

ANONYMOUS SOUTHJERSEY

SOUTH JERSEY INTERGROUP

JULY 2012

Anonymity on the Internet

One A.A. struggles with how to write publicly about her alcoholism, while not compromising the sacred tradition of anonymity.

Ernest Hemingway's words used to be my philosophy for writing: "Write drunk. Edit sober." Every night, I wrote drunk, or on the way to drunk, and in the morning, over my ten requisite cups of coffee, I edited. That was my "process." I say a little tongue and cheek now (but only a little.) One morning, only a few weeks before I walked into my first AA meeting, I found a page filled with a certain cuss word written more than a hundred times. I had no recollection of writing it.

The writing I do is self-revelatory. It is memoir. It is vulnerable and exposing and honest. It is about spirituality and grief and suffering and parenting. And it is public on a blog and in on-line magazines. I use my first name only, protecting myself and my children from stalkers and critical voices, but I wove an incredibly loose veil of secrecy. A well-thought out combination of search words could reveal my identity in a matter of seconds. And then, suddenly I was getting sober in a program that emphasizes personal anonymity as its spiritual foundation.

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Letting Go and Letting God

Step Seven – Humbly Asked Him to Remove Our Shortcomings

"How are you doing?"

"I'm pretty good. How are you doing?"

"I'm pretty good too."

That's great. We're all doing pretty well. It's something I hear at meetings a lot. I know I've said it in response to that question myself. And it's true, even since I got a sponsor and started working the steps, my life has been pretty good.

I'm fortunate that the first three steps came to me quickly and without any reservation. I eagerly took inventory of my grosser handicaps. It was a little less easy to share them with God and another human being, but after reluctantly doing so, I experienced a great reward and relief.

And when I put the drink down, to my surprise, many of my basic instincts were still out of whack. Why do I hold onto some of them? Why don't I take them immediately to God when they return?

I did Step Six with my sponsor in the form of two lists. One side was my shortcomings and the opposite side was what I would ask God have them be: selfish vs. giving.

Then comes Step Seven. A lifelong practice of letting go and letting God: aiming for perfection, while knowing we will never get there.

Most times, thanks to my relationship with God and my experience in A.A., when these defects crop up, I bring them to my sponsor. He helps me explore my options with God and I ask God to remove them. Most times.

Herein lays the other side of "pretty good." Some of the

Letting Go continued on page 5

Throughout the history of Alcoholics Anonymous, the idea of personal anonymity has changed with the media and technology growths. Being anonymous in a world filled with social networking, blogs, and forums is increasingly more difficult. The way each individual defines anonymity has never been entirely clear. Bill W. wrote in the January 1946 Grapevine, "It should be the privilege of each A.A. to cloak himself with as much personal anonymity as he desires. His fellow A.A.s should respect his wishes and help guard whatever status he wants to assume."

One day in a meeting, someone said to me, "I only break my anonymity when I know it will help another alcoholic. Would writing about your alcoholism help anyone else?"

When I quit drinking, I gave myself three months off from writing. Truth is, I had no idea how to write sober, let alone about sobriety. When I drank, I wrote at night with the door shut, a bottle of bourbon on the floor by my feet. In sobriety, I had to relearn how to write, read, edit and exist. It gave me time to understand the program and my feelings about anonymity too.

Writing publicly on a blog means that I talk about myself. When I walked into the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous, I walked in with suitcases full of shame. I wouldn't have told my readers I was a drunk for all the money I could conceive of. It was the secret I buried between all my words. Yet as I dried out, the fog lifted from my brain. I believed the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous. I believed that I had a disease, and that the only cure was this intensive spiritual work called the Twelve Steps, cultivating a relationship with a Higher Power, and working with another alcoholic. I stopped being ashamed of being an alcoholic. Never had I been through such an intensive workout emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and physically, and I loved sobriety. I had to suddenly face this eight hundred pound gorilla in the parlor of my writing--was I ever going to write about my alcoholism and my sobriety?

Privately I wondered if I was keeping my alcoholism a secret on my blog so I could drink again one day. Or

did I want a place in the universe where I wasn't an alcoholic? Or was I putting my personality before the principle of anonymity?

I had to talk to my sponsor.

