

Our Primary Purpose

Brought to you by the Ottawa Area Intergroup of Alcoholics Anonymous

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Special Interest Articles:

- 12 Steps of a Sponsor
- The Hand of AA in Action
- Addicts in AA



The Alkathon -- A Christmas Miracle

By Jen B

For many years in sobriety, I never got around to going to the Alkathon. When I did start going, I remember wandering around feeling awkward and alone. I'd find a person I knew here or there, but was never really able to connect with anyone. Because I went as an observer, I was closed to the joy and camaraderie that I saw all around me; I was locked in the isolation of my self-centeredness.

I have since realized that the Ottawa Christmas and New Year's Alkathons are one of the best places for an alcoholic to experience and renew the power and love that exists within Alcoholics Anonymous. I have seen how

our Higher Power's love shines when any group of people come together in service.

Three years ago, after a long struggle to come back and get sober after a slip, I showed up on the afternoon of Christmas Eve and started to help out in the kitchen. As I worked away carving up turkeys, I heard much laughter and joking around amongst the volunteers. Lo and behold, after a few hours, I BECAME one of those volunteers; I, too, was laughing and joking around. I was still there 8 hours later. I had a wonderful time and it turned out to be the best Christmas I'd had in many years.

I've been active on Alkathon

committees ever since and wouldn't miss our annual Alkathons for the world! I have made so many friends through this area of service and thus have been blessed to expand my lonely life into something that is full of love and promise.

I have to say that I never got to experience the euphoria of doing service until I stopped just watching other people who performed service and got off my butt and did some myself!!

One doesn't get something for nothing and I now know that the benefits of doing service in Alcoholics Anonymous far outweigh any personal sacrifice. As it is said: "Faith without works is dead."

12 Steps of a Sponsor

Submitted by Doris M



*God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I
cannot change;
courage to change the
things I can;
and wisdom to know the
difference.*

- (1) I will not help you stay and wallow in limbo.
- (2) I will help you grow to become more productive, by your own definition.
- (3) I will help you become more autonomous, more loving of yourself, more free to continue becoming the authority of your own living.
- (4) I cannot give you dreams or “fix you up”, simply because I cannot.
- (5) I cannot give you growth, or grow for you. You must grow yourself, by facing reality, grim as it may be at times.
- (6) I cannot take away your loneliness or pain.
- (7) I cannot sense your world for you, evaluate your goals, or tell you what is best for you in your world; you have your own world.
- (8) I cannot convince you of the crucial choice of choosing the scary uncertainty of growing, over the safe misery of not growing.
- (9) I want to be with you and know you as a rich and growing friend, yet I cannot get close to you when you choose not to grow.
- (10) When I begin to care for you out of pity, when I begin to lose trust in you, then I am toxic, bad and inhibiting for you, and you for me.
- (11) You must know – my help is conditional. I will be with you, hang in there with you, as long as I continue to get even the slightest hints that you are trying to grow.
- (12) If you can accept all of this, then perhaps we can help each other to become what God meant us to be ... mature adults, leaving childishness forever to little children.

Savage Sponsor

Dear Savage Sponsor,

I have been in and out of AA for most of my life. I get a few months of sobriety and then stop going to meetings and eventually I drink. I find meetings difficult, you hear the same people talking about the same challenges, I know how the story goes, I know all the right answers. I just tune out. Same old, same old. How can you really spend the rest of your life going to meetings?

Signed,
Sick of the Rooms

Dear Sick of the Rooms,

You know, when I hear someone has relapsed I will often ask them what happened. Not to sound heartless, but I do it strictly for selfish reasons – I want to know what not to do. Funnily enough, the conversation generally goes like this – ‘excuse, excuse, I stopped going to meetings, justification, justification’.

