

# ANONYMOUS SOUTHJERSEY

**SOUTH JERSEY INTERGROUP**

**AUGUST 2015**

## April in August: Taking Care of Yourself

*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.*

Since getting sober, I've made an effort and priority to take care of my health. When I was drinking, I thought I was being healthy still training for long runs, attending yoga, and trying to eat right—but I did all of this drunk and really, how healthy is that? So after getting sober and getting back up on both feet, I decided to make my

health a priority. And that meant doctors' appointments. Lots and lots of appointments.

A friend once told me that taking care of yourself and going to these annual appointments was a gift to



yourself. And I've taken that seriously since hearing that a few years ago. However, in doing the right thing today and attending my annual physical, I was greeted by quite a surprise. My doctor had a young nurse practitioner working with her and sent her in first. She said she

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## Grace and Karma Can Coexist

Recently, I've been thinking about grace and karma. Karma, as I used to explain to elementary-aged kids, is the boomerang--everything you say and do, comes back to you. Grace wipes out karma, in one fell swoop. In this world we live in, how can they co-exist? It is a paradox. Yet they do.

When I apply these two concepts to my life, I see both operating. Grace is what brought me into AA. I said a prayer one night, dead drunk--"God, if you're there, please help me." Six months later, through a series of unfolding events, I was sitting at my first AA meeting. I haven't had a drink since. God took a half dead human being who was drinking away her life,

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**Inside This Issue:** Facing the Light: Grapevine Exclusive ♦ At the International Convention ♦ Newsletter Submissions and Volunteers Needed ♦ Announcements and Things to Do

## Honesty and Credibility

*Step 8: Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.*

The Steps govern the alcoholic, the Traditions govern the group, and the Concepts govern AA as a world service organization. Is there a connection between these three levels of AA?

In my home group, we do a Tradition meeting each month in place of our ordinary weekly Step meeting. Invariably, there are those (myself included) who let out a collective groan when the Tradition meeting is announced. Members come, sometimes with burning personal problems, expecting some discussion of those problems, only to be told that the discussion will center on our survival as a group. The disappointment is palpable!

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## Facing the Light: a Brilliant Field Of Gold, but She Couldn't Feel a Thing. Had Liquor Stolen Her Joy?

All my life I had dreamed of such an evening—and here it was, at last. The long summer day was ending and the silver cornet band, a re-creation of an old music group from the early 1900s, was warming up in the beautiful park's outdoor band shell. We had bought special tickets weeks before, since listening to a brass band had been a great pleasure for both of us at one time. By now we were suffering the effects of our alcoholism, but we were still "OK." We might have a few bad days now and then, but hey, we were going to be all right.

My companion and I had arranged ourselves on a blanket in the grass, our portable liquor bar at the ready, in preparation for a fine evening of drinking and listening pleasure. Fully prepared, we knew how to keep our ice cubes cold, our unbreakable metal drinking glasses ready and our whiskey in good supply to last the night. I don't remember bringing any food for a picnic. Our picnics by now were mostly of the liquid variety.

As the music swelled and we began to sip (or gulp) our drinks, I failed to feel the joy I had anticipated. Damn it, I didn't seem to be having any fun at all. The music was fine but it didn't give me the pleasure I had planned. My companion seemed dull as well. Often lately, I'd been having this feeling of something being wrong. This wasn't fun anymore, life seemed dreary and I couldn't think how to make it better.

In fact, a curtain of unhappiness seemed to have fallen over our entire family. The kids were turning out OK, but they were leaving home and not staying in touch. Things we used to do together failed to unite us as before. Nothing seemed funny; nothing seemed fun.

A farmer had planted an enormous field of sunflowers in a nearby field. We heard that the huge golden flowers turned east in the mornings to face the rising sun, and west in the afternoons. One day, we mixed our drinks and went for a ride to see the dazzling sunflowers. A brilliant field of gold that would ordinarily have lifted my spirits and made my

heart sing, left me feeling uninspired and sad. My drinking buddy didn't get it either. What could be the matter?

