



Sober Time

The Newsletter of the Central Jersey Intergroup

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Editor's Notebook

A recovering alcoholic's baseline New Year's resolution lasts all of 24 hours: not to drink for one day. The next day there's a fresh resolution, and an ongoing pattern of renewed intentions going forward. For those with grander New Year's resolutions extending beyond this primary vital foundation, may your dreams likewise come to happy fruition.

For our part, count on the Central Jersey Intergroup in 2024 to renew its long-standing resolution to serve the regional AA community in useful ways. From meeting lists and literature, to community outreach and institutional speaking commitments, plus much else, CJI's volunteers have recommitted to critical service resolutions.

We're likewise grateful to those who contributed to our newsletter's Winter Issue, sharing invaluable experience, strength, and hope. Christina M describes how the program helped her regain her daughter's trust and deal with a family health crisis. Fred H explains how intolerance of his own flaws made it difficult to accept others uncritically. Beatrice WC tells us how she balances solitude and connection. And we look at willingness from two angles thanks to Chris M and Elliott S.

Again in this issue we hear from a long-timer, Jim V with 45 years, and a relative newcomer, Eileen B, with just over a year. Tony G pays a heartfelt tribute to his sponsors over the years. Newcomer Pete M, who celebrated 90 days on Christmas Eve, describes his early hurdles and hopes. Then we have Diane D reflecting on long-ago sinister conceptions through the notes she kept along the way. Finally, I make a case for viewing AA as both a spiritual and religious program.

Thanks also go to Kathy N for her skillful editing and Joel B for a cartoon straight out of the Big Book's Chapter 3. Let's end with a bit a house-keeping: With this issue, our newsletter debuts a new name. While you enjoy your sober time, we hope you'll enjoy our "Sober Time." ☐

Rob M, Editor

How AA Prepared Me For a Family Health Crisis

Christina M, Princeton

Editor's note: This alcoholic had 18 months under her belt when her granddaughter was diagnosed with leukemia. The time and care she now devotes to help her daughter and her family through this difficult time has helped further cement a once-strained relationship. Christina now refers to her sense of gratitude in the face of a life-threatening disease as "an embarrassment of riches."

Before my life became unmanageable, about the time when denial of my alcoholism had reached a level of insanity, I became a mother. I was blessed with a beautiful, bright, healthy daughter whom I will call Grace.

From her early days, she demonstrated a strength of character when facing the challenges of growing up: humor in the face of frustration, sadness in the face of loss, anger in the face of powerlessness, and more than anything, love and forgiveness in the face of disappointment. I found her intellect daunting, and her resilience, even as a child, confounding. But as she grew older and taller and stronger, as she became her own person, I slowly became undone. And alcoholism was my undoing.

Our lives ran a bit on parallel tracks. As Grace prepared for kindergarten, I returned to law school in my 30s. As Grace began to play soccer competitively, I entered the practice of law. When she was admitted to a prestigious private high school, with her younger brother six years behind, I struggled to succeed at a challenging law career which brought me little, if any, personal satisfaction.

Balancing work and family became an empty daily juggling act, dropping balls when I could not meet the demands of parenting due to work, or alternatively settling for "meeting ex-

pectations" at work because I prioritized my family over billable hours. At a prestigious university Grace managed to balance the challenges of college life — playing soccer, completing her pre-med studies while excelling at art history, and donating her time to charitable events. Meantime my sense of purpose was dissolving into apathy, my passion for life gone. I filled the void with alcohol.

With her immense capacity for forgiveness, Grace tried to save me, but she wisely continued on with her life and began setting boundaries. She completed medical school, walking onstage to collect her medical degree with her three-month old son in her arms. She went on to complete her pediatric residency, finishing that program with an infant daughter and preschooler in tow.

My daughter began to trust me again with caring for her children.

From there she joined a pediatric practice and then welcomed a third child, Teresa, all the while excelling at

something where I'd failed: devoting her life to what mattered to her, valuing herself by her own measures instead of those of others, and finding joy in simple things. And as I saw her rise, I receded into my alcoholic depths. When I recognized that both physical and emotional boundaries were necessary to keep me from harming those I loved most, I hit my bottom.

And so, after many failed attempts to manage my alcoholism, and IOPs completed halfheartedly with an eye still on the bottle, I took myself to a rehab, admitted my powerlessness over alcohol, and turned my will and my life over to the care of God as I understood Him. Just as the Promises promised, I became amazed with the changes in my life before I was halfway through. My daughter began to trust me with caring for her children. No longer was she reluctant to call me after 7 o'clock at

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night. The wall between us began to come down, one day at a time.

Then life as we knew it changed. As I approached 18 months of sobriety, my youngest grandchild Teresa was diagnosed with leukemia. Grace and her husband were broken, facing a positive long-term prognosis but conditioned upon completing a grueling chemotherapy treatment plan over the next two and a half years. They quickly re-prioritized their lives, Grace leaving her medical practice to care for her daughter, and both parents determined to maintain a sense of normalcy for Teresa's older siblings.

This is where the sober me stepped up. Living nearby, I'm able to cook dinners, do laundry, and transport my grandson to soccer or his sister to gymnastics. I can mend torn stuffed animals and sit with my daughter and Teresa in the infusion lab at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. I rise before dawn to accompany my grandchildren to the school bus. And more than anything, I'm able to answer the phone in

the middle of night, soberly and gratefully, when my daughter needs me. Sometimes just my honest, sober presence is a comfort to her.

Today I have 21 months of sobriety, with more than two years to go until Teresa completes her chemotherapy. Since her diagnosis, I have felt greater despair, anger, and pure sadness than I ever experienced as an active alcoholic. I have had every reason for an alcoholic to justify a drink, but I have not done so.

