

ANONYMOUS SOUTHJERSEY

SOUTH JERSEY INTERGROUP

MAY 2015

Invisible Line into Alcoholism; Powerful Threshold to AA

I've heard many people talk about not knowing when exactly they crossed "that invisible line" into active alcoholism, but that what matters is they know they crossed it.

I've also heard an awful lot of metaphors in AA. Many of them are helpful in picturing a person's situation, or relating to a

story in a new way. (A recent favorite: "I was as shaky as a ten-cent ladder.") Taken together, I imagine some of them are 100% contradictory yet none the less true. For one contradiction, it occurred to me that 'that invisible line' is fluid, and also fragmented.

If you were to line up all of the thresholds over which you

stepped anytime you crossed through a significant doorway whose entrance or exit would form part of your identity, I wonder how long that line would stretch. Because I can't begin to calculate the times my stride crossed into and out of liquor stores, homes where there were

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April in May: Surviving Opening Day

Happy baseball season! What says springtime more than warm breezes, time outside, cookouts, and baseball? This month brought a particularly interesting challenge for me in my sober journey—and it involves, you guessed it: baseball.

My boyfriend and I have been together for over a year now and he isn't "one of us." He's a take-it-or-leave-it drinker and rarely drinks around me because it just isn't important to him. However, I recently learned that while I thought I had explained alcoholism and my sobriety to him, I made assumptions that he understood me, and he made assumptions about

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♦ Announcements and Things to Do

True Kinship

Step 5: Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

"The process of one alcoholic confiding in another has without a doubt saved my life. Nowhere else have I ever found such devotion and understanding as with AA sponsoring."

The above quote is what began my day and it immediately evoked Step Five. Communication is the key concept in Step Five. We are "only as sick as our secrets" resonates more than ever here.

What I find, as I evolve in sobriety, is that each Step has a 'big' and a 'little' version. The 'big' version is the time that you really dig in to the Step with your sponsor, doing a good and thorough job of it. The 'little' version is the weaving of the Step into the fabric of your life, on a daily and on an ongoing basis.

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Anyone for Tennis?

Hiding booze in tennis ball canisters in the garage was not social drinking

When I look back at the progression of my drinking, a couple of experiences stand out as clues that my drinking wasn't normal.

One was how upset I felt when tennis ball cans went from opaque metal to clear plastic. At the time, I hid a substantial supply of booze in those cans in my garage. Another telling moment was when the news came out that a former president's wife was seeking help for alcoholism. It gave me pause and I thought, "Maybe not drinking will become fashionable!"

When my business travel increased for my job, I felt free at last to drink with abandon. My descent into chronic alcoholism was steep and rapid. I began to excuse my drinking in the company of friends by saying that I was planning on quitting.

One morning at brunch with friends after a haunting blackout, I was confronted by a friend who said, "I thought you were going to quit drinking?"

"I am," I responded. "The ticket to the spa is home on my dresser." My plan for stopping drinking was to go to a spa for a week.

"Why not just call AA?" the friend asked, handing me the phone while reading the number for AA out of the phone book. With the eyes of everyone at the table on me, I dialed the number.

A deep, gravelly voice answered. "My name is Shirley and I'm an alcoholic." Shirley asked me if I was willing to do anything to stop drinking. At that moment, with everyone looking at me, I said, "Yes."

A short while later, feeling like a teenager on a dare, I signed into detox. After the admissions procedure, I was wheeled down a long, dim hallway, and through a door bearing an ominous black sign that read, "Alcohol Detoxification."

While in detox, I attended my first AA meeting. It was held in a windowless, smoky room in the hospital basement. I watched in frozen panic as the hospital aides wheeled in patients, mostly old men in bathrobes, slumped over, some drooling.

Next, the booming voice of the meeting leader who was reading "How it Works," seemed to emphasize the words, "If you want what we have ...". Looking around the room at the motley crew assembled there, I was convinced that AA was not for me. In short, I was not

one of those people who felt at home once they (*From page 2*)

found their way to AA. In time, I accepted Step One. In spite of myself, I became one of the very people I had scorned and cynically labeled "a kook." Those were the people said they were grateful to be alcoholics.

