

# ANONYMOUS SOUTHJERSEY

SOUTH JERSEY INTERGROUP

AUGUST 2013

## From Dark to Light

*Doing amends a second time around brought a new joy to her life*

I just completed working the Steps for the second time and making amends was a blast. The first time I was newly sober and living in my hometown. The damage I had done was fresh and people were readily available for making direct amends.

This time however, it was over two decades and thousands of miles later. I chose to work the Steps again because I wanted to rededicate myself to emotional sobriety. I did a fearless and thorough inventory, focusing in on the emotional damage I had done. I went back over my drinking years to make sure I had not missed anyone or anything during my original Fourth Step.

I reviewed all of my sober years because I knew there were times when I hadn't worked the Tenth Step. This time, making direct amends in a number of cases proved impossible. People had died, retired, moved away, or were otherwise gone. After doing a diligent search online, I concluded some

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## There Are No Musts

*A member feels uneasy about those who tell him he's not doing AA the right way.*

Recently, I've noticed a different tone, content and message from some members of the Fellowship than I recall hearing in my early sobriety. There seems to be a growing undercurrent of intolerance toward members who are working the AA program "the wrong way." There seems to be a call for such people to return to the "original program" that these folks profess is outlined in the first 164 pages of the Big Book. There are also differences of opinion with regard to whether one should refer to oneself as "recovered" or "in recovery" and controversy around the "singleness of purpose" concept and whether those who also have drug problems should be allowed to share honestly about them at our AA meetings without self-censorship.

I have been verbally attacked for using common AA phrases such as "Take what you like and leave the rest" and even for informing newcomers that they are free to choose their own conception of God. But the one phrase that really seems to incite those on a mission to reform AA is the phrase "There are no musts." I frequently have been told the precise number of times the word "must" appears in the Big Book. And I have even been accused of "killing people" by saying that the AA program is one of suggestions only. In addition I've been told my brand of AA is "watered down" and full of "treatment concepts."

In fact, these ideas that I'm being personally attacked for repeating are in our AA Conference-approved literature. Let's take for example the concept of taking AA "cafeteria style." In our book *Living Sober*, it says:

"The point is, there is no prescribed AA 'right' way or 'wrong' way. Each of us uses what is best for him or herself—without closing the door on other kinds of help we may find valuable at another time. And each of us tries to respect others' rights to do things differently. Sometimes an AA member will talk about taking the various parts of the program cafeteria style—selecting what he likes and letting alone what he does not want."

*There are No Musts continued on page 4*

people were simply unable to be located. I wasn't willing to let myself off the hook however. I asked my Higher Power to bring people across my path if possible, or alternatively to help me think of ways to make indirect amends so I could complete a proper Ninth Step. That's when the fun began.

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It was the holiday season, and some of my most difficult amends were with people who had written me out of their lives. I could give you a litany of reasons for not wanting to do those amends. But the bottom line is that despite any particular circumstance, my lack of emotional sobriety caused damage. I needed to take responsibility for those things. After praying daily on this subject, I woke up one morning with an idea as clearly from God as if He was sitting in my living room talking to me. Christmas presents.

I could begin with Christmas presents! For those who were not speaking to me, I gave them substantial and personally meaningful presents. I did it with a lot of love, and not a shred of resentment. The dollar amount did not matter, the intention to make a peace offering did. With every gift I gave, I felt a sense of freedom and gratitude for a creative opportunity to clear away the wreckage of my past. I also had a sense of closure, neither waiting for nor trying to control any particular outcome.

Much to my surprise, the gifts were well received and allowed me the opportunity to make more direct amends. I took great joy in giving the surprise gifts and was even happier to have the opportunity to directly



state what I was sorry for.

Extraordinarily I was also asked for forgiveness in return for the damage that had been done to me. In a moment's time, relationships were being put right again.

Once those amends were done, I moved on to those situations I still didn't have any obvious solutions for. I realized that because some time had passed and people and places were not being brought back into my life, my amends were going to have to be indirect if they were to be made at all. I made peace with that and began to pray specifically for ideas. The last three places on the list were places where I'd done a lot of collective damage over the years: school, church, and community. I could feel my Higher Power prompting me to make those amends particularly significant, because there was really no way to go back and make up for the things I'd done wrong.

