

# ANONYMOUS SOUTHJERSEY

SOUTH JERSEY INTERGROUP

FEBRUARY 2013

## Why I Chose My Sponsor

*This piece responded to the newsletter's question of the month in January: Why did you choose your sponsor?*

I was floundering around on the fringes of AA back in the late 1990s. I had been to rehab and had a psychiatrist, but something was still terribly wrong with me and I was not "in" AA. I had a few slips that resulted in a drunken overdose and wrecked car. "Slipped" sounded so benign in rehab. I knew before leaving rehab that I would most likely "slip" once I returned to the real world. "Crash 'n Burn" is a much better phrase to describe going out after not drinking for some period of time.

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Anyway... I had very infrequently attended the Pitman Sunday night meeting back when (late

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## Advanced Techniques for Sponsorship Avoidance

*Sometimes we alcoholics struggle with what we think of as "the rules" of the program. For this alcoholic, getting a handle on the sponsor-sponsee relationship has been difficult. It has been a rocky road for me and for the nice people who've tried to work with me since I had to leave my first sponsor (I moved away and she insisted that I have a sponsor I can see in person, not just talk to on the phone). I have a busy life with lots of commitments and I tried my best to "fit" my new sponsor(s) into that, but I failed a lot of the time. Hey, I was busy. I was doing the best I could! Yadda yadda yadda... (I can almost SEE the old-timers smiling as they read this.) Of course I thought I was unique, only to discover that I was just another stubborn alcoholic refusing to take help when help was sorely needed. We can't do this alone, folks. To those that have helped me (or tried) on this journey, I thank you with all of my heart.*

*I came across the following piece in a Grapevine book called **Happy, Joyous and Free**, and I share it because I've showed it to a few people now and they all laugh. See what you think, and remember you can get a copy of this great book and many others at the Intergroup office or at one of the road shows. – Editor*

At eight months sober, I was "fired" by my first sponsor because I had a bad case of the "yes buts." She explained to me that I was interfering with her serenity and if I was not going to follow a few suggestions, then she knew other women who needed her help. She told me she loved me and hoped that I would find someone with whom I could relate. What I heard was "You're not good enough" and "You've failed to meet my expectations." So I made a point to tell everyone at my women's meeting how wrongly I had been treated.

Why weren't they getting angry with me? Why weren't they agreeing with me? Why were they laughing?

I've always been able to manipulate people to my way of thinking. But they were taking her side! And why were they offering to temporarily sponsor me until I found a new sponsor? Didn't they know that I wanted them to shun this woman, treat her as an outcast, make her pay for my

*Sponsorship Avoidance continued on page 2*

humiliation?

I've had three other sponsors since then and am just now understanding why my first sponsor had to let go of me. Over the course of six years, I've sponsored several women, and I know how frustrating it can be on this side of the "yes buts" and the excuses.

Here is my list of recommended ways to treat your sponsor if you don't want to develop the level of trust necessary for working a thorough and cleansing Fifth Step with her:

1. Call her after all major decisions in your life and tell her how well you've managed by yourself.
2. Avoid calling her when you feel angry because you know she will help you look for your part in it.
3. Tell her only what you think she needs to hear, omitting the details that you consider unimportant and slanting the story in your favor.
4. Avoid attending meetings where she might be, and tell her that you still go to a lot of meetings—they just happen to be on the other side of town.
5. Call her at home in the middle of the day (knowing that she has a daytime job) and leave a message on her answering machine requesting a call back, putting the "ball in her court" and giving yourself some time to "work it out for yourself" (along with a ready-made excuse of "well, I called").
6. Give her credit for all your new decisions and behaviors, telling everyone that "my sponsor recommends," whether she did so or not.
7. Screen your phone calls, answering only those that you are in the mood to talk to.
8. If you don't like the suggestions your sponsor makes, keep checking with other AA members until you find one who gives you the answer you want.
9. Remember the character defects that your sponsor has shared over time and thrown them up to her when she's helping you discover your own defects.

These are actual behaviors I've leveraged against my sponsors over the last six years. Today I know that I am responsible—not my sponsor—for my sobriety. So when I play these avoidance games, I'm only hindering my own growth. I must take an active part in my own recovery process.

