

ANONYMOUS SOUTHJERSEY

SOUTH JERSEY INTERGROUP

July 2018

How AA's Tools Helped Me Move to Switzerland

About two years ago I attended my first AA meeting (Collingswood Monday night). After a few months I found a home group (Saturday Men's Early Risers), got a sponsor, and started working the steps.

I could see how the program had changed lives and I wanted the same for me, so I was eager to do the work. Some of the promises came quickly, and that made me all the more ambitious. But it took me a few slips to learn some humility and patience, and now I know what people mean when they say that I'm exactly where I'm supposed to be.

Last summer, a few months after I got completely sober, my wife and I were on a hiking trip in Switzerland, having dropped off our son with his grandparents (my wife is Swiss). She casually mentioned that it could be nice to live in Switzerland, where she was born and raised.



I didn't know how to react to such a crazy idea. Somehow I managed to respond with some grace and have a conversation about it. It didn't seem practical and she didn't seem too serious, so I didn't see any harm in talking, and it was kind of fun to explore the idea.

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36 Years Sober and Still Loving AA

Ed Note: I had the pleasure of interviewing Eddie J and this paragraph says it all to me about him. It came at the end of the interview: "I wanted to say that I love AA. I have spent my whole life helping people – in the Army, Navy, as a Police Officer, and as a member of AA. The people I have met have given me more than I could ever give to them. We are a fellowship, a group of people with a common disease. We help each other, all under the umbrella of a high power which symbolizes love."

Eddie J, sobriety date 10/17/1982; from Williamstown NJ; home group Many Paths to Spirituality, Tuesdays at Runnemedede.

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Inside This Issue: ♦ SJI Trivia ♦ Opportunities for Service ♦ A Masters Lesson on the 7th Tradition ♦ 7th Step Poem ♦

Impact!

There are certain times and certain events that hit you 'between the eyes' and that do so suddenly and unexpectedly. You walk into a meeting for example and expect a placid, almost relaxing atmosphere. It's a meeting that you've been to a hundred times before, it's a weekday afternoon, and your life seems to be flowing along pretty smoothly.

Then, 'Bam!', you're rocked out of your seat! There's the speaker. He looks vaguely familiar. You can't really place him. Then he begins his story and you realize; he used to come to your home group a decade ago. He hung around a year or two and then disappeared. He tells of how he thought he was

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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

Step 7: Humbly Asked Him to Remove Our Shortcomings

*We are not always willing
When we're told we need to 'ask'
And how do we do this 'humbly'?
It was 'Our Way' in the past!
But if we want these ways removed
That were causing us such grief,
We know we must go straight to Him
Asking, humbly, for relief.
We know that He will grant this,
If we allow Him to;
For He will change shortcomings
Into "Useful" things to do*

Eddie J.

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How and when did you get started in A.A.? Where did you sober up and go to your first meeting?

Came to AA in 1972, but did not get sober till 1982. I heard about AA through the yellow pages. I did not go to rehab, went to Camelon Club In Camden in 1982 and have been sober since. I got a sponsor (Mel H) at my first meeting. He was all about the Big Book, and we did the steps this way.

How many groups or meetings were in existence? Can you recall the formats used at some of these early meetings? How were they run?

There were about 150 meetings at the time, all 1.5 hours long, from 8:30 to 10:00 pm. Smoking was allowed. There was more open discussion. Newcomers were encouraged not to speak until they had 90 days. Then we would share, at a meeting our sponsor set up for us. At the end of the meeting we would stand in place, no hand holding, with a silent prayer. There were only annual medallions then, not like today.

When was A.A. started in your town or area? How often were meetings held?

Maple Shade was probably the first meeting in NJ, most meetings were in Philadelphia before that. Maple Shade meeting is about 75 years old. Ashland Men's meeting is 33 years old, started in Oct 1985. Club houses were major contributors to meetings in the early days, with meetings all day long. The 400 Club was started around 1975 by Little Joe and Sully.

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Back to School to Face Tradition 7

AA afforded me the opportunity to go back to school for a masters degree. While I was there, I met with groups on campus to explore creating a meeting on campus. I ran directly into facing with tradition 7.

The university was willing to offer a space for the meeting and potentially money for any literature, coffee, etc. that might be needed to get the group off the ground - or to help pay rent at a church facility that sits on campus.

I was tempted to begin moving forward, but luckily I had been a member of a homegroup in which we often covered the traditions. Taking free space may not normally be an issue, but all of the facilities required a university badge to access - meaning that it wouldn't truly be an open meeting for all alcoholics. Taking money from an outside organization also could put the group in an awkward place moving depending on the University's requests.

