

ANONYMOUS SOUTHJERSEY

SOUTH JERSEY INTERGROUP

March 2018

April in March: The First Few Months of Wedding Planning

I got sober when I was 27. I am 35 now and still learning how to “survive” a variety of experiences and events as a young woman who no longer drinks—in a world that does.

Since getting engaged in December, I’ve embraced the wedding planning and dove right in to venue hunting, vendor meetings, and all the fun stuff that comes along with planning a wedding. What I haven’t quite



been prepared for are the number of references to “popping champagne” to celebrate!

Sure, I knew one of the reasons I prolonged my drinking was so I could “get it under control” in order to drink at my wedding. It didn’t matter that I didn’t even have a boyfriend at the

time—I knew one day I would want to drink champagne at my wedding, toast with my girlfriends at a bachelorette party, and take the edge off when I’m the center of attention at my shower.

(Continued on page 2)

Feeling Like I Belong in a Room Full of Strangers

I was asked to speak at a meeting I had never been to before. I don’t do a lot of speaking in A.A; in fact, I had never taken a commitment. But this was a personal invitation, and I welcomed the opportunity to share what wisdom, strength and hope I may have to spare.

I was sitting in the front of a room filled with people I had never met. The only person I knew was the woman who had asked me to come, and I hadn’t met her before the day she invited me.

Even though I knew nothing about the attendees, other than they were alcoholics, I knew I belonged there—that I would fit in just fine, that I would be understood and accepted. In fact, the strangers in that room would understand what I had to say better than my closest friends.

(Continued on page 2)

Inside This Issue: ♦ Tolerance: A Two-way Street ♦ Poetry Corner ♦ SJI Trivia ♦ From the Editor ♦ Opportunities for Service ♦

Keeping the Focus on Me

I spent years discussing all the wrongs of the world, yet I couldn’t get off the bar stool.

I am an alcoholic (just a drunk working on getting another day), and at times I get disheartened. I don’t know about you, but when I do, I begin to look at what’s wrong with you.

Usually during these times I’m reminded that when I point the finger there are three pointing back at me. I am told to keep it simple and to get the focus back on myself, to look at what we are doing right, accentuate the positive!

The first tradition reminds me of this. I was told that the Traditions, like the steps, are in order for a reason. Imagine what would happen if I jumped from the t

(Continued on page 6)

April

From page 1

However, since getting sober, I now could not imagine drinking through these important moments in my life! The drink used to be my crutch to help me through every situation I didn't want to be in. But these situations? They are all going to be amazing and I want to remember and enjoy every minute of them! So I am firm in my resolve and happy beyond belief to be experiencing all of this sober.

But, that doesn't mean that every reference to "popping champagne" doesn't sting a little. Not because I want to have a drink, but because this is a normal way for a lot of people to celebrate. People who don't drink like me can absolutely drink champagne

to celebrate their engagement, commemorate the day they finalized their venue contract and set a date, or seeing their girlfriends for the first time to show off the ring. But I play the tape through. Drinking champagne to celebrate on Saturday night, by Monday morning I'm back to warm vodka. I know this. I'm grateful to be firm in sobriety and can let these comments brush off. But it is a reminder that getting through the next several months I need to stay on my game. People who don't know I'm in recovery will try to buy me drinks. The hotel we are staying at

Trivia Question

March 2018: How do you request a meeting list change?

Last month's trivia ques meeting lists did we sell in 2017?

Answer: In 2017 we sold enough meeting lists to welcome 15,675 newcomers to Alcoholics Anonymous in South Jersey!



will "treat us" to a bottle of champagne in our room. Half of our wedding guests are likely unaware of my recovery. I need to stay on my game and celebrate with other things—like spa treatments and chocolate. Which I am perfectly content with!

Strangers

(From page 1)

We know why: No one understands an alcoholic like another alcoholic. My non-alcoholic friends all support me and they accept that I no longer drink, but they don't know the obsession I deal with. People in A.A. do.