Call it an embarrassment of riches, an overwhelming sense of gratitude in the face of a life-threatening disease. While modern medicine promises a cure for Teresa, my alcoholism is incurable. Despite the challenges that Teresa's treatment plan pose every day, I am able to find joy and serenity. Why? Because I have found a solution, the fellowship of AA, which allows me to remain present and emotionally available to my daughter and her family, no matter what the future holds, as long as I keep on my sober path. Φ

Central Jersey Intergroup Answering Service Schedule

Central Jersey Intergroup Monthly Phone Commitment								
OPEN	Confirmed							6/7/2023
Week	Time	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	12:00 AM - 8:00 AM	Ken	Allentown Men's BB		Anthony V	Fred	John K	Lou
	8:00 AM - 1:00 PM	Kim C.	Camille	Jamie C.	Camille	Jay F	Beth B	Donald L
	1:00 PM - 6:00 PM	Lou	Lamonte	Eric D	Cathy G	Ed M	Eric D	Murr
	6:00 PM - 12:00 AM		Allentown Men's BB		Angie N		John F	Live
2	12:00 AM - 8:00 AM	Ken	Cheri	Brian B	Anthony V	Fred	John K	John M
	8:00 AM - 1:00 PM	Kim C.	Camille	Jamie C.	Peg M	Jay F	Beth B	Donald L
	1:00 PM - 6:00 PM	Lou	Lamonte	Eric D	Cathy G	Ed M	Eric D	Murr
	6:00 PM - 12:00 AM	Shelly R	Nellie			Nicole M	Prin Alt Group	Todd
3	12:00 AM - 8:00 AM	Ken	Cheri		Randi J	Fred	John K	Lou
	8:00 AM - 1:00 PM	Kim C.	Camille	Casalon	Linda C	Jay F	Beth B	Donald L
	1:00 PM - 6:00 PM	Lou	Lamonte	Eric D	Cathy G	Ed M	Eric D	Murr
	6:00 PM - 12:00 AM	Tara M	Nellie		Randi J	PenWedNight	Eric D	Todd
4	12:00 AM - 8:00 AM	Ken	Cheri	Brian B	Anthony V	Fred	John K	Lou
	8:00 AM - 1:00 PM	Kim C.	Camille	Casalon	Camille	Jay F	Beth B	Donald L
	1:00 PM - 6:00 PM	Lou	Lamonte	WWG	Cathy G	Ed M	Eric D	Murr
	6:00 PM - 12:00 AM	Shelly R	Nellie			Nicole M	Eric D	Todd
5	12:00 AM - 8:00 AM	Ken	Judy	Judy	Anthony V	Judy	Judy	Judy
	8:00 AM - 1:00 PM	Kim C.	Camille	Kathy G	Camille	Jay F	Kathy G	Donald L
	1:00 PM - 6:00 PM	Lou	Lamonte	Eric D	Cathy G	Ed M	Eric D	Murr
	6:00 PM - 12:00 AM	Shelly R	Nellie		Angie N			

For Info or Signup call/text/email Jim G or Kim C at: Jim G: 609-271-9693 jimgraz13@gmail.com,

Kim C: 609-902-5758 Kimberly.connell2014@gmail.com

Troubles With Tolerance: Rejoining the Human Race

Fred H, Princeton

Editor's note: This alcoholic's dim view of himself translated into a dislike of just about everyone else: misanthropy founded on self-loathing. Only when he learned to accept and love himself was he able to do the same for others. Today this open-minded tolerance is a keystone to his program.

My home group, the Winner's Circle of Princeton, devotes every Wednesday to reading and reflection on the Twelve Steps as elaborated in *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*. As we read aloud the chapter on Step 10 one recent morning, a sentence leapt out at me with the force of a revelation: "Finally, we begin to see that all people, including ourselves, are to some extent emotionally ill as well as frequently wrong, and then we approach true tolerance and see what real love for our fellows actually means."

I read these words as yet another of Alcoholics Anonymous'

abundant promises. But more than that, they sounded a keynote in my own journey to sobriety. This is because throughout the 30-odd years I lived as a suffering alcoholic, I was utterly intolerant of both myself and of others. Having no love whatsoever in my heart for myself, it was impossible for me to understand what real love for our fellows actually means.

Growing up, my family culture was one of high professional accomplishment, where even the whiff of failure was not an option. Along with an insatiable curiosity about the world, this led me down the academic path to universities whose standards of scholarly achievement fanned into a roaring blaze the fire of perfectionism my family had kindled. As a scholar I have had some modest successes, yet these came at the cost of decades-long submission

to emotional and spiritual suffering.

And, I must add, bodily suffering — because the only means by which I could alleviate the relentless pressure to succeed, to attain the standard of perfection I thought was expected of me, was to seek oblivion in the bottle. I need not spell out what years of drinking does to the human body: In my case, devolving from a vigorous, healthy student-athlete, captain of the wrestling team, to a quivering emotional, physical wreck of a middle-aged scholar increasingly short on concrete results. I became more and more isolated from, and bitterly intolerant of, the world and its people, about which I had been so avidly curious in my youth.

Tolerance of myself and others, and acceptance of imperfection, bring me closer to true charity.

For most of my adult life I have felt paralyzed, unable to tolerate the possibility of failure in myself. Is it any wonder that such intolerance of my own humanity, which is to say my essential

fallibility, led me to harbor such disdain and intolerance for the shortcomings of others? I could not even tolerate the notion that I was an alcoholic. If acceptance is the answer, I was far from finding it.

I once heard a well-known actor in recovery asked by an interviewer about the root cause of his illness. His response was one word: "fear." I no longer ask myself the "why" question concerning my alcoholism. But I do know that when alcohol found me, or rather I found it, it posed as the ultimate solution to my fear.

My earliest memories are of the joys I had in exploring nature, reading books, collecting things — these activities I did blissfully *alone*. Yet when it came time to participate in human-

Continued

ity, to be with people, going to school and joining the Cub Scouts, dark clouds of fear enshroud these memories. I had the sense I would never be good enough, never be liked; that I would always be found wanting in some regard or another. From an early age I avoided people, places, and things, based on fear.

When I discovered alcohol, not only did it assuage my fear, it fueled my egoistic fantasies of perfection and success. In my alcoholic fantasy world, I could achieve anything — being a great scholar, an ideal husband and father, etc. — solely under my own steam without anyone's help. Still, booze provided no real solution to my relentless fear of being a fallible human, and at a deep level I knew that by trying to accomplish anything risked giving the lie to my perfectionism.