For some time, I fancied myself as a visitor-observer in AA.

As I watched people in meetings get jobs, cars, and teeth and also lose jobs, cars, and teeth, and meet all manner of life's challenges with the help of AA and their fellows, I came to know hope. I was able to do Steps Two and Three once I had hope.

My sponsor would tell me that the person I was would drink again but that Steps Four through Nine were there to help me begin to change for the better. These Steps helped me to take responsibility for my attitudes and actions. I also began to set things right in my relationships with family, friends and at work.

Today, Step Ten is a daily practice, one of taking responsibility for my actions. It's a way to practice what AA calls, "right living."

When I finally came to Step Eleven, my sponsor took a deep, exasperated breath and said:

"You are awfully good at asking your Higher Power for what you want – like a child making lists for Santa. The problem is that you never check the mail. You refuse to take time to practice gratitude, and to open yourself to your Higher Power's will for you."

With that, the lights of Step Eleven went on for me at last. Today, this is the Step that helps me pause and ask my Higher Power for help.

Thanks to my sponsor, I have been active in AA service from the very earliest days in my sobriety: welcoming newcomers, making coffee, sharing at meetings, having a homegroup, attending business meetings, and being sponsor. Today, I cherish this design for living as a way of life. I am deeply grateful and believe that to sustain the full and meaningful sobriety I have today requires that I pass it along to others.

—Mary Ann R., Minneapolis, Minn.

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Area 45 Convention: A Power Dose of A.A

I have attended AA conventions for many years--decades, in fact. Until last year, my conventions were all in Oregon. When I attended my first South Jersey convention last year, I wondered how it would stack up against Oregon's. It stacked up just fine. AA conventions, like AA meetings, are pretty much the same all over.

I love conventions. They're like a shot of B12 in the arm--a power dose of AA. Rarely have I heard a speaker who didn't fill me with the joy, the gratitude, the power of AA. This convention did exactly that. The speakers were excellent. I stood in the hall after the Sunday morning speaker, watching and listening to the participants as they milled about, feeling the energy, the "buzz" of the place. The place was humming. A good AA speaker does that. Fills you with energy and gets you humming.

From the Convention: An Example of Spiritual Growth

This was my 42nd attendance highlighted by seeing many old friends and inspirational speakers.

I look forward to it all year. Gain my information on history of A.A.

This years details of Trustees and their carrying the A.A. message around the world.

Sunday morning speaker Terri K. was an outstanding example of spiritual growth from self-centered selfish person to an altruistic person with a spiritual life.

John D.

I like to take away at least one good thought, one good "aha", from a speaker. From the Friday night trustee's talk, I learned that first of all, AA has such a thing as a national trustee, one from the U.S., one from Canada. Apparently their job is to attend AA conventions world-wide. He talked about his joy in doing so, and how AA is the same all over, and even if he didn't speak the language of the country he was in, he still was able to communicate because all talked "the language of the heart."

The Al-Anon speaker Saturday gave me the aha "to look for God in every moment." She was told by her sponsor she would need to do this after she found out her son had been diagnosed with AIDS and wouldn't live much longer. This stood her in good stead, then and now.

Sunday morning's speaker was electrifying. How does one live with the fact one has killed someone--and not just "someone", but a 14 year old boy who died in his mother's arms--while driving drunk? How does someone live with that, coupled with an abusive, traumatic childhood of their own? Prison, an intensive behavior modification program, and AA showed her and continues to show her



how. Her last statement, "every time I give this talk, I am making a little more of my amends," brought tears to my eyes.

