

Recovery Times

A newsletter from Alcoholics Anonymous San Fernando Valley Central Office

VOL 32, NO. 9 SEPT 2008

A.A. Meetings Seem More Social Than A.A.

The question presented in last month's *The ? Box*, "Is A.A. Becoming Too Social?" will undoubtedly draw a variety of answers and I would like to get my two cents in early, if I may.

I am one who has thought for some time that we were becoming much too social—so social that in some places an A.A. meeting seems more social than A.A.

I am presuming that in this case the word "social" does not mean coffee and cakes, or the little informal gatherings of A.A.s that have become common to the movement. These have my vote, not only because they are congenial and encourage the companionship that we all need, but because they also are a form of 12th Step work and group therapy.

The kind of "social" affairs that worry me are the big events and the full programs that some groups seem to be carrying on in the form of testimonial banquets, weekly dances, bingo parties, bridge parties, golf tournaments and even popularity contests.

There is nothing harmful in these things in themselves. They are a pleasant part of the affairs of the Elks, the Rotarians, the Country Club, the Downtown club, etc., which have become wholesome institutions in American life. I belong to some of these clubs myself and enjoy them, and I support their affairs.

But in my opinion A.A. is different, or at least it started out differently. Among its attractions for me was its simplicity, its singleness of purpose, and its disregard of the social distinctions and social values that inevitably are emphasized in the ordinary clubs.

Social events require organizations. They also require financing and they require planning and supervision.

In the beginning, A.A. was a simple movement. The purpose was to sober up and then help the next guy to sober up. This was done by close, intimate work, usually between two individuals.

As A.A. grew, the size of the meetings naturally grew, too, and a fringe of social activities around and about

the groups began to develop. Up to a certain point, these things are helpful.

But the "certain point" beyond which, in my opinion, social affairs become a hindrance rather than a help, and after which they divert and distract from the purposes of A.A., is that point where they begin to take more time and attention than 12th Step work and

"...let's keep uppermost all of the time the fact that the strength of A.A. has been its simplicity and singleness of purpose."

personal recovery problems. I know members who are spending so much time arranging parties, running clubhouses and/or attending committee meetings that they don't have any time to go work with some poor, miserable and troublesome drunk. They're too busy with the extra-curricular affairs.

Some organization is necessary, but I believe it should be regarded as a necessary evil and be held to a very minimum. Organization has killed other movements. It could kill A.A. and it may already be hindering its most important functions.

Let's consider our social programs on the basis of their contribution to the recovery program. Which activities are essential and which are not? Since they all take organization, and since some of them also tend to put emphasis on the very affectations we are trying to get away from, let's go slow.

Most important of all, let's keep uppermost all of the time the fact that the strength of A.A. has been its simplicity and singleness of purpose. We want to stay sober and to do that we must help others. That's the meat of A.A. and I personally think such things as popularity contests not only don't help, they becloud and confuse our purpose.

H.E., Cincinnati, Ohio

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Calendar Events

Upcoming Events

57th Annual Southern California AA Convention

September 19 - 21, 2008
San Diego, CA
Website: www.aasocal.com

Area 93 Old Timers Event

September 20, 2008, Noon - 3PM
Morro Bay, CA
Info: Jim L. 805-772-2676, Matt E. 805-574-0760

Unit A 27th Anniversary Celebration

Oct 11, 2008
2 PM - Evening
North Hollywood, CA

5th Annual Santa Clarita Valley Convention of AA

October 17 - 19 2008
Valencia, CA
Website: www.scvaaconvention.org
Info: 661-310-0384

24th Annual Santa Barbara AA Convention

October 24 - 26, 2008
Goleta, CA
Website: www.sbaaconvention.org
Email: chair@sbaaconvention.org

Yosemite Summit Conference 2008

November 21 - 23 2008
Yosemite National Park, CA
Website: www.serenityyosemite.com
Email: ysc@sti.net
Info: 209-966-8300