So isolation, avoidance, delay, procrastination — all buttressed by alcohol — became my lifestyle. How could the fantasy of my own perfect humanity ever leave my basement, my study, my garage? As the old wisdom has it, the perfect is the enemy of the good. I could not tolerate anything less than perfection in myself, and thus I could not see the goodness of humanity writ large. A student of humanity by training, my misanthropy and intolerance toward people in the depths of my alcoholism still shocks me today.

The first inkling that I might be able to tolerate myself, to accept all of my own humanity, came when walking into the rooms of AA, where I was greeted with genuine understand-

ing, love, and tolerance. Acceptance is indeed the answer, and I have found true serenity in acknowledging my alcoholism and really taking that 1st Step. By identifying with others, by participating actively in the fellowship, I am able to share in a common humanity.

I can say with conviction that my alcoholism, and the solution to it offered by AA, was what gave me the gift of seeing myself as a member of the human race, neither better nor worse than any of its members. And this has conferred an even greater gift: understanding that tolerance of oneself and of others, and a loving acceptance of imperfection, bring me closer to true charity. For me this means extending my love of myself to my neighbors near and far.

If anything in my AA experience AA counts as a spiritual transformation for me, it is this. In coming to tolerate and love myself, free of the fantastic, self-centered ravings of my alcohol-ensnared mind, I feel a profound freedom to extend that charitable love and a sense of genuine human fellowship to others. I consider this a divine gift of the program and my Higher Power.

Today I recognize the goodness, warts and all, in everyone. We are suffering beings, we have suffered alone, and we have suffered together. Only together do we have a chance at relieving that suffering for one and all.

My mother once said, on hearing of my progress in AA and sobriety, "Welcome, my son, to the human race." Today there is no place I'd rather be. ☐



Public Information Committee

Help carry the message to your community. Want to find out how you can become active in AA and the Public Information Committee?

Join us by attending the monthly committee meeting. The meeting is **7PM, the 2nd THURSDAY of the month at our Intergroup Office** in HAMILTON.

How You Can Help:

- Working together, members of the Public Information (PI) Committee convey A.A. information to the general public, including the media to ensure AA is represented at any events we are invited to attend - such as health fairs, employee fairs - speaking engagements, etc.
- Inform the public of the AA services that are available through the committee by sending out letters to organization within our community such as schools, retirement centers, local businesses, court houses, parole offices, etc.
- Follow up on leads received so the public knows we are available should they desire our attendance at an event or should they want us to provide a speaker or literature.
- Come up with novel ideas to let people know AA will provide services when requested to do so.
- Distribute public service announcements to radio and television stations when they become available.

This committee serves as the central source of information that is made available to the public regarding Alcoholics Anonymous. **The committee ensures that any information the public receives is correct and is given within the guidelines of the Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous.**

Unity,
Service
& Recovery

Central Jersey Intergroup

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The Well-Connected Loner: Finding a Balance That Works

Beatrice WC, Princeton

Editor's note: Isolation is discussed in such pejorative terms you might think it's some grave psychiatric pathology. Alcoholics gravitate toward worst-case scenarios, such as: Isolation leads to self-defeating thinking and heightens the risk of relapse. Taking a less-extreme approach, this alcoholic balances solitude and engagement in a way that's well-suited to her sobriety on the eve of 10 years.

The program and principles of Alcoholics Anonymous contain numerous paradoxes and dichotomies. Over the years I've found myself wrestling with one distinction more than others: connection vs. isolation.

Prior to getting sober, isolation was not always a choice. I behaved in ways which made people not want to be around me. I didn't even want to be around myself. Drugs and alcohol were a way to create further separation from everyone, including me. The desire to connect was there, but the means or knowledge of how to do so eluded me.

Isolation felt like a refuge: a safe place where I would only have to worry about myself. Unfortunately, "worry" is almost all I did with my time, turning my sanctuary of solitude into a prison of anxiety. This of course fueled my disease and so the vicious cycle continued.

When I finally found myself in the rooms of AA, I remember being confused about my feelings while surrounded by others in a meeting. Deriving joy from being with others, especially when sober, was not my M.O., and I found it both uncomfortable and intoxicating (pardon the expression). I struggled to understand why I actually enjoyed these mixed feelings and what I was getting out of this fellowship. In retrospect I recognize that I was being introduced to a foreign way of living, one which stripped me of the uniqueness I held dear. This novel transition also helped me realize that I am one among many and that strength lies in reliance rather than solitary defiance.

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"Honey, where are my carpet slippers? I can't have a fatal relapse without the proper footwear!"

Courtesy: Joel B

During this first decade of sobriety I have discovered for myself the importance of both connection and being alone, and what that means to me. This will look different for everyone, but I think it's important to recognize that "isolation" does not need to be a dirty word in our vocabulary. In fact, I find it empowering when I can use my time alone to rejuvenate my mind and spirit in a way that strengthens my connection with others when once again we meet.

The program has shown me that there is more than one way to "plug in," and the source of power I need to do so changes day to day. When I disconnect from others and use isolation in a positive way to tap into my Higher Power and higher self, I am better able to connect with those around me. I find solitude recharges me and allows me time to reflect. Other times I need to plug into the energy of those around me and let the fellowship reinforce my sobriety.

The beauty of this dichotomy is that when I

find the right balance of connection and isolation, both contribute to a life which is happy, joyous, and free. A proper balance is critical, as too much or too little of either turns into a defect. Excessive concern with connection can lead to codependency, just as too much isolation conduces to depression. These are worst-case scenarios. Living in the extremes is never a safe place for an alcoholic.

Balance sometimes seems like an evasive and unattainable goal, especially if I try to force the outcome one way or the other. This is where the paradox of surrendering to win comes into play: I've found that it's when I stop trying to force connection, or if I allow isolation to overstay its welcome, that I start to sense what my needs really are.