We liked to take weekend trips to get away from the hectic and pressure-filled alcoholic lives. On one trip we discovered there was no coffeemaker in our room, no room service coffee, no coffee shop nearby. But we did have our handy portable liquor bar with us. So instead of coffee in the morning, we had whiskey. What was wrong with this picture? I had no idea.

In time I found myself talking to a psychologist who was the head of our local mental health clinic. When he heard my list of problems and my concern that I was losing my mind, he suggested that I could be an alcoholic. I was furious. What on earth could have caused a professional with such good credentials to make a misdiagnosis like that? He had the nerve to tell me, "I don't counsel with alcoholics. You need to go to AA to address that."

In spite of my doubts, I did pay him for his time and began to follow his suggestions, showing up at the once-a-week AA meeting in our little town, and making my reservation at a chemical dependency center 11 hours away by car.

The Big Book says we don't have to reach out very far to be saved by the loving hand of God. I was one of those who were rescued by the program of Alcoholics Anonymous, and that was 34 sober years ago. Since I was so blind to my alcoholism, I'm deeply grateful that the tiny steps I took were enough to get me to AA to save my life and my sanity.

Years later, when I returned to that psychologist to thank him, he said that when he met me he had just attended a seminar that addressed the needs of alcoholic women. Subsequently, I was the very first one he diagnosed. I've heard many stories of success in recovery resulting from a sequence of tiny events. This is my story.

—Kay K., Redondo Beach, Calif.

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## AA Convention: Masonville Marty Reports from Atlanta

A subtitle for this piece might be, "Fear and Loathing in Atlanta", after the fashion of hippy journalist, Hunter Thompson. Given the assignment to cover the Superbowl in Los Angeles, Thompson remained ensconced in his hotel room playing 'touch football' with the hotel maids and room service bellhops, only occasionally glancing out the window at the stadium across the way; never actually going there!

For those still sleeping, AA held its fourteenth World Convention in Atlanta over the July Fourth weekend at the Georgia World Conference Center, a vast, cavernous complex of buildings that anyone (except possibly its architect) would get lost in. It's probably worth a

look at the GSO website to scan the events crowded into Friday and Saturday, to get some idea of the multitude of meetings and events that took place. Total attendance was close to 70,000, representing AA,s from 80 countries (including "Native Americans" who had their own legation).

Virtually every specialty group had its own meeting room (additional "cavernous" affairs). Here's a sampling: "A.A. and the Clergy", "A.A. in the Caribbean and West Indies", "A.A. and Correctional Facilities", "A.A. Grapevine", "Deaf and Sober A.A.'s", "Lesbian and Gay A.A.'s", "Archives", "Aviation Professionals" (my personal favorite), "Young People in A.A.", "Reaching the Alcoholic With

Special Needs", "Women in A.A.", "A.A. in the Oceanic Zone" (think New Zealand, China, Maldives, India), "Pioneers in A.A.", "A.A. in the Digital Age", "Lawyers in A.A." (sounds redundant!), "A.A. and the Healthcare Professional", "Is A.A. Reaching Minorities?", "A.A. and Court Programs", "A.A. and the Military". Again, this is only a small sampling. There were dozens of others that space does not allow me to mention. In addition, there were meetings in French, Spanish, Italian, German, Japanese and a dozen other languages.

Of course, the granddaddy of all the meetings was the big three that took place at the Georgia Dome, a vast sports stadium

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## Convention

(From page 3)

at otherwise hosts Atlanta Falcons football games. I attended only the Friday night “big meeting” at the Georgia Dome. This is the meeting that everyone talks about when they remember A.A. World Conventions. Imagine, 70, 000 recovering alcoholics all in one place, holding hands and reciting the Serenity Prayer or the Lord’s Prayer. Cynicism aside, it is truly moving and the energy charge that one gets is awe-inspiring. The opening “flag ceremony” is an interesting (although “tedious” at times) affair in which representatives from the 80 countries attending carry out their country’s flag and are individually announced (vaguely reminiscent of the Ms. Universe pageant).

