

ANONYMOUS SOUTHJERSEY

SOUTH JERSEY INTERGROUP

April 2015

April in April: A Young Woman Who No Longer Drinks Surviving in a World That Does

I got sober when I was 27. I am 32 now and still learning how to "survive" a variety of experiences and events as a young woman—who no longer drinks—in a world that does.

One of my best friends is getting married this month, and it seems as good a time as any to talk about it—weddings. And bachelorette parties. And toasts. And sober dancing. Yes, I may not feel as confident in my moves, but I can still dance at weddings.

As I've learned in AA, so much about sobriety is acceptance.



And it's taken me a bit longer to accept this—but alcohol is all around us, and that's OK. Not everyone drinks the way I did and not everyone needs to abstain from it. This wedding I have this month has alcohol at every turn. The shower, that I've had to help pay for, is at a winery. And the favors? You guessed it, mini bottles of champagne.

(Continued on page 6)

Inside NERASSA

So, how do I sum up my first experience at NERASSA? Well, like most of my sober epiphanies, this experience can be described without inventing my own catch phrase. I can borrow from the Saturday night speaker, Rod, who revealed that being part of a weekend like this "made my AA world much bigger"

For me, that doesn't just mean I humbly recognize myself as a small fish in the sea of 919 other attendees. Instead it was so much more - an educational experience on the workings of AA service, while simultaneously inspiring a spiritual journey attempting to distinguish between humility and responsibility. Knowledge of the AA service path would not be a substitute for walking it.

(Continued on page 3)

An Aid to Clear Thinking

Step 4: Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

Step Four is one of the longest and most intricate of steps in the Twelve and Twelve. It was designed for sustained effort and work: two things which I am naturally not inclined to engage in!

I have just had a 'go-round' with someone close to me. What does Step Four tell me? It tells me that my 'go-round', and the residual negativity that I suffer from, are the result of my instincts gone wild; or, to put it into the language of the Step, the result of

(Continued on page 7)

Inside This Issue: Tradition Four and Concept Four ♦ A Daily Reprieve by Pat P. ♦ Grapevine Exclusive: A Thousand Wishes ♦ Announcements and Things To Do

Grapevine Exclusive

A Thousand Wishes

Alone on a porch, he found his faith up in the evening sky

When I finally entered the rooms of AA in earnest, I read the Steps over and over. Early in recovery, I attended a meeting focused on Step Eleven. Thinking about this Step, where we “sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God,” I realized that I understood how to meditate, but I didn’t know how to pray. An analyst by nature and by training, my mind was always spinning, dissecting my thoughts and contemplating my actions. I planned my day each morning and took stock each evening. I analyzed and over-analyzed each and every event of the day, trying to put things into perspective, to grasp the meaning of life, and to understand my role in the universe. But I did not pray.

I’ve had more religious training than most, with years of formal religious studies from kindergarten until the age of 16. By rote, I’d learned hundreds of prayers, but knew little of their true meaning or intent. I’d sat through thousands of hours of instruction and services, without taking to heart the words I heard. My family celebrated holidays together. They were an enjoyable tradition and ritual, but in no way spiritual events. I was an agnostic, clinging to the belief of some cosmic force, always dismissive of the idea of one true, paramount religion and always skeptical of any single view of an all-powerful God.

The night I returned from rehab, I walked onto my front porch. It was a beautiful, warm summer evening. The stars were

shimmering brightly in the sky. I don’t know why, but I looked up and said that childhood rhyme, “Star light, star bright, first star I see



tonight; I wish I may, I wish I might, have the wish I wish tonight.” Then I had to decide on my one wish for the evening, out of all the many things I needed and wanted. This focused me and forced me to decide, for that night, what was the one most important thing for me. Then I made my wish.

I did the same thing the next night—and the night after. Soon, this became my own personal nightly ritual. After about two weeks, I went onto the porch, but it was a cloudy night and the sky was just a dark gray blanket. Even though I couldn’t see the stars, I knew they were still there. This gave me comfort, so I made my wish anyway.