42nd Annual Las Vegas Roundup

November 27 - 30 2008
Las Vegas, NV
Website: www.lasvegasroundup.org

Service Committee Schedule

Sep. 15, 2008	SFV H&I THIRD MONDAY 8PM Business Meeting 7PM Get Acquainted Workshop 5657 Lindley Ave. *****
Oct. 6, 2008	G.S. District #11 FIRST MONDAY 6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30pm meeting 315 W. Vine St., Glendale *****
Oct. 6, 2008	G.S. District #16 SECOND MONDAY 6:15PM meeting 15950 Chatsworth (church), Granada Hills *****
Oct. 6, 2008	G.S. District #17 FIRST MONDAY 6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30pm meeting 5000 Colfax (church), N. Hollywood *****
Oct. 7, 2008	G.S. District #2 FIRST TUESDAY 5:30PM, 4011 Dunsmore, La Crescenta *****
Oct. 1, 2008	G.S. District #1 FIRST WEDNESDAY 6:30PM, 7552 Remmet, Canoga Park *****
Oct. 8, 2008	SFV Board of Directors 6:30PM, Central Office *****
Oct. 11, 2008	G.S. District #7 SECOND SATURDAY 9AM, Agua Dulce Woman's Club 33201 Agua Dulce Cyn Rd *****
Oct. 13, 2008	SFV Intergroup SECOND MONDAY 6:30PM Orientation, 7PM Business Meeting St. Innocents Church 5657 Lindley Ave., Tarzana

To All Meeting Secretaries

Help us keep your meeting information up to date.

If your meeting has changed its Location, Time of Meeting, Meeting Name or Type of Meeting, please update this information *as soon as possible* with your Central Office. Updates can be completed by mail or in person during Literature Sales Hours at San Fernando Valley Central Office. Our address is listed on the back cover of this newsletter. Meeting updates *must* be completed in writing. Any questions can be answered by calling your Central Office at (818) 988-3001 and asking for a staff member.

SFV Convention Update! **New Dates, New Location!**

The SFVAA 2009 Convention will be held
January 30th - February 1st
at the Warner Center Marriott
in Woodland Hills, CA.

Opportunities for Service

Your Central Office needs
telephone volunteers for all shifts,
especially the Overnight (12 Midnight - 9 AM) shift.

If you have one year or more of continuous sobriety, we invite you to join us and help your fellow alcoholics. You can sign up in the office or online at <http://www.sfvaa.org/involve.html>.

Service Opportunities & News

Service Opportunities in the San Fernando Valley

PUBLIC INFORMATION COMMITTEE -

Provides information to the general public about what A.A. does and does not do. Could always use volunteers, especially young people and Spanish speaking A.A.'s for health fairs and to speak at various schools and businesses. Contact Central Office (818) 988-3001.

HOSPITAL AND INSTITUTIONS COMMITTEE -

Carries the message of Alcoholics Anonymous into hospitals, prisons & treatment facilities to those who are unable to get out to meetings. Meets the third Monday of each month 8:00 pm (Get Acquainted Workshop, 7:00 pm) at St. Innocent's Church, 5657 Lindley Ave, Tarzana, CA. For more information, contact Central Office at 988-3001.

SAN FERNANDO VALLEY INTERGROUP -

Elected Intergroup representatives maintain and develop policies for Central Office, and inform other IG Reps about Alkathons, fund raisers, etc. Meets second Monday, monthly, St. Innocent's Church, 5657 Lindley Ave, Tarzana, CA. Orientation 6:30 pm, Meeting at 7:00 pm. Contact: Central Office at 988-3001.

SAN FERNANDO VALLEY CONVENTION -

Volunteers are welcome to participate in the planning of the 2009 Convention. The Committee meets the 3rd Tuesday of each month (except February and March); 7 pm at St. Innocent's Church, 5657 Lindley Ave, Tarzana, CA.

Central Office News

San Fernando Valley Central Office is On the Web

The SFV Central Office website is now available for Internet browsers. On the website, you can find a map to our office in Van Nuys, a listing of upcoming events in the Valley, service organization information and links to other cool A.A. websites. Our meeting schedule is also accessible on the website. Meetings are listed by day, Sunday through Saturday.

Check it out: <http://www.sfvaa.org>

Do you have an article for the Recovery Times?

Email it to us at: sfvaanews@sbcglobal.net

San Fernando Valley Central Office Intergroup Representatives Meeting August 11, 2008

Rick A. Chairperson – Meeting opened at 7:00 PM
Treasurer's Report: See Insert
*Service Committee information - see page 2 and 3
of the Recovery Times for more information*
Old Business: None.
New Business: None

*Birthdays: Victory - 1 yr, Barbie - 3 yrs,
Tom T. - 6 yrs, Brian H. - 8 yrs.*

Motion to adjourn 7:20 PM
*The long form of the Intergroup Meeting Minutes
for August is available at Central Office or at
the Intergroup Meeting.*

*These minutes are pending approval on
September 8, 2008*

Next Meeting - September 8, 2008

*Prepared and submitted by:
Dawn H., Recording Secretary*

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

August 2008

Tony S.	8 years
Randy H.	11 years
Steve H.	13 years
Joan E.	21 years
Linda K.	26 years

**Reseda Big Book Study
and Disc. a number of years**

Your Birthday Gift to Central Office

Many A.A. members share their birthdays with those who need the same help and opportunity that A.A. gave to them.

