

STEP EIGHT

Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.

When I began my 8th Step list, I struggled with the phrase “persons we had harmed”. For me, there were a handful of people I had absolutely harmed. I had been emotionally abusive, put them in physical danger, and so on, but most of the relationships in my life weren’t jammed up because of outward actions. Instead, those relationships were blocked by my unwillingness to share myself with other people without copious evidence that there was something in it for me. My sponsor helped me recognize this and asked me to consider people in my life from whom I was withholding love, affection, and kindness as I made my 8th Step list.

A few months later, as I browsed a social media site, I saw a picture of a friend of mine with his family in Disney World. This friend had been gravely ill, but the guilt I felt over withholding kindness from him in the past made me afraid to ask him how he was doing now. Having done some amends at this point, I recognized that this uneasiness about my friend was an indication I had some cleaning to do on my side of the street.

I sent my friend a message online and asked if we could meet for me to make amends. We had coffee, and I told him how my selfishness often kept me from opening up more to him about how I appreciated his talents and sense of humor. Walking away from our talk a few hours later, face hurting from smiling, I felt the presence of God in my life.

My friend and I had a few more opportunities to spend some time together, even as his illness returned and eventually took his life a few years after my amends. Since he’s passed, I’ve joined with some mutual friends of his to raise money for a charity in his name, something I believe has brought a bit of solace to his family. Without a Higher Power in my life, I was a person afraid to ask a sick man how he’s doing; with a Higher Power in my life I could be a helpful friend.

I believe excessive fear, that emotion that steals hours of my life by turning me away from my Higher Power and his children, has caused me to keep many of the people in my life at arm’s-length. I’m scared of their judgment and often don’t see enough “in it for me” to push through that fear. This program has given me an experience of sublime joy at opening myself to other people and an other-centered purpose in my dealings with them. I don’t think it is hyperbole to say that God has radically reshaped my life, from removing my obsession with drink to things more subtle, but no less significant.

I hope that as we try to practice the 8th Step in our lives, we ask our Higher Power to open our minds to a broader notion of what it means to “harm” our brothers and sisters. Because someone shared that notion with

me, I got a bit more time with a friend and a spiritual experience that will likely be with me as long as I live.

Andy, Collingswood Monday Night

TRADITION EIGHT

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

The Eighth Tradition serves as an essential principle to AA unity. For this spiritual program’s survival, we must focus on keeping the risks of monetary involvement to a minimum while recognizing that some financial exchange is necessary to keep our service centers operational. Tradition Eight guides us regarding where we draw the line in the sand between paid and unpaid work in AA.

Twelfth step work must never be paid. It is language of the heart from one alcoholic to another where trust is formed with the understanding that our aim is to be helpful, not to profit financially. Twelfth step work keeps us aligned with our primary purpose; to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety. Essentially, money and spirituality do not mix with our primary purpose. Financial incentive risks compromising and undermining twelfth step work in its entirety.

A miracle often occurs when twelfth step work offers helpfulness alone as the goal, which results in an intangible gift to both the giver and the receiver. Thus, our language of the heart is offered freely, as it was freely given to us. Again, as mentioned specifically in the Eighth Tradition’s text: “Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional.”

Controversy has arisen over the years as AA has employed special workers. Some have asserted that such employment professionalizes AA. Where is the line between professionalism and non-professionalism? While twelfth step work remains unpaid, work that helps to make twelfth step work possible is allowed and is compliant with Tradition Eight. Telephones need to be answered, and secretarial responsibilities are required to keep AA functioning properly. Additionally, it is acceptable for members of AA to utilize their knowledge to work as individuals in enterprises outside of AA without violating this tradition.

In conclusion, “Our twelfth step is never to be paid for, but those who labor in service for us are worthy of their hire.” Wilson, B. (1953) *Twelve Steps & Twelve Traditions*. page 171. Alcoholics Anonymous World Services.

Lina C.

Sobriety during Covid

This year as I approach another AA anniversary, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed our practices, modified our social behavior and affected those of us in the rooms of recovery as it has every other person in or out of recovery, networks and fellowships. I am currently attending Zoom meetings I frequented in person and Zoom meetings I have never attended in other states. The variety and availability of AA meetings on Zoom is one of the positive effects the pandemic has had on my recovery.