Sometimes I need to be alone and sometimes I need to be with others. It's as simple as that. But as an alcoholic, I have a special knack for over complicating even the simplest things — which is why I plan to *keep on coming!* ☺

**CENTRAL JERSEY
INTERGROUP NEEDS
VOLUNTEERS**

Join A Committee

HOW?

Come to The Intergroup Meeting the first Wednesday of the Month
Hamilton Library Basement 7 PM

👁️ Look at CJIAA.ORG Committee Section 👁️
and pick out the ONE for You

**Sponsors get your sponsees
In Service NOW**

Willingness, Part 1: A Prerequisite for the Steps

Chris M, East Windsor

Editor's note: In Step 3, we "made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him." In this first of two articles on willingness, Chris M reflects on its indispensable role in embracing not only the 3rd Step but also the ones that follow.

If you've been to more than a few meetings, you're probably familiar with this story. Three frogs were sitting on a log. Two decided to jump off. How many frogs were left on the log? Three. But what about the two that decided to jump off? They only made a *decision*, they didn't take action. Action is necessary for a decision to take effect.

Many times I've heard people say they're stuck on Step 3. Impossible. As my friend Jack says, the world is spinning too fast to be standing still. On page 63 of the Big Book it states, Step 3 "... was only a beginning ... Next we launched out on a course of vigorous action, the first step of which is a personal housecleaning."

If I'm not doing my fourth step, housecleaning, then I would argue I haven't done my third step since there's no action. If that's the case, I would also say I haven't done my second step, as I lack the belief these steps can help me recover from alcoholism.

That puts me back at Step 1, which on its own is a dangerous place to be. If I'm powerless and I don't have a Power in my life that can relieve my alcoholism, where does that leave

me? Unwillingness has real consequences.

Experience has shown that when I'm unwilling to take the action, I don't want the results badly enough. Wanting something without the willingness to work for it is magical thinking at best, but mostly just plain brattiness. Understanding this has relieved me of a lot of unproductive and unfulfilling wanting, while also sparing my friends from listening to me whine.

It wasn't until the pain of drinking became worse than the pain of not drinking, that I became willing to take action and work the 12 steps. No, not just the first one, nor even the first three. All 12. I just told myself I couldn't do it on my own. Step 2 told me we could do it together, while 3 was the commitment to work 4 through 12. Living the steps is my Higher Power's will for me.

So how do I know if my will is not aligned with my Higher Power's? On page 84 of the Big Book it says, we "... continue to watch for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear." These are usually pretty good indicators. It continues, "When these crop up, we ask God at once to remove them. We discuss them with someone immediately and make amends quickly if we have harmed anyone. Then we resolutely turn our thoughts to someone we can help." When I am acting with love and tolerance towards others and myself, I am in alignment with my Higher Power's will. Yes, willingness is the key. Φ





BTG is looking for volunteers!

Bridging the Gap is a 12 Step commitment designed to help the individual make the transition from the treatment or correction facility to Alcoholics Anonymous. The temporary contact would be responsible to meet/take the new member to 6 meetings to help them learn about our fellowship.

What Bridging the Gap suggests of the temporary contact:

- AAs who participate should have 1 year of continuous sobriety.
- AAs are asked to meet/take the individual to a minimum of 6 meetings.
- AAs should share their experience with sponsorship, a home group, and the 12 steps.
- An AA's commitment to the BTG program is a minimum of 1-year.
- Bridging the Gap volunteers are encouraged to attend workshops for questions, training and ongoing support.



If you would like to help. . .

Grab a pamphlet and fill out the back form. Take a pic and send it via email. Please include your home group. Or

Scan the QR Code below fill out and submit. It's that easy.
Contact Scott P.- Area 45 Bridging the Gap Coordinator

Email - Bridgingthegap@snjaa.org



Willingness, Part 2: A New Seriousness of Purpose

Elliott S, Princeton

Editor's note: Rounding out our double-feature on willingness, this is a story of a once-promising youth descending into aimless squalor, his circle of human connection reduced to his dealer and liquor store clerk. The promise of recovery emerged when at last he became willing to ask for help.

Like many alcoholics, my willingness to seek help was a long time coming. Seeing my life fall increasingly out of control, I remained stubbornly unwilling to face the facts: I had pushed away everything meaningful in life and was living only in service of my addiction. Day after day I sat alone in a cold, dark, dirty room, shades drawn and door locked, fighting off impending withdrawals by drowning myself in alcohol and drugs.

In fleeting moments of sanity, I would wonder how it got so bad. At one point in my life there was so much promise for the future. How did it all fall apart? Did it really matter how it all fell apart? After all, as soon as I got my next fix, my mind would float into the abyss and I wouldn't be plagued by such existential questions — that is, until the withdrawals kicked in again. Another drink, another drug, and everything was fine again. This was the cycle of my addiction until I found the willingness to ask for help.

To be sure, it wasn't as if willingness struck me like a bolt of lightning. Rather, it was through honest reflection that I finally grasped the magnitude of my dilemma. I was in debt up to my eyeballs, had a car note I couldn't afford, a negative balance in my bank account, and not a dime in savings — and that was just the financial wreckage.

On the personal side, the damage was much

more extreme. I had no friends. I never saw my parents, sisters, brother, or my precious young nephews. I had no significant other. My only companions were my two dogs (and I'm fairly certain they couldn't bear to be near me). If I left the house, it was to go to the liquor store. If I picked up the phone, it was to call the drug dealer.

When I honestly reflected on the wreckage, I could no longer make excuses. It wasn't a better job, a better boss, a nicer house, more money, more time, or any other circumstance that was going to get me out of my hell hole. The only real chance I had at turning things around was to make an earnest attempt at sobriety.

Tolerance of myself and others, and acceptance of imperfection, bring me closer to true charity.

I was now faced with a new problem: How do I get sober? I broke down the problem a little further. What

does it mean to get "sober" anyway? At the very least, getting sober meant that I had to stop drinking and drugging. But how does one stop? Clearly, I couldn't stop on my own, otherwise I probably would have saved myself a lot of pain and heartache.

