



Good News



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A NEWCOMERS FIRST MEETING (Or What Am I Doing Here?)

A Newcomer in Alcoholics Anonymous is a person with less than 30 days of continuous abstinence from chemical substances consumed, inhaled, injected, stuffed or otherwise used to feel good (as in high), feel better (as in stop shaking), feel courageous (as in stop thinking), not feel (as in numb), escape (as in hide), clam down (as in depress) or just to get plastered.

An Oldtimer is a Newcomer with at least another 24 hours of being Clean and Sober.

A Visitor may be a Newcomer or an Oldtimer from another geographic area, an invited guest, or just an interested individual.

A Skeptic is an Alcoholic with a thick skull. Some Skeptics announce themselves as Visitors.

Oldtimers and some Newcomers come to meetings to reinforce their sobriety and to continue in their growth.

Some Newcomers and most Skeptics come to meetings to:

- a) get slips signed before going to court
- b) get slips signed after going to court
- c) get out of jail
- d) stay out of jail
- e) keep the spouse happy
- f) keep the spouse
- g) keep away from the spouse

h) all of the above

Whatever brings you to a meeting, you're here, so you may as well make the most of it.

Each meeting is a separate Group, even though many different meetings may be held at the same club or facility, and generally includes people who attend other meetings, thereby belonging to other Groups. At the front of the room, or meeting place, sit two, sometimes three people. These are the Secretary of the meeting, and one or two Chairperson(s). The Secretary is elected by each Group to serve a six month term, and has the responsibility to organize the meeting room (chairs, ashtrays, coffee and other essentials — donuts are optional) and select the Chairperson(s) for each meeting. They get the meeting started, keep it orderly, pass the basket (AA Groups are self-supporting through their own contributions — Newcomers and Visitors do not contribute), close the meeting, sign the court slips (Nudges from the Judges) and see that the room is straightened up afterwards.

Meetings begin with a Moment of Silence to do with as you choose, followed by the Serenity Prayer. The Moment of Silence is a good time to clear your head of garbage so the Serenity Prayer can put you in the right frame of mind for the rest of the meeting. The Definition of Alcoholics Anonymous, the Twelve Traditions and a part of Chapter 5, How It Works, is then read. The Secretary next asks if there are any AA announcements from the floor, and may or may not have some

Functions of the Northern California Council of Alcoholics Anonymous:

CONFERENCES

Conferences are held for one purpose, TO CARRY THE MESSAGE.

It is an established fact that those who attend and take an active part in our Conferences have a more positive attitude in their solution of the problem of Alcoholism and are aided in acquiring the knowledge needed to arrest this devastating disease.

Some people have a special knack of giving us a message in a way we can understand. Therefore the Speakers, Chairpeople and Moderators at the Conferences are carefully selected to meet this requirement. Through Conferences we are able to hear speakers that we would never hear otherwise; thus we get a new perspective of our problem.

Conferences help us attain the "Freedom from Anxiety" which we

did not have during our drinking careers. We learn how to gain a release from tension by learning to overcome the causes of tension. You can get the same results that we have if you will attend and seek understanding. At Conferences we make new friends and get new ideas. As we apply the good ideas to ourselves as individuals, they infiltrate their way into our Groups and a better Group harmony develops. Finally Inter-Group unity becomes a reality. And the result of all this — a greater attraction to A.A. for those who still suffer. This may sound like a long way around for we surely come back to the individual, thus we are able to better "Carry the Message".

The workshops and A.A. Meetings are designed for the individual: to give each member working tools in the effort to stay sober and live a contented life.

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Coastal Area Link

When he declined Time Magazine's request to put the back of his head on its front cover, along with a featured article, Bill W. was probably warned by the axiom that "the temporary or seeming good can often be the deadly enemy of the permanent best." In this case the temporary good might have been thousands of alcoholic lives saved, thousands rescued from further drunkenness.

Such an illustrated story might have been within the strict letter of anonymity — just barely. However, Bill apparently felt that a cofounder should not skate on thin ice, despite the allurements of the proximate good. His self-restraint was a classic observation of the dictum, "Our common welfare should come first." It was a generous concession to the spirit of anonymity. It intercepted a precedent which might have opened the door to grandiosity, at the public level, for other A.A. members.