So as I sat in the front of that room, I knew the A.A.s would understand how I could lie to myself about my drinking and convince myself everything was o.k. despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. They would know how alluring the thought of drinking again can be; the "I'll just drink like a normal person this time; I can control it; I'll just stick to beer..." thinking. And we share the knowledge that we can never, ever take that first drink without losing everything we have worked so hard for.

Once the meeting was opened for sharing, it didn't take long before these familiar strangers started telling my own story right back to me.

Before I came to A.A., I never thought about how a meeting could keep someone from drinking,

but if I had, I doubt I would never have believed it. Now, when my head gets clouded with old thinking, I just remember the slogan, "Don't drink and go to a meeting." It's my mantra; it's what I fall back on when things start getting confused and I start trying to think my way out of a problem.

That's because an A.A. meeting is the only place where A.A. thinking makes sense to people. Things like, "to keep what we have been given, we have to give it away," and, "we have to surrender to conquer alcoholism," don't make sense to non-alcoholics. In the rooms of A.A., however, the only people who don't understand it are those who are just learning it.

Today, I am a sober man who lives in a world where everyone drinks, and that's OK because whenever I need to, I can go to a meeting and, for an hour or so, be with people who understand what it means to be powerless over alcohol. It is one of the many great gifts of the A.A. fellowship.

Steve W.

Tolerance: A two-way street

The First Tradition has been called our unity statement. Unity is imperative if AA will survive for the next suffering alcoholic who comes through the door. But too often the word "unity" is misunderstood. Often we interpret it as "coming together in a common place"; or, "superficial friendliness and jovial glad-handing"; or even, "public displays of affection (such as hugging)." In truth, while such public expressions may accompany unity, it goes much deeper than these surface levels.

Yes, we share a common malady--our alcoholism--but anyone who has ever frequented the bar life can tell you that commonality in our illness alone produces little unity.

The Big Book says, "Love and tolerance of others is our code." In truth, this is the basis of real unity. Genuine love can come only from the source of love, which we call our Higher Power; tolerance, in turn, is the expression of this love toward our fellows. Tolerance is easy to practice toward those of our fellows with whom we share more than one commonality. For example, it's natural to tolerate people with whom we share a socio-economic status, interests and hobbies, education or (perceived) intellectual level; but what about those of divergent religious, political, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds? Can we be tolerant of them as well?

Since its beginning, AA has tried to foster a climate of acceptance of everyone who has a desire to stop drinking, regardless of background.

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The short form of our Third Tradition reminds us: "The only requirement for AA membership is a desire to stop drinking." In its zeal to accomplish this end, it even added the words "as we understood him" to the word "God" in the Third Step, allowing each person to choose his own conception of God in the hope that this word need be a barrier to none who wish to practice our program of recovery. Thereafter, Christians, Jews, Moslems, Buddhists, Hindus, even agnostics and atheists--at last permitted to seek their own conception of a Higher Power--were able to find recovery from our common illness. This tolerance was key to AA's success and survival.

But tolerance is a two-way street. Living in the Ozarks (firmly located in "The Bible Belt"), I experience frequent examples of low-key "evangelizing" in my AA meetings. This is a subtle form of intolerance that is usually tolerated by other members so long as it doesn't get too far over the line. But occasionally, newcomers, who are not yet aware of the bounds of religious

decorum in meetings, do cross that nebulous line, angering those of an agnostic tendency. I recently found myself in just such a meeting.

A young newcomer, returning from morning mass still attired in his white shirt and tie, attended the 10 A.M. meeting of my home group. The meeting included a young

lady--also a newcomer, who declares herself an avowed atheist--and an older man who refers to himself as a Wiccan. As the meeting progressed, an elderly old-timer boldly declared his faith in Jesus Christ. Feeling thus emboldened by the comments of the old-timer, the young male newcomer then whipped out a pocket Bible and proceeded to read. As if on the sound of "charge," half the group bolted upright and stormed from the meeting, leaving the young man puzzled. I myself felt embarrassed and ashamed.

