

THE **alternative**

www.readingberksintergroup.org

NEWSLETTER OF THE READING-BERKS INTERGROUP OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

NEWS & notes

Pre-Owned Literature Can Still Help Others

With Spring Cleaning just around the corner, make a note of saving any outdated AA literature you might have been saving (Grapevines, Big Books, etc.) and donate it for others to use. Remember, the message of hope and recovery is not diminished by time or wear. The RBI Corrections Committee is always in need of materials to help them in their efforts. See your home group's RBI representative or contact Terry C. at 484-332-0926 or at MensPrison@ReadingBerksIntergroup.org



Washington St. Group Plans Spring Luncheon

Help usher in Spring with old friends and new at the 611 Washington St. Group Spring Luncheon on Thursday, April 8. Food, fellowship and speakers are on the menu for the day.

Tri-District Workshop Offers 'A Vision for You'

A tri-district workshop is scheduled for Sunday, April 18 at the Dunn Community Center in Exeter (next to the Library) 4565 Crestwick Drive. Set for 12 to 5 pm. The theme of the workshop is "A Vision for You."

Answering The Call Of Intergroup Service

The RBI 24-Hour Telephone Hotline has been busy recently and is currently seeking some volunteers to assist with this important service. If interested call Ted at 610-373-1456 or email at Hotline@ReadingBerksIntergroup.org.



Women Do Recover Group Has New Meeting Time

Beginning in April, the Women Do Recover/W.S.R.G will meet every Sunday from 6-7 pm at 647 Walnut St., Reading. Women are greatly encouraged to offer their support to this group.

Walnut St. and Birdsboro Groups to Celebrate Anniversaries

Help celebrate Birdsboro Group's 35th anniversary, starting 7:30pm, April 14 in St. Mark's Lutheran Church, Birdsboro. The meeting will feature speaker Tim M. Fellowship, and food will follow. Coffee and cake provided, additional food donations welcome (if you so choose.)

The Walnut Street Recovery Group will be celebrating their 67th anniversary on April 17 from 1:30 to around 4 pm with lots of food, fun and fellowship.

Also a belated congratulations to the Sober at Six Group of Birdsboro who celebrated their second anniversary last month.

Register Early for COH Speakers Conference

Early registration savings are still available for those wishing to attend the second annual Circle of Hope Roundup Speakers conference in Reading.

Scheduled for June 4 through 6 at the Perkins Auditorium of Penn State Berks Campus, the conference will feature a number of guest AA and Alanon speakers from across the country, as well as AA meetings and of course, lots of fellowship.

Advance registration prices are set at \$30 a person. At-the-door registration is \$35. Registrations are transferable, but not refundable. Space is limited for the event, so early registration is suggested.

Registration forms are available on-line at www.CircleOfHopeRoundup.com.

SCHEDULED SPEAKERS



Peg M. from Omaha, NE
Friday 8:00 PM

Barb M. from Middletown, PA
Saturday 10:00 AM

Rich B. from Ocean City, NJ
Saturday 1:30 PM

Ann C. from Hagerstown, MD
Saturday 3:30 PM

Dick A. from Lithia Springs, GA
Saturday 8:00 PM

"God, As I Understand Him"
Sunday 10:00 AM

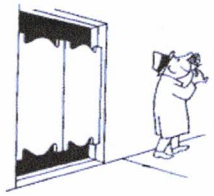
AA and Professional Community To Focus on Co-operation at Area 59 Forum

An informational forum titled, *AA and Co-operation with the Professional Community*, will be held June 3 at the Schmidt Training and Technology Center of the Reading Area Community College.

Sponsored by Dist. 59, the forum begins at 6 pm and will feature a non-alcoholic guest speaker, a Psychiatrist who will share his experiences in working with Alcoholics Anonymous. The forum is designed for attendants to share their experiences, ask questions and provide suggestions as to how AA can cooperate with their professions.