At some point it occurred to me that when I didn't know how to do something, I could ask for help. Obvious, right? But for this alcoholic, it took years of pain to finally comprehend. Willingness entered my life when I was finally ready to ask for help.

I picked up the phone and made the call that changed my life. In that call I spoke honestly to another person about my situation and asked for help. This was the catalyst that led me to Alcoholics Anonymous. I started attending meetings daily.

This wasn't my first foray into AA, but it was my first truly honest attempt. This time around I learned that I needed to stop worrying about circumstances. I had to draw my attention

Continued

away from the laundry list of problems I had, the opportunities I had squandered, the relationships I had lost, my shameful behavior. Those things did not matter anymore. What mattered was not picking up alcohol or drugs that day. The next day I would focus on the same thing, do not pick up today.

As I continued in early sobriety, strange things started to happen. I walked into a meeting one morning and an "old-timer" turned to me and said, "That's the first smile I've seen on your face since you stumbled in."

Instead of cursing him out in my head, I thought about what he said. He was right, I was smiling again. Life was getting a little easier. From there, gratitude began to set in. I was thankful for the struggle and realized I had a lot to learn about myself, others, and the gift of life.

Life is difficult, there's no getting around that. We all have responsibilities, anxieties, fears, worries, and unexpected problems, but therein lies the essence of our humanity. We struggle forward in spite of these burdens. And in my experience, if we persevere long enough, there is a message in all the suffering.

In sobriety I have built new relationships with wonderful people, mended old relationships, repaid debts, and grew (and continue to grow) emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. The gifts I have today are unmatched. There is a promising future ahead. As I reflect on how bad things were, it is clear that I would have never found the peace and gratitude of today without the suffering, and the willingness to ask for help.

If you're struggling, ask for help. It will change your life. Φ

WE TRAVEL TO YOU!

CENTRAL JERSEY INTERGROUP

LIT ON WHEELS

INVITE US TO YOUR NEXT EVENT:

ANNIVERSARY
DANCE

PICNIC
WORKSHOP



literature@cjiaa.org

Roseanne F 609-213-7853
Laura F 609-649-8861

My 45-Year Journey to a Life Surpassing My Wildest Dreams

Jim V, Princeton

Editor's note: Remember the old Benson & Hedges cigarette ad slogan, "You've come a long way, baby?" Well, here's a guy who's come a long way from the dismal squalor of dead-end drinking to a life outstripping his fondest wishes.

How it Was

I was sleeping on the floor of my unfinished apartment, but not to worry — at least my two teenage sons had their own rooms. My wardrobe was down to two suits, five dress shirts, one pair of shoes, a few ties. That was it. I had exchanged my car for a city bus, my means of getting to the mall for a job selling shoes. I was just finishing my third divorce, in this case a woman whose drunkenness I could no longer bear.

She had once been an art student of mine at the college where I taught a few years earlier. I ended up leaving there five years before tenure

with plans to move to New York to advance my own artistic prospects as a painter and sculptor. I wanted to exhibit at a major gallery. Yet due to my escalating drinking and progressive incapacity, I never did make it to New York.

What Happened

On my day off from the shoe store, my most recent ex-wife called and asked if I would drive her to a meeting (in what was once *our* car). I asked what kind of meeting, and she said AA. So I went with her. In the meeting I was impressed by how these people had turned their lives around. And I was optimistic for her; this was just what she needed.

At her behest I attended some Al-Anon meetings but didn't like them much. One night, af-

ter first having a beer to fortify myself and then driving my mother's car to the meeting, I became annoyed with people talking about "their alcoholic." Surely I wasn't like the drunks people talked about in Al-Anon and AA. After all, I could quit anytime I wanted to. So to prove it, and to show everybody I wasn't an alcoholic, I decided to stop drinking.

The next four days after quitting I was sick and shaky with a terrible headache. Strange perceptual phenomena emerged: I kept seeing things out of the corner of my eye that weren't there. Wallpaper took on a kind of creepy, almost animated quality. I remember seeing bugs which disappeared when I went after them.

I craved anything sweet to drink, except booze. On withdrawal day 4, I went to the AA clubhouse where I had first taken my ex-wife. There I found someone who looked friendly and told him how awful I'd

Wallpaper took on a kind of creepy, almost animated quality. I saw bugs which disappeared when I went after them.

been feeling since my last beer Friday. He suggested I see a doctor if I didn't feel better soon, and then invited me to a meeting that was about to start.

When I was called on I said, "I feel terrible ... I think I may have a drinking problem." Mercifully, I started to feel a little better that afternoon, and that night I found myself at another AA meeting. It was there that I first said, "*My name is Jim, and I am an alcoholic.*" It was like finding the rest of the Martians, that is, people just like me. Never have I felt more belonging than I did with this admission.

How it Is Now

That was 45 years ago. I have not had a drink

Continued

or drug since that last beer before the Al-Anon meeting. In these sober years I met a wonderful woman, and we were happily in love for 40 years until she died four years ago.

During our long marriage I finally moved to New York, where my art was represented by a major gallery. I have had one-man shows in New York and Los Angeles and elsewhere in the nation, as well as in England, where I'm represented by an important gallery.

My wife and I purchased a thatched cottage in England, and traveled to places I never thought I would see. For 29 years I taught painting at a New York college. At a publisher's request, in my 70s I wrote a book on painting, and have even lectured about my work at several Chinese universities.

I think this is what they mean by, "... a life beyond your wildest dreams." ☐

My Long and Winding Road To One Year of Sobriety

Eileen B, Dayton

Editor's note: This alcoholic knew by age 28 she had a problem with alcohol and drugs. Yet hers is a classic revolving-door story of rehab, aborted sobriety, relapse. Finally Eileen was ready to escape her cycle of mayhem and return to the fold with renewed commitment.

How it Was

I'm a 57-year-old alcoholic who recently celebrated one year of sobriety after nearly three decades of desperate and futile recovery efforts. How I got here may have a familiar ring.

