

ANONYMOUS SOUTHJERSEY

SOUTH JERSEY INTERGROUP

JUNE 2012

77th Annual Founder's Day

While researching what to include in an article on the annual celebration, the author decides that a trip back in time might be fun.

A friend of mine asked me what I was doing the weekend of June 16th and I told her without really thinking that I would be attending a Founder's Day gathering. She isn't in the program (but she knows that I am sober), so she asked me what Founders Day was all about. I found myself telling the story of Bill W's first meeting with Dr. Bob and Dr. Bob's last drink, all the while thinking to myself, "are there people who really don't know who Bill W. and Dr. Bob were?" A question only a self-centered A.A. member would ask!

When it came time to write this article, I was stuck on how to approach it. I am sure the readers of this newsletter don't need a history lesson but I wanted to honor our founders in some way. What I finally decided to do was share with you some coverage of the 10th anniversary celebration of A.A.—which I found in the online archives of Grapevine magazine. Think of how large a fellowship we have now as you read this excerpt:

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Becoming Entirely Ready

Step Six – Were Entirely Ready to Have God Remove All These Defects of Character

Am I truly "entirely ready" or still "stuck in self"?

As I continue to recover through this amazing process known as "working the steps", the need to figure out the formula of honesty, open-mindedness and willingness loses its significance. I simply cannot figure out the miracle of sobriety, but if I am doing the footwork and following the suggestions outlined in our literature, my answer comes in the form of peace of mind, serenity.

Having experienced the gift of serenity, I sometimes wonder why I still cling to some of the glaring defects that gnaw away at my peaceful state of mind. Does the character defect feel good, or am I hedging on the work that I know I must do in order to stay sober? Perhaps I have already done the work and my Higher Power doesn't think I'm ready? Any other excuses to avoid the reality that my disease is sneaking up on me?

I attended a Step Six meeting years ago and heard a marvelous message about being "stuck in self." Those three words have stayed with me since. The speaker outlined her experience with the unwillingness to become "entirely ready." She described the pain of her resistance to examine the defect and her motives for staying stuck in self. And she emphasized that staying stuck would sooner or later lead her to a drink. I am so grateful for listening and really hearing her honesty.

My journey has included resistance and I paid dearly for my self-centeredness. I have been taught that my insistence in holding on to the character defects because of the "comfort" they provide is my alcoholic mind saying, "I can handle this one...."

Thanks to the tools offered to us – they're free – and the women and men who have so lovingly and honestly shared their experience, strength and hope, I remain teachable.

— Mt. Holly Linda

Symbolizing the unity of A.A., over 2,500 members of the fellowship and their friends from 36 states, two Canadian provinces, and Mexico gathered in Cleveland's Music Hall on June 10 to commemorate and pay tribute to Bill W. and Dr. Bob on the 10th anniversary of the founding of the movement....

Bill opened his Music Hall talk with a brief re-telling of how he had been condemned by an eminent New York psychiatrist to die unless he stopped drinking. . . how a few months later an old friend appeared with the news he was suffering from an illness not only of the mind, emotions, and body, but of the soul. . . how he had discovered from this friend he had been living his life on a demand basis. . . how he would have to lose his life in order to find it.

Honesty First

This friend, Bill explained, showed him he would have to become honest with himself. . . he would have to make peace with his fellow man. . . he would have to envision and live a new kind of giving --the kind which demands no return.

Shortly after, Bill continued, he found himself in the hospital again, where, in a deep depression he finally called on the God against Whom he had always rebelled, to show Himself. "Release came. And with it a new sense of freedom filled my being," Bill quietly said. "It was as simple as that."

Following this spiritual experience, Bill told how subtle conceits soon entered his life. Laughingly he recounted how "I set out to sober up all the drunks in the world. I was determined every drunk should have his hot flash."

Without a single convert six months later, Bill found himself in Akron on business where, following a bitter disappointment, he was faced with a wave of self pity.