I currently work a peculiar schedule that prevents me from seeing sponsees and friends regularly on weekends. It is no coincidence that those near and dear to me tell me the Intergroup newsletter needs articles and to keep writing. So right here, right now I hope to be of service to the fellowship. I am blessed to have not lost my job, am not facing health or financial issues, and have experienced minimal disruption to small group social activities.

I frequently hear AA members share that they are isolated, lonely and depressed. Facing job loss, business interruption or dissolution, health issues, financial crises, lack of child care, closed schools, unavailability of social services and more, the unknown future looms and conjures up increased fear and uncertainty for many.

I heard someone share this week that they have no friends and have been alone since March. I have suggested to sponsees that are lonely to make a friend at a meeting, to call someone who needs help or share something that resonates with them. That's how I found my sponsor a long time ago. She sounded kind and sincere when she shared. Being relatively new in sobriety, I approached her after my home group meeting and felt awkward striking up a conversation, but the rest is history some 20+ years later. Even at a Zoom meeting, you can share with a newcomer or someone struggling by chatting with them privately.

Through the years, I have sponsored many women and made lifelong friends in the rooms of recovery. Here are some of the things I do and have suggested to them and others to stay connected: Walk with a friend on quiet streets, hiking trails, paths in parks, and on the beach. It's almost guaranteed that after two, three, or five miles, I feel better not only physically, but mentally and spiritually than when I (we) started. There is nothing more precious to me than sharing with my besties and my friends, especially during uncertain times, in uncharted territory. That's how we learn and grow together. I have always shared honestly in my relationships and the benefit to both of us in the relationship is exponential. Sharing our life experiences with each other it helps our self-esteem, aids in decision making, provides answers to questions, sheds light on darkness, and teaches us about life.

If you have no one to walk with, smile and wave to neighbors or anyone you pass on the way. Compliment someone on their energy (like a runner), their adorable baby, their beautiful garden, their cute dog, or their colorful outfit. Little by little you will establish a rapport that may turn a stranger into an acquaintance, an acquaintance into a friend, a friend into a walking buddy. Remember, inch by inch it's a cinch and mile by mile it's a trial. Start with a small gesture or a kind word. The rest will take care of itself.

As a wise guru of recovery told me in 2006, not everyone is in your life forever; some for a reason, some for a season. My network of ever-changing women has not only helped me stay sober, but brought me through rough patches, helped with decision-making, and created strong bonds of friendship along the way. It is always a two-way street. By helping someone else or just listening, it never fails to not only fulfill our primary purpose, but enlarges MY life tenfold. And, of course, if I suggest tools to pick up to sponsees, I darn well better be using them myself!

I have also started attending an outside AA meeting that was started to bring people together, provides familiarity and comfort, and is welcome to all. For those who do not yet feel comfortable attending an inside AA meeting, outside meetings allow you to bring your own chair, sit as far away from others as you like and participate in person. Seeing and hearing our fellow members face to face can bring us out of isolation and darkness into the light of shared principles and traditions. An added benefit of meeting outdoors is to soak in the early evening calm, summer breezes and sounds of nature in the background.

So, to anyone suffering with depression or loneliness, I hope you can share of yourself with another fellow traveler trudging this road to a happy destiny whether online or in person to enlarge your (and their) spiritual world. Thank you to all of our service-minded AAs that make the effort and take the action to set up, chair and speak at outdoor (and indoor) meetings, gather friends and newcomers outside their homes, coordinate and chair Zoom meetings and carry the message of AA and recovery during these unprecedented times of COVID-19 and our fellowship's "new normal."

South Jersey Girl

Answering Service Needs You...

Volunteers are needed for the 12-step list. Areas we need most help: Berlin, Camden, Hammonton, and Salem. If you or anyone you know would like to be of service, please have them contact the Answering Service at answeringservice@asaj.org or invite us to speak at your home group.

YOUNG AND SOBER

I thought my life was over when I checked into rehab in May of 2009 - little did I know, my life was just beginning. Right up to that moment in time, I had merely been existing. I lived to drink and didn't really care about much else; not college, not friends, not family, and most certainly not myself. So I ended up in rehab a week after finishing freshman year of college. I was 18 years old and a full-blown alcoholic. I took comfort in knowing that I probably would live past my 19th birthday. I knew nothing of the disease of alcoholism, and I was even more ignorant to the concept (and yes, possibility) of recovery.

