

ANONYMOUS SOUTHJERSEY

SOUTH JERSEY INTERGROUP

January 2016

Is Your Group in the Dark?

This story begins with a 'seething cauldron of debate' between two members. Which turned to resentment, and finally a desire for further service information. (Let's not forget the amends made later either!) I'm talking about a misunderstanding of the general service structure here. One fruitful evening, another member and I began discussing what it actually meant to be plugged into AA as a whole, via home group, district, area, and ultimately the New York General Service Conference. The debate being whether this role was accomplished through the Home

group's Intergroup Representative. It was believed that we were participating in 'AA as whole' through our South Jersey Intergroup. When in fact, this wasn't the case.

I set out on a personal quest to get to the bottom of the matter! The intergroup is our front and center, firing line. They usually are the first contact for alcoholics seeking help in our area.



The importance of intergroup, or central offices, are PARAMOUNT. However, in order for A.A. to run itself, we have to have a system for finding out how A.A. as a whole feels about its world affairs and how it wants to operate. We need constant, honest communication from one part of A.A. to every other, furnishing a wide cross section of A.A. experience. The General Service Conference makes that possible.

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April in January: When a Romantic Vacation Got Real

I just returned from a romantic and jam packed vacation in Paris. My boyfriend had never been out of the country and I couldn't think of a better city to start him on the joys of international travel.

Going into the vacation I was excited to show him some of my favorite parts of the city, explore new places, and drink espressos every few hours. The French sure know how to do delicious coffee drinks! I wasn't at all nervous about my sobriety—I know today—without a doubt—that the only reason I can afford to travel and make these memories is because I put down the drink. There isn't a drink in the world that is worth risking my ability to travel the world.

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Resolve to Ask for Help

Step 1: We admitted we were powerless over alcohol---that our lives had become unmanageable.

When I read Step One, I read such words as "defeat", "powerlessness", "unmanageability." How are these words to be reconciled to the idea of making New Year's resolutions? I have concluded that they cannot be. Which is why I have given up the idea of making any New Year's resolutions (except perhaps to make more meetings or talk to my sponsor more or work more with other alcoholics).

Resolutions, for me, imply some sort of control and/or man

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Desperate on New Year's Eve

There he sat, all alone feeling sorry for himself. Would he drink? Or would he reach out?

After picking up a nine-month chip, I felt great. I had a sponsor, went to meetings every day and had worked up to the Ninth Step. This is where I stopped. After unsuccessful attempts to make amends where I begged for forgiveness, I quit. The recurring memory of a friend looking at me and saying, "I forgive you ... now bye," haunted me and made me feel that I was not doing something right. My sponsor at the time did the best he could with his experience, but he had not been taught about saying, "I was wrong. What can I do to right the wrong?" His words, as I heard them were, "It's all about change." He did the best he knew how.

I had a good job at the time and was making enough money to get my own place. No more sleeping on Mom's couch. (Thank you, Mom!) I did not have much to put in the new apartment, so I went to the furniture store to get a dining room table. Well, I came home with a table, chairs, a coffee table and an entertainment center—all on credit! I overspent what I had planned with the money available. After setting it all up, and feeling like I was finally moving up in the world, I sat back on the couch my grandfather had given me and gazed at it all. I felt empty again. Self-pity crept in, and in no time I started thinking about getting loaded. And it was

New Year's Eve. I had just gotten off the phone with my sponsor 30 minutes before this moment, bragging to him about my apartment and furniture. How empty I felt. The hole in my gut returned. The old solution came back. Being powerless is a horrible feeling. Fortunately, that is one step before surrendering. Just like when I had my last drink and drug nine months before, I made my way to the bedroom, went to my God spot and pulled out the prayer pad. Crying to God for what seemed like a lifetime, I prayed over and over: "Please remove the obsession to drink and drug." That's all I remember. Man, I begged, but the obsession did not go away. I felt God had abandoned me. Why did he leave me after all this work and prayer?