My first recovery attempt at age 28 came while living in Manhattan. I checked into a rehab in upstate New York with good intentions. But young and naïve, I got caught up in a relationship there and my recovery lasted all of three months. The ensuing 10-year relationship was pure chaos fueled by alcohol and crack.

For a while ours was a long-distance relationship while I lived in New Jersey and worked in the city for Playboy. It was a fun job, but I got little work done because I was always using. Luckily, they kept me on for four years even though I was barely employable. I wouldn't drink in the morning, but on lunch breaks I'd often be perched on my customary barstool, then call work and say I wouldn't return. I did this all the time.

Those years brought unfortunate consequences. My relationship with my parents suffered. I got a DWI. I would lend my car out, and twice it was involved in a hit-and-run. I got fired from the Playboy job mainly because I was out of the office so much. Besides, I'm sure they knew I was drinking and using.

The relationship with my partner was abusive. He prohibited me from seeing my friends, who later were shocked when at last I appeared at a friend's wedding. All the while, my partner and I partied constantly. After 10 years of this chaotic lifestyle, I was so sick I again entered a rehab, this time in Connecticut. From there it was onto a halfway house in Florida.

Things went smoothly for the first few months. But again I got involved with a guy and relapsed. From there it was back to a halfway house. Soon I was pregnant with my daughter, who is now 18, and managed to stay sober during the pregnancy. But my partner and I eventually split up.

My drinking continued while raising my daughter on my own. I'd sneak out to the bar all the time. During this period I went to three rehabs, only to relapse each time. I thought others were unaware I was drinking, but my daughter always knew. She would cry and call my parents, saying, "Mommy is silly!"

Continued

At one point I managed to put together more than two years, attending meetings regularly and working the steps with my sponsor.

Then one night, right before Covid hit, I was going into the city and feeling disgruntled with my job. Arriving early at a bar to meet a friend and then go to a show, I was already drunk when she showed up. I left the show during intermission, and though I know the city well, I was so drunk I wandered the streets aimlessly before somehow stumbling upon the bus station. How I got there I'll never know.

What Happened

Many times during my active alcoholism I would have an epiphany and realize I needed help, but just wasn't ready. Then came September 2022, and I experienced exactly such an epiphany, but this time it was different.

My first sponsor was great, yet we became so close she felt she could no longer sponsor me. She recommended I get a new sponsor, with whom I'm comfortable.

After parachuting into the program periodically for nearly 30 years, by now I knew the drill. Yet while I didn't really want to drink, I got this gnawing sense, born of past failures, telling me sobriety would never last.

My sponsors told me, "Don't get into a relationship, they bring out defects and mess up your head." They needn't have bothered, I'm an expert witness. This time I finally got through a year without getting into a relationship — a first for me.

How it Is Now

Now with one year I am certainly doing better. I still don't feel fully solid in my first step, but this time I see greater promise than in previous recovery efforts. While I know to be wary of people, places, and things which may be triggers, many close friends still drink. I'll never give them up, because they're like family.

But if they're going out to drink, I won't go.

My daughter recently left for college, so everyone's been worried about what I would be like alone. I still get cravings, but they're mostly mental obsessions, not physical. Mentally I still struggle every day. But I have the tools and I use them: meetings, contacting other AA members, and if I have a craving, I "play the tape through" and remember how bad it was.

At the time of this writing, I'm working Steps 1, 2, and 3, and practicing turning my will and life over to the care of my Higher Power. I have more good days than bad. My home group, Plainsboro Sunday Morning, has saved my life. I feel closely connected to them, they're now my family.

Long a yoga practitioner, I'm now certified as a "Yoga for Sobriety" teacher, where we incorporate the steps into the yoga class. I've done extensive work on the chakras — points of physical or spiritual energy throughout the body— and have visited yoga studios in Thailand, plus a 3-week stay in an ashram in India.

In sobriety I've been going to church and my relationship with my Higher Power has become stronger than ever. My faith makes such a difference; I'm getting into prayer, and it's definitely been helpful.

In my home group I do service whenever I can, whether it's coffee, bagels, or setting up. I take other commitments as well, but I haven't told my full story yet as I get overwhelmed by all the details. Even now, troubling thoughts sometimes occupy my mind, and I still struggle with this.

My parents are super-supportive and happy about my sobriety, clearly trusting me more than ever. Meantime, I try not to be too hard on myself — sometimes I just have to laugh.

Today I want to stay alive and be the good mother my daughter deserves. I must always keep these dual priorities in mind. A healthy fear of alcohol and a strong faith in my Higher Power serve both vital purposes. Φ

Gifts That Keep on Giving: My Sponsors' Lasting Legacy

Tony G, Hamilton Township

Editor's note: Sponsorship is an indispensable keystone of recovery. This long-timer looks back fondly at the men who guided him along the way to lasting sobriety, not just with wise words but as role models of moral decency.

All sponsorship is good, and I'm fortunate that the men who sponsored me willingly gave of themselves. They shared their experience, strength and hope, with three central ideas:

"(a) That we were alcoholic and could not manage our own lives.

(b) That probably no human power could have relieved our alcoholism

(c) That God could and would if He were sought."

I have had several sponsors over the years. My interaction with some was better than others, but they all guided me through the program. They shared with me their time, knowledge and experience of recovery, sometimes even their families. Another thing they shared was their unconditional love of the program and life in recovery, and their love for me. I owe these men my heartfelt appreciation and prayers.

The lessons I learned were sometimes taught using the formal tools and structure from our literature. There were also those long lengthy

discussions that occurred during those road trips to and from speaking commitments for our home group. Meanwhile I learned a series of useful sayings and meanings (*see below*).

It is imperative that I mention some of the most important and valuable lessons I learned from watching my sponsors in recovery. They walked the walk and didn't just talk the talk.

I watched one of my sponsors, a successful businessman, help others in the program start businesses and become millionaires. This was not his gift to me, but instead he set an example of how to be a better husband and father. From his example I learned how to bring my recovery home and share it with my family.