So off I went to rehab. I figured I would give it a shot for my parents, and could always just off myself if it didn't work. I lacked the honest desire to stop drinking, thinking it impossible that I could be an alcoholic; I had never even had a legal drink! And then came that dreaded word....."God." I was devoutly atheist, and was offended by the concept of insanity implicated in step 2. Me? Insane?! Never!!!! This was all just a huge cult, and I was not drinking the Koolaid. I was blessed to have amazing and patient counselors, who urged me to simply question if my behavior was "sane." Obviously, I really did need to be brainwashed.

After 3 months of rehab, I moved in to a halfway house. It was there that I learned about accountability, and living life on life's terms. I got a job and a bank account. I learned how to write a check. Amidst the chaos of living with 15 other women in early sobriety, I had FUN. Right around 6 months I realized I wanted to stay sober for more than just my parents- I wanted it for me. I started to laugh again, and in the privacy of my own little room (when my roommate was at work, obviously) I started to pray.

I did everything wrong except drink. I got a sponsor because I had to. I had mostly accepted steps 1 and 2, but I treated the book and the steps like schoolwork. I half-measured everything, finding a project to work on instead of myself. I moved into a sober house where I was proudly paying my own rent and working my boyfriend's program. I saw my sponsor when I attended our homegroup. I was blissfully ignorant that I was just a dry drunk, having a great time fellowshiping and suffering from untreated alcoholism. My life came to a halt around 18 months when I finally realized that my beloved project had been lying, cheating, using, etc. What a painful discovery, that no human power could relieve me of my alcoholism (nor could I do so for anyone!) My sponsor gave me an ultimatum, and by the grace of god I found my hand in hers as we knelt and said the third step prayer. She helped me keep the whole "God" thing super simple - was I willing to believe that she believed? I had no argument there. She pointed out that "God

could and would if he were sought; " I didn't have to find anything, just remain willing to seek!

She took me through the rest of the steps, and I realized I had been robbing myself of the opportunity to just accept help and develop a meaningful and trusting relationship with someone who wanted nothing from me, except to see me sober and happy. And that I helped other alcoholics achieve sobriety. I had always had an AA job, but I was then able to start giving away what had been so freely given to me. I felt the best high of my life when I saw the lightbulb turn on for my sponsee. No drink or drug ever gave me such a feeling, and I finally understood the miracle of the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous.

I have been fortunate enough to grow up in AA. The promises have all come true for me, and I have received innumerable blessings. I celebrated my 21st birthday, surrounded by people who truly cared for me. I amended relationships, and am able to continue those living amends today. I graduated college with a Bachelors of Science in Nursing. I landed my dream job, and have now been a nurse for almost five years. I AM RESPONSIBLE. I remain in the middle of the herd, actively participating in unity, service and recovery. I work with a sponsor (who knows she is my sponsor!), and I am blessed with sponsees. I absolutely insist on enjoying life (I wouldn't have stuck around if this weren't the best gig out there). I try to live just one day at a time, doing my best to align my will with gods will. Most importantly, I continue to seek a better relationship with myself and God.

Just because I'm sober doesn't mean life is all rainbows and cupcakes. Life still happens, and sometimes it hits hard. I have felt immense pain in sobriety, but have also experienced happiness - even serenity amidst calamity. I have been shown how to put one foot in front of the other and walk through the hardships guaranteed in life with dignity and grace. Better yet, I have been able to help others by sharing my experience, strength and hope. I used to think alcoholism was a curse, but I now understand what it means to be a "grateful" alcoholic. I was given a precious gift - the ability to help another alcoholic like no one else can. And today, I cherish that gift.

In Loving Service, Jen G.



BIARRITZ INTERNATIONAL A.A. CONVENTION

October 9, 2020 to October 11, 2020

Venue: Le Grand Large , 1 rue Dalbarade, 64200 Biarritz, France

DURING COVID-19 LOCK-DOWN VENUE HOTEL RESERVATIONS ARE SHUT.