It's hard to ask for help, but even harder to accept that help and do the action recommended. My favorite part of the Serenity Prayer is "courage to change the things I can." It takes courage to admit I'm wrong, courage to agree that my way causes me pain and misery, courage to accept help, and courage to change habits that have been forty-one years in the cultivation.

When I share my experience, strength and hope with other alcoholics, I make sure to tell them about my first sponsor firing me because I was too afraid to make the necessary changes.

Today I actively seek out my sponsor at the meetings I know she attends regularly. I make sure I honestly tell her how I am feeling today. I pick up that one-hundred-pound phone and call when I'm confused and into self-will. And I try to act on her recommendations even if I'm convinced that they won't work. My sponsor isn't a sounding board, just waiting to catch my whining. She's someone whose sobriety I respect and who has spent more years living sober than I have. She is someone who has what I want—courage. — Jacqui H., Lago Vista, TX.

*49th Annual Southern New Jersey  
Area 45 General Service Convention*

**"We Found a New Freedom"**

*March 22, 23 & 24, 2013*

Crowne Plaza Hotel  
2349 Marlton Pike (Route 70)  
Cherry Hill, NJ

**Registration: \$35.00**

**Contacts: Joe O. (Convention Chair): 609-827-2174**  
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Mt. Laurel, NJ 08054-9998

*Keynote Speakers, Old Timer's 25+ Panel, Young  
People's Speaker, Al-Anon Speaker, Marathon  
Meetings, DJ with Dancing and Karaoke, Service  
Workshops, Sobriety Countdown, Sunrise Spiritual  
Meeting, Round the Clock Coffee & Tea, Fellowship  
and Fun.*

## Through our Group Conscious

*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 no govern.*

Tradition Two helps us to sort out the always-tricky question: "Who is in charge?" After I came out of my alcoholic fog and looked around at the meetings, meeting rooms and members, I had a lot of questions. I needed to know who decided how meetings would be run, who the speakers would be and how the collection was spent. After attending meetings for a while, I noticed that there is quite a lot of menial labor required to keep the meetings running and the rooms open. Who does it and why? I'm sure I'm not the only one who came in with questions like these. But I was genuinely surprised as I learned the answers. AA is different from any other organization I've encountered. I'm as amazed today as I was then about how and why the Fellowship works.

The short answer is that "group conscience" runs AA at every level. Yes, we have volunteers for different jobs. However, they have no authority to decide anything; they merely have the responsibility to carry out the decisions of the group, or the "group conscience."

It would seem that an organizational structure like this would produce only chaos. At times, it does, but eventually everything gets sorted out--not always the way any particular member wants it to.

I saw this principle operating up front and personal in the first group that I joined. It was run by one individual who had been there for some years and made all the decisions about the group himself. Everyone else just wandered in and out. What happened was that when a serious problem faced the group, it fell apart. No one had enough interest to solve it. That group doesn't exist today.

When I attend business meetings today, the part of this Tradition that I try to remember is that it is a "loving" God expressed in our group conscience. Too often we are too human. I want to look smarter, more important or better informed; I want to see someone else put in his or her place; I want to squash what I think is a really stupid idea. Our business can and should be conducted in a loving way.

I am just here to serve, and by doing so, I retain the gift of sobriety.

--Nancy C. Coconut Grove, FL

## Came to Believe

*The Second Step: Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.*

A sober friend raised his hand at a Step study meeting and related, in a self-effacing manner, his trouble with the Christian-derived practices some groups adopt to share the spiritual foundation of recovery. "He's not my father," my friend said, "he's not in heaven, and he's not a he. To me, those words don't have the ring of comfort, truth, or meaning. And 'fake it till you make it' makes no sense to me. Sobriety requires honesty, not faking anything."

He admitted that he hadn't gotten sober on his own power. "There is certainly something out there. But all this God stuff just doesn't get me near it."

A few days later, at the Big Book meeting, another sober friend recounted how troubling it was to sell his staunchly atheist, alcoholic, German niece on reading *Alcoholic Anonymous* in translation because of the book's insistence on spiritual awakening as the foundation of recovery. He acknowledged his own resistance to "the God stuff" at the beginning of his sobriety, but then chuckled with humility, adding, "Thank God, I was desperate enough to try anything." Years of daily spiritual practice had turned a vague, distrustful apprehension into the simple, central fact of his life: Thy will, not mine, be done.