Rather than bolster my ego by being able to say that I created a meeting, we mutually agreed not to move forward. Sometimes the best action is no action.

Michael H

Trivia Question



July 2018: Who decides where Intergroup's money goes?

Answer to June 2018 question, How do you become an Intergroup Rep?

Intergroup Representatives are elected by the Homegroups to represent them in the South Jersey Intergroup Association. Anyone is welcome to attend an Intergroup meeting. If your Homegroup is not represented, we encourage you to come out so you can see what we do and let your Homegroup know what Intergroup offers. If you do that you will have a real good shot of being elected as your group's next Intergroup Rep!

Our meetings are at 8 pm on the 3rd Wednesday of each month at St. Bartholomew Episcopal Church, 1989 Marlton Pike (Rt 70), Cherry Hill. We recommend that visitors and new representatives arrive 15 minutes early to check in at the Unity table.

Impact

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okay after a year or two of sobriety. He thought he had things "under control."

You remember him as a fairly decent looking fellow of middle age. He now appears somehow aged. His hair thinner, some unnatural weight-gain, a bit of bloating, some more wrinkles. He looks worried and nervous; a bit scared even. It dawns upon you that alcohol has literally, 'kicked his ass!'

He takes you through the years; the barrooms, the nowhere jobs, the hopelessness, the wasted education, the nightly drinking, the damage to himself and to his family. You realize that he's reached the age where he doesn't have many chances left—it's do or die time for him, right now.

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He's back to try and salvage his life. He wants to try and do it right this time—to get a sponsor, work the Steps, keep a regular meeting schedule. You pray for him and hope for the best. You realize that only time will tell. Will he pass that magic mark where he stops just going through the motions, like last time, and truly accept the fact that he's an alcoholic and all of the consequences of that condition? Will he be spiritually moved at some point and come to genuinely understand who and what he is? There's absolutely no telling. He may be handing you the same crap as before. Only God knows at this point where he's headed.

You do know however that he's done you a huge favor by coming back to tell his story. He's brought you a gift that you can get

nowhere else but at this meeting; this meeting that you thought was going to be routine and average. He's made a tremendous impact on you this average, placid afternoon. He's rocketed you back to the truth of who and what you are.

A wave of peace and gratitude comes over you. He has done your research for you. He has answered any lingering questions or doubts you may have had. He has woken you up out of your sleep of long-term sobriety. You realize you've been "coasting" a bit lately; taking things for granted. He shakes you violently out of your sleep. There, but for the grace of God, and this program, go you.

Masonville Marty

Switzerland

From page 1

It would not have been possible to make that decision, or even have that conversation, had it not been for the tools that AA provided me.

Earlier that summer, just before that trip, I had redone my 4th/5th step, but when I got back home I had a whole new set of fears that hadn't existed before. Having just cleaned out my old resentments, fears, and other useless stuff, I now had space to work through the new set, which I did with the help of my sponsor and my higher power.

I felt sorry about leaving the South Jersey AA community. I was only just beginning to get to know myself, and felt that I needed to go to more meetings and talk to more people to continue making spiritual progress. There would not be that depth of support where I was going. Before leaving I tried to cram in what I could. But I realized I was getting ahead of myself again, and came to rely on faith that I'd find the support I'd need.

We were going to be living in Bern, and from what I could tell there were only four AA meetings there, all in the local Swiss German dialect, which is hard to understand even for a High German speaker (which I am not). I figured I'd try those German meetings, hopefully meet some people who spoke English, and maybe start an English-speaking group. As our departure date got closer, I looked at the website more closely and saw that one meeting had "Englische" in its description. My wife confirmed that it meant they

would speak English, which was a great relief to hear.

I've been attending that English-speaking meeting every Wednesday since I arrived in early April. It's tiny. There are only three

I figured I'd try those German meetings, hopefully meet some people who spoke English, and maybe start an English-speaking group.

members including me - one English woman and one German. They have both been attending this meeting for about 20 years, even though they each live over a half hour away. The first two meetings it was just me and the English woman. I was so grateful for her during that period! If it weren't for her there wouldn't have been a meeting. And the trouble she goes to! She is blind, so her husband drives her to the train. After taking the train to Bern, she takes a tram to the church. Then she gets it all set up with hot water and glasses for tea that she hauls upstairs. But, after a couple of weeks the meeting was feeling a bit stale, and I was glad when the third member started coming. Last Wednesday (May 23), neither of them would be able to make it, so they asked me to open the doors and chair the meeting. Well, of course I would, even though it seemed unlikely anyone else would show up. That evening it was pouring rain and I was running late. I had to take my