(Attempts to book dates on the hotel website will show hotel as fully booked.)

- Al-Anon & YPAA participation
- Theme: KEEP IT SIMPLE

Speakers: Karen Casey, Ph.D., lecturer, and program member since 1974 will be the speaker of note, Karen will also facilitate a two-hour workshop/presentation on the Saturday afternoon.

Karen is author of recovery reference books "Each Day A New Beginning", "In God's Care", among over 25 other books.

ALL accommodations HAVE UNOBSTRUCTED OCEAN/SUNSET VIEW

- Fly direct to Biarritz Airport (BIQ)
- Website: <https://aaconventionbiarritz.com>
- Registration: Pre-Registration (online) €35.00 (after 30 August €42.00)
 - Venue Accommodation from €55.00/night/person (B&B)
 - Alternative Accommodation from €30.00/night/person (B&B)
- Extend your stay at convention discounted tariffs, enjoy tourism in the region



One Day at a Time

“One day at a time” the old timers would say. My first thought was don’t they know what I have to do? Easy for you to say, I thought. The old timers would chuckle and say all you have is 24 hours to not drink, hit a meeting and call another drunk.

Well thanks to my higher power, the 12 steps, and all of the other recovering drunks like myself, we just got 17 years of 24hrs. The one thing I keep in mind is yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, but today is a gift. For this drunk, on any given day, I only have to do that for 24 hours.

Most importantly, you were asking me to come back and don't give up until the miracle happens. You said if you do what we do, I could have a sober life like you. I was desperate and bought into it.

I have a life beyond what I would have settled for and, as they say, these are suggestions, but for this Irish Catholic Alcoholic, they were instructions. A few little instructions gave me back my family, my mom, and a peaceful life!

Thank You AA and all those on this Journey with me. I Will Keep Coming Back!

Maureen M.



EDITORIAL POLICY

Anonymous South Jersey is a monthly newsletter published by and for members of South Jersey Alcoholics Anonymous. 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@asj.org.

THIS MONTH IN AA HISTORY

8/8/1879 – Dr. Bob born in St. Johnsbury, VT.

August, 1934: Rowland H and Cebra persuade court to parole Ebby T. to them.

8/11/38 – Akron & NY members begin writing stories for Big Book.

8/16/39 – Dr Bob and Sister Ignatia admit first alcoholic to St. Thomas Hospital, Akron, Ohio.

August, 1941: 1st meeting in Orange County, California held in Anaheim

8/19/41 – 1st AA Meeting in Colorado is held in Denver.

8/1/43 – Washington Times-Herald (DC) reports on AA clubhouse, to protect anonymity withholds address.

8/3/54 – Brinkley S. gets sober at Towns Hospital after 50th detox.

8/28/54 – 24 Hours a Day is published by Richmond W.

August, 1981 - Sales of the Big Book passes 3 million.

8/18/88 – 1st Canadian National AA Convention in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Words of Wisdom

Last month I volunteered to write the *Words of Wisdom* section of the South Jersey Intergroup Newsletter. It seemed like an easy assignment. After all, sober or not, nothing comes easier to alcoholics than imparting “words of wisdom”, right? I mentioned to my wife (a long time Al Anon) that I had volunteered to do this. She sighed and pointed out a fundamental problem. I don’t remember *exactly* what she said, but I think it had something to do with alcoholics, big egos, and the ability to share something you don’t have.

So here I sit in front of my computer in my unairconditioned attic man cave struggling to think of some words of wisdom while keeping the cat off the keyboard. It is August 2nd. I promised this on August 1st. What to do.....?

Well - as previously noted - we alcoholics are prolific generators of slogans, proverbs, and sage advice in all forms. Some of this is of questionable value (I used to go to a meeting where “*live easy but think first*” was an often-used slogan for years and I still don’t know what that’s supposed to mean). Some in my opinion is just plain wrong (e.g. “*if you’re a bank robber and you come into AA, you’ll be a better bank robber*”). Then again, in much the same way that a large enough number of chimpanzees with typewriters will eventually produce a Shakespeare play, it is inevitable that some of the slogans, proverbs, etc. generated by recovering alcoholics are true gems. So, you see: I don’t need to invent any

words of wisdom; the Fellowship has done this for me. Here are some of my favorites, generally not heard in South Jersey, in no particular order:

“*This isn’t ‘Well Peoples Anonymous’*” – Regarding the inevitability of recovering alcoholics to inconsistently practice the principles of the program in their lives.

