

ANONYMOUS SOUTHJERSEY

SOUTH JERSEY INTERGROUP

July 2016

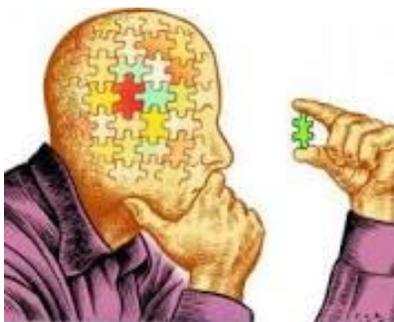
What I Have Learned in Sobriety

Probably my favorite book of all time has a passage in it regarding a fictional half-way house for alcoholics and drug addicts. In it, the author lists "the things you will learn when you enter Ennett House." (My favorite is, "You will be far less concerned about what others think of you when you realize how seldom they do.")

Anyway, that prodded me to start thinking about the things I have learned in nearly three years of sobriety. So here, in no particular order, is my list so far:

What "unmanageable" really is.

I always thought that it was my responsibility to control my own life, and if things weren't going the way I wanted, then it must be my fault for not doing a good job of it. I operated under the illusion that I was



doing a good job of managing my life, and for a while, it was true enough. As my alcoholism progressed, however, manageability became an illusion. Bills didn't get paid, household chores did not get done, and then I started slipping at work.

Through it all I was able to convince myself I was doing fine. I would tell myself, "Hey, I only need five hours of sleep every night, and I don't even have a hangover, so I must not have drank THAT much last night."

The things I drank to forget.

Along with the illusion of being in control, I created an illusion of perfection. I believed that I had high personal standards and that I met them on a regular basis. Any time I didn't, drinking would take away the memory of it, and I wouldn't have to feel bad about myself.

Now, my memory is playing catch-up. The family commitments I missed, the times I embarrassed my significant others, the personal goals that I let fall by the wayside; they are all making an appearance in my sobriety. (Feeling bad about others for what I did to them wasn't too much of a problem, but that's another article.)

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Being Aware of Your Limitations

Several weeks ago I brought this topic up at my home group meeting. The answers that people shared were very interesting. Knowing our limitations is sometimes difficult, even more so for recovering alcoholics.

I had always set out to limit how much I would drink, but as hard as I tried to only have a couple of drinks, I would soon be powerless over the unpredictable outcome. I always struggled with the fact that I couldn't control how much I wanted to drink – to drink like others

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Back to Court

The last time she was here, she had broken teeth, two broken ribs and an eye swollen shut

I sat in my car, fixated on the row of squad cars parked in a neat line nearby. I had never intended to step inside of this building again, and I watched anxiously as one well-dressed person after another walked through its doors.

Two years into sobriety, AA had already restored many gifts, including the ability to learn. I enrolled in the local community college and promptly resumed my formal education, which I had abandoned when I was drinking. This semester, one of my assignments was to observe a local government meeting. True to my character defects, I procrastinated until the only meeting I could attend was a borough planning committee meeting in a township where I used to reside. Prior to the meeting, I called the office where it was to be held, and the employee who answered the phone informed me that the township building was attached to the police office. Judging from the ensuing silence on her end of the phone, I probably responded a bit too enthusiastically, "Oh, I know exactly where that is!" However, my relief was rapidly replaced by dread as horrific



memories of my drinking days invaded my thoughts.

Now here I sat, stalling in the parking lot, reluctant to enter a building I never thought I would enter again. I had been to this exact place many times during the worst years of my alcoholism, and the last time I was here I had two broken ribs, my left eye was swollen shut, and most of my front teeth were broken off. Today, for the first time, I would enter the building as neither a victim nor a criminal.

I joined the committee meeting tentatively, feeling like an imposter. I was certain that one of these professional-looking people would realize that I didn't belong amongst them, that I was in the wrong part of the building. I fully anticipated that someone would discreetly approach me and whisper, "Miss,

the police office is down the hall." Instead the people at the meeting smiled and welcomed me. When I announced that I was a student, they responded to me with such warmth and interest that I felt like a newcomer introducing myself at my first AA meeting. Several people took the time to speak with me afterward in case I had any questions about the proceedings. On my way home, I was still stunned that no one could tell I was an alcoholic.

I'm gradually learning that although I will always be an alcoholic, I'm so much more than that. When people meet me, they don't identify me as a drunk or a delinquent. They don't know my past, and I don't behave like a drunk anymore, though I often still think like one. The people at the committee meeting looked at me and saw a student. When others look at me today, I want them to see a kindhearted person who has something to offer society, both in the Fellowship and out.

Kasha S., Mechanicsburg, Pa.

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The Poetics of Recovery

Searching, always searching

For something else.