One day, I shared my star story with this kind woman in my home group. Her ever-present smile grew even wider. She leaned over and gave me a big hug. Looking into my eyes, she said, “That’s so good.” I was happy she liked the story. Then she said, “That means you’re

praying every day.” Wow, how her words struck me. This insight she so simply stated opened the door for me.

Indeed, I had been praying without even realizing it! In some small way, I did have faith in the order of the universe and its permanence, embodied in those stars. I had hope, not that all my wishes would be granted, but that important ones might come to pass. Prayer, faith and hope then made me able to separate religious doctrine from spirituality. Spirituality led me to begin to believe in a Higher Power. That belief helped me begin my journey toward discovering a God of my understanding. By the time I really started working Step Eleven, I knew how to both meditate and pray.

It’s now over a thousand wishes from my first one that summer evening. I can’t remember them all, but I vividly remember the very first one. On that night, I knew what I most wanted: I wished for sanity. Over time, I have grown to understand that a prerequisite for sanity is sobriety. More recently, my wishes are for more moments of serenity, sanity and sobriety. To me, that’s the progression the Steps lead us through.

A wish is a hope for tomorrow. My Higher Power and the AA program are what give me hope today.

—Anonymous

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A Daily Reprieve, a Daily Commitment

On p. 85 of the Big Book, it says: "We are not cured of alcoholism. What we have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition." I have recently learned, added, a new dimension to that teaching.

It all began when I called a friend/sponsee and found her crying with pain and grief over her son's impending divorce. She was crying for herself as well as her son, for she would be losing a daughter-in-law, whom she loved like a biological daughter, and her daughter-in-law's family, whom she loved as her own. She said her son and daughter-in-law had been to a trusted marriage counselor from their church who said to them, "Marriage is a daily commitment. You must wake up every morning and make a commitment that day to your marriage." Sadly, the wife doesn't want to do that.

The only good thing to come out of this very sad conversation is that what my friend shared with me sparked a whole new awareness for me. I had been reading pp. 85-88 almost every morning for years, and it suddenly hit me what those Big Book words quoted above were saying--it's not just we get a daily reprieve, it's that we get a daily reprieve only if we commit to and maintain a spiritual condition--and for this

alcoholic, that means waking up every morning and making a commitment to my Higher Power and to working my spiritual program.

This was brought vividly home to me a few days after we talked. I woke up from a disturbing dream, which was so disturbing that I forgot to finish my daily morn-

ing prayers that I usually say before I get out of bed. It was really bugging me! I was all churned up inside, so I went downstairs and started writing about the dream. Suddenly I realized I hadn't finished my morning prayers. So I started praying and picked up where I had left off. All of a sudden, I felt the connection, strong and clear, with my Higher Power. And I immediately felt good

again, right with the world, my world. I realized how important, how essential it is for me to make a spiritual commitment every morning to my Higher Power and my AA/12 Step Program. It is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of a spiritual condition.

And my dream? As soon as I started praying and connecting with my Higher Power, it faded into the background, and eventually dissipated.

And for that, as for all other things AA, I am grateful.

--Pat P



NERASSA

(From page 1)

It was expressed to me early in my sobriety that getting a home group, and getting involved in service would help enrich my sober experiences in a number of ways -- not the least of which was it would help me feel part of AA. So I jumped in like a good eager alcoholic -- besides I had ideas -- BIG

ones! I found out that service is meant to be performed with love and without expectations, something I was reminded of over and over this weekend.

In Area 45, we have Intergroups, Districts, home groups; and within each of those we may have committees with trusted servants. I knew all this before NERASSA, and I even had an AA Service Manual,

albeit barely cracked open. I thought I had a voice in AA and my home group had a conscience, which we do. However, I didn't realize how all these pieces fit together. Quite frankly, I had hung my hat on the notion that AA was not organized and therefore the pieces didn't have to fit together -- isn't that what autonomy means?