That was December 31, 2000. Exactly one year before, I had relapsed for the first time after outpatient treatment. That New Year's Eve, two AA friends had invited me to an alkathon at our clubhouse where there was a chance to do service. I remembered telling them thanks, that I would meet them later that night. But I didn't. Also that day, the treatment center had a tipsy

taxi phone bank and they had asked me to help out. But I declined; I said I was too busy. God

was giving me two solutions and I turned them both down. How blind I was. But God did not abandon me. This year I didn't say no. I got in my car and drove over to that alkathon. I really did not

want to drink. I believe a physic change had occurred in me as a result of working the Steps this year. My thinking had changed. This time I went out for fellowship.

I joined in with a group of people that included my first sponsor, and I tried to listen. But the obsession still seemed stronger than the conversation. I wasn't hearing anything. Then all of a sudden, I blurted out, "I want to drink!" I don't remember what was said after that, but I kept going up to people and saying the same thing, "I want to drink." Lo and behold, out came the same two friends who, the previous year, had asked me to go to the alkathon with them. They approached me. One of the men, Ray, said, "Hey, why didn't you call us?" I had no answer. They gave me two options: come sleep on their couch or share at

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This Year: One Day at a Time

My name is Derrick and I'm an alcoholic.

My sobriety date is July 8, 2013, and as I reflect back, I realize that 2014 was the first calendar year since 2003 that I did not take a drink. The significance of this is at once monumental, yet inconsequential. When I celebrated my first full year of sobriety, my sponsor told me, "Now you've gone through every season of the year, every holiday, every Friday night and every mundane Tuesday without picking up." I smiled and felt proud. Seeing this, he tacked on one of his favorite things to tell me: "Now GO GET ANOTHER DAY."

I have completed a full year of sobriety. I have completed a full calendar year of sobriety. I never picked a day to start being sober; it took what it took, and when the time was right my Higher Power put the right circumstances and the revelation of a bottom in my life to enable a spiritual awakening of willingness and surrender. If I had picked the day, like many do with New Year's resolutions, I feel I would have inevitably chosen another, as I would have never actually turned over my will.

This date, July 8th, is the New Year's Day of my sobriety, the spiritual calendar around which my sobriety revolves. Like the regular New Year's Day, however, the date is largely inconsequential—it serves no other purpose than to mark time. This is not to say that the day is insignificant, but it is truly not as significant as the day that I am presented with some seemingly insurmountable challenge or pain, and don't pick up a drink. In this sense, every day, every moment is the New Year.

I make progress on the daily schedule, by not picking up a drink one minute-hour-day-week-month at a time. Marking this time fills me with wonder, gratitude and appreciation for AA and my Higher Power, that I could stay sober for any measurable amount of time. When I consider how I've changed by working the Steps and improving myself and my relationships, that's where I begin to mark real progress, progress that cannot be measured on a calendar, but only in my capacity to attempt to do the next right thing, continue to practice honesty, open-mindedness and willingness, attempt conscious contact with my Higher Power, and not pick up the first drink, one day at a time. This revelation is the true occasion for my own personal fireworks and parade.

However, just like mere hours after the ball had dropped and the cleaning-crew descends upon the city, the debris is swept away and the whole glorious reason for the celebration begins again: one day at a time.

Thank you for allowing me to share. --Derrick

ANONYMOUS SOUTHJERSEY

FORGIVENESS

I don't know about you, but for me, forgiving is the hardest thing for me to do. Actually, it is only under certain circumstances, and that is when someone has hurt me and refuses to acknowledge it. If they do acknowledge it and apologize, even if they don't apologize but at least acknowledge it, then I find it easy to forgive. But if they don't, I find it extremely difficult to forgive. Even with all I have learned in AA, that the person I am hurting the most with my resentment is me, and the person I will help the most if I do forgive is me, I still want to carry that resentment and anger towards them rather than give it up to God and forgive them.

I think this is partly due to my fear that if I do forgive them, I will set myself up to be hurt again. And that is a very real fear, because I have done that in the past, repeatedly. Plus, why (I say to myself) should they be allowed to get away with what they have done? I will say, "Karma's a bitch, baby, and you'll get what's coming to you..." but as long as I say that, I'm not forgiving. I know that. Forgiving is entirely letting go, including the need, or the want, to see them "get their just desserts." I do believe in karma--I sure have experienced it myself!--but I also believe it's not the only Way of the universe.