All members of the professional community — judges, doctors, therapists, social workers, probation officers, student nurses, etc., are encouraged to attend. Registration is free. To register, please e-mail your name and occupation with any questions or suggestions to publicinfo@area59aa.org. Registrations will also be accepted at the event.

Victor E.



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commitments INTERGROUP TWELFTH STEP

Caron Adolescent Extended Care - Men Sundays 7 pm

Apr. 4 Caron Alumni
Apr. 11 Happy Hour Group
Apr. 18 Leesport Group
Apr. 25 Shoey Group
May 2 Caron Alumni

Wernersville State Hosp. See Guard in Building 34 Mondays 7 pm

Apr. 5 Hilltop Group
Apr. 12 Robesonia Group
Apr. 19 Advent Men's Group
Apr. 26 Shoey Group
May 3 Robesonia Group

Reading Detox Unit Every Other Tuesday 8 pm

Apr. 6 Alpha Group
Apr. 20 Happy Hour Group
May 4 Walnut St. Group

Reading Detox Unit Thursdays 8 pm

Apr. 1 Robesonia Group
Apr. 8 Hilltop Group
Apr. 15 Shoey Group
Apr. 22 Walnut St. Group
Apr. 29 Birdsboro Group
May 6 Shillington Group

*I am responsible, when anyone, anywhere
reaches out for help
I want the hand of AA always to be there,
and for that...I am responsible!!*

Caron Adolescent Extended Care - Women Sundays 7 pm

Apr. 4 Caron Alumni
Apr. 11 Happy Hour Group
Apr. 18 New Life
Apr. 25 Leesport Group
May 2 Caron Alumni

St. Joe's Hospital MH Unit 3rd Floor Reed & Walnut Sts. Mondays 7 pm

Apr. 5 Alpha Group
Apr. 12 Alpha Group
Apr. 19 Congo Group
Apr. 26 Boyertown Group
May 3 Walnut St. Group

Caron Foundation Thursdays 8 pm

Apr. 1 New Berlinville Group
Apr. 8 Robesonia Group
Apr. 15 Advent Men's Group
Apr. 22 New Life Group
Apr. 29 Oley Group
May 6 Hilltop Group

Caron Foundation Young Adult Female Fridays 8 pm

Apr. 2 8:15 AM group
Apr. 9 Sat. Morn. Women's Grp.
Apr. 16 Walnut St. Group
Apr. 23 Sat. Morn. Women's Grp.
Apr. 30 Sat. Morn. Women's Grp.
May 7 Sat. Morn. Women's Grp.

If you take a commitment for your group, make sure the person agreeing to go has a substitute if they can't make it. If you would like to go to the St. Joe's meeting, contact the hospital first to see if there are any alcoholics there: 610-378-2092. When sending group members to commitments, it's great to double up! Send a newer and an older member, and everyone will benefit!! PLEASE make sure that someone honors the commitment that you take for your group.

These may be the only meetings that the patients may have. Remember, "You Are Responsible", when you commit your time. PLEASE don't let these commitments go unattended. If you cannot make your commitment please notify Steve at 610-750-4019.

STEP

4

'Made a
searching
and fearless
moral in-
ventory of
ourselves.

GRAPEVINE POLL

Results from recent
Grapevine Magazine reader polls

Question:

*How many Fourth Steps
have you done?*

Total Responded: 2180

One

523 votes (23.99 %)

**Two- I missed some
items the first time. 333
votes (15.28 %)**

**I do one every year or
every few years.
469 votes (21.51 %)**

**I'm thinking about doing
another one.
104 votes (4.77 %)**

**I haven't done one
751 votes (34.45 %)**

Set Them On Paper...

Step Four: 'Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves. "In dealing with resentments, we set them on paper." That simple sentence in chapter five of the Big Book slowed my reading one evening as I sat with a blank pad in front of me, making no progress on my Fourth Step.

At that time I had been coming to meetings for two years and had not had a drink during that time. My introduction to the Steps was at my first meeting where the Twelve Steps were printed on a yellowed old shade that hung behind the speaker. I thought that if this was all there was to Alcoholics Anonymous, I'd have it down pat in four or five weeks, because everything that was on the wall had been included in my religious education. The Fourth Step was nothing more than an examination of conscience while the Fifth Step was the sacrament of confession.

