

ANONYMOUS SOUTHJERSEY

SOUTH JERSEY INTERGROUP

January 2015

New Year; New You

By Pat P.

I've often heard it said in meetings over the years: "AA is a very simple program--all you have to do is change your whole life." Fortunately, we only need to do it one day at a time.

For me, AA really has been and is about changing my whole life--starting with stopping my drinking, then working the steps so I had a replacement for drinking. What I've learned through experience is that if I go to change an unhealthy habit, whatever it is, like smoking, or eating sugar, if I simply stop it, I either return to it eventually, or replace it with another bad habit. For example, I'd go on diets in my younger years to rid myself of excess weight, but as soon as I dropped the weight, I'd return to bad eating habits and put the weight back on.



The same thing happened when I tried to quit drinking before I discovered I was an alcoholic and came to AA. I was able to stop once for a

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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 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; however it need not always be. It can be my wife (who, I've come to learn, grows wiser as I get soberer!), or it can be another alcoholic whose opinion I trust. As long

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The Strange Egg

Though he didn't grow up feeling out of place, because of alcoholism he would come to know great loneliness

Strangely enough, one of the things that initially made me feel out of place in AA was that early in my life I did not feel out of place.

I had trouble relating when I heard people mention in their stories that they were outsiders when they were young. My whole family was a bunch of oddballs. I never knew any different. A genius brother, a loud, charismatic, alcoholic father, an eccentric grandmother who would give me aspirin and champagne, these were the characters in my life. I myself was odd enough to fit right in.

In grade school I had lots of friends. In high school, I was a nonconformist with many others in the early 1970s. I always was artistic and had a rebellious streak, but it was never something I was horribly self-conscious about. I thought of it as a benefit. I wasn't the best or the worst.

When I started drinking too much, my self-image became slowly distorted. I became more self-centered and selfish. Gradually as my alcoholism progressed, I perceived myself as being an outsider, a misfit at the center of the universe. In reality, I had become a misfit, but the center of the universe was a tiny bit of a distortion. Lost, misunderstood, self-pitying, isolated, seemingly rejected, I became lonely in the particular way alcoholics understand.

Initially that common understanding was what was so appealing about AA. "Here were people who understood." The way they treated me at first was entirely appropriate for someone who had been suffering that kind of traumatic aloneness. I was given space. I didn't trust enough for hugs so I didn't get any. I didn't have to do stuff I thought was stupid, like "share" and say the prayer at the end and go to coffee. What a relief! Had those things been required, my path in AA would have been very different. My



perception of AA as a place where I could be myself would have been greatly reduced.

I love AA for how it encompasses the outliers of society and provides a loose yet comprehensive unity for those of us who have suffered alcoholic loneliness. One thing I have tried to do in AA is preserve my positive unique qualities. I have many more good things about myself than when I walked through the doors. My first Fourth Step had only

one positive thing I can remember, and at the time it took a lot of thinking to find it. It was that I was always kind to animals.

Now I am mostly nice to everyone, most of the time. What a gift! I am still a little bit of a weirdo, but I try not to have it be burdensome to others or look at it negatively myself.

I have a little trick I use to help me keep my seat in AA. I have often noticed that people in AA use their old ideas about being misunderstood as a way to avoid making progress. In other words, it is possible, and sometimes dangerous, to see myself as too much of an individual in AA. I might think that, after many years of sobriety, "I got this. I don't need meetings anymore." Or I may think I can't do a certain kind of service work because of my particular likes or dislikes. Or I might think I don't have to try to reach out to a certain type of newcomer. These are all ways I can miss out on being, "one among many" and "a worker among workers."

By being average and right-sized, I am in the middle of the AA pool. And the water's fine. So, all hail the rugged individual, the eccentric, the non-conformist, the oddball, the outcast, the strange egg. It's what makes AA beautiful and unique and by the grace of God, unified.

—Tim M., Alford, Ma.

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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 on the past year, and the new year ahead, 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

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."

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



Day of Sharing: How Is A.A. Treating The Court-Referred Person?

“Our channels of contact have always been charged with the language of the heart”—Bill W., Grapevine, June 1960.