All of the Trustees from the GSO are introduced and this is followed by an actual “meeting” with three speakers (20 minutes each).

One of the highlights for me was attending the foreign

language meetings—in this case the Italian meeting. It borders on the miraculous to be in a meeting in the native language of my father and his father, not

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*The miracle of our fellowship and of our recovery shines through stronger than ever. We are united in our differences. We are each like snowflakes – no two of us are exactly alike and yet we share a common challenge and pathway*

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understanding the majority of what is spoken, yet still having the spiritual message come through and speak directly to your heart and soul. It is an exercise and an experience that I recommend to all and a reminder that language barriers should never stop you from attending an A.A. meeting—wherever you are and in whatever language is available. To paraphrase Gertrude Stein, a “meeting is a meeting is a meeting!”

Another highlight for me was wandering through the crowd (crowds everywhere!) and now and again running into a friend from South Jersey or

from my home group. That feeling of loneliness in a crowd vanishes instantly and hugs are the order of the day. That’s another great thing about the convention: you could stop anyone at random and get a hug! You do belong, no matter where you wander. This perhaps, is the true meaning of our world-wide fellowship and the *raison d’être* for the convention itself.

Lines, lines, lines! After the first day, I still had not registered. Notwithstanding the fact that I had pre-registered by mail, the line to get your actual bag and registration materials was hours long and I did not see any point in wasting three hours of valuable convention time to get a cardboard badge and a lanyard.

To get anywhere near coffee or food was another huge hassle. The lines to eat lunch or get a cup a coffee were maddeningly long and it became impossible to follow any pre-planned schedule of meetings and get coffee or food on your way.

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*You’re ready for sobriety when alcohol doesn’t work any more*

## 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@asj.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

## Submissions Needed for September "Convention" Issue

You've heard my spiel about the Atlanta Convention, now let's hear yours! Please send in your thoughts and impressions from the Atlanta Convention for inclusion in our special Convention Issue in September.



It's an early deadline issue so make it quick. Why not sit down right now and jot down a few lines about your experience in Atlanta. We'll collect them and publish them all in September! Thanks so much,

Your Editor.

## Newsletter Committee Needs Volunteers



Here at South Jersey Intergroup, our traditions and our common sense tell us that it's good to have "new blood" every two years or so.

The same thing goes for this Newsletter. By the end of 2015, it will have been two years for our current Newsletter Chair and Co-Chair and, while they've done a good job and made some improvements here and there, it's time to see what others can do.

So come on and give it a try. It's a great commitment and one you can do from the comfort of your home in front of your laptop. Also, as an added bonus, our production and lay-out team have agreed to stay on. So no worry about the mechanical end of things. Just write and create and shepherd contributions from other creative A.A.'s.

If you're interested in becoming the Newsletter Chair or Co-Chair, drop us a line at [asj.org](mailto:asj.org) or Marty P. at [mperrotta02@comcast.net](mailto:mperrotta02@comcast.net) or at 856-313-9531.

## Convention

(From page 4)

If coffee is the lifeblood of A.A., the convention was seriously hemorrhaging. Whoever planned the convention did not coordinate with the Georgia staffers to make sure that there were enough stations throughout the center to accommodate 70,000 people in search of food and coffee—especially coffee! (I'd better watch my step here. I'll be getting a call from GSO appointing me to the 2020 convention planning committee!) At any rate, by the second day I had learned my lesson and packed my own food and coffee.

I was able to register mid-way through the second and final day of the convention, feeling the irony of registering just hours before leaving! I attended a "Newsletter" meeting with great hopes of having a productive exchange with A.A. Newsletter people from around the country and the world. What I got was three speakers talking about their recovery and almost not at all about their Newsletter work. And here I thought, was the heart of the problem. Conventions ideally, should be about an *exchange* of ideas between and among one's compatriots across the world.