The seventh step tells me this is a fool's quest.

There is nothing else,

But sobriety; right here, right now.

The same thing applies to the search for one's "true" self;

A chimera equal to the search for "something else."

Perhaps then there is some miss-taking

In those places where AA literature speaks of finding a "true" self.

Is this the opposite of a false self?

Can a self, any self, be false? Or is not every self "false"?

What we perceive or feel as the "self" is really a compendium of feeling-states; now this, now that. We move through identities like changing clothes and changing days. A search for a single one, must be in vain. We are only time moving through awareness.

Before I got sober, consequences were my life.

I pray for mercy, not justice. Justice requires some degree of revenge, no matter how small. It is also motivated—even if only a little—by some degree of resentment: poison to the alcoholic; poison to me. Another thing is required by justice and that is judgment. Any judgment I have in my head is bound to be false (ditto, beliefs, opinions, positions). Not only are they bound to be wrong, but I cannot handle them.

It is a beautiful, cool, late-spring evening,

I take a walk.

Thoughts, impressions, flow through me like water through a channel.

I allow them to flow freely.

I cannot have one stay for too long without suffering moving in also.

I cannot staunch the flow of impressions and allow them to become thoughts; i.e., solid, fixed objects.

I move, the thoughts move: that is how it must be.

Marty P.

Limitations

From page 1

who had an easy time controlling their drinking. I have tried several times to quit drinking, but could not. I always thought it would be different this time because, after all, I had my willpower to assist me in doing things differently. Only God truly has no limitations. I failed each time to make a gratitude list of what was going good in my life when I stopped drinking, even if it was only for a little while.

Life, and all that comes with it can be hard for me on any given day, but I have a loving and caring God in my life now, and if I continue to yield to His will and follow His plans for what He has in store for me and my life, I have a fleeting chance to stay sober one day at a time.

Life has its ups and downs. For this alcoholic, change, and conforming to people and situations I come up against every day is sometimes hard to deal with, but at any part of the day, at any given time I know I can pause, say the Serenity Prayer, and know that God will continue to do for me what I can't do for myself. I remember hearing that somewhere. People and things sometimes don't change, but I have the tools of AA and God's grace to give me the upper hand. All that I have to remember is that this man has got to know his limitations.

Big Mike

Sobriety

From page 1

Instead of admitting mistakes and processing the guilt and/or shame, that is—instead of dealing with reality—I drank to make them go away. Alcohol not only covered them up, but they never went away. Now, in sobriety, they are storming back into my consciousness carrying big bags of guilt and shame that have accumulated over the years. “These belong to you,” they seem to say. Being sober means learning to deal with the things that I drank to forget and experience all the bad feelings that I hid from in my life.

I am a judgmental person.

For years, I thought poorly of people who couldn’t cope with their emotions, including alcoholics. I wasn’t mean about it; I didn’t denigrate them, or shame them, or try to make them feel bad about how they are. Where appropriate, I could even offer them moral support. But I did think less of them in my own mind. They were “flaky,” “a mess.” I had pity for them, but no compassion. Now, I am one of them. It’s the kind of thing I would drink to forget, if I were still drinking. Now I have to confront it, look at myself honestly, and experience the guilt of the unfair, hypocritical way I thought of people and treated people.

I gave up doing things I enjoyed to drink.

Over time, my hobbies slipped away; I spent less time with my friends; I spent more time in isolation, all so I could satisfy my disease. In my mind, I was doing what I wanted; it was my choice. “My day is done,” I would tell myself, “why shouldn’t I relax with a glass of bourbon?” Answers like “It’s

Sobriety is like starting over, reinventing my life. Yet in many ways, it’s like going back to what it was like before alcohol took over

only 6 p.m., on a Tuesday, and you just got home from work” wouldn’t occur to me. I didn’t want to spend time with my wife, reading a book, playing golf, or anything else. Eventually, it was every night of the week, then every weeknight and all throughout the weekend.

The things I gave up to drink still bring me pleasure.

Sobriety is like starting over, reinventing my life. Yet in many ways, it’s like going back to what it was like before alcohol took over. Reading, cooking and golf were all passions of mine that fell by the wayside as drinking took up more of my time.

In sobriety, we are taught that we have to change people, places and things. For me, it’s about choosing the right ones

to keep. Re-embracing the things that gave me pleasure helps me appreciate sobriety and the gifts that come with it. It’s not enough to give up drinking; I need to fill the space with things that give me pleasure and are truly good for me.

I don’t have to be angry.