One of the things I most remember about Mike D was the way he spoke to his family. In particular, the dignity and respect he displayed to his wife. She was his equal and he attributed much of his success in life to her. Mike inspired me to speak and behave in the same manner with my family, especially with my wife.

Folks, listen to your sponsors and learn everything they share. Watch, observe, and listen, and follow the lead that they set. The results just might be beyond your wildest dreams. Φ

Phrase or Quotation	Translation
"It's the first drink that gets you drunk."	Once liquor touches my lips all bets are off.
"One drink is too many and one hundred is not enough."	If you don't take the first drink it is impossible to get drunk.
"Walk through the first drink."	What will that drink cost you family, friends, job, your freedom, and your self-respect.
"AA will brain wash you."	Your brain needs washing.
"You must be (or remain) teachable."	Be humble.
"You must change people, places, and things."	Stay away from drinking friends, bars, and alcohol
"You only have to change one thing, everything."	Stop lying and start telling the truth
"If you are a horse thief when you come into AA and you don't stop stealing horse, all you will be is a sober horse thief."	You need to change, and that change comes when you stop lying, cheating, and stealing.
"You brought this disease into your home, now you have the responsibility to bring recovery into your home."	My attitudes, actions and behaviors must change to reflect the value of my recovery and I must share that recovery with my family.

Guest Editorial: A Newcomer's Hopes and Hurdles

Pete M, Princeton

Editor's note: We arrive at AA carrying baggage, from the merely carry-on to a load stretching the bounds of storage. This newcomer, who celebrated 90 days Christmas Eve, spent a lifetime giving the world the proverbial finger. He's now ready for a change of heart.

Previously the most important letters in the alphabet were F and U. Sometimes I'd form very basic words, even phrases, with these letters. But the basic sentiment of FU at the core was always there. For half a century I've been homicidally and suicidally angry. I don't think I can change that black heart. The best I can do is cloak myself in a thin veneer of civility.

Now my most cherished letters are AA. Back to kindergarten. Back to basics. Less running with

scissors. Learning to share. Knowing when to eat, sleep, maybe play, even work.

In our alphabet the letter A holds primacy as the first letter and first vowel. For me, our pairing of this inaugural letter invokes a new beginning in learning the arbitrary human need to impose order over chaos.

I'm too messed up for this. Always have been, always will be. But I'm a champion of hiding, a master of disguise. All my tools of avoidance and escapism and nihilism are my point of entry into Alcoholics Anonymous. Despite all this, I'm there for those fleeting moments when I forget myself and laugh, both at myself and others. My contribution will be small but more than I'd ever hoped for. Φ

Speaking Opportunities at Hospitals and Institutions

8/26/2023			1st Week	2nd Week	3rd Week	4th Week	5th week
Princeton House Women 1000 Herrontown Road, Princeton	Mon 11:30 AM		Open	Open	Filled	Open	Open
Princeton House 741 Mt. Lucas Road, Princeton	M - F 9:30 AM		Just Opening Back up on a limited basis				
Princeton House Herrontown Road, Princeton	TBD		Just Opening Back up				
High Focus Centers 15 Princess Rd, Lawrenceville, NJ	M or Th, 4:30 PM		Would like to have 15-25 year old speakers for a Teenage program				
Trenton Psychiatric Hospital 101 Sullivan Way, Trenton	TBD		Just Opening Back up				
Avant Rehabilitation & Care Center 1314 Brunswick Ave, Trenton	TBD		This is a Rehab with new ownership and just starting up AA Meetings				
Rescue Mission of Trenton 96 Carroll Street, Trenton, NJ	TBD		The Mens Rehab, is just (re) starting up AA Meetings there.				
We Level Up 276 Bakers Basin Rd Lawrenceville, NJ	7 PM Wed		Filled	X	X	X	X
	7 PM Sun		X	Filled	X	X	X

Notes : Open means the Commitment needs to be filled

Filled means the Commitment is filled by CJIG

All Commitments can be filled by either men or women **except:**

Princeton House Women is a Womens Commitment

The Rescue Mission is a Mens Commitment

 = Needs to be filled = filled

X = means the Facility has filled the commitment

Notes From a Haunted Past: Insights From Incarceration

Diane D, Robbinsville Township

Editor's note: Bill Wilson recommends we should "... not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it." While keeping that door ajar, we may look back on behavior that is, by any estimation, regrettable. This alcoholic had pen and paper handy to chronicle her cranky thoughts and snarky behavior, documenting a dismal view of herself and others. These wayward patterns of thinking are undergoing a radical change.

Over the holidays I finished Steps 4 and 5 with my sponsor, and decided now would be a good time to type up a stack of thoughts and observations I'd scribbled during my hospitalization, incarceration, and stays at several homeless shelters.

Yet going through that stack of paper years after I emerged from prison and homelessness was uncomfortable. Now that I'm aware of my character defects from my Steps 4 and 5, I cringed reading my unfiltered thoughts from long ago.

Describing a cellblock mate, I wrote, "Jennifer is a recovering crack addict from Trenton, and looks like she grew up in a variety of trailer parks in South Florida, living on a diet of Froot Loops and lighter fluid." I probably thought this was witty. After all, I had spent most of my life patting myself on the back and getting accolades for my ability to put words together, from college through jobs in journalism and marketing well into my 40s. Yet looking at such comments now, I'm agog. There I was in prison for my misbehavior, and I was judging cellblock mates.

We were incarcerated for crimes ranging from prostitution to murder. We bunked, showered, and ate together, yet I felt separate and different from them, as if I were unique with nothing in common but addiction. Most of the women in the block had substance-abuse issues, some arriving dope sick. There was probably a lot of stuff I could identify with in their stories, if I had gotten to know them, but I felt like an outlier in this room of inveterate criminals. Here I was, having gone to many AA meetings with enough vodka seeping from my pores to start a bonfire with a carelessly lit match, snarkily disapproving of someone snorting powder off a chessboard.

Later into my notes I revisited the fear and disdain and confusion I felt when I learned a recently released cellmate relapsed and died of a heroin overdose. She was athletic, raised horses, and loved the outdoors. When she left I was sure she'd be fine, alive and well, not dead. We all cried, all these women with different backgrounds and stories, distraught over the news. All my feelings about myself and others in the cellblock gave way to a collective sadness. In that feeling I was no longer separate and distinct from my cellmates.