Sick, you don’t have all the answers, I probably have less, but I do know that since coming to AA I have more answers than before and it

isn’t because I spent a lot of time talking at meetings. I can learn a lot in the rooms of Alcoholic Anonymous when I stop judging, stop planning what genius thing I am going to say next and just listen to others, even to the ones who go on and on about their challenges. Maybe one day they will solve them and I want to know how. What else am I going to do? coffee is free and it is cheaper than a movie.

All the best in 2012,

SS



The Hand of AA in Action

By Julie V, B-United

Hi Friends, my name is Julie and I am a grateful alcoholic. I had an experience today that touched my very soul! I heard a cry for help, and there was this poor soul, drunk, sitting on the sidewalk and yelling for help.

People walked by like he wasn't even there. My heart went out to this fellow, a brother, a human being, a drunk just like me. I went across the street to see him, as he kept crying for help. There he was sitting on a cold sidewalk, in cold weather, with no socks, and hardly any clothes.

I ran to my car to get a blanket and went to sit with him. I covered him up, rubbed his legs to get the circulation going, to warm him up. My heart ached for this poor fellow.

He kept saying help, help! Someone called a ambulance, but it took over half an hour to get there. I talked

with him, kept rubbing him, hugging him to me, telling him help was on the way.

The police came and this poor fellow cried he didn't want to go to jail. He needed medical help, and I assured he would be going to the hospital, where they would take care of him, treat him, keep warm and feed him. He was so kind to me, but verbally abusive to others. I asked him to be nice, because we were all trying to help him. He understood that. Even the police really didn't want physical contact, but I didn't care. I did up his little coat and did the best I could to keep him warm.

We chatted and cried together. Just because someone is down and out, drunk, homeless, hurting, doesn't mean they don't deserve respect, love and compassion. I knew deep in my soul that this person very well could have been me!

Why wasn't it me? I don't know why my Higher Power

took me out of that hell but I am so very grateful for it. By the time I asked for help there was nowhere else to go. A hand reached out to me and I took it! If that hand had not been there, where would I be today? Is it not my responsibility to keep that hand extended? I heard that cry for help and I knew I had to be there! When anyone, anywhere reaches out for help, I want the hand of AA to always be there! I choose to be that hand whenever there is a cry for help. Someone was there for me; I need to be there for others.

When the ambulance took this brother away, I cried and cried. I cried for him, for me, and for all the ones that have not survived their alcoholism. I prayed and thanked my Higher Power for the opportunity to show love, respect and compassion to another human being. My alcoholism is a beautiful gift, one that I am so very grateful for!



"People walked by like he wasn't even there."

Addicts in AA?

By Hayley G

Over the years, there has been a quiet, but provocative, debate in AA: should drug addicts be attending our meetings? I have been hearing this question asked in hushed tones for quite some time.

For those who are reading this article, it is not meant to offend anyone: it is simply meant to raise the issue, so that whoever stumbles upon it may find their own answer, or pose their own questions.

Our traditions clearly state,

"The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking." When I came to AA, that was just about the only honest desire I had (until I found my character defects).

I had been using drugs and alcohol throughout my most formative years, and at the age of 17 I knew I had to do something different. I've been here in AA with you ever since. When I heard people in meetings talking about their feelings, thoughts, behaviours, and reactions to life events, I knew I was an alcoholic; I knew I was like

them, and they were like me. I had found the precious process of one alcoholic relating to another; which got me thinking...

As I mentioned, I used drugs as well as alcohol before I found AA. If I am attending a meeting of our sister fellowship, I identify as an addict for two reasons: because it's true, and out of respect for their program. When I attend a meeting of AA I identify as an alcoholic for the same two reasons. I am able to identify and relate with both addicts and alcoholics, based on my experience.

But what about the alcoholic (without a history of drug use) sitting in the sharing portion of a meeting and hearing an addict talk about their history of drug abuse -- can they relate?

While attending a meeting a couple of years ago, I heard a member share about his struggles with drugs. As this person shared, I watched another member roll his eyes, evidently bored and impatient that someone in an AA meeting would bring up the topic of drug abuse.