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*Through God's grace, my focus was shifted from the cold ashes of the past to the spark God lit to make a difference, right here, right now.*

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Some direct amends had long ago been done with specific people, but I was a difficult at best and impaired at worst person to have around in each of those three places. I began really listening, being alert for signs, looking for opportunities to put things right. What I discovered in each case was truly a chance to move forward and put the past behind me. Through God's grace, my focus was shifted from the cold ashes of the past to the spark God lit to make a difference, right here, right now.

Suddenly, chances to be a positive, productive contributor to each of those three communities began to present themselves. I also strongly sensed that in these cases, God not only wanted me to give my time but he wanted me to give of myself.

I was sitting in church one day when our pastor explained to the congregation that a major repair at one of the church buildings had been required to bring it up to code. The repair was entirely unexpected and cost many thousands of dollars. They made a heartfelt appeal that anyone who could help with a gift of any amount would be making a real difference.

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*From Dark to Light continued*

If God had handed me my checkbook himself, the message wouldn't have been any clearer. I enclosed the check in a Christmas card to our church and they were quite surprised and very grateful. It was not enough to cover the entire budgetary shortfall of course, but for me it was a substantial sum of money, and what I felt was on par with the degree of damage I had done elsewhere.

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As I left the church that night my heart overflowed because I knew that this amends, while unable to be direct to my old church, had made a significant difference at a critical time in the life of my new church. In addition I volunteer with the music ministry, which is a powerful avenue for people to experience God's presence in our midst. It is some of the most satisfying work I have ever done and helps make up for the harm I caused elsewhere.

It was much the same with school. I'd caused some of the worst damage in the halls of academia, raising a ruckus and disrupting the learning environment on more occasions than I can count. My new school sent out an appeal to help construct a new building, which was incredibly needed.

Again, I made a significant donation. Not anywhere near what the beautiful new facility would cost, but enough to make a difference and I felt great joy about that. I went beyond the financial contribution however, and now I volunteer to teach life skills to high school kids who've faced a lot of difficulty and hardship. It is a joy and an honor to be there for and with these kids who have a lot to offer the world and just need someone to believe in them and help draw it out.

Finally it came time for the last of the three places. My

community. There isn't much in my new hometown that means more than hockey. And as we say here, it's about so much more than just the ice. Hockey transforms lives. Many dedicated people have been working for years to raise money and build a new ice arena.

People here are passionate about it and realize the vital role it fills in our community. It hit me one day as I showed up for skating practice that the fundraising posters weren't just catchy to look at. I could actually help. So I checked into options and bought a glass block that will help build a dedication wall in the new arena. That was the main way individual people could contribute to the effort. This amends perhaps felt best of all.

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*...at long last, rather than tearing things apart, I was helping build up something that future generations will benefit from for years to come.*

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The very next time I went to practice I stopped in my tracks because I realized, as I looked at all the little kids racing around and families doing laps together, that at long last, rather than tearing things apart, I was helping build up something that future generations will benefit from for years to come. In addition to that, I volunteer my time as an organizer and participant in the new adult hockey programs at our rink. We are raising much needed money and bringing the joy of hockey to a growing group of adults whose lives are being changed by this awesome sport.

Once my amends were finished, I received perhaps the biggest gift of all, blessings beyond measure which I wasn't even thinking about while focused on setting things right. I looked up one day and found myself living a sober, free, happy life rich with people, activities, and places I never thought I'd be a part of and that meant everything to me. It is a full life, well spent, and one that I never would have been launched into if it wasn't for Alcoholics Anonymous and the Ninth Step.

—Deb H., Sun Prairie, Wis.  
(from the online edition of Grapevine Magazine)

*We love to publish pieces from local AAs. If you want to share your experience with a step, tradition, concept, or other AA topic, please send your submission to newsletter@aasj.org.*

## Step Eight

*Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all. A member of the fellowship wonders, do we need to make amends to ourselves?*

The beauty of the Twelve and Twelve is in those moments when something absolutely new ‘jumps out’ at you—something you’ve never seen before. Recently, reading the Eighth Step, I saw that the Step was as much about looking forward as it is about looking back. The Step says pretty clearly that it is about learning to have healthy present relationships with the people in our lives, by reviewing the way we’ve poisoned our past relationships.

At the top of my Eighth Step list was my wife. I continued to drink for about ten years after I met my wife and, although I treated her well in some ways, I treated her pretty shabbily in others. Driven by fear and immaturity, I refused to commit wholeheartedly to our relationship and so left her never really certain whether I was in or out. Treating her like a Queen one day, abandoning her the next. Worse, I had no idea at all that I was doing wrong or acting unfairly and no thought or care for the harm or the pain I was causing her.