This past October 18, 2014, Area 45 of GSO held its annual Day of Sharing. This year’s event took place at St. Bartholomew Church in Marlton and was hosted by our own, South Jersey Intergroup.

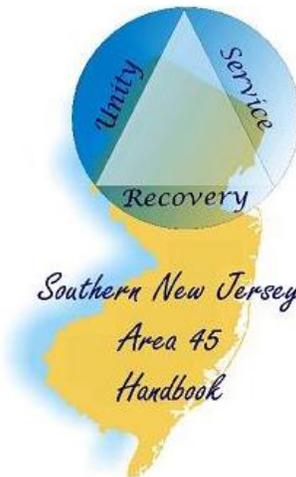
The Day of Sharing brings together representatives and members from Area 45 and the various Intergroups that make up Area 45: Central New Jersey, South Jersey, and Cape-Atlantic. The purpose and intent of the Day of Sharing is to try and unify the Area 45 groups and Intergroups around various issues of mutual concern.

This year’s theme focused on A.A.’s relationship with the Courts (e.g., to sign attendance papers or not?), how is A.A. treating the court-referred person? And how is A.A. “Bridging the Gap”; i.e., are we providing a “bridge” from prison, jail or hospitals, to A.A. as a whole?

After a general introduction, the meeting divided into various focus groups; each one dedicated to a discussion of one of the three issues listed above. In that way, members from all over South and Central Jersey could “share” ideas about how each group is dealing with and

approaching these issues and areas of concern. The focus groups then “reported” back to the meeting as a whole.

A major topic of discussion regarding the subject of the sign-



ing of slips of attendance for court-referred people was whether a group’s policy on this issue should be noted in the Meeting List. Some groups sign slips of attendance and some do not. One point in favor of such listing was that some court-referred people can only (due to limited resources) reach perhaps one or two meetings and these persons should have some foreknowledge of which meetings they should aim for.

Another topic of discussion was: how is A.A. treating the court-referred person and/or the person newly arrived from prison? Do these persons get the same attention as other newcomers? Do we ‘look down’ at persons needing papers signed? Do we make these persons feel comfortable and at-

home in our meetings? Should a group’s “signing policy” affect how that person is treated?

A final area of discussion concerned “Bridging the Gap” between treatment facilities, prisons and A.A. Is A.A. making the right “connections” between itself and these facilities and institutions? Is there a ‘drop-off’ between the time a person is released and the time that person can find their way to a meeting? Here I would refer the reader to GSO’s pamphlet: “Bridging the Gap” and encourage members to read it and discuss it with their groups.

The major message that I took away from the Day of Sharing was that help is available and resources are available for all members and groups. For example, our own South Jersey Intergroup has a “Connections Kit” available to any group for the asking. The kit will provide valuable information and resources for any group wishing to learn more about the issues discussed in this article.

I would encourage each group to send a member-representative to the 2015 Day of Sharing when the date and location for that is announced. It is a great way for each group to get deeper into A.A.’s primary purpose: to carry the message to the next suffering alcoholic.

--Masonville Marty

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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Toll Free Hotline: 1-866-920-1212

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

If One Is Good, Two Is Better

Especially when it comes to the 7th Tradition.

Are you still dropping a dollar in the 7th Tradition basket? A one dollar donation was plenty to cover the cost of my seat when I got sober in 1993. At that time a gallon of gas cost \$1.15 and you could buy a pack of cigarettes for \$1.70.

I wasn't sober long before I started hearing requests for additional dollars at your home group or on special occasions. All costs are still rising and these costs affect General Service, Intergroup and the facilities that rent space to our groups. If we can start looking at \$2-\$3 as being the generally appropriate donation it will help AA continue to grow in a manner that remains true to our sacred traditions.

When I look at the 7th tradition at the personal level, I strive to be self-supporting by covering the cost of my seat. At times when I am blessed financially, I might throw in an extra 12th step dollar to help cover the cost for the alcoholic who still suffers. When I am struggling, I contribute what I can and trust God will improve the flow of money into my life.

Money is just one of the ways we give back what has been so freely given to us. Perhaps your valuable contribution has included making coffee, putting away chairs, reaching out to another alcoholic, serving on an Intergroup or General Service committee, or answering your phone. Whatever it has been, thank you for being an important part of the program and fellowship that continues to save our lives.