There is another Way, and that Way is Grace. As I write this, I am reminded of my own drinking career, and my redemption from that. I am in AA--and sober today--because one night, 34+ years ago, I sat on a
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Forgiveness

From page 3

couch, dead drunk--again--and cried out, for the first time, "God, if you're there, please help me." Six months later, through a series of events I now know were a result of that prayer, I was sitting in my first AA meeting. And I've been sober ever since. God didn't say to me, that night I cried out in prayer, "You must pay, karma's a bitch, baby." God simply answered my prayer by leading me to AA. I call that Grace.

When I remember this, and strive to look at the world, and people, and those who have hurt me and refuse to admit it, I see I have a way out of carrying that resentment. It's my choice. It's still very hard for me to do, though.

AA has given me another tool to use when I'm finding it difficult to forgive, and that is the end of the story "Freedom from Bondage" (appropriately titled) on p. 552 of the third edition of the Big Book. This is where the author is told to pray for the person or thing he resents, to ask in prayer for everything he wants to be given to them, and if he doesn't really want those things for the person, do it anyway, and do it every day for two weeks. I've used this tool and found it helpful; sometimes I have to do it more than once for the same person, and sometimes I've been so mad at the person I've had to pray first for the willingness to pray for them! I really can be a hard nut to

In The Dark (From page 1)

(from page 1)

The leaflet 'Circles of Love and Service,' reminds us that; "You and I may not need a General Service Conference today, to ensure our own recovery. But what about the millions of sick alcoholics still stumbling out there in the dark?" So I ask you, how do we get our group to make its voice heard on overall A.A. policies? How do we have our say in world-wide A.A.? The answer is through a group service position that may arguably be the 'most important job in Alcoholics Anonymous.' The Group Service Representative (G.S.R.)! I've been inquiring local groups in my area, and to my dismay found that this position has really fallen by the wayside. Our district meetings are scarcely attended. This is problematic, because groups that do not have a G.S.R., are isolated from the rest of the Fellowship. They do not participate in the group conscience of A.A. as a whole. They lack the ability to send ideas or problems to the assembly, so other groups can share their experience and maybe help.

I am writing this article, to remind others, and myself that we need our intergroup, which is impressively well attended. But we CAN NOT forget the significance of the General Service Structure, which is accomplished through our local district meetings and area assemblies. In our Co-Founder Bill W.'s own words, "The strength of our whole A.A. service structure starts with the group and with the group service representative (G.S.R.) the group elects. I cannot emphasize too strongly the G.S.R.'s importance."

I encourage all of you, bring this up at your group conscience! See if your group is currently "in the dark." And if so, please do something about it by electing someone. Remember our pledge..! "I am responsible."

*God Bless,
Young and Sober,
Michael E.*

crack when it comes to forgiveness.

And what about the fear they'll hurt me again? This one, I'm learning, involves setting boundaries. Sometimes that's within the relationship: "Do this again and I'll _____." Sometimes it means ending the relationship. I'm still learning the boundary setting, too. Forgiving, my sponsor tells me, is

not about forgetting. Yes, she says, it's about letting go, but one still has the right and the responsibility to take care of oneself, and to protect oneself.

So all in all, I'm learning a lot about forgiveness in AA. Thank goodness it's progress, not perfection.

Pat P.

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

WE ARE NOT SAINTS

“We are not saints.”

“The point is, that we are willing to grow along spiritual lines.”

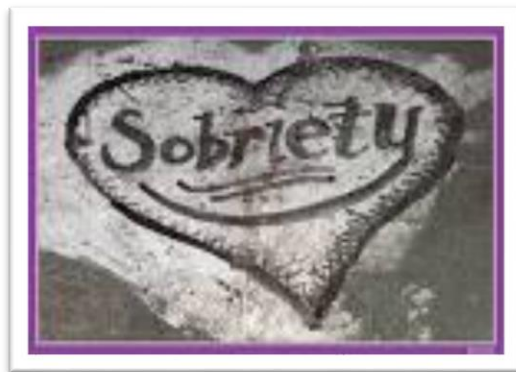
I've listened to, and read this line more times than I would be able to recall. This line that is often lost in the mix of chit chat, finding the proper seat, and coffee re-fills now has a deeper meaning to me.