I used to say "by the Grace of God I didn't kill someone driving drunk." After her talk, I decided this was too glib, too pat, a way to deal with the fact I escaped that burden. (I did come close, once.) Was it the grace of God the speaker did kill someone driving drunk? I don't think so. Why it was her, and not me, I do not know. But perhaps the answer lies in something else she said earlier in her talk. When she was grappling with the idea of God, and could she believe in such a thing, she said to someone who did, "what kind of God would let these horrible things happen?" The response she got was, "rather than ask what kind of God would let these things happen, ask what kind of people would do these things?" Which puts the responsibility for change, for doing things right instead of wrong, squarely back on us--where I think it belongs. And AA/the 12 Steps, teaches us, as it did her, precisely how to do this--if we want. If we work it. It's our choice. It's always our choice.

Such a powerful talk. Such a powerful weekend. I'm always glad when I attend a convention.

Pat P.

Tradition Five and Concept V: Promoting AA Unity

The key to both Tradition and Concept Five, is "Unity." Without unity, neither A.A. as a whole, nor any individual group, can stay focused on its primary purpose: to carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

Mixing A.A.'s message with other issues—issues dealing with reli-



gion, money, education, hospitals and rehabilitation centers—erodes unity of purpose and often discourages the newcomer. How many times have you heard someone at a meeting say, "If I thought that you guys had anything else in mind besides helping me stay sober, I would have been out the door pretty quickly!"

There is another important side to this idea of unity. That side is reflected in Concept V. Concept V tells us that everyone's opinion in A.A. will be respected and valued. It tells us that the "majority" (whether of the group, the Area, or General Service) does not have a monopoly on what's best for A.A. and that a minority opinion may be often the right one while the majority may sometimes be dead wrong on a particular issue. That's why Concept V incorporates the "Right of Appeal" as a cornerstone of the A.A. framework.

The traditional "Right of Appeal" in A.A. insures that, whatever the issue under discussion, the "minority" opinion will always be heard and all personal grievances will receive careful consideration; whether at the group, the district committee, area assemblies, or the General Service Conference. The "Right of Appeal" also includes the "right to petition" the General Service Conference on any issue, by anyone, no matter how much of a "minority" position that petition might represent.

Both Tradition Five and Concept V are designed to promote and continue, A.A. unity. Tradition Five keeps each group focused on our primary purpose, while Concept V keeps "everyone" at the A.A. table by insuring "everyone" that "everyone's" voice will be heard and considered, all the way up (or "down") to the General Service Conference.

Your Editor

Step 5

(Continued from page 1)

The 'big' Step Five is the three or four hour variety, where you sit with your sponsor (or other appropriate person) and admit what's on your Step Four list. The 'little' Step Five is the daily, weekly, monthly or yearly review with another person of just what your faults are and how they are manifesting themselves in your life from day to day. The working of Step Five implicates a willingness to talk and to keep talking about what's going on inside of us: what's bothering us, frustrating us, wrong with us, and what's interfering with our peace of mind, our serenity, and our sobriety.

Unless I develop a certain openness, and a willingness to talk to others in A.A., I remain locked in fear and sickness and come that much closer to a drink. As Step Five tells me, "we cannot live alone with our pressing problems and the character defects which cause or aggravate them... We have to talk to somebody about them...It seems plain that the grace of God will not enter to expel our destructive obsessions until we are willing to try this...Step Five was the answer. It was the beginning of true kinship with man and God."

So talk, talk, talk. It doesn't have to be perfect. It doesn't have to be about something deep and meaningful. I've often found that, when I start talking about the weather with another A.A. or with my sponsor, the conversation pretty soon takes a deeper channel. Conversation is like a river: it matters not where it starts, it finds its own path and level. So, let it flow. Just begin, anywhere. Just try!

Masonville Marty

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.