--Karen M

7th Tradition long form:

The A.A. groups themselves ought to be fully supported by the voluntary contributions of their own members. We think that each group should soon achieve this ideal; that any public solicitation of funds using the name of Alcoholics Anonymous is highly dangerous, whether by groups, clubs, hospitals, or other outside agencies; that acceptance of large gifts from any source, or of contributions carrying any obligation whatever, is unwise. Then, too, we view with much concern those A.A. treasuries which continue, beyond prudent reserves, to accumulate funds for no stated A.A. purpose. Experience has often warned us that nothing can so surely destroy our spiritual heritage as futile disputes over property, money, and authority.

New You

(From page 1)

month when I made a pact with friends for us all to stop drinking--which we did--but as soon as the month was over, we all hit the bars again as soon as possible. In fact, we may have celebrated the month of abstinence being over by going to a bar! (I say "may have" because it was so long ago, I don't remember.)

So the whole point of AA, for this recovering alcoholic, is to have something to replace my drinking with--and that's when I discovered the power of replacing a negative with a positive. It's not enough to stop. I need to START doing--and continue doing--the positive behavior. In the case of drinking, it was to replace it with the actions of AA. With my other unhealthy habits--

-if I feel they are an addiction, I go to the 12 Step meeting for that addiction. If it's not, I find a positive replacement for it.

I continue to work the AA program because through it, I have not only been able to stop drinking, I have been able to change my whole life. If I had continued drinking, I'd have either died long ago, or lived a life on the streets until I died or was incarcerated. Because of AA, I not only have gotten to live a much longer life, I've gotten to live it in good health--physically and mentally, emotionally and spiritually. I've gotten to work jobs I loved and found fulfilling. I've gotten to be a good friend, daughter, sister, professional colleague. I've gotten go back to

school for higher education. I've gotten to be a contributing member of society. Most importantly, I've gotten to have that spiritual awakening the 12th step promises us, and become aware I am a child of God, and to grow in spiritual awareness. And not just in AA (although that is the bedrock of my spirituality) but in other spiritual paths and disciplines as well.

It's interesting--the first day I came to AA, I did change my whole entire life--I just didn't realize it at the time. It has taken me the rest of my sober life to realize it--and to continue to realize it....and to continue to realize it....

--Pat P.

Step 1

(From page 1)

as it's not me.

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

Sobriety is like pizza...



When it's good, it's
REALLY good, and when
it's bad, it's still
PRETTY DAMN GOOD!

Meetings: My Secret Weapon to Keeping My Ego in Check

I sat on the edge of the bed, and the counselor asked me if I was OK.

"I'm not the guy who winds up in rehab," I said. Of course, technically I wasn't in rehab. It was my first day of detox, rehab was still four days away. But once I finished my intake and caught my breath, the shame of winding up in a "facility" hit me.

"Don't worry," he said. "They will help you deal with that when you get to rehab."

That was more than 18 months ago. I am still sober, but I also still have my struggles with shame. It's like in sobriety I feel like I've been defeated somehow, that life got too hard for me and I just couldn't take it. Everything else just bubbles up from there—I should be more successful, have a better job, make more money, be better known and respected. And so on.

I shared some of these feelings with an AA at my local meeting, and he said, with more than a little gravity: "You know what that is? That's your ego."

I knew right away that he was right.

So now my problem is how to deal with my ego. After all, my ego is part of who I am and, when it's not shaming me, comes in handy. The solution came from something I heard in my first week of rehab: The key to staying sober is "don't drink, and go to meetings." The first time I heard that, I rolled my eyes. Such a corny, hackneyed phrase could not seriously be the key to my recovery. Funny thing, though. Going to meetings worked.

Every time I go to a meeting, I get something out of it. Even if I sit there and just zone out for an hour, it's still an hour that I dedicated to my recovery. Honestly, though, I don't think I have ever gone to a meeting without learning something important about myself and/or my alcoholism.

Meetings keep my ego in check. I don't know how, but I still use my cell phone even though I don't really know how that works either.

It's like the rock paper scissors game. You know, ego beats sobriety, but meetings beat ego. In the battle between my ego and my sobriety, meetings are my secret weapon. They keep me on track and keep me focused on my recovery.

