

Recovery Times

A newsletter from Alcoholics Anonymous San Fernando Valley Central Office

VOL 34, NO. 1 JAN 2010

The Anvil of Experience

“When anyone, anywhere reaches out for help, I want the hand of AA always to be there. And for that: I am responsible.” The first time I read those words they brought tears to my eyes. They have come to have real meaning to me.

I wasn't sober long before I wanted to know everything about this wonderful Fellowship—the Steps, Traditions, history—everything. I was hungry for anything that AA had to offer—still am. About the time of my first AA anniversary, I attended a general service workshop that was sponsored by my district. The weather was bad and it was poorly attended, and the man who was chairing the gratitude meeting said, “I hear people in meetings talk about how grateful they are but the people here tonight are the ones who are truly grateful.” I knew him; we were members of the same group. This man soon became my second sponsor. One of the first things he told me to do was to shut up and learn to listen so that I could listen to learn. It was one of the most powerful suggestions I have ever taken in AA. I realized that, at a year sober, I had no clue how to live sober. Alcoholics Anonymous didn't need me but I desperately needed Alcoholics Anonymous.

I had been active at the group level from the time I was three months sober—first coffeemaker, then secretary, then treasurer. Now my sponsor suggested that I become active in general service. I became a GSR (general service representative) for my group. I attended district and area meetings, assemblies and conferences, and it took a good year before I was able to actually hear what was going on.

My sponsor now took on a new dimension, and became my service sponsor. In order to serve my group responsibly as a trusted servant, I needed guidance and direction in the Twelve Traditions and the Twelve Concepts for World Service. I trusted that my sponsor's experience in service would provide that. It did and still does. We talk weekly, we write to each other, and we constantly exchange AA information.

When I was three years sober I moved back here to the San Francisco Bay area to be near my family. I continue to be active and serve as delegate to the central office for my home group. Each time I attend a delegate's meeting, I have to ask myself if I am acting responsibly for my group. Do I have the group conscience in mind or do I have my own agenda? If I have my own agenda I cease to be a trusted servant. When I am at my home group I ask myself if we are acting in accordance with the Traditions. That is our responsibility as an AA group.

I found out early on that I couldn't trust my own thinking. I had to become willing to surrender my thinking and replace my ideas and beliefs with the spiritual principles of Alcoholics Anonymous. I am responsible as a trusted servant to be informed—my group expects and deserves that. This responsibility requires me to take action, to do some reading, and to find out what the principles say—not what I think. Simple, not easy. The beautiful thing about AA is that we don't have to reinvent the wheel. We have directions and guidelines that we can follow; they were hammered out on the anvil of experience by those who have gone before us.

I am a free woman today—free from booze. It is my individual responsibility to continue to grow, with the help of a Higher Power, a sponsor, and the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous. It is our responsibility—both individually and collectively—to carry the message of Alcoholics Anonymous (especially the message embodied in the first 164 pages of our Big Book) and to give back that which has so freely been given to us.

I recently said to my sponsor, “How do you pay back something that can't really be repaid?”

“Pass it on,” he said, “and help keep this thing together.”

Lee J., San Carlos, California

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Calendar Events

Upcoming Events

35th Annual San Fernando Valley AA Convention
 January 29 - 31, 2010
 Woodland Hills, CA
 Website: www.sfvaaconvention.org

Service Committee Schedule

Jan. 18, 2010 **SFV H&I**
THIRD MONDAY
 8PM Business Meeting
 7PM Get Acquainted Workshop
 5657 Lindley Ave.

Feb. 1, 2010 **G.S. District #11**
FIRST MONDAY
 6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30pm meeting
 315 W. Vine St., Glendale

Feb. 1, 2010 **G.S. District #16**
FIRST MONDAY
 6:15PM meeting
 15950 Chatsworth (church), Granada Hills

Feb. 1, 2010 **G.S. District #17**
FIRST MONDAY
 6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30pm meeting
 5000 Colfax (church), N. Hollywood

Feb. 2, 2010 **G.S. District #2**
FIRST TUESDAY
 5:30PM, 4011 Dunsmore, La Crescenta

Feb. 3, 2010 **G.S. District #1**
FIRST WEDNESDAY
 6:30PM, 7552 Remmet, Canoga Park

Feb. 3, 2010 **SFV Board of Directors**
 6:30PM, Central Office

Feb. 13, 2010 **G.S. District #7**
SECOND SATURDAY
 9AM, Agua Dulce Woman's Club
 33201 Agua Dulce Cyn Rd

Feb. 8, 2010 **SFV Intergroup**
SECOND MONDAY
 6:30PM Orientation, 7PM Business Meeting
 St. Innocents Church
 5657 Lindley Ave., Tarzana

Things We Cannot Change...