Perhaps there's another lesson here also. Perhaps we are being told that Tradition should never be sacrificed at the altar of short-sighted compassion. It may be safe to say that such compassion has been the proximate cause of many Traditions violations, especially regarding problems other than alcohol.

When Bill reflected on the Time incident, he said: "I estimated that it would be better for some to die and others to suffer, rather than to set such a perilous precedent. Therefore, I declined the publicity, and I must confess it wasn't easy." (Reprinted from page 314 of *Pass It On*, with permission of A.A. World Services, Inc.)

A final thought: The Traditions safeguard A.A. at the public level. They are meant to safeguard our internal relations as well. There can be no second-class Traditions because anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all of them. They are vital to groups, to service committees, to the Conference, to the General Service Board and to the A.A. Grapevine.

Frank B.
Lakeport

NEWCOMERS

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themselves.

By this time, the Newcomer should start to realize that, before anyone says anything, they introduce themselves by their first name (some add their last name), then announce that they are an alcoholic. Now for the Biggie! The Secretary asks if there are any Newcomers within their first 30 days of sobriety who would care to introduce themselves by their first name, only. "This is just to get to know you better, not to embarrass you", the Secretary says.

Say What? How embarrassing can you get to stand up in front of a bunch of strangers and say something like that. I mean, I can tell that guy in the corner definitely is one of those. And that gal over there don't look so hot, either. But Me?

Then some smart ass across the room gets up and says "My name is Methusula. I'm an alcoholic." No doubt about him.

Decision time! Do I stand up and say this thing, stay seated and say it, say I'm not sure, or just keep my mouth shut. The ones who did get up and say it got a big "Hi, (Methusula)", a smile and a big round of applause. The one guy who said he was only here because he was sent here by the courts got all that, and a sly grin to boot, so I won't say that. Maybe I'll wait 'til next time to say anything. That's O K, too.

The Secretary welcomes all the Newcomers (some keep count and tell how many), then says "You're the most important person in the room." Ha! Must be looking for new members to raise some more money. The Chairperson is announced, stands up and tells who and what he (she, if it's a woman) is, and starts to talk. They tell How It Was, What Happened Then, and How It Is Today.

The How It Was and What Happened Then is called the Drunkalogue. What and how much was

drunk, and all the things that happened as a result. Drunk drivings, jails, robberies, penitentiaries, accidents, divorces, lost homes and children, jobs and friends — a lot of misery. The lucky ones just stubbed their toe or got caught in bed with the neighbors spouse. Whatever it was, though, was the result of what was used, for whatever reason it was used.

Then comes the Revelation. The Bottom. The Drunk to End All Drunks. The one that led that person to seek help, and the reason he (she) is standing here right now saying all these things to all these people. A little about how they got to be here. The Dark before the Light.

Now comes the good part. How It Is Today. This is the point in the talk where you listen to what has happened for this person when alcohol stopped being the answer to everything, whether good or bad, that went on in their life. No more drunk driving arrests. No more time locked up somewhere because of things done while under the influence of chemicals. You still might end up there, but now it's just your own dumb fault, not a stupid thing you did, and didn't think clearly about. No guarantees that everything will be all roses from now on, but the way you manage your life in bad or good times will be easier if your mind isn't fogged over. More opportunities will become available to you than when you were out of it, and you can take better advantage of them when they do come up. Your life has become more manageable.

This is called sharing. We share our experience, strength and hope with each other that we may solve our common problem and help others to recover from addiction. Our Hopes, not our Expectations. As others get up and share, the stories are different. The past is different. Each Today is different. Hopes for the future are different. Yet, with all these differences, several things are shared in common. A common problem — addiction to chemicals. A common failure — being powerless to overcome this problem of our own

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Archives and Our Future

Archives has become a more talked about subject recently, not only as a movement to retrieve and collect memorabilia from our past, but as a tool in directing our destiny. This year, it gained in prominence through being one of the Agenda Topics at the 1986 General Service Conference, one part being how it may serve us in furthering our Primary Purpose.

High on the list, perhaps, is the oft heard adage that if we forget the past, we are bound to repeat it. For individual alcoholics, that means returning to a life of drunkenness and despair. For AA as a Society, there is a much greater and more regrettable consequence, for if we as a Society do not remember the lessons of our past, the risk is that the efforts of over 50 years may fall apart and our Fellowship cease to exist, condemning many future lost souls to an alcoholic dilemma without the solution which we have found.