By sending a donation to Central Office you share your birthday with Recovery Times readers. Send a dollar (\$1.00) a year - or \$1.00 for each year of your sobriety - or send as much as you wish to give to celebrate your birthday. The amount doesn't matter - it's the "counting" that counts.

May your special day be filled with joy from morning until night, and may the "24's" that lie ahead be especially glad and bright.

Signing Your Name In an Anonymous Program

Box 459 vol. 54 no. 4 August-September 2008

People showing up at A.A. meetings with slips to be signed to verify their attendance sometimes raises concerns among group members. Some may fear that someone there unwillingly is likely to violate the anonymity of group members. Those in a small group may fear being inundated by court-ordered individuals.

A.A. has been cooperating with the court system for decades, helping judges, probation officers, and others become aware of A.A. as a resource. One result has been court-mandated attendance at meetings by those charged with alcohol-related offenses, typically driving while intoxicated (DWI). There are also persons showing up with other types of slips to be signed, such as those who reside in halfway houses that require residents be alcohol-free.

Some A.A. groups, based on their experience and by their group conscience, do not sign attendance slips of any kind. Usually, groups leave it up to chair people to sign or not, depending on how comfortable they are about putting their names and sometimes phone numbers on the slips. The position of these groups is that those who sign do so in the spirit of cooperation. In signing slips of any kind in A.A., neither the group nor the members are bound in any way. Those mandated by courts are usually required to go to meetings for a period of time.

“Signing cards doesn’t bother me one bit,” says Jerry W., an A.A. in Kalamazoo, Michigan. “But I do tell those whose cards I’m signing, ‘this is not going to get you sober.’” Jerry, who is six years sober, was himself getting slips signed when he first came to A.A. “I’ve saved those slips. I like to look back and see the meetings I attended, and I’ve got a bunch of phone numbers on mine,” he says.

“When I came into A.A. I was facing a court date to answer a DWI, and it wasn’t my first, which means they can take your license away. My job, which required that I drive, was on the line.”

Jerry had a psychotherapist who pushed him to go to A.A. and had him bring back slips signed to prove his attendance. “I didn’t want to go but my lawyer said that proof of A.A. attendance would help with my court appearance. So I went, and I started to get sober.”

“Funny thing is that when I got to court I was resigned to whatever was going to happen. I didn’t feel like trying to hustle anyone or manipulate the system—which was a first for me.” As it turns out the judge said: “So you’re going to A.A. Well, let’s see what happens.”

At his group in Kalamazoo, he says, those with slips to be signed drop them in the basket at the break, to be picked up at the end of the meeting. “You are self-conscious taking that slip out of that basket, I’ll tell you. I was impatient for the day when I could come to meetings and not have to get those slips signed,” says Jerry.

A big issue for some members, though, is the problem they have sharing honestly and openly in rooms where there may be those who don’t want to be there. “Their thinking is ‘we don’t want to be in meetings—laying our stuff out on the table, our personal stuff; speaking honestly and openly—with those who don’t want to be there and who might be endangering our anonymity.’”

That aspect of the issue has been a point of contention in Otsego, where A.A. member Kelly D. lives. “In my experience more energy has been expended on this issue than on any other,” says Kelly, who has been sober for 13 years. “I’ve signed about a thousand of these slips over the years.” He has seen the number of newcomers with court slips rising since the mid-1990s. “I filled in as chair for one of the evening meetings and 18 of the 20 people there had court slips. Let me tell you, you can get writer’s cramp signing eighteen slips. Seriously, I don’t like it. There’s not the trust and confidentiality that you need in an A.A. meeting. There’s very little real sharing, and some of those there are openly hostile,” says Kelly.

Steve L. of Biwabik, Minnesota, sober in A.A. for 27 years, agrees it can be a problem. “Some who come with slips to be signed you can tell can’t wait to get out. These are the ones who make others uncomfortable and make people question whether signing cards is a good idea,” says Steve. “The issue of signing slips comes up every five or so years as a new crop of service people come in. They ask: ‘Should we be doing this? Is this affiliation?’ The answer is that we can do it in the spirit of cooperation,” says Steve.