Obviously, the staff of Valley Central Office cannot know all the members of the local fellowship. If you have knowledge of the passing of one of our members, please notify us here at Central Office during literature sales hours or mail us the obituary from the local newspaper. You can also email us at sfvaanews@sbcglobal.net.

Valley Events

TO FIND OUT WHAT ELSE IS GOING ON
 YOU CAN:

COME TO CENTRAL OFFICE

CALL US AT 818-988-3001

VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT <http://www.sfvaa.org>

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>.

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.

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 2010 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](mailto:sfvaaews@sbcglobal.net)

San Fernando Valley Central Office Intergroup Representatives Meeting December 14, 2009

Josh S. 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: George M. - 6 years, Pat K. - 6 years,
Dennis B. - 15 years, Di V. - 16 years,
Marilyn - 18 years, Wayne - 26 years,
Cheryl A. - 27 years, Cliff - 30 years*

Motion to adjourn 7:20 PM

*The long form of the Intergroup Meeting Minutes
for December is available at Central Office
or at the Intergroup Meeting.*

*These minutes are pending approval on
January 11, 2010*

Next Meeting - January 11, 2010

Prepared and submitted by:

Dawn H., Recording Secretary

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

December 2009

<i>Marilyn</i>	<i>2 years</i>
<i>Russ W.</i>	<i>3 years</i>
<i>Liz</i>	<i>4 years</i>
<i>Ty H.</i>	<i>12 years</i>
<i>Ken J.</i>	<i>30 years</i>

Learning to Live

Men's Stag 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.

From Wish List To Gratitude List

Unlikely riches and satisfied needs

If you could write your own ticket to the rest of your life right now, you'd short-change yourself by a long shot." My sponsor glanced inward as if remembering something of his own experience.

I was arguing with him about this loving God he claimed was overseeing things and whom I should learn to trust. I was three months sober after twenty years drinking and drugging, a hostile divorce in the works, the IRS serving notice, holed up in a rented room, scraping by on small fix-it jobs, and I was telling him I could conjure a pretty good picture of what my life would look like if there really was a loving God. I had my five-year plan, so why wait for something better from The Big Guy?

Savvy to alcoholism and my personal shortcomings, he agreed I probably had a pretty vivid imagination. We could talk about my five-year plan sometime. But how was I doing today? Was I asking for help? Was I reaching out to others? Was I making progress on that Fourth Step?

I was easily distracted. Besides, today wasn't going well, and was about to get much worse.

My substance abuse counselor took a different tack. He encouraged me to write down what life on my own terms would look like. "If you want to get what you want, first you have to know what you want," he said with a wink. What he didn't say, but what I've come to understand since, is that, "You can't always get what you want. But if you try—if you try, try, try—you get what you need." But that was years down the line.

A week later I swaggered into the counselor's office, wish list in hand, ready to show this guy he wasn't treating just any old small-time loser. People had said my whole life that I had great potential. Also that I never lived up to it. But I had vision, a direction. While cleaning up the wreckage of my past, I had my eye on all that life would be...some day.

Starting with a twenty-acre spread and my custom-designed house on the south side of a local mountain, I talked my way down the list: a new truck for me every year, a station wagon for a pretty blond wife and three well-behaved kids, the thirty-foot sloop we'd all go sailing in on blissful summer weekends, the vacations to Italy and New Zealand, the second home in Hawaii, the substantial real estate investments that would fuel all this, maybe a bid for political office. A believer in hard work (if not always an active one), I emphasized the reputation I'd earn for custom building with my waiting list of eager clients from a wealthy coastal town I couldn't then afford to rent an apartment in. A smart guy with great potential could expect nothing less, right? If there was a loving God, and I lived a sober life and played by all his rules?

The counselor sighed. He looked pained, searching for a gentle way to break bad news. "It sounds like you don't like yourself very much right now," he said.

When I told my sponsor about this little exercise, he raised the same patient smile and asked what I'd learned. I grasped what both men tried telling me, but only in an intellectual sense. It was just information in my head until I'd lived sober and on life's terms for another decade, and grew up some in the process. When asked what a good life would look like, I created a list of things—my pile of stuff—that other people could admire and comment on about how successful I was. Because I didn't like myself very much at the time and was incapable of being part of a lasting relationship, I needed that pile of stuff, if only as a fantasy, to believe that I was worth anything at all.