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SJIG holds its monthly meetings on the third Wednesday of the month at 8 pm at St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church 1989 Route 70 East, Cherry Hill, NJ

The General Service Convention is about Service

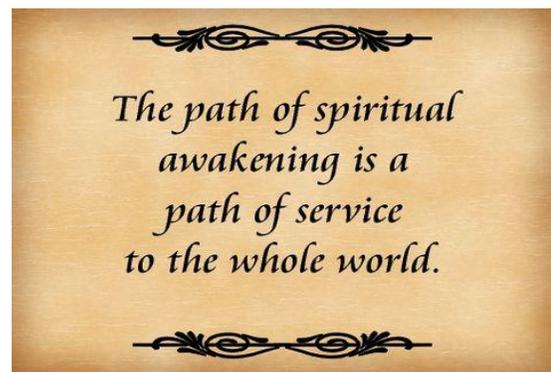
As I sat at the Peach Can table, fulfilling a commitment to the Area 45 Ad Hoc hospitality (get those archives to Atlanta) committee on Saturday at the recent General Service Convention, I pondered how wonderful it was to be of service to my fellow conventionists, and yet I still saw a host of AA friends, old and new, wandering from table to table.

When I came into the rooms a few 24s ago, I had the mistaken belief that it was the material things I had collected that set my personal value. I have come to realize that the real value in life is in relationships: home group friends who know how I'm doing on sight; AA friends I haven't seen in a while, but still have a big hug for me; the small percentage of AAs you know really well because you see them all the time - in service; and the renewed relationships with family, with whom relations may have been quite strained while in the cups.

I also greatly appreciate the chance to have had a great conversation about sobriety, AA literature and the rewards of service with my young co-volunteer during my earlier shift at the SJIG Literature table. This person admitted to being hesitant to take a literature commitment, but did so anyway because their sponsor is a big proponent of service. That is just awesome.

So, if you went to the convention and didn't have a commitment, consider doing so at the next convention. Better yet, join an Intergroup committee or take a speaking commitment. Be of service, you might really like it.

jerseybrett



Invisible Line

(continued from page 1)

parties, my own home, and hundreds of such places, I have to believe it's longer than thousands of miles. There is my invisible line: fragments of thresholds in all different colors, from shiny to scuffed. And as parts of one line, they come together and transcend time.

The path which leads to our miraculous seats in the rooms is composed of numerous thresholds. Before it occurred to me that my drinking wasn't normal, nor were the frequent (read: daily) overindulgences more than temporary habits, my feet led me sometimes reluctantly, sometimes eagerly, to locations that however seemingly varied were all really the same: a place of intoxication that could keep me hiding from how I felt.

The irony is that somehow the toughest threshold to cross

wasn't the one into rehab, or even into IOP, but into the place I now know was safer and

I pray to a higher power that I may be responsible for wearing thin the thresholds at the doors of these rooms and for holding the door for others to join me....

more powerful than the others: a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous. With the tread worn thin into liquor stores, that trip had become easy--no--habitual. While the way to alcohol forged a well-worn path, I had grown tired of strategizing. I'd pray that a shift change of cashiers meant people wouldn't know I had already been there. I'd pay more for wine I liked less because the Mom-and-Pop place with dust-covered bottles was better than visiting the discount store for a second time that day. It wasn't easy, it was an obsession, more so inevitable

than something that didn't require effort. In fact, it took an awful lot of tiresome effort to deny each time that I was an alcoholic, to deny that this wouldn't go on forever without me changing.

It wasn't until I had come to the most frightening juncture there was, and more than a few times crossed its threshold, before I began to see a different blurred line: that from active alcoholism to recovery, provided by walking into the rooms of AA.

I can say that the friendships I've fostered in the fellowship are more gratifying than the fact that I know the cashiers at Canals by name, or the Monday night guy at the tavern and the stories of his grandkids and wife. I can smile now at the depth of gratitude and contentedness I have in sobriety in comparison. I sometimes think of pulling in to one of those places to say hello, and maybe that I'm sober, although surely they are hurting for business now that I'm out of the game.

For now, I pray to a higher power, whom I believe orchestrated every single step, that I may be responsible for wearing thin the thresholds at the doors of these rooms, and for holding the door for others to join me.

--Paige M.