"For the first time I realized," Bill explained, "I needed to talk to a drunk just as much as the drunk needed me." Whereupon the "strange chain of circumstances" unfolded which culminated in Bill and Doc's meeting. . . the random selection of the minister's name. . . the long list of people who failed to respond. . . the final spark in Henrietta S. . . the eventual meeting with Dr. Bob after a Mother's Day bender.

"Something passed between us," Bill stated. And a "beginning greater than either one of us was made."

A Word for Anonymity

Back-tracking from the present, Bill talked briefly on how the book was written four years after his meeting with Dr. Bob. . . how he considers himself not its author but the umpire for all of the contributors to it. . . how from literally scores of suggestions it was titled "Alcoholics Anonymous" instead of "The Way Out" ("There were 13 books that had been published, called 'The Way Out' and that was not only too many, but unlucky," Bill smiled). . . how there have always been in A.A. differences of opinion over our anonymity, and how most of the "older folk" hope that it is kept unless there is some "very grave or good reason to the contrary," adding that "to be truly adult in this is to be truly modest" . . . how there is a fortunate absence of a "professional class" in A.A.

Nor is A.A. without its "sins," Bill pointed out. Not the least of which, he explained, were those A.A.s, often including himself, who "viewed with alarm the A.A. movement and the problems within it." Citing a personal experience wherein he was derelict in his responsibility, he also deplored the frequent neglect of the new man and the failure in some instances to give him his shot at A.A. In this regard, he referred to the excellent sponsorship system in Cleveland, urging closer inspection for those interested in well-conceived 12th step work.

Currently, Bill concluded, there's the problem of leadership despite claims there are neither leaders nor elected officers. . .the problems of remuneration for A.A. secretaries, janitors, and all those falling in this area of special functions. On this latter matter, Bill voiced the feeling that spiritual activity was never paid for, although functional activity, just as everywhere, was.

While on leadership, Bill said, he regarded a leader as one who has learned to love the best in men; one who has worked at the program; one who has stayed sober; one who has come to the realization that "A.A. is much bigger than any of us," and, as a result of that realization, has stepped aside for others to share the limelight. As for himself, Bill humorously finished, he

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Musings on the Sixth Tradition

Tradition Six - An A.A. 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.

Why does Alcoholics Anonymous work? How has it survived (and grown greatly) since its founding almost seventy-five years ago? Why is it still the most effective means of treating alcoholism (especially in lieu of the magnitude and multitude of medical treatment breakthroughs during that time)?

The answers to these questions are as numerous as our own individual paths to sobriety. Strictly and solely speaking for this alcoholic only--here are my answers. Alcoholics Anonymous works because it was, and is, divinely inspired. All efforts to achieve sobriety, by Bill W. and Doctor Bob's own intellects and willpower, failed. Steps Two and Three ("I can't--God can. I'm going to let him.") were the keys to opening the door of sobriety.

A.A.'s survival and growth is due to the number of factors. First--IT WORKS! Also Tradition Six, along with Traditions Seven and Eight--enable us to form a protective cocoon that effectively deflects any diversions from our primary purpose to carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

A.A. reads give us numerous examples of what happens when we are diverted from our primary purpose. While almost all of the projects undertaken in the name of A.A. were worthwhile, and certainly well-intentioned, they were doomed to failure. They failed because if they were successful, they took us away from our primary purpose--and if they did not succeed they were still distancing us from our main goal--carrying the message of hope to another who needs it.

There are many brands of glue that work together to keep Alcoholics Anonymous a strong, vibrant, effective fellowship. A glue of spirituality is the base of our foundation. Without that dependence upon an entity stronger than ourselves (God, as we understand him) we cannot effectively begin our daily journey into sobriety. A glue of sponsorship is key--we all need someone to walk us through the steps--and many times this sponsor will also become our spiritual adviser--another key. The glue of each group of which

we become a member enables us to form a strong bond and identify with other group members. The glue of services--be it making coffee, passing out books, greeting people at the door, cleaning up the room post-meeting, chairing, sharing, speaking, whatever.