I won’t go into the details of my amends to my wife, since that concerns the Ninth Step and this is about the Eighth. Suffice it to say that she was on my list; and that is what the Step tells us: make a list. Don’t do anything yet involving others; for now, just make the list (and then have a good long talk with your sponsor!).

Working the Eighth Step, I had to come to see the myriad ways in which I had harmed my wife. That process was necessary if I was to amend my ways and learn a whole new way of being in our relationship. And so it went with others in my life: my employer, my family, my friends and co-workers. I had to see all the ways I had harmed others in order to stop doing that now.

Importantly too, I had to see the way I had harmed myself by harming others and I needed to stop doing that to myself. I have come to learn that, without a healthy relationship with others, it is impossible to have one with yourself; and that a healthy relationship with yourself, ‘feeds’ a healthy relationship with others.

I’m not certain but perhaps we need to put ourselves also on our Eighth Step list; after all, did not we harm ourselves as much as others? And don’t we now have to learn to treat ourselves better? I’d like to hear other opinions on this.

I’m sure that the Eighth Step will continue to reveal more to me in the coming months and years. As I change and grow, so do the Steps! So do my relationships with the people in my life. All of that—the seeing, the learning, the changing—belongs to the rewards of working this Step.

--Masonville Marty

How about the phrase “There are no musts”? Can this concept be found anywhere in our AA literature? You bet your bottom dollar! In the Tradition One chapter of the “Twelve and Twelve,” it says:

“Our Twelve Steps to recovery are suggestions; the Twelve Traditions which guarantee A.A.’s unity contain not a single ‘Don’t.’ They repeatedly say, ‘We ought ...’ but never ‘You must!’” In addition, the “There are no musts” phrase was published in Grapevine in February of 1948. They are Bill W.’s words, not mine:

The Third Tradition “tells every alcoholic in the world that he may become, and remain, a member of Alcoholics Anonymous so long as he says so. In short Alcoholics Anonymous has no membership rule.

“Why is this so? Our answer is simple and practical. Even in self-protection, we do not wish to erect the slightest barrier between ourselves and the brother alcoholic who still suffers. We know that society has been demanding that he conform to its laws and conventions. But the essence of his alcoholic malady is the fact that he has been unable or unwilling to conform either to the laws of man or God. If he is anything, the sick alcoholic is a rebellious nonconformist. How well we understand that; every member of Alcoholics Anonymous was once a rebel himself. Hence we cannot offer to meet him at any halfway mark. We must enter the dark cave where he is and show him we understand. We realize that he is altogether too weak and confused to jump hurdles. If we raise obstacles, he might stay away and perish. He might be denied his priceless opportunity.

“So when he asks, ‘Are there any

## Tradition Eight

*Tradition Eight: Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers..*

When I first looked at this tradition, I did not understand what it meant by “nonprofessional.” I understood, or at least I thought did, that special workers such as secretaries, writers, business professionals and others would be employed by AA, particularly at the national level. However, when I took a look at the long form of tradition 8, I learned that this tradition was focused on 12th step work and that nonprofessional meant that AAs should not get paid for helping another alcoholic.

*Long Form: Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional. We define professionalism as the occupation of counseling alcoholics for fees or hire. But we may employ alcoholics where they are going to perform those services for which we may otherwise have to engage nonalcoholics. Such special services may be well recompensed. But our usual A.A. "12th Step" work is never to be paid for.*

But what about those people in AA who are drug and alcohol counselors and do this for a living? Does this go against the 8th tradition? Are they getting paid for helping another alcoholic? The answer is no and yes. It doesn't go against the 8th tradition but they are getting paid for helping another alcoholic. The difference is their work is NOT 12th step work. Their work is based on professional training and is different than an alcoholic helping another alcoholic. An alcoholic or a nonalcoholic can do the counseling work, and based on their training and education, should be compensated for their work. These counselors, as part of their treatment, acknowledge the value of the steps and often support attendance at meetings, getting a sponsor and engaging in step work. The counselor is doing this as part of his or her job, not to help themselves stay sober. Remember, the essence of 12th step work is that carrying the message of AA to another alcoholic helps both the stepper and the step-ee stay sober.