“*Two dead batteries don’t start a car*” – Regarding “boy meets girl on AA campus” relationships.

“*If you think you can control the disease of alcoholism solely with will power, try using will power the next time you have a bad case of diarrhea*”.

“*My struggle working this program has never been to ‘find my inner child’. It was finding my inner adult*”.

“*If you get hit by a train, it’s the locomotive, not the caboose, that kills you. Likewise, it is the first, not the last, drink that does the real damage to an alcoholic*”.

I dare say that every AA in South Jersey is familiar with the saying “*Do the next right thing*”. Less well known, but equally important, is its corollary: “*Don’t do the next wrong thing*”.

“*It’s not a big deal - it’s a little deal*” – Regarding keeping things in perspective (OK - I actually heard this from my 5-year-old granddaughter who, as far as I know, is not an alcoholic. What can I say – I take wisdom wherever I find it).

“*Easy does it, but do it*” – Regarding the need to actually start working the steps and keep working them consistently.

“*The thing you put in front of your sobriety will be the second thing you lose when you go back out*”.

“*The animals that stray from the herd are the ones that get eaten*” – Regarding the importance of fellowship.

“*There’s nothing so bad that a drink won’t make it worse*” - Regarding staying sober under any and all conditions.

Hopefully, someone gets something out of this random collection of program wisdom. If not, there’s always the *Words of Wisdom* section in the September Newsletter.

Paul S.



Getting Sober During A Pandemic

I decided to stop drinking on January 5, 2020. The holidays were over, and I had just returned from vacationing in Florida. While I kept it together during a family visit, I knew I had a drinking problem, and I had to do something about it. I called my local AA phone number on January 3. The gentleman who answered the phone suggested I download the "Meeting Guide" app that would give me all the meetings being held near my location. This app was a godsend! I waited about a week to attend my first meeting which was right near my house. It was a Saturday noon meeting, and I liked the group well enough. At that meeting, I was told about a women-only meeting that was held on Tuesday evenings.

This meeting was a much larger group and a little overwhelming, but the women were welcoming, provided me phone numbers, and gave me my Big Book! I quickly learned there were many types of meetings so I then attended a Sunday afternoon meeting that focused on the 12 traditions. The women in this meeting were very warm and made me feel very welcome as this is where I met my current sponsor, and it became my home group! All this, and it's still January!

My sponsor and I started to review the big book and slowly worked each step. I had one business trip in January which was challenging as everyone drinks on the company's dime, but she called me to check in during the trip. I went out once or twice with girlfriends in February, but didn't drink. I had received my two chips by the beginning of March! Coronavirus had been in the news for a few weeks during this time, but then it got serious very quickly. Our governor announced that our state was now in quarantine, and meetings stopped abruptly. Everything changed, and life became very strange.

Everyone was scared of the virus, and getting food and necessities was a real challenge. I was fortunate to be able to work from home, but our teenagers were now virtually learning which wasn't ideal for anyone. Every night was the same, and we couldn't see friends or family. Not being able to relieve the stress, boredom and anxiety with alcohol was very difficult, but I continued to work the steps with my sponsor on the phone. Staying in touch with my sponsor, friends and

family helped a lot during this unprecedented time. Then Zoom came on the scene which allowed the fellowship to hold meetings virtually. I had never heard of Zoom before the quarantine, but quickly became adept at it. I was so grateful to hear and see my home group even though it was not the same as in person. We kept the same structure of an in-person meeting, but there are no coins or hugs every month. However, the fellowship remained strong and pulled together during a difficult time in everyone's lives. Since the virus makes it difficult to be of service, I volunteered for the AA answering service as I wanted to be helpful in a safe way. In some ways, the quarantine helped my sobriety because I couldn't be tempted to go to bar as they were all closed, or meet up with friends for a drink, but it took me a few months to feel that way.

All organizations and businesses are going through transitions during the pandemic which will have long-term effects on how they will operate in the future. I hope we all move forward in learning new ways to reach out to each other to stay sober!

Sue.



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