Far from this ideal, most of the meetings I attended eschewed any exchange of ideas from attendees in favor of sitting in well-ordered rows of chairs and being talked to for two hours or so. No input from the crowd thank-you; just sit and listen: an atmosphere decidedly not in the spirit of sharing, the real spiritual foundation of A.A. as a world phenomenon. To sum up, too much planning in the wrong directions and not enough in the right ones.

I'd like to end this piece on a positive note. Despite of course, my many hassles and misgivings about the convention, the miracle of our fellowship and of our recovery shines through stronger than ever. We are united in our differences. We are each like snowflakes—no two of us are exactly alike and yet we share a common challenge and pathway. Conventions, as large as they are, do not change this simple message: wherever and under whatever circumstances we come together, we have survived and thrived by relying on and sharing with, one another. And the real miracle is that, any two of us, wherever in the world we happen to be, can recreate this miracle each day of our lives. I remain grateful for the thousands of volunteers who gave of their time and energies to make the Atlanta Convention possible. It is service in the best spirit of our traditions and legacies of Unity, Recovery and Service. Now I'm back to the touch football game in my hotel room!

*Masonville Marty*

## Step 8

(From page 1)

To counter this, I look for a connection between myself and the Tradition. Step Eight concerns my relations with other people and the harm I have done to others. Tradition Eight concerns the relations of my home-group with those still drinking and those wishing to stop. Should these be approached professionally?

The Eighth Tradition is quite clear that my approach, and the should be always non-professional. The Tradition tells me that my relations to others outside the group should be on a personal level; using my experience, strength and hope. The personal approach, is the only effective way that we as AA's have found, to possibly reach another suffering alcoholic and be believed. The Tradition also tells me that anytime money or employment for hire or any other agenda comes into play, my ability to honestly reach other alcoholics is diluted.

The Eighth Concept lays out the duties and limitations of the Trustees of the General Service. It states that their role is one of "custodial oversight" of the various and respective committees of AA as a world (non) organization. It also highlights that, as a group, AA may hire paid service workers that any group needs: custodians, cleaners, office-workers etc.

On all levels, the common theme is honesty and credibility. How do I, the group and the world organization best contribute to my own sobriety and growth and that of others? The basic message is one of purity: any other concern besides that of entirely unselfish caring for my own sobriety and my relationship with all others, will diminish my effectiveness as an individual in recovery and as a carrier of AA's message of spiritual recovery.

*Masonville Marty*

## April in August

(From page 1)

was a student and helping my doctor by doing an initial checkup and asking me some questions. We went through the basics and when it came to the question about whether I drank, I said I don't and that I'm sober.

In the rooms I've heard so many times about being honest with your doctor and making sure they know about your sobriety, and I always have. In fact my chart certainly should have already made note of this.

However, the young girl looked up at me confused and said, "no, I'm asking whether you drink socially with friends." I was so surprised that my honesty was met with a complete lack of recognition. I then had to repeat myself and said, "no, I'm sober meaning I'm in recovery." She realized her mistake but went on to grill me about how often I go to meetings, did I go to a treatment center, what days do I attend meetings, etc.

I was flabbergasted. While I don't mind being honest with my doctor, this young girl was not impressing me with her rapid-fire questions and I quickly shut down. When she left the room I took a moment to remind myself that being honest with her was still the right thing, and while my sobriety is a really big deal to me, it isn't necessarily a big deal to those around us. Her insensitivity to me wasn't personal and clearly she was a student, there to hopefully practice her bedside manner.

I still know I did the right thing mentioning my sobriety, and I will continue going to these various appointments and keeping my health a priority because today, I don't take my life for granted. My life and health are important and while I felt somewhat belittled today by the young nurse practitioner, she really has nothing to do with my recovery.

April E.