These are "individual" glues that we all must practice to achieve and maintain sobriety--and to help others reach that same goal. The group glues that help us to keep our fellowship and program strong, healthy, independent and effective hinge upon our ability to control our own destiny, independent of any outside influences. How do we do this? We are financially self-supporting through our own contributions (no one "owns" or "rents" us.) We have no opinions on outside issues (Phillies, Flyers, Democrats, Republicans, straights or gays.) We don't support or oppose any causes. We are all about--and only about--carrying the message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

May we never deviate from this path!

— A Work in Progress Alcoholic.

Editor's Note: We at Anonymous South Jersey really encourage you to submit your own essay on one of the steps or traditions. It doesn't have to be lengthy and you will be helping other alcoholics by sharing your experience, strength and hope. Next month we will be featuring Step 7 and Tradition 7—send your thoughts to newsletter@aasj.org.

Happy Anniversary!

The Cherry Hill Young People's group was founded in June 2001. The founders of this group started this meeting to bring younger people in sobriety together. This is a big book meeting held every Wednesday at 8:00 pm; the last Wednesday of the month is a speaker/celebration meeting. The group's first meeting location was at Barclay Farms in Cherry Hill, and their current location is at St. Luke's Lutheran Church in Collingswood.

This group will be celebrating their 11th anniversary on Wednesday, June 20, 2012, at St. Luke's. There will be food at 7:00 pm, followed by a speaker at 8:00 pm.

— Jenn C., Archives Chair

Fellowship Announcements and Things to Do



Thursday, June 21 - Bordentown - Grapevine anniversary .Food starts at 7:00 PM, followed by great speaker. Presbyterian Church 420 Farnsworth Ave. Bordentown City.

Friday-Saturday, June 29, 30 - July 1 - 1st Annual Liberty Bell Roundup. The Woodstock of A.A.. Ramada Philadelphia Airport, 76 Industrial Hwy., Essington, PA 19029. \$35.00 Registration.

Wednesday, July 4 - Burlington County 4th of July Alcahthon. 10:00 AM - 10.00 PM. Sponsored by SJIG. Hosted by the 449 Club, 6 Pemberton St., Pemberton, NJ. More Info: Kathy Jo - 609.790.3740 or Billy - 703.980.6515 unity@A.A.sj.org . Pot luck dishes are greatly appreciated. Food donations call: Sandy O. - 908.731.1482 or Jennifer H. - 856.437.9744.

Tuesday, July 10 - Northfield will celebrate their anniversary at 8:00pm @ Good Shepherd United Methodist Church, 207 Northfield Ave., Northfield, NJ (behind the Tilton Market)

Saturday, July 14 - Fishing Trip aboard the Duke O' Fluke sponsored by SJIG Social Committee.1:00 - 5:00 PM. \$25.00 p/p includes rod, tackle, bait, and mate's tip. Higbee Ave. at the bay, Somers Point, NJ. Contact - Mike Lore: 856- 779-1830. mikelore@voicenet.com. Directions: www.dukeofluke.com

Tuesday, July 10 - Mt. Ephraim Women will celebrate their 5th Anniversary with 2 great speakers. Food begins at 6:30 PM with speakers to follow - all are welcome. First Church, 201 Jersey Ave., Mt. Ephraim, NJ. (Jersey & Centre off Kings Hwy).

Saturday, July 14 - District 19 Pizza Party and Workshop on A.A. Sponsorship. 7:00-9:00 PM, Millman Center, Bayshore Rd., Villas, NJ. Presenters: Kathy Jo S., SJ Intergroup Unity Chair and Dan P., SJ Intergroup Trustee. Food and beverage donations welcome. Contact Harry T., DCM District 19, (609) 231-5316.