Now with Steps 6 and 7, I find myself resisting letting go — of what, I'm not sure. I just have to humbly ask God to remove my defects of character. To ask that God help me let go of my arrogance, pride, and judgmental nature. I have no idea how I'll know if they've been removed. I just have to be open to becoming that person through guidance from my fellows in the program and from my Higher Power. ☐



The Church-Bashers' Refrain: 'AA Is Spiritual, *not* Religious'

Rob M, Trenton

Editor's note: AA principles are deeply spiritual, and recovering alcoholics frequently speak with heartfelt gratitude of the program's spirituality. But they don't stop there. Perhaps believing AA is not in any way religious, many are quick to add, "... but not a religious program." Does the distinction stem from a thoughtful comparison between AA spirituality and Christian principles? Or do they simply find organized religion an irresistible target?

In meetings we often hear people insist that, "AA is a spiritual program, *not* a religious program." Everyone nods in agreement, except perhaps a skeptic or two who might see clear currents of religion throughout Bill Wilson's program and literature.

Let's pretend I'm one of those skeptics. Don't get me wrong, I see AA as a profoundly spiritual program of love, moral decency, patience, tolerance, and a close connection with God. Yet I also consider AA a deeply religious program, precisely for those same reasons.

Notice when I use the term "religious," I'm not referring to ornate cathedrals and the pomp and pageantry of the Catholic Church (of which I'm a practicing member, and will refer to here). Likewise, I disregard the Vatican's outdated moral strictures. Religion, at its core, to me means primarily the Ten Commandments and the Christian principles of the Gospels. The rest confers far less meaning.

Seen in this light, we find ample doses of religious thought throughout Bill Wilson's writing. To me, any conception of what God can do for me is a religious thought, and the AA literature is full of such ideas. Four of the 12 Steps call specifically for a Higher Power's intervention. When Bill refers to God in the Big Book, his

conception resembles a traditional God, with the herculean, superhuman power to restore us to sanity, care for our life and will, and remove our shortcomings.

In the Big Book's "We Agnostics" chapter, Bill even hints at crediting God for creation itself: "Yet, in other moments, we found ourselves thinking, when enchanted by a starlit night, 'Who, then, made all this?'" That chapter is wall-to-wall religious arguments coaxing the reader to faith. Bill's preferred term for his Higher Power was the traditional "God," and every time I come across it in his writing, I think, here comes another religious concept.

The reasons why many recoil at the very word "religion" are legitimate and spring from deep-seated roots. Perhaps in youth some were repelled by stories of a harshly punitive God. Severe hardships may lead some to question God's benevolence or very existence. The Catholic Church's retrograde stances on a range of social issues,

not to mention the pedophilia scandals, have turned many off for good. No wonder people don't want to call AA "religious." There's also the important concern that we don't want to turn people away by seeming to impose beliefs. Ours is a big tent.

Yet by drawing a distinction between Bill Wilson's brand of spirituality and that of Jesus, we may risk seeing the two as mutually exclusive. Looking at Christian principles — love, humility, compassion, tolerance, charity, penitence, forgiveness, mercy — we see values that are likewise pivotal to AA spirituality. Regular prayer is central both to AA and Catholicism. With so many commonalities, why insist on some kind of imagined dichotomy?

Now that the skeptic has had his say, let's

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come back to our original question: Is AA a spiritual program but not in any way religious? A related question is, why do some embrace AA spirituality while disavowing — almost with a sense of *good riddance!* — forms of religious spirituality that nonetheless closely mirror Bill Wilson's guiding principles.

The author F. Scott Fitzgerald defined intelligence as being able to hold two competing thoughts in your mind at once. In AA, we call that being open-minded. Embracing the program as both "spiritual *and* religious" seems more open-minded to me than the exclusion-

ary "spiritual *not* religious." This view requires no great mental acrobatics — AA and Christian spirituality are hardly contradictory patterns of thinking, speaking, and behaving. They are essentially the same.

That's why I'm sure my late father would have loved AA. A moderate drinker, he'd have his two Martinis with dinner each night and then be done. A devout Catholic who left us too soon at 66, he would have loved all the God talk. But mostly, he would have loved the spirit in the room. Φ

News From the Literature Committee

Dr. Bob And The Good Old Timers (Hard Cover)

A portrait of Dr. Bob, a co-founder of A.A. The youngster who grew up in Vermont in the late 19th century became a hard-drinking college boy, then a medical student fighting the onset of his own alcoholism, a respected physician, a loving but increasingly unreliable family man, and at last a desperately ill drunk. He was without hope until he met a stockbroker from New York, Bill W, who urgently needed a fellow alcoholic to help him maintain his own sobriety.

Available from the CJI Literature Committee for \$12.00

Emotional Sobriety

Powerful and uplifting, the book "Emotional Sobriety: The Next Frontier" features stories of sober women and men that depict the personal transformations that sobriety can bring when sober alcoholics practice the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous in all aspects of their lives.

In a 1958 article for Grapevine, the international journal of Alcoholics Anonymous, Bill W wrote

about the ongoing challenges of recovery that he faced long after he stopped drinking, including his struggle with depression. For him, "emotional sobriety" became the next frontier.

In these honest and humble essays drawn from the archives of Grapevine magazine, you'll discover what emotional sobriety is all about. Many will realize that happiness is a by-product of giving without any demand for return; others learn to embrace the present with gratitude so they may claim moments of real peace.

The stories in this anthology show that when we have the willingness to find solutions, rather than staying stuck in problems, we can let go of fear, selfishness, and resentment, put aside selfish demands, practice outgoing love, and become more connected to our Higher Power and our friends, family, and community.

With unflinching honesty, this collection includes the voices of AA members reflecting on their own emotional sobriety or, as Bill Wilson put it, "a quiet place in bright sunshine."

Available from the CJI Literature Committee for \$14.00