## Karma

(From page 1)

her talents and her parents' hard work to raise her to be a good person, and lifted her out of the grave and the hell she was living in to be sober. Sane. Useful. And grateful. That's Grace. It couldn't have been karma, because karma is when you get what you deserve. AA sure isn't what I deserved. It's been the greatest thing that's happened

to me in life, and even though we talk about "paying our dues," if I had gotten what I deserved when I was drinking--well, can't even go there. Too awful to contemplate.

The karma part, for me, is working the Steps. I had LOTS of misdeeds to clean up from and for. The Steps gave me what I needed to do that--and to still do that, when I mess up. Or get messed with. Karma is also about the degree of effort I put

into working the Steps. Half-hearted effort nets half-hearted results. Whole hearted efforts--you get the picture.

So it seems to me that just like the Buddhist koan of the sound of one hand clapping, grace and karma can exist simultaneously. How so, I do not know. God continues to operate in a way I don't understand and can't explain. But I sure do like it.

Pat P.

# Fellowship Announcements and Things to Do

August 2015

## **“Language of the Heart” Meeting**

This meeting is now focusing on the Grapevine publication called “Emotional Sobriety.” In this collection of Grapevine stories, sober women and men describe the transformations sobriety can bring as they practice the principles of AA. Come join us Monday’s at 7:00 PM, Trinity Methodist Church, 284 Cedar Rd., Mullica Hill, NJ.

## **New Beginner Meeting**

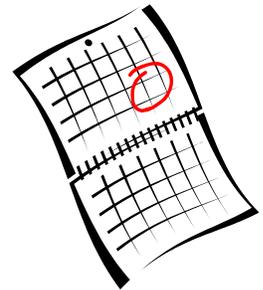
Washington Township “How Important Is It Group,” Thursday’s 7:30 PM. St Charles Borromeo School. Johnson & Stagecoach Rds. Open. Joe 856 589 5710.

## **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 6-7pm. Big Book—Step Study. Zion Lutheran Church, Fairview and Pavilion Aves., Riverside, NJ.



## ***Mark Your Calendar!***

**July 20-24** – The Marlton Group that meets at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church at noon every weekday will be meeting at Dance for NJ, 2003 Lincoln Drive, Suite A, Marlton.

**July 24-26** – Jal-Con 2015, the Annual New Jersey State Al-Anon Convention will be held at the Sheraton Edison Hotel, 125 Raritan Center Parkway, Edison, NJ, 08837. Saturday night banquet with recovery countdown, AA, Al-Anon, and Alateen speakers.

Register online at: <https://whoscoming.com/jalcon>. AA members are needed to chair AA meetings at the Convention. Contact Dave MacD, Area 45 Jal-Con Chair, at [davemacd21482@comcast.net](mailto:davemacd21482@comcast.net) or cell: 856-469-7604.

**Thursday, July 30** – Swedesboro 12th anniversary at the Bethesda Methodist Church in Swedesboro. There will be ice cream sundae making at 7:00 and reading and a speaker starting at 7:30.

**July 31-August 2** – 22nd Annual Pennsylvania State AA Convention in Harrisburg, PA. For information, visit [aapastateconvention.com](http://aapastateconvention.com)

**Sunday, August 2** – District 14 Annual Food, Fun, and Fellowship Picnic at Parvin State Park. More details later. NEW

**Saturday, August 8** – District 13 hosts Family Unity Day Picnic at Fort Mott State Park, 454 Fort Mott Road, Pennsville, NJ 08070 (856-935-3218). Call Jim H (856-299-0383) or Justin S (609-315-1214) for details

**Sunday, September 27** – Triboro Riverton Group celebrates their 42nd Anniversary. [Sacred Heart Church, 405 Linden Ave. \(4th and Linden\), Riverton, NJ 08077. Food and Fellowship @ 7:00 PM. Speaker @ 8:00 PM. For further information, please refer to South Jersey Intergroup website: \[www.aasj.org\]\(http://www.aasj.org\)](#) NEW