Thru trial and error (lots of error) I'm learning that it's ok to make mistakes as long as I can look at them honestly and objectively, finding the growth in whatever is bothering me. Being on firm spiritual ground and keeping my life turned over is the key that unlocks the willingness to accept the lessons learned from my shortcomings and from life. When I feel I've been wronged or my feelings hurt, or when I've treated another with the same disregard, the answer is still the same.

Awareness and acceptance, followed by growth, helps me keep life situations from turning into problems. Whatever issues life hands me, or especially the ones I create can be fought with a good look inside myself and surrender to my higher power. For me, it's more proof that the answers to my problems are in that big blue book, in black and white, waiting for my acceptance.

Having the awareness that my problems are created by me and my resistance to life on life's terms forces me to look honestly at the motives driving my actions. Definitely not at the top of my “fun things to do” list. My only wish is that this “growth spurt” will slow down at some point!

Shawn



April

(from page 1)

While my boyfriend drank a glass of wine with dinner, I happily partook in sparkling water. It's amazing that trend hasn't caught on fully in the US yet! And after dinner if he were still nursing his drink, I had no problem ordering an espresso to settle in with my dessert. We were having a great time and there was no head butting about our activities, what he or I were drinking, or how we were handling our first time out of the country as a couple. Things were going great.

However, we were in Paris during the terrorist attacks. And

this changed the course of the end of our vacation. What was a fun time away in another country turned into fear, worries about getting home, and sadness.

But thanks AA and my tool chest that I've filled over the past few years, I knew how to handle myself. Prior to getting sober, an event similar to this gave me something to drink over daily. I justified my bad behavior because of what I had been through. But today, I was able to stop, take care of myself, check in with my AA family, and pray. I knew that if left to my own devices too long I would stew and get into a funk. AA has taught me exactly how to avoid this.

While the events in Paris were horrific, it is no excuse for me to go down a negative path. A drink won't make anything better—and in fact, will only make things infinitely worse.

Today I am so thankful that I have such an amazing support system in my life, and tools to help me process the world around me.

I don't need to understand why bad things happen in this world. The truth is, they do. But if I can approach life on life's terms and deal with my feelings without numbing myself over warm vodka and boxed wine, I'm not adding to the chaos of the world—at least for my family and friends!

April E.

Grapevine

(from page 2)

the next meeting. No way I was going to show how weak I was in front of over 200 people. They smiled, hugged me and left. I guess that was tough love. The next AA meeting started at 8 p.m. It was probably the largest one of the night and in a smoked-filled room. After the usual readings, the room got quiet. It seemed like 10 minutes went by, but it was probably 10 seconds. I shared pretty much the same thing as what you have just read. The next person shared about being at the gas station wondering if he should buy some beer or come to the alkathon. Someone shared that he had a 12-pack in the truck. A man with 18 years shared about how he still wanted to drink. Finally, for the first time in the Fellowship, I did not feel alone. Wow, I was not the only person in the world with the mental obsession to drink. Praise God, I've not had the obsession since that day. I believe I

finally surrendered to this disease. Like Bill W., I had met my match. I was powerless!

Just like Dr. Bob, I started working the Steps (making amends) with a willingness I never had before. I got together with Ray and asked him to help me to make amends. I thought he would say he was too busy, but instead, he said, "Come over tomorrow morning and let's get started." Three years later, I was finally finished with all my financial amends. The material had been replaced by the spiritual. It was more important to be right with my fellow man than to have certain material items. The shame, fear and remorse were replaced by the God-conscience they talk about in the Big Book. A spiritual awakening was happening. Thank you, Alcoholics Anonymous. I'll never forget that New Year's Eve. You can find me at our alkathon every year at Club 12, helping out, listening to shares and hoping to help someone just like me.