With that settled, I sat back to drink my coffee and the days passed.

I found hope in the Fellowship and moved forward like a horse with blinders on, never looking back. But the sharing, especially at Step meetings, brought reality to me as my head cleared. Like all who had gone before me in the Fellowship, I could not escape the past.

For the first year, the first three Steps held my attention. Every time that I got to the Fourth Step, I proceeded to lose myself in the text of the "Twelve and Twelve." Why did I get lost there? Easy--just the mention of the seven deadly sins--pride, greed, lust, anger, gluttony, envy, and sloth--and guilt raises its head. Guilt did help me not pick up the first drink though it kept me from understanding the rest of the text in the "Twelve and Twelve." Privately I wanted to finish all the Steps so fast I'd make the Guinness Book of World Records, but publicly I nodded my assent when people said, "You should do a Step a year." I found myself writing in circles every time I tried to list all my sins.

One day, anger became my companion. It stayed day and night. My sponsor said that his sponsor claimed the Fourth Step was the Step for anger. Why didn't I take another look at what the Big Book had to say about it?



But the sharing, especially at Step meetings, brought reality to me as my head cleared. Like all who had gone before me in the Fellowship, I could not escape the past.

That night I discovered the sentence. "In dealing with resentments, we set them on paper." Nothing about guilt or sin here. No examination of conscience or sacrament of confession, just resentments. The Big Book says "resentment destroys more alcoholics than anything else. From it stem all forms of spiritual disease. . . ."

I began at my earliest memory and came forward through my life. My list was thorough. No one I knew well was left off, nor were institutions with which I had had contact. I was a walking resentment.

As I got to the middle of my list, my need to justify my resentment with a short postscript disappeared and I

attempted simply to discover whether my anger was based on threatened self-esteem, money, ambition, or personal relationships. When my list was complete I began to discover a startling truth--I had really been dependent on everyone. In this context the words "selfish," "dishonest," "self-seeking," and "frightened" took on new meaning. I appeared to be as powerless over the things I feared as I was over alcohol.

But I had only to turn the page of the Big Book for the instruction to make a list of my fears, ask my Higher Power to remove my fear and direct my attention "to what He would have us be." The Big Book says that after completing the Fourth Step, "you have swallowed and digested some big chunks of truth about yourself." This was true. Yet these truths were not accompanied by guilt. Instead I felt a deep sadness at the desperation with which I had acted. It was the beginning of an acceptance of myself, shortcomings, wrongs, and all.

The Fifth Step stood ahead--the road to "perfect peace and ease." I was ready to call my sponsor and set the time for it. We made the date two weeks from then--I wanted to stay on the old, familiar road a little longer before sharing my inventory with him.

Bernie B., New York, New York
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SELECTIONS FROM THE GRAPEVINE

RELAPSE

A Head Full Of AA and A Belly Full Of Beer

At my home group, one of our members gives a Grapevine report once a month. He recently mentioned that the Grapevine was looking for stories about relapse. When he said that, my ears suddenly opened, probably because I was back for the second week in a row from what was, so far, the worst relapse I've had yet.

The meeting I attended was my home group for almost two years until I walked out the back door, with no plans of returning. I had taken suggestions from my sponsor while attending the Badger Group back in 2002. I worked the Steps with him, I took commitments, helped set up and make coffee, and did all the other things I was asked to do. Life started to look okay after a while. I loved AA and was actively involved in this group and others. I even started sponsoring guys and felt at home in Alcoholics Anonymous. I was ten months sober when it was suggested that I not get into a relationship. Until then, I had taken the suggestions my sponsor had given. But I decided he was wrong on this one and I started dating.

To make a long story short, the relationship ended and, although I didn't know it at the time, I was on my way out of the doors of AA. Once again, I was too proud to admit that my sponsor was right and too resentful and ego-driven to care. I slowly tip-toed out the back door after a year and nine months of sobriety and got drunk again.