But after a couple days the conversation started getting serious, and a few times I got scared and shut it down. A few weeks later I

had a more open mind and in the fall we finally decided to move. I had a bicycle for the first time, and I was a little afraid of the route (steep, wet, cobblestone streets, and confusing bicycle lanes and laws). I didn't have a headlight or rain pants but I figured I'd be back home soon. Who would show up in this weather? Well, as the bells started to ring out 8:00, I saw a figure coming in out of the rain. I went to let him in and he said he was here for AA. What a miracle. I could tell he was American right away, and it was the best meeting since arriving here. He suggested that more people would attend if we moved it downtown. Our location is out of the way for visitors, and a little hard to find. I think that would be a change worth pursuing, though I'll need some help from others, including my higher power.

I've only been to one other meeting in Bern. There were nine people there and only three spoke some English. At one point, someone handed out a worksheet for doing a resentments inventory. They all started filling it out together as if none of them had done one before. I thought it was strange, but was glad to see they were actually discussing the steps. After the meeting I walked home with a guy who had lived in the USA for two years. He told me that the AA culture in Bern is more like a social club and not very deep, that they don't often talk about the steps, and had only done so at this meeting because of his prodding.

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July Service Opportunities

Answering Service:

If you or anyone you know would like to be added to the 12-step list please contact us via answeringservice@asj.org.

Archives:

If anyone has any memorabilia such as coins, meeting lists, grapevines, anything at all related to SJ AA they want to share please feel free to pass those items along by contacting archives@asj.org. They will be cataloged and kept at the SJ Intergroup office.

Budget & Finance:

If you have a question about how Intergroup allocates resources, a question about how much it costs to extend a particular service to our South Jersey community, or a suggestion for something you have always thought would be a great idea...this is the time of year to ask those questions! The 2019 budget will be taking shape in the coming months and we are at our

best when we collectively identify work in the community that is valuable and then make sure we allocate funds to programs. We are listening...

Newsletter: We would love any and all contributions - articles, poetry. This is a great way to do service! Please submit by Wed, July 11 for the Aug newsletter.

Public Information:

We are always looking for people to help distribute literature to Dr offices and hospitals. Please email Public Information at publicinfo@asj.org if interested in helping.

Social Events:

Members are needed for the Social Events Committee. Come out and make the fun happen! Please email socialevents@asj.org for more info.

Speaking Commitments

Hospitals and Institutions (H&I) is looking for speakers to visit the following facilities:

Please contact Frank or Debbie at handi@asj.org if you are able to take one of these commitments.

Sunday

Inspira Underwood Psych Unit – Woodbury, July 1, 4-5pm: 509 N Broad St Woodbury

Monday

Ancora – Hammonton, July 16, 30, 7-8pm: 202 Spring Garden Rd, Hammonton

Jefferson MICA Unit – Cherry Hill, July 16, 23, 30 11am-12pm: 2201 Chapel Ave W Cherry Hill (NEW BUILDING)

Maryville Men – Post House – Pemberton NJ July 2 8-9pm: 610 Browns Mills Road, Pemberton NJ

Tuesday

Maryville Womens Williamstown, July 31, 7-8pm: 1903 Grant Ave Williamstown

Cooper Psych Unit – Camden, June 26, July 24 8-9pm: 1 Cooper Plaza Camden

Wednesday

Jefferson Psych Unit – Cherry Hill, July 4, 11 7:45-8:45pm: 2201 Chapel Ave W Cherry Hill NJ

Unity Place I - Cherry Hill, June 27, July 4, 25 12:40-1:30pm: 1 Keystone Ave, Cherry Hill, NJ

Camden VOA – Camden, July 4, 11, 18, 25 7-8pm: 510 Liberty Street, Camden NJ

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Thursday

Ancora – Hammonton, June 28, July 19, 26 7-8pm: 202 Spring Garden Rd, Hammonton
Unity Place II – Hammonton, June 21, July 5, 19, 2-3 pm: 121 S. White Horse Pike, Hammonton
Daybreak – Atco, June 21, 28, July 12, 19, 26 10:30-12:00 noon: 368 White Horse Pike, Atco

Friday

Jefferson Psych Unit – Cherry Hill, July 27, 7-8pm: 2201 Chapel Ave W Cherry Hill
Maryville Womens' Williamstown NJ July 20, 7-8pm: 1903 Grant Ave. Williamstown

Saturday

Maryville Mens' Williamstown, July 28, 7-8pm: 1903 Grant Ave. Williamstown
Cooper Psych Unit – Camden, July 7, 21, 10:30-11:30am: 1 Cooper Plaza Camden
Cooper Psych Unit - Camden NJ June 23, 30, 8-9pm: 1 Cooper Plaza, Camden.