“I tell those coming in with court slips that, ‘you haven’t been sentenced here,’ which is true; they are given a choice of going to jail or to a facility or to A.A.” As to whether these mandated attendees remain sober, Steve says: “My experience is that it is about the same attrition rate for people coming in new, whether they are getting slips signed or not. You don’t know—it’s like trying to pick out from among a group of newcomers who is going to stay.”

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Fear and the Fourth Step

Step 4 - Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

How often have you heard, “I know I should start on my Fourth Step, but I’m terrified!”? I know guys in the Fellowship who, when active, were flat-out reckless. But take these very same go-for-broke guys, and suggest it’s time to do a Fourth Step and you’ve never seen such cagey deliberation, such wariness, such humorless, frozen-faced fear.

Where does this terror come from? Have we somehow unknowingly fostered this fear? Have we turned the Fourth Step into something that bears almost no resemblance to the original process?

At other times, we seem to let our disease come up with palliatives to put off doing a Fourth. For instance, when a newer member tells her sponsor she’s afraid of tackling the Fourth Step, this well-meaning sponsor tells her with the best of intentions not to worry, or to hold off for a couple of years. Why? To stay irritable, restless, and discontented for two more years?

Sometimes, we make the Fourth Step just about impossible to do. Where did the suggestion “Write your life story” come from, for example? Very few of us have time to write an autobiography. And even if we did, how much of it would actually contain an inventory of the resentments, fears, and guilt that we have to get rid of? Then there are those recovery publications that peddle twenty-page inventories or guides. Are we writing federal legislation or doing an inventory?

Here’s another new twist: “Don’t forget to put down your assets, too.” Why? Has anyone you know ever gotten drunk over an asset? Has anyone ever wanted to get rid of his or her assets?

Does Step Five say to share the exact nature of our assets? Is it possible that our disease has come up with yet another way to water down this Step?

Shouldn’t we stick to the original analogy Bill W. used? He chose the word “inventory.” He did not choose “balance sheet.” Assets go on balance sheets. On one tape recording, Bill W. said that part of the reason for publishing the Big Book was to “nail it down in black and white so the drunks couldn’t wiggle out of it.” Nowhere in the Fourth Step section of the Big Book does it even once mention the word “asset.” Could it be that we drunks are trying our best to “wiggle out” of this simple process?

Remember the classic scene from old gangster movies? The setting is an interrogation room at the police station. The veteran detective wants information from the nervous suspect, and in a tired, I’ve-been-here-before voice, says: “Okay, Louie. We can do this one of two ways: the hard way or the easy way.” It’s the same with the Fourth Step. We can do it one of two ways. The easy way is between pages 63 and 71 of the Big Book.

Ted D., Teaneck, New Jersey

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Co-founder Quotes

Bill W.

A rebellious refusal to work upon our glaring defects can be a ticket to destruction. Or, for a time, we can stay sober with a minimum of self-improvement and settle ourselves into a comfortable but often dangerous mediocrity. Or we can continuously try hard for those sterling qualities which can add up to greatness of spirit and action—true and lasting freedom under God, the freedom to find and do *His* will.

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On Sponsorship...

To Listen...

"I cannot give you advice. I can only share my experience, strength, and hope with you." How I love to hear those words today, because they mean my sponsor is going to help me see how my alcoholic thinking is blocking my serenity.

No one ever said that continuous sobriety was going to be easy. "Get yourself a good sponsor," everyone says. I realize today that I need someone who will listen to me as I unload my pent-up feelings. I trust my sponsor Jay completely. He never judges nor ridicules me. I'm sober today because I welcome my sponsor's help.

Everyone has problems during sobriety. That's life. As an alcoholic, however, I don't always deal with life on life's terms. My natural instinct is to make the hurt go away by drowning myself in a bottle.

A failing marriage almost cost me my sobriety. My wife endured my alcoholic drinking for seventeen years before I sobered up. She welcomed the sober me with open arms—at first. I became a model AA, worked a good program, and lived my life according to the Twelve Steps. But after the pink cloud turned into a thunderstorm, my marriage resumed its old rocky course.

I cried at meetings about my personal problem only to be told, by some, that my topic wasn't appropriate for the group discussion. Others reminded me of AA's singleness of purpose. Helpful newcomers shared their experiences and offered advice. A few old-timers relied on their experiences, but I didn't like their outcomes. I was confused. Finally,

Paul, the quiet guy with twenty-two-years' sobriety, blurted out, "Talk to your sponsor."