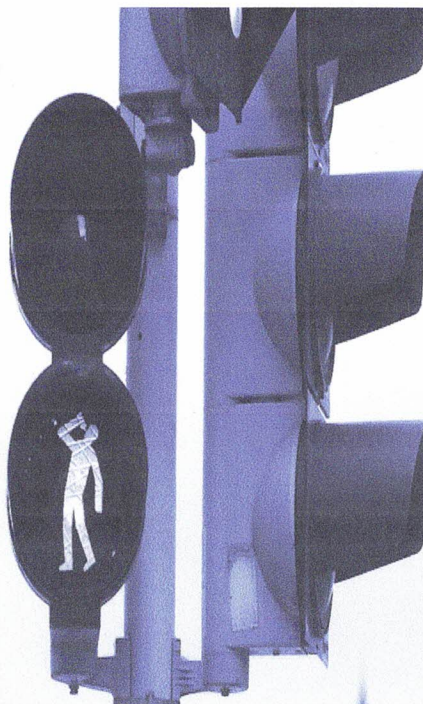
I had been trying to stay sober since 1994. When I woke up after the first night of drinking, I cannot describe the guilt and remorse I felt.

What had happened? Should I go back right away? I knew in my heart that I was an alcoholic, but I couldn't go back and tell them I drank. What would they think of me?

So I decided, To hell with AA. I'm never going back, no matter what. I continued to drink every chance I got. All the good things that AA had given me--a job, a car, self-respect, trust of family and friends--slowly melted away as I drank more, and more, and more.

The problem with drinking was that my head full of AA didn't mix well at all with a belly full of beer. I thought about AA everyday but tried to drink as much as I could to keep from thinking about it.

Eventually, I told the guys who called all the time to quit calling me, and that made my drinking even worse. They continued to care about me even though I didn't care about me. I knew in my



*I thought about
AA everyday but
tried to drink as
much as I could to
keep from thinking
about it.*

heart that if I were ever to be happy again, I'd have to go back to AA, and there was no way that was going to happen.

I continued to drink and party on a regular basis. In no time, I was jobless and hopeless, suicidal, and wished I could fall asleep and not wake up. No matter how bad it got, though, I was never going back to AA. I hated those people.

They didn't know me; I was not like them. They just didn't understand that my case was different.

On what would turn out to be the end of this year-long jag, I woke up alone in a hotel room I had managed to stay in for three days. I was scared, lonely, desperate, and completely out of gas. Getting up to get loaded, day after day, had finally burned me to the ground. I wished for the end.

I got up that last day and proceeded to get good and drunk for what I hoped and prayed was the last time. I left that hotel and drove home. All I could do was cry. I had been beaten into a state of surrender. I didn't care what anyone in AA thought because I had made them out to hate me. I decided I was going back.

At first, I had conditions. I was not going to the same group; I'd get sober somewhere else. But eventually I went to my old home group and have been sober since September 24, 2005, by the grace of a God I have yet to understand.

When I went back to my old home group, I was thirty days sober. I waited until I had exactly thirty days so I wouldn't have to raise my hand to admit I was back. Much to my surprise, they welcomed me back into the group. The people I thought would never talk to me again came up to me with open arms. Although I felt uncomfortable being back again, it wasn't nearly as bad as it felt being gone. I'm still very full of fear and anxiety. I had forgotten what it was like to feel the fear and motions that come with early sobriety. I got a sponsor again and started to work the Steps. I've been told to shake hands and have started doing so, even though it feels awkward. People have told me how glad they are to see me back.

I'm not sure if I'm grateful to be back yet. I'm taking things a minute at a time much of the time. I know one thing and one thing only: Today I'm sober and loved by members of my home group, even though I might not love myself yet. I'm grateful that when I did put my hand back out for help, they grabbed it and said come on in. I can only pray that I never forget this bottom. I may never get a chance to get sober again.

Dan G., Waukesha, Wisconsin

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