After the meeting, I approached the young Bible-reader. I told him that I, myself, though not a churchgoer, am also a Bible-reader. However, I said, such readings are not appropriate in an AA meeting, where members of various beliefs attend. I also suggested to the old-timer that perhaps he should go easy on the "J.C." talk. When the Wiccan asserted himself, I also reminded him that Wicca is a religion and not to be promoted in AA.

(Continued on page 6)

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

From the Editor:

Exciting news - we are starting a Poetry Corner! Any budding poets out there, send along your work. I would like to add a request - I hear a lot of good things in the rooms. Sometimes I try to remember them, but by the time I try to write them down, they're gone. If you hear something that makes you think, clears something up, sounds profound, pass it on! We would love to hear it too.

For our journalers and storytellers, you know we would love to have your input also. We are in this together (hmmm, there's a topic) so let's start sharing!

Thank you to this month's contributors.

My thought on step three is to remember that the key here is willingness. I used that to open the door to my spirituality. In the beginning, I put myself in the care of AA, my home-group and my sponsor. I say this a lot, my first spiritual experience was with my sponsor. Learning to trust, to figure out how to have a sober relationship with another person, a woman, made me realize there is a power out there bigger than me. I can feel that power in the rooms. That experience allowed me to start out on a path that has changed my life.

Judy P



POETRY CORNER

STEP THREE

TODAY, WE WILL TAKE A HARD LOOK AT STEP 3

*AND THINK ABOUT WHAT THE MEANING
MIGHT BE*

IT ASKS THAT WE MAKE A DECISION TO TURN

*TO A POWER GREATER AND PERHAPS COME TO
LEARN*

*THAT THOSE TIMES THAT WE TRUST OUR WILL
TO GOD'S CARE*

COMFORT AND RELIEF WAIT FOR US THERE



March Service Opportunities

Answering Service: Currently we have an open shift on Sunday Morning 10 am-12 pm, and Sunday Afternoon from 12-2 pm, and 2-4 pm. We are continuing to take names for our waiting list, and are still taking AA members to sign up to be available for a 12 Step call, so please have interested people continue to contact us via answerservice@aasj.org.

Bookers: If you or your group are interested in filling any of these Bookers commitments, please contact Beverly at bookers@aasj.org:

- Sunday, March 18, *Hampton Group*, Hampton Hospital, Westampton 10:30 am
- Sunday, April 1, *Hampton Group*, Hampton Hospital, Westampton 10:30 am
- Sunday, April 22, *Sunday Night Pitman*, St James Church, Pitman 7:30 pm
- Sunday, May 20, *Medford Serenity*, St. Mary's, Rt 70, Medford 7 pm
- Sunday, May 20, *Sunday Night Pitman*, St James Church, Pitman 7:30 pm
- Tuesday, March 6, *Back to Basics*, St. Mark's, Rt 30, Oaklyn 5:30 pm
- Tuesday, April 17, *Fellowship Group*, St. Stephens, Beverly 8 pm
- Tuesday, May 1, *Fellowship Group*, St. Stephens, Beverly 8 pm
- Tuesday, May 15, *Fellowship Group*, St. Stephens, Beverly 8 pm
- Tuesday, April 10, *Happy Hour*, 449 Club, Pemberton, 5:30 pm
- Tuesday, May 22, *Happy Hour*, 449 Club, Pemberton, 5:30 pm
- Tuesday, April 10, *Women's Courage to Change*, Riverton 8 pm
- Tuesday, May 8, *Women's Courage to Change*, Riverton 8 pm
- Wednesday, March 7, *Medford Group*, St. Pete's, Medford 8 pm
- Wednesday, April 4, *Medford Group*, St. Pete's, Medford 8 pm
- Wednesday, April 11, *Medford Group*, St. Pete's, Medford 8 pm
- Saturday, March 31, *Thorofare Saturday Night*, St. Pauls, 8 pm

Literature: Literature volunteers are always welcome, especially for the morning shifts. Please e-mail literature@aasj.org for more information.