(continued on page 4)

From Books for Children (and *grown-ups too!*)

*Words of inspiration for when we're feeling low
or just need a reminder that the miracle is yet to come.*

**Little things have big
results sometimes.**

-- *Willie Without*,
Margaret Moore, 1951

**True friends never owe
each other anything.**

-- *Bear Circus*,
William Pene du Bois, 1971

**Talent is something rare
and beautiful and precious,
and it must not be allowed
to go to waste.**

-- *The Ugly Duckling*, Hans
Christian Andersen, 1845

**Piglet was so excited at the idea
of being Useful that he forgot to
be frightened any more.**

-- *Winnie the Pooh*,
A.A. Milne, 1926

**Trouble can always be borne
when it is shared.**

-- *The Tale of the Mandarin Ducks*,
Katherine Paterson, 1990

NERASSA

(From page 3)

My wheels started spinning in the fall when I attended my first Area 45 Assembly meeting. That's where I learned about the delegate. The delegate attends the annual Conference on behalf of Area 45 and there they are our voice. If our group doesn't attend Area meetings, or at a minimum district meetings, our group conscience may not be relayed to the delegate for consideration in voting on matters that affect AA as a whole (which to not have a voice is, of course, also the group's choice). And that's why the Service Manual highlights the importance of a GSR. The GSR is the lifeline between Area and the group – through their participation, and

with effective communication; they educate the group on upcoming AA agenda items, and in turn educate the delegate on what's important to our group. Did you know that even if you don't have a group designated GSR, any member of AA can attend the Area 45 mini-conference on April 11th and participate in discussions with our delegate on Conference agenda items? I didn't until last week!

Halfway through NERASSA weekend, the snow was falling steadily, and inside the enthusiasm level continued to rise. I was intrigued to learn that most in attendance were currently experiencing lack of interest in service committees in their Areas. Besides the increased use of the internet and social media, participation seemed

to be the most discussed topic all weekend – in every facet of service. How could we bring this excitement that seemed contagious in the Grand Ballroom in Somerset, New Jersey back to our groups – small or large? There were lots of ideas and successful experiments shared throughout the weekend, mindful that we are a program of attraction rather than promotion.

So, I invite you to get involved – grab an AA friend and head to meetings held by your District and Intergroup and Area and beyond – like Atlanta this July for the International Convention! There seems to be no limits to how big my AA world can be when I concentrate on the WE!

--Lisa S

Editorial Policy

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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@aasj.org.

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR SJ INTERGROUP:

South Jersey Intergroup Association, Inc.
PO Box 2514
Cherry Hill, NJ 08035
Office/Literature Sales: 1-856-486-4446
Email: Info@aasj.org
Website: www.aasj.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 8 pm at St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church
1989 Route 70 East, Cherry Hill, NJ

2015 International Convention of Alcoholics Anonymous

July 2-5, 2015 - Atlanta, Georgia

July will be here before you know it and the countdown is on for the giant celebration in Atlanta in honor of A.A.'s 80th Birthday.

For those of you who have been sleeping, A.A. will convene its 14th International Convention from July 2-5, 2015 in Atlanta, Georgia. The theme will be "80 years—Happy, Joyous and Free."

Some 4000 A.A. volunteers will host tens of thousands of A.A. visitors from over 90 countries. A.A. members and guests from around the world will celebrate A.A.'s 80th year with Big Meetings held Friday night, Saturday night and Sunday morning in the Georgia Dome. Other meetings, scheduled or informal, will take place throughout the weekend in the Georgia World Congress Center and local hotels.



Here's your chance to attend an A.A. meeting that's 50,000 strong and meet A.A.'s from all over the world. There'll also be lots of parties, fun and great food. Atlanta itself offers a variety of cultural and tourism sites.

If you haven't already, make plans to attend. Low cost housing and dining will be available at nearby colleges and thousands of volunteers stand ready to assist you for whatever special needs you might have. To find out more, go to www.aa.org.

April in April

(From page 1)

While I don't love using my money for anything alcohol related, what choice do I have as a bridesmaid? So instead of being upset about it and taking it personally—I'm starting that



day on good spiritual ground and accepting that this is for a friend and has nothing to do with me.

The bachelorette party, on the other hand, is something I am accepting of in the fact that I cannot go for the whole thing. But I can still be there for my friend and enjoy dinner in the city and just drive separately. After dinner is over and we

move to the bars, I will stay for a few photos and then head home, happy knowing that I won't keep myself in a situation that will quickly make me resentful and unhappy. And who knows—maybe I will end up having fun and wanting to stay!