**Alcoholics Anonymous
South Jersey Intergroup
80th Birthday
Picnic**

**Parvin State Park June 13, 2015
10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.**



Gratitude

*The prayers and meetings
All the smiles and warm greetings
And should I feel I will fall
There are many I can call
Many who've been where I've been
Who know the alcohol sin
Who understand fellowship
And what to do should I slip
That alone has made me strong
This "home" is where I belong
There may be dark days ahead
Things I do that I will dread
So, I focus on each day
Alcohol-free I will stay
My life is hour to hour
I thank God for His power
He knows full well my story
That I don't want the glory
I know that I'm on my way
Another glorious day
I stayed away from the drink
And was nowhere near the brink
He is always close at hand
As I take my daily stand
No longer living in fear
Not afraid that I will veer
I have given Him the wheel
Happiness is all I feel*

Paul N
March 5, 2015

ANONYMOUS SOUTHJERSEY

April in May *(continued from page 1)*

what I would and wouldn't want to be around.

Welcome to the Phillies opening day. I remember last year I learned of his yearly tradition where he went to the game with friends and their significant others. However, this year as he was making his plans, I never got an invite. Instead, I got, "Hey I'm going to opening day." I will be honest, at first I took it personally and we had a bit of a tiff over it. I couldn't believe that an event with friends and their significant others was something he would want to attend alone! After talking about this with him though, it turns out that his friends tailgate before and after the game and he didn't want me exposed to that. Of course I instantly got defensive and said I was perfectly capable of determining on my own what I should or shouldn't be exposed to. But after talking it through, it was clear that he thought he was protecting me—when I never explained to him that I don't need protection.

The thing is—there is grey area here. With things like tailgating, I can be around it—for a little while. I have a time limit there. On a beautiful day, I can surely hang in a parking lot chatting with friends, eating, playing games, and feeling grateful that I don't actually have to use the gross port-o-potties every 20 minutes! And as long as I am on good spiritual ground and know I won't be stuck in the situation longer than I want to be, I am totally fine going to a tailgate and then watching the Phillies.

But here is the grey area—when I'm done, I'm done. When people start drinking longer in the day, repeating themselves, and getting a little goofy, there isn't anything left for me there. And that's ok! People without a drinking problem can tailgate and enjoy their day. But I need my car, I need to say my goodbyes, and I need to leave before I get annoyed.

It's a growing process for both of us. He is a black and white type of person and likes answers. This is a grey area for me and short of telling him to put the ball in my court, I don't have clear answers on what is always right for me and for how long. But thankfully, he wants to learn and is patient. And frankly, I want to be invited to future baseball games! Being sober shouldn't mean missing out on fun activities—it just means having a plan and knowing my own comfort levels with things. And sometimes those levels change based on the day, how my week is going, or—anything really! It's a grey area. And that's ok.

April E.

Fellowship Announcements and Things to Do

May 2015

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 Open Big Book Meeting

Saturdays at 7PM at the Center for Family Services, 108 Summerdale Road, Voorhees, NJ 08043 (upstairs).

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!

Friday, April 17 – Bellmawr Friday Night Group celebrates their 50th Anniversary. Food at 7:45 PM followed by speakers at 8:30 PM. Holy Spirit Church, 20 E. Browning Rd (east of Black Horse Pike), Bellmawr, NJ 08031 NEW

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, April 18 – Collingswood Men's Early Risers Group is celebrating its 8th Anniversary with two speakers and continental breakfast. ALL ARE WELCOME Meeting Starts at 7:00 AM . Come early, stay late. *We've recently moved to 710 Collins Ave. Oaklyn, NJ 08107, One block west, off the White Horse Pike at Collins Ave. NEW

May 15 – 17 – Delaware AA State Convention at Rehoboth Beach, Delaware. For information, contact Area 12 Convention, PO Box 12544, Wilmington, DE 19850.

July 2 –5 – International Convention of Alcoholics Anonymous in Atlanta, Georgia. Please visit www.aa.org for details.

July 31 – August 2 – 22nd Annual Pennsylvania State AA Convention in Harrisburg, PA. For information, visit aapastateconvention.com