Switzerland

From page 4

He also said most people are reluctant to tell you their phone number, which was true. No one had offered me theirs. So I am feeling pretty motivated to start a new meeting, or revamp the existing English-speaking meeting. I just need to remember to do it with humility and patience, ask for help, and listen.

Unfortunately for me, the person that I walked home with is moving to Zurich next month. He told me that there are plenty of good

meetings there, so once I get settled and have more time I will venture out there. He also told me that there are some good NA meetings in Bern. He said NA is less formal and more friendly than AA, and English is more welcomed and understood. It's generally younger, and the younger Swiss speak more English.

On a personal note, things are going well here. I'm in regular contact with my sponsor in South Jersey, and I haven't had the urge to pick up a drink. The thought has crossed my mind that maybe I can leave my alcoholic past behind

and not worry about AA. But I know that alcoholics can't do that. My past, dark as it is, is one of my greatest possessions. I have to remember my past, and stay engaged in AA, in order to maintain and grow my spiritual practice. Without it, things would not be going so well. I still have my challenges, and I never know what new ones life will throw at me. I have to stay on defense, for alcohol is a cunning, baffling, and powerful opponent. I'll keep coming back to the Fellowship of the Spirit, joyfully trudging the road of Happy Destiny with all of you.

Anonymous

Eddie J

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What else do you know about the growth of A.A. during that period of time?

There were specialty groups when I first came in, such as Police, then Police and Fire, Doctors. In the late 70's and early 80's there was a system of counter measure cards. People with DUI's were sent to meetings by the courts. They would have to have a counter measure card signed by someone at the meeting, which they would bring back to the court to prove they had been at the meeting. Individual group conscious decided who would sign the cards. Both these things were causing controversy within the groups. Some groups were formed to get away from the counter measure cards. Some of the people having these signed were not alcoholics per se, and ended up

talking about what went on in closed meetings outside of the rooms. Meeting lists had a c for counter measure cards, and slowly groups began to assimilate out of the specialty group mentality.

What contributions did you, yourself, make to the growth of the Fellowship? (Don't be unnecessarily modest!)

I helped start the Ashland Men's meeting in October 1985 with Al B, Blue and some others; I helped facilitate opening up Back To The 40's meetings with Bill Knoll and Al B; started The Other 12 (traditions meeting in Runnemedede); Many Paths to Spirituality (in Runnemedede) and a Police and Fire meeting in Collingswood (this is no longer around).

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Eddie J.

From previous page

Father B at Ashland Church asked for an AA group to meet there. It took about 6 months to take off. Moorestown Men's, Philadelphia and Police and Fire supported the group. There were many motorcycle enthusiasts and public servants who joined the meeting, which made it feel like home to me.

I did and still do 12 step calls, sponsor men, run groups, and have been involved in Intergroup at all

levels – from homegroup rep, to committee chair, Intergroup chair and Trustee. I was also the GA rep.

Funny story, when I came in to AA, I was told I was going to be made Chairman. OH, this is good, I thought. They like me, know who I am! Well, I was chairman: I had to set up and put away the chairs, and clean up after the meetings. In those days we had cups and saucers.

What controversies over issues addressed in the Traditions can you recall people wrestling with?

The issue with counter measures helped change the wording about having an honest desire to stop drinking to a desire to stop drinking. Tradition 7 focus – controversy was resolved with group consensus. To open a new meeting we would knock on doors of churches or community halls/spaces and ask if we could start a meeting. We had one meeting in Winslow where instead of rent we would contribute donations a few times a year, such as candy for the Halloween parade. Otherwise we would pay rent.

What individuals were especially prominent in your sobriety?

My ex-wife was very important in my sobriety. She is the reason I got sober and stayed sober, even after the death of our son, Daniel. She also went to Al Anon. My first sponsor Mel H who I met at my first meeting, took me through the steps in the Big Book. He never answered any of my questions! Instead he would ask "Did you run it through the steps?" He encouraged me to sponsor people, which I started doing when I was 9 months sober. Al B was my first sponsee and we have been together for 36 years. Mel H showed me how to live and also how to die. He suffered from cancer, remained sober till the end with grace and dignity. We had 14 years together. My second sponsor, Marty C was also instrumental in my sobriety. A loving, caring man, he showed me how to adjust to the death of Mel, and keep my mind and heart open to what was new.