But for this one—I need an escape plan. So my car will be with me, my friend who knows I'm sober will know that whenever I leave it isn't personal, and I already have plans of hitting a meeting and brunch with friends the following morning.

And I know the wedding itself will be fine. As I've grown in sobriety I've learned a lot about not taking things personally. A toast at a wedding and drinking there is totally normal for a lot of people. It isn't about me and I can just as easily drink soda and celebrate my friend, because that is what I am there to do. 5 years ago? I would have

been there to drink and likely make a fool of myself, practically forgetting about my friend. But now I can be the friend she needs me to be. And a respectable party guest! And for this one, I have my car too. In case I need to duck out early—I can!

The thing is, these events are supposed to be fun. When I first got sober—they weren't. I was awkward, uncomfortable, and resentful of being put into situations where drinking was part of the event. But as I've grown, I've become more comfortable in my skin and accepting of the fact that this is my life now—and it's a great life! I can do everything I used to do and more—except throw back drinks thinking I was being classy. It took me some time, but I've even dusted off my dancing shoes and gotten comfortable hitting the dance floor again. Sobriety is freedom and happiness, and even if I look like a fool dancing—I've earned my spot on the dance floor smiling and laughing with my loved ones.

—April E.

“There is No Middle-of-the-Road Solution”

**Area 45 Southern New Jersey 51st Annual General Service Convention
March 20, 21st, and 22nd, 2015**

Banquet, DJ and Karaoke, Fellowship, Speaker Meetings, Marathon Meetings, Workshops and Old-timers Meeting. Al-Anon Program.

Details: Visit snjaaconvention.org. The Crowne Plaza Hotel—2349 Marlton Pike (Rt 70), Cherry Hill, NJ 08002

Convention Chair—Debby S. Chair@snjaaconvention.org 856-404-5351

Registration Chair—Kelly W. area45conventionreg@gmail.com 609-817-4691

Step 4

(From page 1)

my instincts exceeding proper proportions. Which instincts? My instincts for “sex, material and emotional security, and an important place in society.” These it seems are at the root of our “emotional deformities” and nearly all of our problems with others and with ourselves. According to the Step, “Every time a person imposes his instincts unreasonably upon others, unhappiness follows.”

Step Four also tells me that I can “move toward the correction” of my defects and that, by a “willing and persistent effort to do this”, I can find sobriety, contentment, and a faith that works for daily living. My first move in this direction is to take the moral inventory that Step Four calls for. What an order! As I stated above, the length and intricacy of the Step seems to make such an inventory look daunting indeed.

Here is where having a sponsor to guide you through Step Four is of the utmost importance. You can relax and take the process a little at a time. As I heard at a meeting, “You’re not going to get better by next Tuesday!”

Practically speaking, you get a pen and paper, find some quiet time each day or every other day, and add a paragraph or two to your inventory at each sitting. Don’t edit; just write whatever comes to mind, using the questions in the Step Book as your guide. You’ll have plenty of time to read what you’ve written later on, together with you sponsor, and discuss any revisions and/or additions. Once started, the going gets easier.

Remember also, that in doing Step Four, “thoroughness” is key. The Step here advises us to *write* out our questions and answers as a monitor on our thoroughness. Here again, our sponsors can give us a better perspective on whether they think we are being thorough or not. The Step also reminds us that *writing* will be “an aid to clear thinking and honest appraisal.”

April is a perfect time to work on Step Four. It is the harbinger month; the month of rebirth and of new beginnings. What better time to assess ourselves and become willing to move forward with our sobriety?

—Masonville Marty

TRADITION FOUR AND CONCEPT IV

‘Autonomy’ is the key in Tradition Four. Every A.A. group should be *autonomous* in managing its own affairs; except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.

Remarkably, the Tradition, as explicated in the Twelve and Twelve, says very little about how this concept of autonomous separation between groups, and between a group and GSO, works out on a day-to-day basis. What is discussed, at some length, is the principle that each A.A. group should have “no other affiliation.” It is this principle that seems to be the genuine focus of Tradition Four.