Missing from that list were:

- 1) The surprising mix of people with whom I'd share the saving grace of AA.
- 2) Any reference to AA's Ninth Step Promises coming true in my life.
- 3) A sober partner with whom to share the serenity, courage, and wisdom of AA for a lifetime.
- 4) Coming to accept and love the family I grew up in, including my alcoholic father, who died four years before I got sober.
- 5) Work that is both enthralling and a service to others.
- 6) Feeling comfortable in my own skin, even when I make mistakes.
- 7) The burning desire to learn, to be open-minded, to seek God's will in troubling situations where experience and understanding aren't enough.
- 8) Good health.
- 9) A quiet excitement for what each day will bring.
- 10) Freedom from the burden of self.
- 11) Wonder, mystery, and gratitude at how failure and conflict are resolved by listening, patience, prayer, persistence; and with a visceral sense of personal growth.

All missing from that first list. In fact, today I have none of the stuff intended to impress my counselor with my vision of success. But I know that, had I been granted all those

Continued on next page →

Wish List *cont.*

trappings and none of what's come to be meaningful and valuable to me, I would have truly short-changed myself.

I own a few nice things that are useful or fun, including an absurdly expensive bicycle (also not on the list) that I ride with unreasonable pleasure and to no one's benefit. But it's not likely my net worth will ever approach what I pictured at three months sober. Job, home, car, furnishings are all modest by American standards. Taken together, though, they're more than I'm able to fully use or properly take care of. My cup runneth over.

Money, things, reputation, power are still of value, but only relative to the time they grant to explore new ways of living and working with others. So I've given up trying to determine or even guess where I'm headed. But I do know why.

There's a final item on my gratitude list:

12) I've surrendered to the will of what I know is a loving God. One whose ways are mysterious to me, but to whom, based on experience, I entrust my own.

A friend in the Fellowship claims worldly success is simpler than it looks anyway. "All you have to do is do the right thing at the right time and do it right." Simple maybe. But impossible on my own unaided resources. And thank God for that. Thank God.

*Anonymous
Maine,*

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*Co-founder
Quotes*

Humor from the Grapevine

Desperate for work, a resourceful old lush answered a want ad for an experienced sea captain. Striving for authenticity, he wore a peg leg, a hook, and an eye patch. "You certainly look the part," observed the interviewer, "but tell me, how did you lose your leg?"

"Ahh, me leg," improvised our man. "A cannonball blew that off years ago in Far Tortuga."

"You don't say... And what about your hand?"

"Aye, laddie, that went in a swordfight, beating off pirates."

"Amazing... And how did you lose your eye?"

Our hero hesitated here, then confessed a bit sheepishly, "To tell you the truth, I was staring into the sky one day and a dang old seagull dropped dung into it!"

"And that put your eye out?"

"Aye," he admitted. "See, it was me first day with the hook."

« « « » » »

An old drunk's favorite topic of conversation was his disbelief in the existence of heaven and hell. Eventually, he died. The next day, two of his drinking buddies met at the bar to console each other.

"Poor old John," said one. "There he is, down in the funeral parlor, all dressed up and nowhere to go."

Bill W.

We treasure our "Serenity Prayer" because it brings a new light to us that can dissipate our oldtime and nearly fatal habit of fooling ourselves.

In the radiance of this prayer we see that defeat, rightly accepted, need be no disaster. We now know that we do not have to run away, nor ought we again try to overcome adversity by still another bulldozing power drive that can only push up obstacles before us faster than they can be taken down.

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Sponsorship

Most of us have come to know that in order to keep our sobriety we must share it, that the only way we are able to keep what we have gained in this program is through giving it away.

When we ask for help from AA we receive it; once we have received, we find that from then on this becomes a program of giving and of sharing, especially through Twelfth Step calls and sponsoring a new member.

Some members consider these two activities as a sort of “package deal”—when they make a Twelfth Step call, they automatically assume that they are also to sponsor the individual. In my mind these are two entirely separate functions, and the fact that I make a Twelfth Step call does not necessarily mean that I am to be that person’s sponsor. By the same token, I might occasionally sponsor some individual who has been contacted first by some other member.

All of us are acquainted with individuals who measure their success in AA by the number of people they have sponsored who “make” the program. Some consider it a failure on their part when someone they have contacted or sponsored fails to remain sober. As far as my own success or failure on this program is concerned, it makes little difference whether my “baby” makes the program or not. Naturally I like to see him make it for his own good, but the important thing, for me, is that I have tried. I have tried to “carry the message” and tried to give what has been given to me. After making a call, if as a result of that call the new person starts coming to meetings, it makes little difference to me whether he chooses me or some other member as a sponsor.