There is, however, a danger in letting the successes and the failures of our past be the single guideline to shaping our future. Often we may find that something which succeeded in the past may have succeeded for reasons which are no longer valid. Similarly, things which may have failed in the past could be those things which, in today's environment, may allow us to be more effective in reaching the Alcoholic Who Still Suffers.

Change is one of the constants in life, a statement which may frequently be heard in meetings. If we become rigidly dogmatic in our views of change we run the risk of losing what we have thus far achieved perhaps as much so as if we were to be loose and free to change those things which we have come to believe in. For that reason, we must be as cautious when we resist change as when we make changes.

Our past has some lessons along these lines which would serve us well. In the beginning, both women

and younger people of both sexes were not readily received into the Fellowship. Women, often because husbands and society itself were reticent to consider the fair sex as prone to this masculine disease. We have changed over the years, in large part because the role of women in society has changed. Likewise the young are now accepted, in part because the program, once considered effective only for those hard core down and outers, is now acknowledged to be effective for 'high-bottom' alcoholics, and in part, because the youth of today's society begin drinking careers earlier and pursue it with greater zeal than was generally true in the past.

Attending meetings frequently is another area of change. In the early days, morning meditation was considered an indispensable part of the daily routine much the same as many now stress daily meetings. The change was gradual, and due largely to the lack of frequent meetings in the past compared with the abundance of meetings today. The potential danger here is that many may come to feel that, if they attend a meeting a day, the other parts of the program may be less important. I have encountered a great many Longtimers who seldom attend meetings, yet through living the principles which they acquired early in their sobriety, their lives are no more threatened by slips than if they attended two meetings a day.

Archives should never be reduced to the simple dictionary definition of being a place where historical records and documents are preserved, and those things placed in our Archival Repositories should never become merely things of a passing interest which were important only to those in our past. These things are important to our future, and the manner in which we learn from our past will indeed determine what our future will be.

Dave Q.
San Jose

Where's the Meeting?

It's my summer vacation again and I've been using a lot of my extra time to visit new meetings both at home and out of town. I love going to meetings because I know that I'll find a bunch of people talking about my favorite subject — recovery from alcoholism through the Twelve Steps.

I attended a meeting that was listed in a local meeting directory with the name and address of the building in which it was held. When I arrived at the building I found an open door and a series of A.A. signs pointing up the stairs and down the hall until I reached the meeting room. The room had a literature rack at one end, bulletin boards with A.A. announcements posted, a big chart of the Steps on the wall, and some A.A. books on the table. It was about twenty minutes before the meeting was to begin and there were several group members already there and they welcomed me and introduced themselves.

I attended another meeting that was listed in another local meeting directory in a similar fashion. When I arrived at the building, I entered and walked past several doors that led to rooms that were marked something other than A.A. Eventually I found two unmarked doors, side by side. One door was open, the other had an A.A. sign above it. It was ten minutes before the meeting was scheduled to begin, yet neither room was occupied nor contained any evidence that an A.A. meeting was to be held there.

I've been sober for a long time and am no longer embarrassed to ask where the A.A. meeting is, but what about the newcomer? The next time you go to an A.A. meeting, look around and try to imagine how it must look to the newcomer. Is it well marked (we so often meet in back rooms and basements)? Are there A.A. materials in evidence (racks of A.A. literature, books, signs on the

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THE SOCIAL HOUR

My dictionary defines a curmudgeon as: "a crusty, ill-tempered (usually) old man." In the articles I have written I have chosen to express my opinions on various things which I believe may be detrimental to our A.A. fellowship, and in doing this, I am sometimes a nit-picker, and somewhat of a curmudgeon! I do this deliberately; not just to be critical for the sake of being critical, but out of love for our fellowship and a desire to see us stick firmly to our Traditions, and with Dr. Bob's last admonition to us to "keep it simple".

With that introduction, I turn again to Tradition Five: "Each group has but one primary purpose — to help the alcoholic who still suffers."