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*Yet, my relationship with a Higher Power is the central fact of my life today, too. This means that I've come to accept that what I know, understand, and can control or manage about my life is far outweighed by what I don't and can't know, understand, control, or manage.*

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But he was baffled about "how to sell the God stuff" to wary, skeptical newcomers. Add isolated, arrogant, contentious, and assertively agnostic to those shortcomings, and you've got the baggage I lugged into early sobriety.

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*Step Two continued on page 5*

1990s) they took a break for people to go out and smoke. I was so uncomfortable feeling like I did not fit in that I went outside with the rest of the smokers... although I wasn't a smoker. I was very frightened to be seen sitting alone during the break with no one to talk to...actually...I was more frightened of the feeling I knew this thought would bring within me. I had very little experience interacting and/or talking to another human being when not under the influence. So I went out there and sort of looked at my feet and listened while these people laughed and talked. Apparently, they all knew each other... at least that's how it looked to me.... but no one knew me. In hindsight, they could just as easily have not known each other...they just had some time in AA and practiced the program so they had a level of comfort I didn't know one could have. So I stayed out there and finally I decided to direct a comment to this big guy standing out there near me. He had shared a few minutes before when we were upstairs in the meeting before the break.

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*He spoke in a way that reminded me of a book about Zen I had read. I was very frightened and intimidated but the silence and my awkwardness was even more uncomfortable, so I blurted out "Hey...I like what you said up there in the meeting...sounded like Zen." You see, I knew it was Zen and I also assumed that the big guy did not know it was Zen...He looks down from way up there in the sky..."Yes" he says, "I know."*

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He spoke in a way that reminded me of a book about Zen I had read. I was very frightened and intimidated but the silence and my awkwardness was even more uncomfortable, so I blurted out "Hey... I like what you said up there in the meeting... sounded like Zen." You see, I knew it was Zen and I also assumed that the big guy did not know it was Zen. This was my ego's way of letting this 6'5" guy know that this little 5'6" guy was not someone to be messed with. If I couldn't beat you physically, I could beat you intellectually--that was the defense my ego threw up. So the big guy turns towards me and looks at me. I stand there waiting for his response. He looks down from way up there in the sky.... "Yes" he says, "I know." "What?" my mind says silently. "He knows it was Zen... how could this be? He knows? That means ... that he can see me!" The frightened little

ego in me that is now screaming in humiliation! The awful realization that this giant guy whom I've never met can see my ego standing there stark naked. Let me tell you, if I could have dug a hole in the concrete and crawled in, I would have.

That was my first encounter with Big Jim. But I was still not ready or able to ask him or anyone else for help. My ego was still firmly in-charge. So, after one more crash 'n burn, I called another guy in AA who was helping me and lots of newcomers, Big Steve. I knew he knew Big Jim (look...when you are 5'6", everyone is "Big-someone"). So I asked Big Steve if he had seen Big Jim and that I was sort of, kind of, looking for him... but I NEVER mentioned that I was dying inside, etc... I told Big Steve the usual: "Yeah...I'm fine."

A couple of days passed and the urgency for help had dissipated when the phone rang: "Hello... yes, this is Steve (my name)... who? Jim? Jim from AA.... Oh...yes... I remember you.... Me? Oh yeah...I'm fine... doing good.... You spoke to Big Steve... he said I was looking for you... yes... just wanted to say Hi is all... Big Steve mentioned I am struggling? No... not really.... You what? You are my Sponsor starting right now? Well... I guess that's ok.... It IS ok you say? Well. all right then.... Start reading the Big Book? Sure... if you say so... call you tomorrow? Um.... Yeah... if that's what you'd like... I'll call you"....

That was the beginning. AA, Big Jim and Big Steve were already doing for me what I could not do for myself. Big Jim is still my Sponsor today. He is also a loving, trusted friend and because of AA, his guidance and the 12 Steps, I can love him right back today and be a trusted friend to him as well. I have 14 years of continuous sobriety as of last November 9th and my life is truly a blessed and beautiful experience... no matter what the circumstances are. Big Jim still tells me "Steve... rather than try to manipulate circumstances to suit what your ego thinks are ok, why not work on your spirituality so that you can be ok no matter what the circumstances are!" Sound advice!