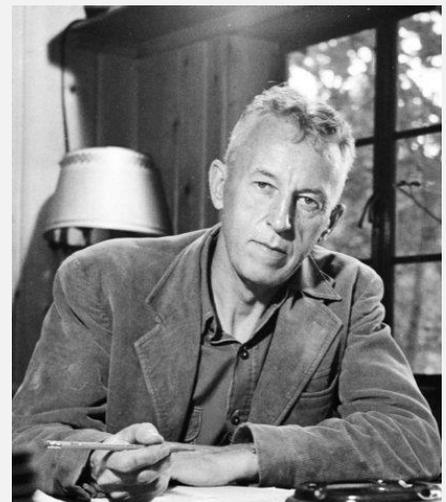
So I'll see ya at the next meeting.

--Steve W., Masonville

As Bill Sees It

"The idea of 'twenty-four-hour living' applies mostly to the emotional life of the individual. Emotionally speaking, we must not live in yesterday, nor in tomorrow."

As Bill Sees It, pg. 284



Fellowship Announcements and Things to Do

January 2015

New Years Day Alcahon

7:00 AM—7:00 PM at the Burlington Big Book Group of A.A., St. Barnabas Church, 309 East Broad Street, Burlington, NJ 08016 (4 blocks from River Line).

Temporary Meeting Location Change

On December 18, 19, 22 and 23, the Noon meeting of the Marlton Group (that usually meets at the Prince of Peace Church on Route 70) will be meeting at Dance for New Jersey, 3003 Lincoln Drive West, Marlton, NJ.

Hemingway Group

There will be No Meetings of the Hemingway Group (Marlton, Gibson House, Tickerton Road-Indian Springs Driving Range) on December 24 and 31.

New AA Meeting

Tuesdays from 5:30 -- 6:30 pm at The Temple Lutheran Church, 5600 North Route 130, Pennsauken, NJ 08109 (Corner of Rt 130 and Merchantville Avenue). Beginners Big Book and Open Discussion.

New Grapevine Publication

Sober and Out (cost \$11) 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. If you have any changes or any new items that you feel would benefit our fellowship, please let me know, so we can get it out to the people. Wayne: 856-534-0104 or wcp714@verizon.net

Mark Your Calendar!

Sunday, December 21—Sunday Big Book 25th Anniversary. St. Bart's Episcopal Church, 1989 Rt. East, Cherry Hill. Pizza & Refreshments, Guest speaker. 7:00 – 9:00 PM.

Wednesday, December 31—New Year's Eve Bash presented by the South Jersey Recovery Softball Leagues. Live DJ & Food. \$10 p/p. Children 15 and under are Free. Pitman United Methodist Church, 758 North Broadway, Pitman, NJ. 9:00 PM – 1:30 am, non-AA **NEW**

Saturday, January 17—Woodstown Group will celebrate their 60th Anniversary. Eating begins at 6:30 PM. Speakers to follow at 8:00 PM. Woodstown Presbyterian Hall, 46 Auburn Rd., Woodstown, NJ. 1 block west of Rt. 45 (N. Main St.) Info: Ron / Ginger 609.970.2170c, vvpeachy@aol.com. Side Dishes & Desserts Welcome. **NEW**

Saturday, January 24—Woodstown District 13 will be having an AA workshop @ 46 Auburn St. Woodstown, NJ 8:30 AM – 1:00 PM.

Saturday, January 31—District 3 will hold a 7th Tradition Workshop, Trivia Game, and Pot Luck Lunch 12 noon—2:00 PM at St Stephen's Church, 158 Warren Street, Beverly, NJ. Learn about the importance of the 7th tradition in all levels of AA from the homegroup to GSO, win prizes at the Trivia Game, and enjoy delicious food and fellowship! Questions or would like to bring a dish, please contact Jessica S. at (609)954-5672. **NEW**

March 20, 21, 22: Area 45 Southern New Jersey 51st Annual General Service Convention. The Crowne Plaza Hotel at 2349 Marlton Pike (Rt 70) Cherry Hill, NJ 08002. For registration and additional information: snjaaconvention.org and area45conventionreg@gmail.com or call: Debby S. at 856-404-5351 and Kelly W. at 609-817-4691.