The 8th Tradition is designed to ensure that anyone reaching out for help regarding his or her alcohol use will receive it, free of charge.

This is 12th step work. AA members freely share their own experience with fellow alcoholics and by doing so, help in their own recovery in the process. As A.A. members representing the A.A. program we are all volunteers and the only expertise we claim is our own experiences as active alcoholic. Even speakers at conventions share their experience, strength, and hope free of charge.

The bottom line is, the 8th tradition reminds us that only an alcoholic can do 12th step work and should not take money for it.

*--Andrew P., Daily Reflections, Haddonfield, NJ*

*There are No Musts continued from page 4*

conditions?’ we joyfully reply, ‘No, not a one.’ When skeptically he comes back saying, ‘But certainly there must be things that I have to do and believe,’ we quickly answer, ‘In Alcoholics Anonymous there are no musts.’”

Now I fully realize every person in AA and every AA group has a “right to be wrong,” and nobody including myself can speak for all of AA. But I have to tell you, I’m getting a little tired of hearing the principles and slogans I got sober with being falsely attributed to some imaginary conspiracy to “water down” AA. My advice is don’t listen to the self-proclaimed lecturers and Big Book “gurus.” Read the literature for yourself, and find out what’s in there. And don’t just read the first 164 pages of one book. Read all of the AA literature. That way when someone gets on their soapbox and tries to accuse you of “watering down” the “original program,” you’ll realize that person just doesn’t understand where you got those wacky ideas from in the first place.

*—Jim F., Dallas, Texas (from the Grapevine Magazine online archives)*

### **Answer to July’s Question of the Month: Can you tell us about one of your amends in a general way?**

A lot of the amends I have to make, are to myself. Over the years, I had many broken relationships. So, I threw out all the old photos of pictures of people I used to date, or of me drinking and partying it up. It was a painful process, but I did it at places where I knew I felt comfortable with my surroundings. I did it when my sweet and loving family members were around me, in one of my AA meeting rooms during a Big Book Study, and the back row of a movie theatre with a flashlight affixed to my head watching a movie about Hope and Love. It was AMAZING how many pictures of myself I had, and how much I changed in less than one year of sobriety.

*--Amy R. (Maple Shade Thursday Night)*

## 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 AA as a whole, nor does publication of information imply any endorsement by either AA or South Jersey Intergroup. Quotations and artwork from AA literature are printed with permission from AA World Services, Inc., and/or the AA Grapevine, Inc.

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@asaj.org](mailto:newsletter@asaj.org).

### CONTACT INFORMATION FOR SJ INTERGROUP:

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Website: [www.asaj.org](http://www.asaj.org)

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 St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church 989 Route 70 East, Cherry Hill, NJ

## Hot Diggity Dog! Happy Anniversary!

The "Hot Dog Meeting" home group was founded in August 2010. It is an open, Big Book meeting held on Friday evenings at 7:00 pm at the New Beginnings Club in Runnemede. This group originally held its meetings at the Kiss Club, and was started because the founders wanted to have a hot dog meeting available in our area again--the last hot dog meeting in this area was held on 93 Steward St. in Camden, and it closed in 1994.

Here are some AA "fun facts" for this month from the Archives page on our Intergroup website: [www.asaj.org](http://www.asaj.org):

August 19, 1941: First AA meeting in Colorado held in Denver

August 25, 1943: AA group donates a Big Book to a public library in Quincy, MA

August 1981: Big Book sales pass 3 million

--Jenn C., Archives Chair

## Announcements

The chair and co-chair of the newsletter committee (and many others) will be rotating out at the end of the year. Now is your chance to get involved in service at the Intergroup level. If you think you might be interested in taking over the newsletter, we're happy to help you make a smooth transition. Please contact Patty or Angie at [newsletter@asaj.org](mailto:newsletter@asaj.org) for more information.

## Question of the Month

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

*What prayer do you rely on the most and why?*

Please email your replies no later than Friday, Sept. 13, to [newsletter@asaj.org](mailto:newsletter@asaj.org).

## DEADLINES FOR SUBMISSIONS

September, Step and Tradition 9	Friday, September 13
October, Step and Tradition 10	Friday, October 11
November, Step and Tradition 11	Friday, November 15
December, Step and Tradition 12	Friday, December 13

For each month, we'd love to get your submissions on the step or tradition that corresponds. We are always looking for AAs to share their Experience, Strength and Hope (ESH) in print.