I've turned into the person I never wanted to be. I try to have love and compassion for myself and everyone I meet. A tall order at times, but as AA says... it's progress, not perfection. I love my life and I love AA.

--Steve R., Berlin, NJ

outweighed by what I don't and can't know, understand, control, or manage.

You'd think being spared the ravages of a terminal illness that kills about eighty percent of those afflicted--a rate higher than a lot of cancers--would be enough to drive that home. Not so with me in the beginning. I was a "show me" kind of guy. So, my sponsor addressed my resistance to "the God stuff," not with prescription, but with fact. "The central fact of your life right now," he said, "is that, on your own, you can't stay away from a drink, not even for one day." I had to agree. The evidence was overwhelming.

Then he assured me that getting and remaining sober didn't depend on what I believed, what I thought, what I understood, or what I felt. "This is a program of action" he said. "It's what we do that provides the power to stay sober and to change and grow." Among the things he suggested I do were a daily practice of prayer, a careful study of the Twelve Steps, and service work helpful to others. It didn't matter that I didn't understand or believe in any of it. What mattered was that I do it, that I keep an open mind, and that I be vigilant and honest about the results.

So I prayed, using words from AA literature, to the Great Whatever. I attended a regular Step meeting and talked with my sponsor long and skeptically about what I read and heard there. And I volunteered for service positions at my home group.

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My sponsor pointed out that AA literature insists that "willingness is the key." Not faith, not belief, not spiritual awakening, not understanding, not courage, not acceptance. Willingness.

He also marked the heading to Step Three, where it reads, "We made a decision..." I still didn't have to believe anything, understand anything, know anything. All I had to do was make a decision.

So I decided that--even though I didn't believe in God, couldn't understand God, didn't particularly desire a relationship with what I didn't understand, and didn't think

it would work anyway--I would still take the daily action of asking for God's help and thanking God for it at the end of the day. I was willing to take this action, I told my sponsor, only because my life was a hopeless mess, and he and others said that doing this--as pointless as it seemed--had worked for them. And besides, what did I have to lose?

"You're on your way," he said, and chuckled.

"Today I call my Higher Power 'God' because it's real easy to spell," an AA speaker said last week. I laughed and nodded. Yes, that's it exactly, I thought. Using the "God" word also makes my experience comprehensible to others whose spiritual practice and vocabulary may be different from mine, but whose key insight and experience is (in my opinion) the same. That applies equally to conservative orthodox as well as those who beat drums and dance naked by the sea at the full moon.

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*I didn't arrive at this conclusion because I believed in, had faith in, or understood anything; and certainly not because I had courage. I started on the path scared, confused, and defiant. But I've made progress in acceptance and surrender because of what I did, and still do. It's a program of action.*

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I didn't arrive at this conclusion because I believed in, had faith in, or understood anything; and certainly not because I had courage. I started on the path scared, confused, and defiant. But I've made progress in acceptance and surrender because of what I did, and still do. It's a program of action. What you're willing to do determines the quality of your sobriety and life. And anyone--enthusiastic, ambivalent, or kicking, screaming, and arguing like me--can take the same action.

This is where it's brought me: solely on the basis of evidence, I've come to believe in and to rely on a power outside myself, which I still do not understand or otherwise comprehend. I took--and still take--the specific action recommended in Alcoholics Anonymous and in Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, and my life gets better, my problems help me grow, and the little I do understand of life dwells ever more serenely in the shadow of what I don't and never will understand. Honestly evaluating my track record in sobriety gives me the faith--not the desperate magical thinking, but the faith--that I can expect to move deeper in this direction in

## My Ex-Girlfriend

I had a girlfriend and I really loved being with her, so I thought. I was attracted to her right from the beginning. Our relationship started out as a casual fling -- mostly on the weekends. We had so much fun together. She made me feel good and courageous. She helped me feel accepted among my peers. I was the life of every party. I loved the way she made me feel; I wanted her every day she was so seductive and addicting. I yearned for her morning day and night.