Naturally I assume the responsibility of seeing that he is made to feel at home and introduce him to other members of the group. However, I feel that the new member should be allowed the privilege of choosing his own sponsor (or *sponsors*, if he desires more than one) without feeling obligated to me.

It is very possible that I might not be the most suitable person to sponsor a particular new member. I might be unsuited by my personality, by my education (or lack of education) or by my profession. For the same reasons I might be just the one to sponsor some one else. It is my belief that the more we have in common with a prospective member the more help we can be as a sponsor.

I believe also that the same holds true in making Twelfth Step calls. When we receive a call for help from an individual and we know of another member who is a personal friend of his or perhaps engaged in the same business or profession, we should, if at all possible, give this other member the opportunity to make the call.

Because of the very nature of an alcoholic, the approach used to convince one individual that AA is the solution to his problem will not necessarily work for another prospect. Many members use the same approach on all prospective new members whom they contact, when actually we should pattern our methods to suit the personality of the individual with whom we are working.

A short discussion on the principles of AA and a statement of some of the things it has done for us may be sufficient for some prospects, but for some we may find that this is not enough. A good many are a little harder to convince and it may take several calls before we can get them to a meeting. Others we may have to “nurse along” for some time, even after getting them to a meeting. Of course, we’ll also find that there are some we are unable to convince.

If we will keep in mind, however, the basic thought that this is, after all, a program of *giving*, we can derive a great deal of benefit from our efforts whether our prospect makes the program or not. Also, when an individual for whom we feel responsible does make the program, let’s just remember that his sobriety has been brought about by the same Higher Power that gave us our own and that our efforts have played only a very small part in the process.

One final thought, which helps to keep me on an even keel: let’s not go about our Twelfth Step calls or sponsoring new members with a feeling of self-righteousness, or with the idea that we are making considerable personal sacrifice just to help some poor drunk. Certainly it’s true that the alcoholic needs our help, but don’t ever forget for a minute that working with other alcoholics is one of the best possible ways to help ourselves.

*R. L. O.
Lawton, Oklahoma*

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Taking the Time to Listen

Step 12 - Part 3: "and to practice these principles in all our affairs."

"Deck the halls. . ." danced in the air as I walked into the club where our AA meetings are held. I was glad to be there. It was a chance to see many familiar faces, a breather from the "normal" world.

I felt particularly good, with a "I've-just-done-a-good-deed" kind of feeling. Mentally I had done an inventory. I'll share it with you: First, I had over three years of working as a temporary sponsor resource person. I'd worked on the archives committee for the state convention. My one-on-one sponsorship was adequate. I greeted visitors when they attended our meetings. I drove people to meetings, to detox, to treatment centers, and went on Twelfth Step calls. I collected clothes for AAs at the rescue mission and spoke at rehabs. I'd become immersed in helping the sick, suffering alcoholic. Yes, I felt good.

Did I have a tiny flicker somewhere in my heart that something was missing? If so, I ignored the feeling.

The meeting began and many of the smiles on those faces changed as members shared the pain of the season. It seemed that the very joy pouring forth in carols, well wishes, and colored lights was the catalyst for sadness.

I heard stories that touched my heart. Not pity-pot stories but stories of life: relationships broken, jobs lost, children ill, confusion that replaced the sane thinking of someone with long-term sobriety. Mental illness plagued one, cancer another. Their stories were no less tragic than the alcoholic detoxing in a downtown center.

I saw them as if for the first time. Then God nudged me: "Look around you. These people need love and support. Charity begins at home." I thought of the times I'd given a home group member a quick hug and sailed out the door to help a newcomer. The term, "If it doesn't work at home it doesn't work" took on a new meaning. The members of my home group are my family.

The sick, suffering alcoholic sits in my chair, sits in the chair next to me, or across the room. Newcomers don't have a corner on being sick or on suffering. Maybe my hands don't shake as they once did. I can actually get the coffee cup to my mouth without spilling it. I may look strong but I'm not; but my strength depends on my spiritual condition, which depends on my attendance at meetings and for that I need you.

After all these years I still may not say how I really feel. I may fear rejection. My head monsters may be dragging me around by my thoughts. I may still say, "I'm fine" when I'm dying inside. If I hide my pain, the others probably hide theirs, too.

Now when I look into the eyes of the person next to me and ask, "How are you?", I will take the time to listen. I want to keep in mind that at any given time, each of us may need the same love and support as someone who is attending their first meeting.

Sandra E., Jacksonville Beach, Florida

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Van Nuys, CA 91405*

Current Information

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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.

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