

ANONYMOUS SJ

South Jersey Intergroup

February 2012

Looking for Love (in All the Wrong Places)

A member shares her experience, strength and hope about dating in sobriety

For many alcoholics, the road to romance has been pretty bumpy. As it says in the Twelve and Twelve, "...it is from our twisted relations with family, friends, and society at large that many of us have suffered the most." Drinking was involved in the first meetings of all the significant others I had in my life, pre-sobriety. I was either at a bar or at a party where LOTS of alcohol was available. I ended up married to an active alcoholic, and what I remember most about the years we spent together are loud arguments and incredible hangovers.

We broke up before I got sober, so I was single when I started coming to the rooms. After the mess that was my marriage, I wasn't really interested in meeting someone and luckily for me, I had a sponsor who advised me to wait a year before dating (this is one of the unwritten "rules" in AA, although not everyone agrees with it). Still, I do remember thinking that a year seemed like a long time when I was new.

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"All our experiences are but lessons in some form or another which condition us for our larger destiny. Of that I am sure. Any way you look at it, it's a problem world. What matters, and what matters only, is what we do with our problems."--Bill Wilson

The Second Step

"Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity."

The word sanity had very little meaning to me during my early years in AA. When the occasion arose to discuss Step Two, we would talk about the word insanity, but little time was spent on sanity. Someone usually set the theme by telling about his or her insane escapades, and then each of us in turn would follow by recalling our own insane acts. Sometimes, it would take on the appearance of a contest, the object being to see who could out-insane the other members.

Then, one night after a Step Two meeting, I decided to find out what those courageous early members who put our Twelve Steps together really meant by sanity. I was a little surprised to find out that my dictionary defined it as the quality of being sound of mind, sound of judgment, reasonable and rational in one's thoughts. I was further surprised to find that the definition of sanity did not even mention insanity. As I sat there mulling over the definition, an idea occurred to me: "This is what I'm to be restored to—sound, reasonable, rational thinking."

--W.H., Shenandoah, Iowa (This is an excerpt from the book "Step by Step: Real AAs, Real Recovery", reprinted with permission from The A.A. Grapevine, Inc.)

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Looking back though, I can now confirm that for me, at least, it was good advice. I am so different today from what I was with 30 days, or 60 days, or 6 months. I needed time to get my own head straight before I could begin to think about being involved with another person. The newcomer reading that will probably think I'm exaggerating but I'm not—WAIT! It's worth it.

I did many stupid things, relationship-wise, when I was drinking. I knew this, but I was still terrified at the thought of having to try to meet people without a drink in my hand. I used alcohol for courage, and to make me feel smarter, funnier, prettier—all of the things I felt I wasn't. Now I know, of course, that the only thing alcohol did for me was to help me make bad decisions.

Here is what I've learned since putting down my martini(s)—when I am on a date, the man I am with usually wants to get to know me before we jump into bed. More importantly, if sex is all he's really interested in I figure that out pretty quickly and get myself out of that situation (a clear head is a wonderful thing). And hey, I feel pretty, smart and funny anyhow! All of the fears I had about having nothing to offer someone were completely ridiculous. As a matter of fact, I cringe when I think of how I used to act.

It's not smooth sailing—I still find myself doing stupid things, relationship-wise. The difference is that I own up to my behavior and try to treat the person I am dating with respect and honesty. If I want to be treated like that in return, there is no alternative. And trust me on this one, sober sex is awesome—being fully present for that act is an experience you really need to have if you've never been there before.

One final note: I only date men who don't drink—whether they are in the program or not. It's just a decision I have made for myself, because it eliminates one of the problem areas for this alcoholic.

--Anonymous

What about you? Did you meet your current partner in the rooms, or are you in a relationship that began before you got sober? Send us an email or a letter and we'll publish your comments in a future edition of the newsletter.

We Want to Hear From You!

There is a lot of great AA material that we can reprint here in the newsletter, but what we'd really like is to tell YOUR story.

Please share your experience, strength and hope with us. We'll be featuring someone's thoughts on a step and a tradition in each issue, corresponding to that month. For instance, March is the third month so we'll be talking about Step 3 and Tradition 3. However, don't let that limit you—if you feel more comfortable just telling your story, we'd love to have that also.

Your submissions should be fairly short, so they can fit into our format—the longer they are, the more we might have to cut. We do reserve the right to edit them for content and length—but we'll do our best to keep it close to what you send us.

You can send it via regular mail or to our email address below, and please remember to keep a copy for yourself. Suggestions for future newsletter topics are also appreciated!