Saturday, July 28 - "Speaker Jam at the Beach". Presented by CAIG's Young in Recovery. Ventnor Community Center, 6500 Atlantic Ave., Ventnor, NJ. 12:00 PM - 10:30 PM. Bring your beach chair and supplies, a covered dish or dessert, and your FUN spirit. Speakers all day ! Mild refreshments will be served. More Info: Greg B. 609-457-0313

Sunday, July 29 - Annual Family Picnic. Parvin State Park , Pavilion A & B - Cost: \$10.00 (softball, kids games, fellowship, swimming, fishing, boating, and family camping. more info : www.matttalbotgroup19.org.

Saturday, August 4 - Area 45 Corrections & Treatment Facilities. 17th Annual Inter-Area Conference. "Freedom from Bondage". 9:00 AM - 2:00 PM. St. Charles Borromeo RC Church, 176 Stagecoach Rd., Sicklerville, NJ.

Tuesday, August 7 - "A Way Out" Group Anniversary. Transfiguration School, Magill & WHP, Collingswood, NJ. 7:00 PM: Food, 8:00 PM: Speaker.

Sunday, August 19 – District 14 Picnic at Thundergust Pavilion in Parvin State Park on Parvins Mill Road, Pittsgrove, NJ. Starts at noon, rain or shine. Bring your own chairs and softball equipment. Tickets \$10 each, under 8 Free. Call 856-367-7009 for more information.

and Dr. Bob look upon themselves as purely "a couple of old, cracked antiques who have had a little more experience than others."

Dr. Bob's Reasons

Dr. Bob, in a different vein, indicated he felt we need to follow the steps in our program as long as we live, particularly himself. For he realizes, he said, he has the best reason except Bill for not taking a drink. . . his 10 years of sobriety. And, he stated, "I most certainly don't care to get tight anymore."

"Blindly groping for the truth," Dr. Bob continued, "the early development of the activity in Akron was not easy. It was mostly by the trial and error method. We had no precedent whatsoever, gleaning a fact here and there as time went on. Eventually a generalized procedure was discovered with a reasonable hope of acceptance."

The religious group to whom he had gone for help to solve his alcoholic problem, Dr. Bob went on, told him "to bury the past and not visit the grave too often." Wryly, he commented. . . "I want a very faint recollection of the past --but not too faint."

Proceeding along a spiritual line, Dr. Bob told how we have all been taught to avoid religious discussion or argument. But he said that he has averaged at least an hour's reading each day for the past 10 years on some spiritual subject. However, he hastened to say, he has always returned to the simple teachings of *The Sermon on the Mount*; *the Book of James*, and *the 13th Chapter of Corinthians in the Bible* for his fundamentals.

Man's Triumvirate

Stating that the A.A. program is not an intellectual program, Dr. Bob talked of the three divisions of man - the physical man, the mental man and the spiritual man. And he uttered the hope that he was developing into a well-integrated individual.

"Because the spiritual search is a long search and requires unrelenting effort," Dr. Bob said, he has attempted to acquire a satisfactory understanding of the teachings in *The Bible*.

On *The Twelve Steps*, he stated that they've been alive for seven years. And that there's been no

suggestion of a change in them. Furthermore, he hopes there will not be a change, unless they can be bettered.

Some of them, he pointed out, interfere with our personal schedules. "And we sometimes feel we don't need all of them --although there has never been a protracted success with a modified program."

"So we'd better accept it in its entirety," Dr. Bob advised. "For John Barleycorn's a tireless and relentless instructor. Today, thousands of people are sober because they've followed the program."

Winding up his remarks, Doc indicated that "our program must be followed by each individual. And each individual is the only one who can do it for himself. Let none of us ever forget --love and service keep us dry. . . love for our Father and our neighbors. . . love, through service, in never refusing our aid to anyone."