I discussed my problem, several times, with Jay. He listened intently and never offered advice nor judged my actions. When I had completely spilled my guts out, he said a few words of encouragement and relayed how someone else in the program had handled a problem similar to mine. He also gave me the names of some professional counselors who were better equipped to deal with my problem than he was.

Jay met with me on a moment's notice during this critical period. He listened ninety-five percent of the time. As he sensed I was ready, he suggested additional ideas for me to reread in the Big Book and pointed out that my particular problem is covered on page 130. He also reminded me that the Third Step allows me to turn my will over to the care of God and that I needed to pray for an answer to my problem. "You may not like the answer you get, but you will get an answer to your prayers," he said.

When Jay was convinced that I'd applied the tools of the program to solve my problem, he supported the decision I made. Then came the words that I'll remember for the rest of my life: "I couldn't give you advice, but I did share my experience, strength, and hope with you. You've done everything I've asked you to do. Other people in the program who had a problem similar to yours have made the same decision that you have. They are happy and sober today. I support you, and I love you."

James D., Columbus, Ohio

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Humor from the Grapevine

One of our sober buddies went into a saloon to get directions to his next sales call. But, when he asked where the such-and-such company was, he was bombarded with conflicting suggestions and directions. Finally, one old duffer told them all to shut up, walked up to our friend, planted an elbow on the bar, and said, "Okay. Let's get this started right. Where are you now?"

« « « » » »

Then there's the determined wife who announced in clarion tones one Saturday evening, "You are not going down to the saloon tonight!"

Thereupon, she got into the family's only car and drove off, leaving Hubby stranded at home, she thought. However, an alky will find a way. His riding mower was seen in front of the saloon at midnight.

Or, consider the lady who wished to remain anonymous even to her offspring. Instead of laying it out straight for the little ones, she used the excuse that she was "going out to play cards." She went to a lot of meetings, and night after night, she departed saying gaily, "Well, I'm off to my card game."

After some months, her eight-year-old blurted out as she left, "Is that all you do at AA meetings, Mommy? Play cards?"

« « « » » »

Finally, there's the young suburban housewife who solved the problem of getting her husband to water the house plants while she was away. She placed the plants alongside his liquor cabinet with a sign: "We like to drink, too!"

On Sponsorship...

...and Learn

I am always quick to acknowledge the contributions my sponsors have made to my sobriety, but I often forget the growth I've attained from the ladies I sponsor.

I became a sponsor for the first time when I was eleven months sober. I'd never read the pamphlet on sponsorship so when Tina would call with overwhelming newcomer problems, I'd pick her up, bring her to my house, tuck her into bed with a stuffed animal, and say, "We just won't drink tonight and tomorrow everything will get better." Somehow it always did and eight years later Tina is a sober mother and almost finished with nursing school. I wasn't so lucky with Beverly. After release from a mental hospital, she checked into a hotel with a bottle of pills and a quart of vodka. I learned that I have no answers, only experience. If I haven't lived it or done it, I need to send the newcomer to someone who has.

Jackie taught me to live and let live. She gave me the courage to leave my grown children so we all might make our own decisions and lead our own lives. Five

years later, we are all doing well and one daughter has joined Al-Anon.

I'd never been to a prom so being Kim's bridesmaid and wearing a formal filled that void. Later I was allowed to witness the miracle of her daughter's birth. Phyllis taught me about kindness, and Sheila taught me to be a friend. Shirley taught me to never give up, Rose taught forgiveness, and Vickie taught trust.

I came to AA looking for a way to drink like a lady. What I found was hope and self-respect, unconditional love mixed with honesty, tolerance, and understanding. By working with others I'm allowed to witness the miracle of sobriety and observe the twinkling eyes as others learn to speak the language of the heart. Like me they came to scoff and stayed to pray. I thank God for lessons learned and pray that I'll never be too old or too rigid to learn from everyone in the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Eileen K., Orange, California

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San Fernando Valley Central Office
7417-E Van Nuys Boulevard
Van Nuys, CA 91405

Current Information

Name

Address.....

City..... St ZIP

New Additional Contribution

Renewal \$.....

Moving ????: We need your former address as well as your new address to correct our records. Fill out both forms and mail to the address above.

Former Address

Name

Address.....

City..... St ZIP