesday, November 17 — The Pitman Stairway to Recovery Step and Tradition Meeting will be having their anniversary. Light refreshments at 7pm and speaker at 7:30. All are welcome!

Saturday, November 21 — Gratitude Dinner sponsored by South Jersey Intergroup. \$30.00 p/p Nicolosi’s Catering, 1 Hessian Ave, Woodbury, NJ. 7:00 – 11:00 PM. Tickets on sale at IG Office, IG Meeting (3rd Wednesday at St Bart’s), Edward S: 856-524-816

November 20, 21, & 22 — Cape May 9th annual Waves Roundup at the Grand Hotel hosted by Cape Atlantic Intergroup more info: www.caigrp.org.

Saturday, November 28 — Magnolia Saturday Night's 44th Anniversary, 8:30-10pm, Two Speakers and Desserts. Dessert contributions welcome. Holy Trinity Lutheran Church - Bldg. in rear, Evesham and Warwick Rds, Magnolia, NJ.

Wednesday, December 2 — 18th Annual "Friends of Bill" Mens' Christmas Dinner at Nicolosi Catering - Hessian Ave. & Rte. 45 West Deptford. Cost: \$40 There will be a silent auction - 50-50 tix - speakers - great buffet (men are encouraged to bring a new toy) more info call Jack H. 856-304-7001.