--John J., Cleveland, June of 1945

One of the things that struck me after reading the article was that Bill W. spoke about growing pains within the fellowship that are strikingly similar to those problems we sometimes experience today! And I love Dr. Bob's quote: "I want a very faint recollection of the past, but not too faint." That is good advice for all of us, eh? I hope you enjoyed the trip back in time as much as I did.

One other note before ending—not everyone agrees that it is right to celebrate Dr. Bob and Bill W. in this way. Below is an excerpt of a letter written to the Grapevine:

"I do not believe Dr. Bob or Bill W. would have condoned such mass public events to mark their meeting in 1935; they would have spoken against it. It smacks of unhealthy religious emotionalism. Neither of them wanted a monument on their graves connecting them to A.A. Their monument was Alcoholics Anonymous. Better to let them rest in peace, in respect of their anonymity. Mark their meeting in another way, in gratitude and respect of their leadership by guarding your Third Legacy, guarding Traditions, spending time with a newcomer, or visiting an alcoholic in a hospital medical ward instead."

So what do you think? Do we make too much of Founders Day? Send your thoughts to us in an email and we'll print them in a future edition of the newsletter. Send to newsletter@assj.org.

— Patty H., newsletter chair

“Bill W.,” the Documentary — A Review

We ran a story about the making of the Bill W. documentary in the May issue of SJ Anonymous. The film opened on May 18, 2012, and as of this writing is not showing in the South Jersey/Philadelphia area. That didn't deter the group of women who wrote the article below.

Four of us from the Medford Women's Friday Night Big Book meeting decided to get ourselves down to Washington, D.C., to see this 2012 documentary on the man that "Time Magazine" selected as one of the "100 Heroes and Icons of the 20th Century": a hero not only to us alcoholics but to the thousands of members of other 12-step recovery programs which have adopted the steps and traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Helen P.: "I thought it was great. I really enjoyed it. It showed his humanity, his faults and his drive to stay sober. I can't say I like the person, but you can't help but respect him for all he gave up trying to keep AA going and successful. I think Bill Wilson was a very sad man. He was haunted by his own depression. It would have been interesting to see what today's meds could have done to help him."

The eventual meeting with Ebby Thacher and Dr. Bob Smith are recounted in the film as well as the Oxford Group's influence on A.A.'s 12 steps. But what we didn't know was that when the Big Book ("Alcoholics Anonymous") was written, published and ready to be picked up at the printer's for \$5,000, Bill and his friends didn't have enough money, and the printer wouldn't give the books to them until they did. We learned about Hank Parkhurst, a name we rarely if ever hear. He was the patient in Towns Hospital that Dr. William Silkworth described in "The Doctor's Opinion" as "a case of pathological mental deterioration" and who, after one year of following Bill's advice, Dr. Silkworth did not even recognize. He was a dynamo just like Bill, full of ideas and enthusiasm. He became very important in the success of the Big Book. As someone said, "If it weren't for Bill, the Big Book would never have been written, but if it weren't for Hank Parkhurst, the Big Book would never have been published." Being an agnostic, Hank was also instrumental in the phrase,

"God as we understood Him" being incorporated to the Big Book.

After the Big Book was published in 1939 and distributed, first locally, then nationally throughout the United States, Bill became the go-to-guy in A.A... Everybody wanted to see him, hear him, shake his hand. He began to despair of his three disparate parts: Bill the man, Bill the alcoholic and Bill the patriarch. He was deeply saddened that he could no longer go to an A.A. meeting "like any other drunk" and just sit down, shut up and listen.

Bill had become a hero and icon in A.A. and he was not happy about it.

He rarely was able to attend an A.A. meeting as just another alcoholic. He began to feel further and further away from the steps and traditions that he, himself, had created. Finally, in 1955 he turned the leadership of A.A. over to the Fellowship.