It is interesting to note that in every reference to or explanation of this Tradition which I have been able to find in Bill W.'s writings, he tells us that Tradition Five is to remind us that we alcoholics are inherently capable of helping other alcoholics on only one problem — their alcoholism. He almost always invokes his favorite cliché in discussing this: "Shoemaker, stick to thy last." I discussed one aspect of this in my last article on "Dual Addiction."

Bill W.'s emphasis on Tradition Five is thus always "Each group has but one primary purpose — to help the **ALCOHOLIC** who still suffers." Let me change the emphasis slightly, however, to make my present point,

as follows: "Each group has but one primary purpose — to **HELP** the alcoholic who still suffers." I am afraid that we often make the primary purpose of our group, or at least of our group meetings, to be more of an opportunity to get together socially than to help the alcoholic who still suffers. I don't want to downgrade this social aspect of A.A. meetings — it is important to me to share both my ups and my downs with my fellow alcoholics, and to feel their love, understanding, and support at A.A. meetings. However, I have too often been at meetings where newcomers were treated in a disappointing way. The meeting begins; the newcomer introduces himself or herself at the appropriate time; there is applause, and friendly smiles; the meeting proceeds, and at least some of those who share make a point of welcoming the newcomer. At the end of the meeting, the group usually breaks up into smaller groups with one-on-one discussions, and perhaps plans are made to go out for coffee. Usually, someone will go over and say a few encouraging words to the newcomer, and sometimes exchange phone numbers, but sometimes the newcomer just sits there looking lost. Now this isn't always bad from the newcomer's point of view. We all know that newcomers are often shy — quite ashamed to find themselves at an A.A. meeting — and would like nothing better than to crawl into the nearest hole. From their point of view, the less recognition given them, the better. For them, just observing the love and fellowship of A.A. is a novel, rewarding, and encouraging experience, and is about all they can absorb initially. Nonetheless, the newcomer, by being present, is asking for help, and the group, both in its individuals and as a group, should take more action to carry out its one primary purpose, which is not to have a pleasant social hour, but to help the alcoholic who still suffers.

Don G.
(Curmudgeon)
San Francisco

1986 Events

SEPTEMBER

- 7: CCFAA PICNIC — Elk Grove Park. Games, prizes, food, rummage and plant sale. For info call (916) 443-8138.
- 12-14: LAKE TAHOE FALL FESTIVAL, Lakeside Inn, South Shore, Lake Tahoe, Ca.
- 20: CONCORD SERVICE CENTER, Elks Lodge, Willow Pass Rd., Concord, Ca., 2:00 p.m.

OCTOBER

- 3-5: SO. CALIFORNIA CONVENTION, San Diego, Ca.
- 10-12: NCCAA CONFERENCE — Redding, Ca.
- 26: MYRTLEDALE OCTOBERFEST, Calistoga Fairgrounds, Calistoga - 3:00 p.m.

NOVEMBER

- 6-9: 25th ANNUAL HAWAIIAN CONFERENCE. Westin Ilikai Hotel, \$50.00 fee in advance required. Send check to: 25th Annual Hawaii Conference, P.O. Box 23434, Honolulu, Hawaii, 96822.
- 7-9: HIGH SUMMIT CONFERENCE, Yosemite Park, Yosemite, Ca.
- 15: CNIA ASSEMBLY
- 15: A DAY OF SOBRIETY, Campbell Community Center, Winchester & Campbell Ave., Campbell, Ca. - 1:00 p.m.

DEADLINES FOR MATERIAL

Dec. 10 . . Jan.-Feb. issue
Feb. 10 . Mar.-April issue
April 10 . May-June issue
June 10 . . July-Aug. issue
Aug. 10 . Sept.-Oct. issue
Oct. 10 . . Nov.-Dec. issue

WHERE'S THE MEETING?

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walls, etc.)? Are there members who arrive early to greet the newcomer and the visitor to make him feel welcome? Let's not lose the newcomer between the sidewalk and the meeting room.