An A.A. group’s involvement in ancillary projects (like education and medicine, for example) only serves to dilute the primary energies, focus and purpose of the group (to remain sober and help other alcoholics achieve sobriety) and leads to problems of power, money and prestige; eventuating no doubt and often, in the group’s demise.

Concept IV deals with the questions of prestige and power within the structure of A.A. as a whole. To guard against a “dictatorship of the A.A. Trustees”, this Concept declares that all of A.A.’s workers at the General Service Office (i.e., executives, staff, accountants), both alcoholic and non-alcoholic alike, paid and unpaid, shall have a right to be represented and participate in GSO discussions and meetings at all levels (whether such “discussions” are conducted by service corporations within the GSO, or by the Trustees themselves).

Here is part of Bill W.’s comments on this Concept: “...our Trustees...traditionally invite paid executives, staff members, accountants, and any others whose reports or advice may be required, to attend each quarterly meeting of the General Service Board...Although they do not vote, these workers may freely participate in debate.”

Thus the “Right of Participation” is embedded in A.A.’s Concepts at the level of the daily functioning of the GSO. It guards against “big shottism” on the part of the Trustees and it can work the same way on the group level in the context of Tradition Four. By avoiding any affiliation that is not A.A., the group remains focused on its primary purpose—staying sober and helping others—while allowing the group sufficient autonomy to run its own show.

— Your Editor

Fellowship Announcements and Things to Do

April 2015

New Publication

Sober and Out is the title of a new Grapevine publication (cost \$11). It is a collection of stories by AA members who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (and a few friends) from the pages of AA Grapevine.

New Beginner Meeting

Washington Township "How Important Is It Group." Thursdays 7:30 pm. St Charles Borromeo School. Johnson & Stagecoach Rds. Open. Joe 856 589 5710

New Women's Meeting

"Sisters Share and Care." Tuesdays 6:00-7:00 pm. Big Book—Step Study. Zion Lutheran Church, Fairview and Pavilion Aves., Riverside, NJ.

Meeting in Need of Support

Friday Nite Live Group. Friday 6:00-7:00 pm. Holy Trinity Church, 2211 West Landis Ave., Vineland.

Meeting Change

Tuesday Night's "A Way Out" group (originally at Transfiguration Church in Collingswood) is now meeting from 8:00-9:00 pm at Logan Memorial Presbyterian Church, Calvin Hall, 18 West Merchant Street, Audobon, NJ.

Mark Your Calendar!

March 20, 21, 22 – Area 45 Southern New Jersey 51st Annual General Service Convention. The Crowne Plaza Hotel 2349 Marlton Pike (Rt. 70) Cherry Hill, NJ 08002. For registration and additional information: snjaaconvention.org and area45conventionreg@gmail.com or call: Debby S. at 856-404-5351 and Kelly W. at 609-817-4691.

Wednesday, March 25 – Voorhees Women of Grace is celebrating their 23rd Anniversary. Food at 6:00 pm and speakers at 7:00 pm. Gentlemen are Welcome! "The Meeting Place" in front of Hope Church, 500 Cooper Rd. (Corner of Cooper Rd. & Centennial Blvd) Voorhees, NJ. 08043.

Tuesday March 31 – Ashland Tuesday Night Big Book, 21st Anniversary. Food at 7:00 pm, speaker at 7:30 pm. Evangelical Presbyterian Church, 33 E Evesham Rd., Cherry Hill/Voorhees border.

Saturday, April 18 – District 14 Unity Event. Dinner-Speaker Meeting followed by Music & Dancing. Church of the Resurrection, Trinity Episcopal Church, 800 E. Wood Street 800 E. Wood Street, Corner of 8th & Wood Sts., Vineland, NJ. For More Information Contact: Greg C. (856) 238-8488, ghc01@comcast.net. Jessica S. (856) 896-5583, jniz1@msn.com. Dinner at 6:00 pm.

Saturday, June 13 – South Jersey Intergroup will celebrate Founders Day at Parvin State Park Starting at 10:00 am to 4:00 pm Picnic is FREE everyone is invited.