## Fellowship Announcements & Things to Do

August 23 - 25 - Camping Trip at Red Rock Mountain Campground. \$20 p/p. Camping, hiking, amazing waterfalls, campfire, fellowship. Info call: Brian C. 609-932-0477

Sunday, August 25 – Soberstock 2013 presented by New Beginnings. Lake Garrison, Monroeville, NJ. 11:00 AM – 6:00 PM. Featuring: Igloo, The Foley McKenna Band, The City, and Chris & Ed. \$20.00 p/p includes food & music. Advance tickets available at New Beginnings Clubhouse.

Thursday, September 5 – “The Anonymous People” – Documentary Film. AMC Marlton 8, 800 N. Route 73, Marlton, NJ. 856.596.8788. 7:30PM. 100 seats must be sold in advance to have showing. [www.theanonymouspeople.com](http://www.theanonymouspeople.com)

Monday, September 9 – Hainesport Serenity celebrating 30 years at 8pm. Desserts served after speaker Wayne K from the Winslow Crossing Serenity Group

Saturday, September 21 – 5K Run/Walk to benefit Center for Family Services. Washington Lake Park, Sewell, NJ. Register online at [CFS5K.com](http://CFS5K.com)

Sunday, September 22 – 9th Annual Unity Breakfast presented by Cape Atlantic Intergroup. The Grand Hotel of Cape May, 1045 Beach Ave., Cape May. \$25.00 p/p. FOR MORE INFORMATION OR QUESTIONS CONTACT: Cris K 609.437.6188 or Kim R 609.402.2388. Register and pay by credit card online at [www.caigrp.org](http://www.caigrp.org) OR send check or money order payable to Cape Atlantic Intergroup and send to: Cape Atlantic Intergroup, P.O Box 1205 Ocean City, NJ 08226. Guest speaker: Gail L. from Akron, OH

Saturday, September 28 – 1st Annual 5K Run/Walk. Jersey's Walk for Recovery presented by Recovery Advocates of America. Mercer County Park, rain or shine. Registration/Opening Ceremony at 1:00 PM, Walk starts at 2:00 PM. Visit: [www.recovery-advocates.org](http://www.recovery-advocates.org) for more info.

Saturday, October 12 – “Acts of Recovery” Haddonfield Methodist Church, 29 Warwick Rd., Haddonfield, NJ (corner of Warwick & King's Hwy) 12:00 – 5:00 PM

Each Weekend in October – Book-Toberfest. Stepping Stones, 4945 Friendship St., Philadelphia, PA 19135. Questions? Call: Rick D. 267-210-6486

October 24 – 27 – 29th Annual Area 29 Convention in Hagerstown, Maryland. Clarion Hotel and Hager Hall Conference Center, 901 Dual Highway, Hagerstown, MD 21740. Registration info and other information available online at [www.mgsconventions.org](http://www.mgsconventions.org).

Saturday, November 2 – 3rd Annual Freedom Fire. Old Cedar Campground, 274 Richwood Rd., Monroeville, NJ. (GPS: 39.64019 x 75.17577) Food & Fellowship 5:00 – 6:30 PM, 2 Speakers & Bonfire – 6:30 – 9:00 PM. Bring chair or blanket. Call: Rich – 856.904.3534. Donation: \$5.00.

November 8-10- 7th CAIG - WAVES ROUNDUP, \$35 p/p 3153 Fire Rd #1-C, Egg Harbor Twp ,NJ 08234 [www.WavesRoundup.com](http://www.WavesRoundup.com)

November 8-10 - Eatontown, NJ 3rd Jersey Shore Round Up. Sheraton Hotel R. 35, Eatontown, NJ 07724 / 732.542.6500 \$129/ night Registration: \$90 (2 meals & ice cream) by 10/8: Jersey Shore Round Up, 3 Ashford Ct., Spring Lake Hgt, NJ 07762. Jimmy A. [jimarg328@verizon.net](mailto:jimarg328@verizon.net) 732.245.1362.

Saturday, November 16 – Gratitude Dinner/Dance sponsored by South Jersey Intergroup. Nicolosi Catering, 1 Hessian Ave., West Deptford, NJ. \$20.00 p/p. Advanced ticket sales a must. Arrive early for fellowship and dinner, then dance while enjoying coffee & desserts. 7:00 PM - ? Call: Brian C – 609.932.0477 or Mike L – 609.504.3652.