But she became over-controlling and consumed all of my thoughts and actions. She turned me into someone I hated! I wanted to break it off with her, because she was ruining my life. I tried many times to break away from her, but her passion was so strong. I kept coming back for more punishment. She is very popular and everywhere and that makes it hard to forget about her. Even though I knew she was no good for me, I thought I could handle her. She was ripping me apart!

When I was introduced to a special group of men and women who had practically the same problem I did, I realized I was not alone and I could break off this relationship and be happy with my life once again, and I did! Even though I love my new life without her, once in a while I still find myself fantasizing about having a one-night stand with her and having a good time like we did in the beginning.

I thank God that my newfound friends are there to remind me this cannot be possible. This evil girl named ALCOHOL is out of my life forever just as long as I don't have that first kiss. Now I know this all can be possible with the help of GOD and my food friends of Alcoholics Anonymous.

--David C.,  
*Audubon Last Mile Step & Tradition*

## God is or He isn't: A Spiritual Axiom

Sure, I understood the "God is." After all, I have been a practicing member of one of the world's major religions for five decades. But I had no conception of the "Or He isn't" part of this axiom. I always prayed to the God of my understanding (usually for good things for others--sometimes about things for myself, which might or might not have been good).

Today, my understanding is that "God is" twenty-four hours a day, seven days of the week, and 365 calendar days each and every year. He is not "God is" only when I choose to call on him. He ordains, controls and rules all the time. He orders each day, everywhere, for each and every one of us. There are no random happenings in God's world--all things are accomplished according to his divine plan. Sometimes (seldom) I see and understand why he has taken some particular action. Sometimes (once in a while) I see and understand some particular action--after it has occurred. Most often, I do not know why God has done the things that he has. That is okay with me--if it is something that He wants me to know about He will reveal that fact in his time, not my own.

Usually I accept God's will, as expressed in His actions, with grace, peace and serenity. Sometimes I ascribe my own thoughts, wishes and motives to God's actions. When I do so, my self-will has wrested God's will from my life and actions. My ego has temporarily taken over. My subsequent thoughts, wishes, motives and actions are then guided solely by my intellect and good results seldom, if ever, follow.

It is only when I "allow" God to be God (forgive me, Lord, for this outrageous presumption) that my life can be restored to some degree of sanity, sanctity, and value to others. God is in all of you, and all of me, all of the time. I can see Him working in you, and I pray that He also works in me. I know that He will, if I "allow" Him to do so.

--A Work In Progress Alcoholic.

## Question of the Month

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

*What is your favorite A.A. saying and why?*

Please email your replies no later than Friday, March 15, to [newsletter@aaaj.org](mailto:newsletter@aaaj.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 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—write to us at [newsletter@assj.org](mailto:newsletter@assj.org). Contact information is required and anonymity is respected. We edit for space and clarity only.

Due to space limitations, we are unable to publish flyers for events in this newsletter.

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

my life, as long as I'm willing to make the decision each day to take the action recommended.

That much I understand because that's how it has worked for me so far. The rest is still a mystery--but what a magnificent mystery! And what a life I've been given in return for my willingness and my daily decision.

There's no trick to getting "the God stuff." We're not "selling" anything. It's a results-oriented proposition. It's free and simple: Try doing this, and see what happens. The key is willingness. The door is action. The payoff is patience, tolerance, understanding (a little, anyway), and love. It's all in our literature.

I hope my experience makes getting the "God stuff" and sharing it a little easier for others. Just keep in mind when you read Bill's old-style fervent prose that--He, She, It, or Whatever--"God" is still real easy to spell.

--Anonymous

## Unity Committee Needs You

South Jersey Intergroup's Unity Committee needs YOU. Want to take on more service? This is a great way to contribute and learn more about how AA works at the Intergroup (IG) level, and to be involved in planning Alcathons and other activities, including a Round Up in the Fall (the first in nearly 20 years!).

You can serve as the IG rep for your group if it doesn't already have one, or just volunteer.

All are welcome! IG reps can also invite the Unity Committee to speak to their groups about the importance of AA traditions and how service is important to recovery.

Contact new Unity Chair Joe T. with any questions at 856-589-5710, or email him at [unity@asaj.org](mailto:unity@asaj.org).

Look for a feature article about the Unity Committee in a future edition of this newsletter!