Like many people growing up, I was taught to work hard, to give it my best, no matter what I was doing. I turned that work-ethic into a crusade and then into a war. At work, especially. I wasn’t just angry, I embraced anger; I took the attitude that if you’re not angry then you’re not trying hard enough. I thought it showed me to be passionate, tough, a go-getter, but in the end, it made people question my suitability for the work.

This may have been the hardest lesson of them all.

This is what I have learned in three years of sobriety, and sharing it with you, I hope you will see that you have no doubt learned a lot, too.

It also is a good way to appreciate the gift of sobriety. Even knowing what I know now, the lure of alcohol still pulls at me; I still want the oblivion that it brings. Remembering these lessons is a good way of reminding myself how much better my life is now without booze.

Steve W., Masonville

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

Announcements and Things To Do

Liberty Bell Roundup

Friday-Sunday, June 24-5-6 - 5th Liberty Bell Roundup, Philadelphia Woodstock of AA, Registration: \$40

Bike Run

Sunday, June 26 - K.I.S.S. Club 6th Annual Bike Run to Fort Mott. 818 H. Broad Street, Woodbury NJ, 08096
Contact: Heidi 609-556-7554; Chief: 609-221-8260; Jim: 609-270-2483.

44th Anniversary

Tuesday July 12 - Northfield Tuesday night Big Book and step meeting celebrates 44 years with Jeff G from Medford, NJ speaking at 207 Northfield Ave, Northfield, NJ doors open at 7pm speaker at 8pm cake and fellowship following the speaker

Meeting Change

The "We Shall Know Peace Group" which meets in Marlton at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, will be meeting at St Barts Episcopal Church, 1989 Rt 70, Cherry Hill the week of July 25 - July 29, 2016. Please join us.

As Bill Sees It

"In our Twelve Traditions we have set our faces against nearly every trend in the outside world.

"We have denied ourselves personal government, professionalism and the right to say who our members shall be. We have abandoned do-goodism, reform and paternalism. We refuse charitable money and prefer to pay our own way. We will cooperate with practically everybody, yet we decline to marry our Society to anyone. We abstain from public controversy and will not quarrel among ourselves about those things that so rip society asunder -- religion, politics and reform. We have but one purpose: to carry the AA message to the sick alcoholic who wants it.

"We take these attitudes not at all because we claim special virtue or wisdom; we do these things because hard experience has told us that we must -- if AA is to survive in the distraught world of today."

AA Co-Founder Bill W., January 1955
"Why Alcoholics Anonymous Is Anonymous"
The Language of the Heart

In Step 7 We Are Guided by Humility



Step Seven occupies a single paragraph in the Big Book, consisting only of a short prayer to one's "Creator." The prayer takes the form of a request that one's "Creator" should now remove from one, *every single defect of character* that stands in the way of one's usefulness to one's Creator and hence, to others. Here, it seems, one needs to turn to the Twelve and Twelve for considerable explication of what is involved in Step Seven.

The first thing that we learn from the Twelve and Twelve is that the *whole* emphasis of Step Seven is on humility. We "humbly" asked for our defects to be removed. Extremely helpful to me in understanding Step Seven was to substitute the words "prayerfully" and/or "gratefully" wherever I saw the word "humbly." This helped me to a better experience with this Step. Try it for yourself and see what happens!

The Step Book also tells me that *fear* has been the chief activator of my defects: fear that I would lose something I already had or fail to get something I demanded. It then goes on to explain that there is a difference between a demand and a request; some-

thing that I had been entirely incapable of understanding for most of my adult life. To me, the two were just about equal: What I wanted, I demanded, and that was that. If the world refused to supply it, there was something wrong with the world, and I would have to drink until the world changed its mind!

The Step Book also says that before sobriety, just about my entire life was predicated on unsatisfied demands. As I journey through sobriety, I find that I must let slip away, one demand after another and change my attitude. Humility must now be my guide—in reducing my demands for things my way, and in asking my higher power to remove my defects. No peace or serenity will I find unless and until I start living this way. Half measures here avail us nothing.

As always, I recommend working with one's sponsor on this and other Steps. I also recommend going back and reviewing your Fourth Step inventory.

This gave me the key to identifying those defects that I needed to present and re-present to God. The ones that I neglected to include in Step Seven were character traits that I had really not come to see as defects. These are the ones, I suppose, that are referred to in Step Seven, as things I like too much to want to give up. Indeed, it is only because I like them that I fail to see them as defects.

As time goes on however, I come to see more character traits that I once thought of as enjoyable or useful, as traits needing to be taken from me. I cannot do this alone. I need the help of my Higher Power. At no time, certainly, do I get to select the timetable for this process. I just do my best, paying attention each day to those personality traits that really cause me problems with myself and others. Little by little, these get whittled down to size before being discarded for good. Again, humility is the key to this process and a daily practice.

Masonville Marty