--Patty H., newsletter chair

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The Second Tradition

“For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.”

As a sober, active member approaching 20 years, I continue to be astonished at what I perceive to be a misuse of the Twelve Traditions. In my view, they are meant as a “tool,” not as a “club.”

Don’t get me wrong. I couldn’t be more for the Traditions. I continue as best I can to use them as a path or guide to my living in the AA Fellowship. I see them as guidelines that direct my conduct, relationships and activities. As a result, they impact on my home group and ultimately, they are reflected in the Fellowship as a whole. I see the Traditions as principles, or perhaps better yet, truths. But they are not rules!

A rule asks nothing more of you than that you obey. A principle requires you to do your own thinking. A rule gives you credit only for being a member; a principle gives you stature as a person. Principles are mingled with a sense of values. Progress is the key word. A rule demands perfection, which is something I’m not willing to attempt. I tried perfection early on in sobriety, and that doesn’t work.

But the rule-makers abound in AA. Rule-makers seem to be self-appointed, always judging someone else’s application of the Traditions. The Twelve Traditions are like the Twelve Steps—meant to be interpreted by the person applying them. Too often I see those ready to accuse the doers with, “You are in violation of Tradition _____.”

To those who hold the rule interpretation of the Traditions, I say, fine, that is your right. I would like to give my view.

Alcohol was the great persuader to most of us. Worded differently, the lash of alcohol drove us to AA and to becoming open-minded. That was a certain, sure authority. In recovery, we were introduced to another authority, a loving God as

Somehow this Tradition has been perverted by making the ancillary phrase, “as he may express himself in our group conscience” the operative words. A vote is not necessarily God’s authority; it is usually man asserting his authority. Or, more kindly, a vote is a survey.

A lot of mischief has been done in the name of group conscience. In the early days of AA, when the term was invented, group conscience meant “consensus.” It was not unusual at all for a vote of, say, 20 to 15 to be ignored and the issue settled by a coin flip. The coin toss was viewed as a more reliable indication of God’s authority than the 20 votes. It is the reason that such a high percentage is required today on many AA issues.

Group conscience poses the questions, “What would God have us do?” and “What would it take to get us all together?” Unity comes to mind.

In recovery, we find that we cause our own problems and are therefore quite leery of others who seem to have their own solutions to improve the rest of the Fellowship. We have found that AA succeeds in spite of us, not because of us. We also see where group conscience is a much misused, maligned and misunderstood concept. Much of the confusion comes, I find in my experience, by people who either bypass the First Tradition or by those who do not understand the concept of unity as expressed therein.

The Second Tradition has one other facet that evokes a lot of misunderstanding. We elect trusted servants, and then we don’t trust them. Why? We put people in positions of responsibility, then proceed to tell them to do things as we would do them. That idea was proven to be a bad practice long before AA came along.

Second Tradition (continued from Page 3)

The Second Tradition is very explicit that we are to trust our elected servants. People must be reading this as “agreeing with” rather than “trusting.”

Most of us find that we don’t even agree with ourselves most of the time; how can our trusted servants find a common agreement among their thousands of fellows in the Fellowship?

In recovery, we recognize the need for unity and tolerance of others, we acknowledge that God is the authority and power in our lives, and as a result, recovery continues as more and more is revealed to us. That’s what the book says. --Anonymous (From the February 2012 issue of Grapevine, reprinted with permission from The A.A. Grapevine, Inc.)

On the Road Again (A Brief History of the SJIG Road Show)

It was the winter of 2010. I had been doing service at the intergroup office for four years in the literature room, selling books to members who wanted them for either their group or personal use.

Although we have a vast collection, mostly everyone who comes in buys the basics: Big Books, 12 & 12s, Daily Reflections and meeting lists. On a few rare occasions someone would buy a lesser known book.

The treasure of literature sitting and collecting dust, not helping anyone, struck me one day. I began to ask people when they came in to buy the basics if they knew we had Grapevine books like the Beginners Book, Emotional Sobriety, Voices of Long-Term Sobriety and many more.

Repeatedly the answer was no, they did not know, and they ended up buying a book for themselves that they didn’t know we had.

The Road Show was born. I decided that we had to take the literature to the groups. Instead of only one person representing their meeting being introduced to our treasure chest of literature, we could introduce the entire group to it!

We got a committee together, loaded up plastic boxes with books and CDs, and went on the road

It has been a great experience and a lot of fun visiting different meetings and meeting new people—but the best part is watching members discover a piece of literature that they never knew existed.

Mission accomplished!—Penny E.