Bill's last public appearance was at a convention in July 1970. At the end, he was very concerned about the future of A.A. when he was gone, although it gave him enormous pleasure to be able to see people actually recover from alcoholism and remain sober. When Bill died on January 24, 1971, he had been sober for 36 years. Nevertheless, according to the documentary, when Bill was on his death bed he did what many of us might do, he begged for a drink.

We left the theatre with a greater understanding of our Bill W., not only our hero and icon, but also Bill the imperfect alcoholic, a true human just like the rest of us.

— Helen P., Mary C., Melody R., and Sandy S.

Question of the Month

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

What topics are your favorites for open discussion meetings?

Please email your response no later than Friday, July 13th, 2012 to: newsletter@asj.org.

Experience, Strength, & Hope

Gold Mine

The kind, soft words of a friend in A.A. removed the shame he had over relapsing

I admitted to an old friend and long time member of A.A. that I was only 10 months sober because I had tried drinking again. My confession came with a great deal of remorse and embarrassment. To my surprise he warmly replied, "You now have a gold mine of experience to share and to use to help other alcoholics." The words kept repeating themselves over and over in my head. The clouds lifted and the horizon looked sunny for the first time in months.

I had been searching for the reason for my relapse. I painstakingly examined the way I had taken each Step and looked for clues with the fear that another failure could lead me out again. The result was a tense sobriety. When I would confess to friends that I had yet another bout with drinking they would offer their opinion as to where I had failed and I generally became more anxious and guilt-ridden.

As I re-read the first 164 pages of the Big Book I prayed that the key to my taking a drink after long periods of sobriety would be clear but I entered each day as though the monster hiding around the corner would pounce on me when I least expected it. I lived in fear.

Why now were the words, "you have a gold mine" so freeing and encouraging? They reminded me that my higher power was with me and that I had a purpose in life. I had not been abandoned as a failure, who would never get this A.A. program. I had been given tools and an opportunity to help others and at the same time help myself. The message was one of hope, not blame.

For some reason, my friend's encouraging words made it clear why I had gone back to drinking. It wasn't that I didn't believe I was an alcoholic. I knew that alcohol affected me differently than it did my associates. I understood that I lost all control when I drank. But although, I may have admitted that I was an alcoholic and asked God to remove the obsession to drink from me, I hung tightly on to everything else. I had not

abandoned my life to a higher power.

My faith was limited to letting God handle my alcoholism. I figured that with enough discipline and hard work I could manage the rest of my affairs. Of course my self-centered way led to anger, frustration and a general discontent that made it easy to pick up a drink. I failed to trust my higher power to help me in every aspect of my life.

As the Big Book says, God is either "everything or he is nothing." I have found that life and sobriety are much easier when he is everything. I was reminded that the focus of A.A. is on today and the 24 hours in front of us. I did not need 10 years of therapy dissecting my past to change my life. My friend's kindness helped bind me to A.A. and to trust my higher power.

I know different styles of advice work at different times and situations. I am not advocating one size fits all. I can only share what worked for me. Guilt, blame and shame hindered me while simple words of encouragement removed the fear and gloom and gave me a new purpose. Instead of keeping to myself so my failings wouldn't rub off on others seeking sobriety I had a mission to seek out alcoholics and to share my experience strength and hope with them. Most importantly I was reminded that I have a higher power in whom, I can trust to lead me into a happy and productive sobriety.

— Anonymous

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Is this your first time in the fellowship? Or, like many of us, have you been in and out? What brought you back? What do you say to others who are struggling? Send us your story and we'll print it in a future edition of Anonymous SJ! Send to newsletter@aasj.org

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—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.

Send your submissions to:
newsletter@asj.org.

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR SOUTH JERSEY INTERGROUP:

South Jersey Intergroup Association, Inc.
PO Box 2514
Cherry Hill, NJ 08034
Office/Literature Sales: 1-856-486-4446
info@asj.org
Website: www.asj.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 the following location:

St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church (St. Bart's)
1989 Route 70 East
Cherry Hill, NJ

If you would like the SJIG Road Show to 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*

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