Little Joe, Sully, and all the road show guys were my early sobriety crew. We would all travel together to meetings. We would pick up newcomers and take them to meetings. The crew got so large, that we would sometimes be 25 people showing up at any given meeting! In those days if you showed up alone you got booed!

How were new members contacted? What kinds of Twelfth Step work were going on? Are there any Twelfth Step anecdotes that stick out in your mind that you'd care to share?

New members came to the meetings. Like me, I was given a meeting list and was told when I went to a meeting if someone shared something I liked, I was to

go and ask for their phone number. We were told to always bring the meeting list, a pen, and a quarter (for phone calls) to a meeting. We had to do the work for our sobriety. We also picked up people. I have been on the 12 step call list for the South Jersey Intergroup for many, many years. We get the call and go pick up a newcomer.

There was this guy, Larry G, who worked in the back room of my bar. He would spend his paycheck drinking at the bar, until one day I asked him if maybe he drank too much? He was my first 12th step "call". Larry ended up in AA and had 33 years of sobriety when he passed.

Today, A.A. is well known to, and supported by police officers, judges and corrections officials. What kind of relationship did A.A. in your area have with local authorities? How has that changed since you sobered up?

It was in the late 70's and early 80's that the Governor's Council on Alcoholism (was NJ Division of Alcoholism) has at its helm a member of AA, Riley Regan. The government wanted someone from AA, and Riley did end up taking the job.

Out of this came the decriminalization of alcoholism, giving validity to the disease. After this, people could not be locked up due to alcohol (which ended locking people up for the night to sober them up). The police, (myself included), now had to take them to a treatment center. Law enforcement became more of a social event rather than the law. Since insurance had to now pay for all this, detoxes and rehabs

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started popping up. Then in 28 days we would pick them up and bring them to a meeting. Side note: Riley Regan was the only paid person on the council in the early days. He was an armed robber, he shot himself in the foot, and eventually got sober. He stayed active in AA, and did much to help alcoholism being decriminalized; he was also instrumental in developing the IRDC.

Treatment facilities nowadays frequently host A.A. and other Twelve Steps meetings. Did any of them use a Twelve Step format or incorporate meetings into their structure?

Corrections facilities started AA meetings in jail because the people needed treatment. Ashland Mens started meetings at Riverfront Prison and the correctional facility at Fort Dix. There has been an issue in the past with the amount of clearance needed for anyone to go to a prison for a meeting. That has been changed, with the primary person obtaining clearance and taking a guest with them.

You can't force someone to go to a meeting.

When you first got sober, how did A.A.s interact with the media? Have you had any profound experiences sharing your relationship with alcohol with the public?

I did a radio talk show about AA. We talked about meetings, what AA is about. We never used last names, so it remained anonymous. I think this was a good idea, as it gave people an idea of what AA was about. PSA's were also common at this time. Now, media coverage goes through GSO. It used to go through Intergroup, Public Relations. (Public Relations still works with high schools in the community).

Do you think your group(s) has had an influence in your community? If so, how?

I was the first Camden cop to get sober and let people know about it. We started the Camden County Stress Unit to help fellow policemen deal with their disease. I taught this program in Canada and at Yale. (Yes, I can say I went to Yale!) We did 12 step work this way, and it became a positive influence on the police force.

What do you remember of early conferences, assemblies, and conventions? Can you recall opening intergroup or central offices?

We rented a barn in Medford for the Intergroup Office. The space became small quickly, so we moved to Pennsauken (mid to late 80's) and hired our first office manager, Bob Bingham.

Have you had any contact with G.S.O.? I was an area 45 rep.

In the early days of the Fellowship all we had was the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*, common sense and your compassion.

How did early A.A.s treat newcomers, constant slippers and Thirteenth steppers?

Newcomers were treated with utmost respect. The continuous slippers—we referred to them as the golden slippers club, and cautioned people/newcomers to stay away from them. 13th steppers were not only out of control, frowned upon. We took responsibility for our own group.

In what ways has A.A. changed over the years?

In the 40's you became a card carrying member of AA after you finished your steps. The card would have your sobriety date, as well as the date you finished your steps. Then you were allowed to go to open meetings. You also needed to start sponsoring people. As I mentioned before, coins were only given out annually.

Rehabs have changed meetings a lot. We did not used to hug, get into a circle or say the Lord's Prayer at the end of meetings. We would have a silent prayer and stay in place.

The ages of people coming into AA are a lot younger than when I came in. I was one of the only young people around in those days