She asked me to do intensive work with the Eleventh Tradition. To journal and to pray. She told me to bring anonymity up as a topic whenever I was at a meeting where topics were called out. She worked in a public arena, as well, and she shared her experience with personal anonymity. One day in a meeting, someone said to me, "I only break my anonymity when I know it will help another alcoholic. Would writing about your alcoholism help anyone else?" I thought about the tens of thousands of women who read my writing a month, the countless mothers struggling alone with addiction.

And then I found in our literature, this statement, "A.A. members may disclose their identity and speak as recovered alcoholics, giving radio, TV and Internet interviews, without violating the Traditions—so long as their A.A. membership is not revealed." I decided to write about my drinking. I wrote about the struggles I have had to keep sober, the insidious ways alcohol had made my life unmanageable. I talked about what sounded like a relatively high bottom in the rooms, but what would sound like a low bottom to my readers. I talked about being a good mother AND an alcoholic. I asked my sponsor to read it and make sure I wasn't breaking any traditions with my piece. She assured me I wasn't.

When I published my piece, I never mentioned AA. I mentioned my struggle with the bottle. I am one drunk and I spoke for myself, about myself. I didn't mention the fellowship, a spiritual program, or my sponsor. I took in the perspectives of the Eleventh and Twelfth Traditions, praying for guidance and hoping I was maintaining them in this new digital age. The response I received from my on-line community was overwhelmingly positive. I received countless emails of support and quite a few talking about similar struggles. I even heard from women who have come to accept their own alcoholism after reading about my bottom. All because I wrote sober, edited sober, and shared sobriety.

— Angie Y.

The Tradition of Self Support

An AA remembers his first meeting, and what the 7th tradition was able to provide.

Tradition Seven - Every A.A. Group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

"We'll pass the basket." When I heard these words at my very first meeting that Monday night in January, I said to myself, "Here we go, I knew there was a catch: it's all about money."

Yep, all two bucks worth.

I was hurting that night. I was given a SJIG meeting list by my Doctor, who got it from our public info volunteer. Then I went to a church basement which just managed to be open...for me? Being a cold January night, I was greeted with a few cups of coffee and some cakes to accompany them. As I took my seat I was handed a nice hard back book to join in the reading.

With some down time I could not take my eyes off of the placards and notices and the two long window shades that had a lot of ideas laid out on them. They made these announcements about things to do and they did not cost anything. The meeting came to an end and all the books were gathered and put in a bin for another meeting. But then this group of guys got with me and each was suggesting taking for free "any of the pamphlets that were available", as well as a big blue book.

They were doing what all groups have been doing for over 75 years; helping the newcomer via the self-supporting contributions put in the basket at meeting places, even in Audubon. For this alcoholic, a few skins in the basket are the least I can do for what was so freely given to me.

— Joe C., Last Mile Step/Tradition, Audubon

Editor's Note: I remember when I first came in and I saw the basket being circulated. I also thought, wow, we need to donate? And my sponsor said to me with a smirk, "So...how much did you spend a night on booze?" I never had that thought again.

Did You Hear?

From the GSO:

I am thrilled to share with you the recent news release from the Library of Congress that our book, **Alcoholics Anonymous**, has been named on its list of "Eighty-Eight Books that Shaped America" – books that have "influenced the nation...shaped Americans' view of their world and the world's views of America."

The Big Book will be on display -- along with the remaining books on the list – as part of a special exhibition in Washington, D.C., from June 25th through September 29th.

— Phyllis Halliday, General Manager
GSO US/Canada

For those of you that may want to see the exhibit, check out the Library of Congress website at <http://www.loc.gov/index.html>. Here are some questions that you might have, answered already:

1. Where is the Library of Congress located?

The Library occupies three buildings on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C.

2. What are the Library's visitor hours?

The Thomas Jefferson Building and the Library of Congress Experience is open to the public from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Saturday. The Jefferson Building is closed on Sundays and on Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day.

3. Do I need tickets or reservations?

Visitors do not need tickets or reservations to enter the Jefferson Building or to visit the new Library of Congress Experience. For tour availability, please check at Orientation Desks. For group tour availability, contact vso@loc.gov or 202-707-0919.