Meeting List: The committee is continuing to reach out to the meetings that don't have any contact person listed. The goal is to eliminate any meetings that may have closed but are still listed on the website and meeting list. Please contact us at meetinglist@aasj.org to help with this project.

Newsletter: We would love any and all contributions - articles, poetry, things of interest heard in the rooms, anything that has helped you in recovery. Please submit by Friday, March 9 for the April newsletter.

Website Committee: We are looking for people with IT experience to get involved with creating and maintaining the new website. Please contact Josh at webmaster@aasj.org for more information.

(Continued on next page)

(Continued from previous page)

Speaking Commitments

Hospitals and Institutions (H&I) is looking for speakers to visit the following facilities. Please contact Frank or Debbie at handi@aaaj.org if you are able to take one of these commitments.

Monday

Ancora – Hammonton, March 26 7-8 pm; 202 Spring Garden Rd, Hammonton, NJ

DayTop Young Peoples Community Feb 26, March 12, 26, 7-8 pm; 9 Harding Hwy Rt 40, Pittsgrove, NJ 08138

Wednesday

Unity Place I - Cherry Hill, March 21, 28 12:40-1:30 pm; 1 Keystone Ave, Cherry Hill, NJ

Solstice Counseling - Lumberton, March 7 12-1 pm; 1561 Rt. 38 W, Lumberton, NJ

Thursday

Robins' Nest - Women's Sober House - March 1, 15, 29 2-3 pm; 42 Delsea Drive South, Glassboro, NJ 08028

Ancora – Hammonton, March 29 7-8 pm; 202 Spring Garden Rd, Hammonton, NJ

Lourdes Medical Center - Psych Unit, March 15, 8-9 pm; 218 Sunset Road, Rancocas, NJ 08046

Unity Place II – Hammonton, March 1, 15, 29 2-3 pm; 121 S. White Horse Pike, Hammonton, NJ

Daybreak – Atco, March 8, 15, 22, 29 10:30-12:00 noon; 368 White Horse Pike, Atco, NJ

Focus

From page 1

first step to the 6th. Hmmm! That is what I did back when I was using. I'd chill out for a while and try to convince you that I'll change my behavior and defects. Then I would blame you, point out what's wrong with you and justify my return to drinking. And do it all over again.

This became second nature to me. Left alone I could focus AA right out of existence. What is our primary

purpose? To me it is a no brainer. Each individual AA member is a part of this area and you do have a voice. There are opportunities for personal growth and service and Intergroup also provides opportunities for that kind of growth and personal recovery. I have a responsibility to keep my focus on unity and with the help of my AA network to keep it positive.

Thanks, AA and area 45 for the opportunity to grow and recover in spite of myself.

Anonymous

Grapevine

From page 3

As I said earlier, tolerance is a two-way street. At the 10 A.M. meeting the following day, virtually the same crowd appeared, except the young Bible-reader. I introduced the topic of "tolerance" for the discussion, and then gently challenged those present about their behavior at the previous day's meeting. I said that tolerance must be practiced both ways--both to

ward those of an agnostic tendency and toward believers with an evangelical tendency.

AA's unity does not depend on uniformity or even conformity; it depends on love and tolerance of others with their peculiarities. In AA, I've learned to focus on similarities, not differences. AA is not the place for debates about religious dogma, but when newcomers attend, such slip-ups are inevitable. This is when tolerance is most applicable.

Narrow-minded bigotry has no place in AA. We neither promote nor attack another member's religious beliefs; nor is it our job to try to convert anyone to ours. We in AA are here to save drunks, not souls!

-- DAVE C.
Springfield, Mo.

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