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As I observed this, I wondered if the individual who had rolled his eyes had done this because he could not relate to the person sharing. Had the words become just 'white noise'?

And the larger question is: when people in need of recovery come to us, asking for help, do we turn them away based on their experience with drugs or lack of experience with alcohol? I don't think so. However, if the addict finds he or she cannot relate to alcoholics, or feels that they may only have a problem with drugs, AA may not be the most beneficial of all programs.

When I was new in AA I still had a (little) problem with wanting to be the centre of

attention. When identifying myself in an AA meeting I would often announce myself as an addict or cross-addicted, an alcoholic-addict, or addict-alcoholic, depending on my mood. In a room of about forty people identifying as alcoholics, I wanted to be different and noticed. I never did get the standing ovation I was waiting for.

I have observed this very thing in our meetings: people coming in proudly announcing the flavour of their past life, and within a matter of months, their announcement has been simplified to just... "Alcoholic." It's not so bad to be just like the rest of us, is it?

Getting back to the question at hand -- should addicts be

attending our meetings? -- I still don't have an answer. But I will say this: I have yet to meet an alcoholic whom I could look at and say, "Sure, the occasional pill or puff won't hurt you. Would you end up abusing it obsessively as a way to run from your feelings? No way! You'll be fine. Go get em!" Nor have I met an addict whom I thought could take the occasional drink or two. Just a thought.

In conclusion I want to thank those who have been open-minded enough to discuss this with me. Tradition Three from our Twelve & Twelve offered valuable insight into this topic. I urge anyone who is interested to give it a read.

From the Editor's Desk - Our Single Purpose?

By Michael S

While on a Caribbean cruise ship last month, I popped down to the Friends of Bill meeting on deck three. Six people were sitting around in a luxury lounge. I joined them and instantly felt the warmth and comfort of being among my own.

We started sharing. A rough-looking New Yorker was followed by a soft-spoken Brit. They both talked about how good it felt being sober and truly present with their wives on the cruise, all thanks to the program. Then a thin woman self-identified as an over-eater. Four sets of eyebrows shot up; four sets of eyelashes set to rapid blinking.

The thin woman explained how AA had helped her get a 350-pound monkey off her

back. Ah,OK.

Then I talked about the empathy and pity I felt for the obvious drunks on board who were morbidly determined to fully amortize the cost of their all-you-can-drink alcohol passes (my non-alcohol pass was keeping me happily afloat, thanks).

Then a second woman spoke, and she, too, was a thankful, recovering, over-eater. Holy cow! What next? A clean-living formerly crazed coffee drinker? A maniacal masturbator? In fact, it was just a drug addict. But does Bill know all these people are his alleged Friends?

What does Bill say? "...there is no possible way to make non-alcoholics into AA members. We have to confine our membership to alcoholics,

and we have to confine our AA groups to a single purpose."

For the addict who is or was also an alcoholic, Bill says, no problem-o; he's in. What does Bill say about the non-alcoholic drug addict? "So far, I don't know of any case of pure drug addiction that we have been able to approach. In other words, we can no more approach a simon-pure addict than the outsider can usually approach us... We just don't talk that fellow's language."

Now, that "us versus them" kind of language makes me kind of nervous. It can easily slide into demagoguery. I know it tastes great, like a big, greasy cheeseburger, but it isn't good for me.

So what do we say to the non-pure-alcoholic who is

using AA to deal with their particular obsession?

As a softie, I can't imagine asking someone in a room to shut up about their food problem or their drug problem. I might not like it, but I'm not likely to sully my serenity with a confrontation.

But if it got out of hand; if there was too much talk about non-alcoholic stuff, I would have to take a second look at Bill W's warning: "We have to confine our membership to alcoholics, and we have to confine our AA groups to a single purpose. If we don't stick to these principles, we shall almost surely collapse. And if we collapse, we cannot help anyone. ...We must accept the fact that no non-alcoholic, whatever his affliction, can be converted into an alcoholic AA member."