Fellowship Announcements & Things to Do *July & August*



Thursday July 26 - Swedesboro Living Sober @ Bethesda United Methodist Church, 1435 Kings Highway. We invite you to our annual ICE CREAM social. Ice cream and sweets at 7:00 PM and two speakers at 7:30PM. NEW

Saturday, July 28 - "Speaker Jam at the Beach". Presented by CAIG's Young in Recovery. Ventnor Community Center, 6500 Atlantic Ave., Ventnor, NJ. 12:00 PM - 10:3

0 PM. Bring your beach chair and supplies, a covered dish or dessert, and your FUN spirit. Speakers all day! Mild refreshments will be served. More Info: Greg B. 609-457-0313

Sunday, July 29 - Annual Family Picnic. Parvin State Park, Pavilion A & B - Cost: \$10.00 (softball, kids games, fellowship, swimming, fishing, boating, and family camping. More info: www.matttalbotgroup19.org.

Thursday, August 2 - "Bill W." a new documentary film (non-AA). Ritz East, 125 S. 2nd St., Philadelphia, PA 19106. Info: 215-925-2501. For more screening locations visit: www.BillW.com/screenings.

Saturday, August 4 - Area 45 Corrections & Treatment Facilities. 17th Annual Inter-Area Conference. "Freedom from Bondage". 9:00 AM - 2:00 PM. St. Charles Borromeo RC Church, 176 Stagecoach Rd., Sicklerville, NJ.

Tuesday, August 7 - "A Way Out" Group Anniversary. Transfiguration Church, Magill & WHP, Collingswood, NJ. 7:00 PM: Food, 8:00 PM: Speaker.

Sunday, August 19 - District 14 Fellowship Picnic. Parvin State Park, Thundergust Pavilion, Parvin's Mill Road, Pittsgrove, NJ. 12 Noon. Presale Tickets: \$10.00. Children under 8: Free. Rain or shine event. Bring your own chair and softball equipment. AA / Alanon speakers, 50/50, Door prizes, games. More Info call: Michele - 856.367.7009. Sides and desserts welcome.

Sunday, August 19 - Area 45 Summer Assembly - Registration, 8:30 am; New GSR/DCM Orientation, 9:00 am; Assembly, 10:00 am; Lunch, 12:30 pm; Workshop, 12:45 pm; Committee Meeting, 1:30 pm - approx 3:00 pm. Carslake Community Center, 209 Crosswicks St., Bordentown, NJ.

defects that I keep are ones my pride and/or ego feel a need to hold onto. "A whole lifetime geared to self-centeredness cannot be set in reverse all at once." (12&12 p.73.)

I'm human, so I'm not 100% free of lust, greed or pride. I guess I wouldn't be human if I was. But the Twelve and Twelve says that these desires for sex relations, material and emotional security and for companionship are perfectly necessary, right and surely God given—but with alcoholics, they far exceed their proper function, First, I have to put the drink down.

And when I put the drink down, to my surprise, many of my basic instincts were still out of whack. Why do I hold onto some of them? Why don't I take them immediately to God when they return?

"To be doomed to an alcoholic death or to live on spiritual principles are not always easy alternatives to face." (Big Book, page 44) And living with these defects, although painful at times, seemed at the time easier to deal with than humility and change.

"To be doomed to an alcoholic death or to live on spiritual principles are not always easy alternatives to face." (Big Book, page 44) And living with these defects, although painful at times, seemed at the time easier to deal with than humility and change.

I'd like to share a little story I heard an old timer tell, and for me, it really made clear how I look at my defects and why I hesitate to take a practical program of action when they appear.

A little league baseball team was going to play in the championship the next day, and after practice, the coach told his team to take it easy the rest of the day, and make sure that night, they all got eight hours of sleep. That night, Jimmy went to bed at 9:00p and fell right asleep. But at 1am, he woke up with a pain in his tooth. He got a drink of water and went back to bed. An hour later, the pain woke him again. Then at 3:30 again and this time, it was really hurting. He tried to get back to sleep, but this time it was too painful.

Finally he woke his mother and told her. She gave him

some aspirin and some medicine to numb the pain. He was finally able to sleep. But after a long night of being up and in pain, he played poorly and his team lost.

Why didn't he just go to him mom when the tooth woke him up the first time? He would have gotten a good night's sleep and probably would have felt and played better. The answer is simple: he knew him mom and he knew that if he told her he had a toothache, she wouldn't have let it go with just giving him an aspirin and some medicine. The next day, she would call the dentist and make an appointment. And the dentist wouldn't just stop with that one tooth. He would examine all of his teeth and make more appointments. The dentist wanted all of his teeth to be perfect. Jimmy didn't care if all of his teeth were perfect; he just wanted to stop the pain in that one. If his mom asked about his tooth, he would have just answered, "It's pretty good."