Barbara W.
Eureka

Fletch's Territory

Well alkies, as time gets closer to our fall conference in Redding (October 10-12), and even closer to the big central office picnic at Elk Grove park (Sept. 7, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.), you can see that all's well in the territory. A.A. is alive and well and growing by leaps and bounds. New groups springing up, new activities to replace the "fun" we thought we'd left behind, and lots and lots of newcomers. Now this brings me to the subject of my last column here in the Good News . . . yeah alkies, Wife #1 says she has typist cramp and it's time for ol J. P. to rotate out to something easier, like being head taster at A.A. potlucks and stuff. Oooh, I almost forgot . . . the subject. Well, just hold on to your easy does it bumper sticker, I'm getting to it.

But first, I've got to tell ya this. When you're in Redding, drop by the Good News desk and give Frank a big hug. Then do yourself a big favor. Get a subscription, or renew your old one to one heck of a fine newspaper — "The Good News". You won't be sorry . . . trust ol J. P.

Oh yeah — the subject, sorry 'bout that but I got carried away thinking about those fine dedicated folks that put the Good News out. Ya know, alkies, there's a lot of love behind that Good News desk. When you tell 'em in Redding you appreciate it you don't have to say "J. P. sent me", but ya can if you're shy.

Huh? Subject . . . oh yeah, the subject is love. I just want you to know I love you all, very much.

In Fellowship,
Just Plain Fletch

NEWCOMERS

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free will. A common result — that our lives had now become more manageable.

The most important thing that is shared in common is that these people who stand in front of you, baring their souls for all to see, have found something that has allowed them to arrest their disease. To control it. To

A Few Words Without a Script

The first time I saw The Traditions Play, I was only a few months into the program. At that time the Traditions were pretty much a mystery to me — in fact, just about every aspect of sobriety was a mystery. I was just beginning to discover that people in Alcoholics Anonymous knew how to have a good time without taking a drink. The players were wonderful — but wait! In the midst of this terrific comedy show came a very well explained interpretation of our Twelve Traditions. For the first time I actually understood how the Traditions worked and why they were so important to the program that we read them at every meeting.

The part that I had really liked was that of "The Newcomer" played with stumbling perfection by one of the regulars in my home group. I remember saying, "What fun! I wish I could do that!" Hah! I could barely bring myself to speak to three people at the same time without the thought of having a drink first to give me some confidence.

One day, after several years of sobriety and service, an announcement was made at a meeting that someone was needed to take a part in The Twelve Traditions Play. Having com-stand up and face their frailties with a strength that allows them to live each day Clean and Sober.

How they did it is something you will have to discover for yourself. But the answers are here in these meetings. These meetings of these Groups of Alcoholics Anonymous. It's free for the taking — you've already paid your initiation fees to get here. All you have to do now, is stick around, listen and learn.

I'll share one thing with you, though. Part of the secret we share is that we have to give it away if we want to keep it. And one Oldtimer can't give it away to another Oldtimer. It has to be given away to a Newcomer.

So, if you're a Newcomer, Keep Coming Back and Help Save An Oldtimer.

Dave Q.

San Jose

(Just an Opinion)

pletely forgotten the often received admonition to: "Never volunteer!" I found myself with the part of "The Newcomer". Maybe the real reason the play works so well is that there are no long rehearsals — everyone grabs their script and just **reads!** The play always seems to entertain and amuse while accomplishing its true purpose — to explain in detail just how the Twelve Traditions are designed to keep Alcoholics Anonymous running smoothly. I've done the play several times now and to be completely honest, by the time we're done I'm shaking for real. But it's wonderful to hear so many people afterward talking about how much they've learned. And, as the meeting secretary remarked at the end of our last performance: "You must really love your Sobriety to get up on stage and do this!"

Linda H.
Willits, California

CONTACT SERVICE

Recently, a new committee has arisen from traditional A.A. entities. It is identified as the Northern California Contact Service Committee. Its purpose is to carry the recovery message to alcoholics in the process of being released from facilities, regardless of whether the latter are penal institutions or other types of facilities. It is dedicated to providing Twelfth Step contact immediately upon release. The emphasis is on "immediately" because that is precisely the critical moment.

Rick, the Committee Chairman, would be happy to see each General Service district represented at the monthly meetings. In fact, all entities are asked to send representatives to the meetings. Ideally, this committee is to be composed of members from General Service, Hospitals and Institutions, and the Intergroups.

The Northern California Contact Service Committee meets on the fourth Saturday of each month at 4 p.m. at the Oakland Central Office. Please attend if possible.

Frank B., Lakeport