If you would like to have the SJIG Road Show visit your group (perhaps to celebrate an anniversary), email your request to literature@asj.org. You can also call the SJIG office at 1-856-486-4446.

DON'T FORGET!

March 23 - 25 - 48th Annual Southern New Jersey Area 45 General Service Convention. Crowne Plaza Hotel, 2349 Marlton Pike (Rt. 70), Cherry Hill, NJ. \$35.00/pp. Register by mail, or online at www.snjaaconvention.org Preregistrations must be received by March 9.

We’ll have a preview of the convention in next month’s newsletter. Also, be on the lookout for these other great topics:

- To Share or Not to Share?
- Do I Want to Be a Sponsor?
- Service 101
- Coffee Talk

Keeping It Green—a Newcomer Speaks

When I walked into the rooms of AA, I heard people say things like “keep coming back” or “let go and let God”, and one of my favorites, “just don’t pick up”. At the time I thought, these people are absolutely crazy, I just need some “dry out time”. What do a bunch of old guys sitting around drinking coffee have in common with me, I thought. They gave me phone numbers, and I thought “Why in the heck would I ever call you, I can’t relate to you, and you don’t know me.” Turns out, they weren’t crazy at all--I was.

I spent the better part of 2011 in and out of the rooms, two rehabs, and most of the summer going hog wild. But every time I went back to the rooms of AA, they kept welcoming me, and telling me “keep coming back”. I still couldn’t understand; how is it that these people actually want me to come back? To top it off, these people always seemed happy--they must drink, a least a little. No way were people this happy without ever having a drink! I was lost, depressed, and couldn’t understand how I could ever live without taking a drink. My soon-to-be sponsor would tell me I needed to be honest and do what I was told. Of course, I still didn’t get it. I am pretty thick-skulled (in case you hadn’t noticed).

My morning of enlightenment came in late 2011. I woke after yet another bender, feeling particularly terrible. I lay in bed thinking, I don’t ever want to feel this way again. I called my sponsor and begged for help, telling him I was finally ready to do whatever it takes to feel better. My sponsor told me yet again: be honest, and do what you are told. So I started really listening, making coffee, greeting people, reading the first 3 steps, and going to as many meetings as I could possibly make. I have not had a drink since that day, and I feel as though the obsession to drink has been lifted.

In the sober time I have, which isn’t much, I have learned several things that may help my fellow newcomers.

Those old guys sitting around drinking coffee knew me better than I thought they did. I am happy to say today, they are not old guys to me anymore, they are friends. I have also found, funny thing, my sponsor was right (don’t tell him though). If I was simply honest with others, and myself, and took the time to do what I was told, I really could, and have, started feeling better. So finally, to the doubtful newcomer like me, if I want what they have, I have to do as they do. It has worked for me, it can work for anyone.

In closing I must say...Keep coming back, let go and let God, just don’t pick up, and my new favorite, one day at a time. It truly does work, if you work it. --
Jamie P., Willingboro HighNooners

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Friday, February 17 - Millville Pass It On Group 21st Anniversary. 7:00 PM. F- F- F. 2 Speakers; Presbyterian Church, 2nd & Pine Sts., Millville, NJ.

Friday, February 17 - Friday Night Wenonah is celebrating its 42nd Anniversary! Food: 7:00 PM; 2 speakers at 8:00 PM. Episcopal Church basement, N. Monroe & Poplar Sts. Wenonah, NJ

Saturday, February 18 - Washington Twp. 11th Anniversary. Breakfast: 9:00 AM.; Speaker Discussion, 9:30 AM to 10:30 AM. Meeting will be in the Parrish Hall. Church of the Holy Family, Hurffville Rd. - Washington Twp

Sunday, February 19 - Moorestown Spiritual Growth Group 34th Anniversary. Trinity Episcopal Church, Main & Church Sts., Moorestown, NJ. Pizza & salad: 7:00 PM. AA Speaker: 8:00pm.

Friday, February 24 - Audubon Friday Night will celebrate their 34th Anniversary. 8 PM. Logan Presbyterian Church - Calvin Hall - 18 W Merchant St., just off the WHP.

Friday-Sunday, March 2-4 - Northeast Regional AA Service Assembly (NERAASA 2012) – Albany Hotel. See www.NERAASA.org

Friday-Sunday, March 16-18 - Area 51 N.C. 24th Freedom From Bondage Conference - Days Inn /\$65/night by February 27, 805 SW Service Rd, South Pines, NC 28388. 800-262-5737/ 910-692-8585 Register \$12.00 Check: CFC Mail to: 18 Jones Wood Ct, Wendell, NC 27591