--Anonymous

Editor's Note: We at Anonymous South Jersey really encourage you to submit your own essay on one of the steps or traditions. It doesn't have to be lengthy and you will be helping other alcoholics by sharing your experience, strength and hope. Next month we will be featuring Step 8 and Tradition 8—send your thoughts to newsletter@aasj.org.

Question of the Month

For next month's issue, we'd like to get your response to this question:

How does your group celebrate anniversaries?

Please email your response no later than Friday, August 10, 2012 to: newsletter@aasj.org.

Editorial Policy

Anonymous South Jersey is a monthly newsletter published by and for members of South Jersey Intergroup (although we welcome readers from other areas!).

Opinions expressed herein are NOT to be attributed to A.A. as a whole, nor does publication of information imply any endorsement by either A.A. or South Jersey Intergroup.

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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.

*Send your submissions to:
newsletter@asj.org.*

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24 Hour Hotline: 1-856-486-4444

Toll Free Hotline: 1-866-920-1212

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

Happy Anniversary!

The Barrington Early Evening Recovery Group was founded on July 13, 2006. This is a one-hour, open discussion meeting held every Thursday at 5:35 pm. The founders of this group wanted to have an early evening meeting available in the Barrington area. Their current location is at the First Presbyterian Church, 401 W. Clements Bridge Road.

— Jenn C., Archives Chair



Experience, Strength, & Hope

Perception and Perspective

One alcoholic with a bag of "nevers" and "not yets" changes his perception of alcoholism and happiness.

Perception was not one of this alcoholic's strong suits before I joined the ranks of Alcoholics Anonymous. I thought then that I had a drinking problem--even to the extent that I might be an alcoholic (as I knew even then that I could never take only one drink--and that I drank to become drunk--not sociable.) However, I never considered--even remotely--that my life had become unmanageable. I had been blessed (or cursed, depending upon one's viewpoint) to be one of those "I never" types of alcoholics. (I know now that those "I nevers" are merely "not yets".) I had all the trappings of a good life--good job with a corner office, nice view, corporate title, six figure income, nice expense account (read: drinks paid by the company), nice home in a nice neighborhood, wonderful, loving wife, and four great children (well, sometimes great, but occasionally a pain in the posterior), money in the bank, mortgage paid off, minimal credit card bills, active church member with service responsibilities.

Nice picture, right? Sure it is, and it was my perceptions of my life until one night in December. The previous evening I had attended my office annual holiday party by myself, as my wife had stopped going to that function with me years prior to that time, I got home late and went to bed. All other household members had retired earlier. The next evening, my wife asked me if I would do her a favor. I said, "Sure, if I can." She asked me to attend an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, or if I did not care to do so, to move out of the house. To say I was surprised by her request would be an understatement of monumental proportions. How could she possibly think that I had a drinking problem--much less one of such gravity as to require me to attend an A.A. meeting? So I agreed to attend an AA meeting. My plan was to do so--come home and tell my wife that I was cured of my drinking problems, and continue my life as before. However, my attendance at my first A.A.

meeting caused me to change my life plans. I was warmly greeted at that meeting, as at all meetings, and made to feel very comfortable. People seemed to be genuinely happy. (I looked for booze, but I could not find any.) The meeting stated and I identified myself by my first name and said that I was an alcoholic. That was my first public "outing" of myself as an alcoholic. When I pronounced that statement, I felt a rush of emotions--relief, comfort, liberation, the removal of a tremendous weight from my shoulders, and the knowledge that my life could (and would) become better and that I could learn not to drink one day at a time, if I just did what the rest of the people in this room did, one day at a time. I also realized that if I chose not to follow the A.A. path my life would deteriorate--quickly, steadily, and surely. I chose the A.A. way of life, and it has been, by far the best choice I ever made, and the one that has completely changed (for the better) my life and my perceptions of life, of you, of me, and of the God of my understanding.

Oh, yes, what about that word "perspective" including in this article's title? My perspective used to be that things were either "great" or "lousy"--no shades of grey. (And in my perspective of life, they were usually "lousy.") My correct perspective is that "life things" happen to all of us. What matters is how I deal with them. Things that I used to view as lousy and happened to me because I was unlucky, or because God was mad at me, or because you didn't like me, are now just "life things." The good things that happen to me I now consider gifts from God. And I find that more good things happen to me that more that I do good things for other people.

I think that I will keep coming back!!

— A Work in Progress Alcoholic.