Anonymous

Her, Emerging by Paige M.

"I'm writing you into a poem"

I told her.
The kind you can't slip out of on a comma
(Those line breaks will take you back
Flush left
every time.)

No one can see
That we're Siamese –
No surgeon can sever.

She walks with me even in dreams
My sweat-soaked hair is hers,
Enveloping my neck in dream seaweed
I pull and pull
Weeds turn me over and grow.
My eyes ask her
To disentangle her grip
She twists tighter around every bend
Clings to every joint
Needs my breath to breathe.

I need to give a name to the ache
Give her a birthday
So that she might die,

End the parenthesis on a gravestone,
Chart every invisible bone
that I might less likely choke.

In photos she's just the negative –
I am pictured alone
The empty space next to me
presses its face
Against the dim ink of the darkroom
There she develops.

Then I splinter and there's less of me
That mess from which she built herself.

I peel layers of skin
From my fingertips
Self-conscious about the rips
The unspoken questions they might invite
As if I will rejuvenate myself
One skin cell at a time.

Maybe I'm digging a way out of her
Chipping away at her weightless flesh
Until she's small enough to swallow whole.

Step 1

(From page 1)

manageability. Step One tells me that that is not the case for my life. Not that my life is in fact, unmanageable; it is just not manageable *by me!* I have to yield the idea of manageability to someone or something else; just as I had to do that first day of sobriety, when I got down on my knees and asked for God's help.

In everything I do, in every plan I make, in every decision I decide to act upon, I must first check with someone else. Usually that person is my sponsor, but it can be my wife (who grows wiser as I get soberer!) or it can be another alcoholic whose opinion I trust. As long as it's not me.

This daily check on my behavior, thoughts and plans, is in fact what is meant by the idea of unman-

ageability. This way of living seems to exclude the idea of "resolutions." As I look back at my personal history, resolutions have never worked for me. Either they were wrong, or they weren't in tune with reality, or I broke them just as quickly as I made them. I have found a better, more effective way to do things: *ask someone else!* That is a completely new idea for me and has really never failed (since becoming sober) in putting me on the right path.

So I guess that my resolution for 2015 is to make no resolutions. It is just to ask God to bless the year for me and for others and to keep on doing what works: letting my higher power, my sponsor, other AAs, and my wife, manage my life. That seems to always work for the best.

Masonville Marty

Fellowship Announcements and Things to Do

January 2016

Friday, January 1 – New Year’s Day Alcathon hosted by the Burlington Big Book Group. 7:00 AM to 7:00 PM (meetings every hour on the hour). St. Mary’s Guild Hall, corner of West Broad and Talbot Streets, Burlington City (opposite the River Line). Food donations accepted and welcomed. Contact Pat M. at 609-456-8887 to volunteer to take a meeting.

Monday, January 18 - Collingswood celebrates its 71st anniversary @ Holy Trinity Church, Haddon & Fern Ave. 7:00 pm dinner followed by 8:00 pm speaker.

Barrington Meeting is Moving

Monday Barrington 1:00 PM AA Meeting is moving! The Just For Today Group of AA that meets Mondays at 1:00 PM at the Barrington Presbyterian Church is moving to Ascension Lutheran Church in Haddon Heights starting November 2, 2015. The address is 534 4th Avenue in Haddon Heights. Please join us!

Meeting Focus

The Monday night “Language of the Heart” meeting in Mullica Hill 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 in all aspects of their lives. Come join us Monday’s at 7:00 PM, Trinity Methodist Church, 284 Cedar Rd., Mullica Hill, NJ.

Grapevine 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 Meetings

New Washington Township beginner meeting. 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.

New Speakers Meeting starts May 7, 2015. Grace Speakers Group. Thursdays at 8:30pm. Grace Church in Haddonfield, 19 Kings Highway East, Haddonfield, NJ 08033.

New Meeting Times

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

Willingboro Group Monday Night New Time: 7:00 pm. First Presbyterian Church, Calvin Hall, 494 Beverly-Rancocas Road, Willingboro, NJ. Meeting format and location will remain the same. Come out and support the group!