

alternative

NEWSLETTER OF THE READING-BERKS INTERGROUP OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

NEWS & notes

Help A Group and Help An Alcoholic

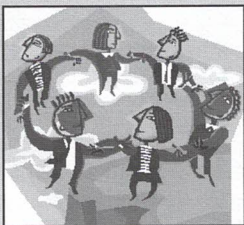
Two area groups are looking for your help in supporting their members.

The Spirit of Recovery Group meets

at 7 pm Mondays in the basement of the Holy Spirit Church, 4th and Windsor Sts., Reading. Enter through the side door.

Another local group, *A Fresh Start*, meets on Tuesdays at 7:30 pm in the Albright Church basement Room 100.

Please show your support for these group and their efforts by attending one of their meetings soon.



Group Anniversaries To Be Celebrated

The *Gibraltar Group* will be commemorating their 16th anniversary on Friday, July 30 at St. John's Church, 1045 Old River Rd., Birdsboro.

The speaker meeting will begin at 8 pm with lots of food, fun and fellowship. All are welcome.

The *Time To Start Living Group* will be hosting a anniversary celebration at their speaker meeting on Friday, Aug. 27 at 6:30 pm. The group meets at the Good Shepherd Church, 107 Tuckerton Rd., Temple.

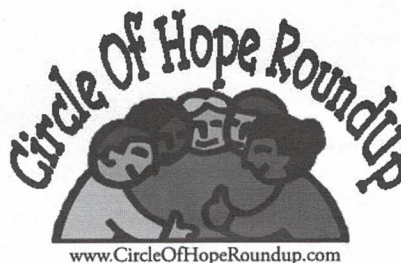
Circle of Hope Conference Resounds With The Message of Hope

The Circle of Hope Roundup Speakers Conference held June 4-6, 2010 at Penn State University Berks Campus was a great success. The message of hope of Alcoholics Anonymous was heard throughout the weekend as expressed by our 5 guest speakers. We had great attendance from both the local fellowship and quite a few from out of town.

Friday night, Peg M. from Omaha, NE shared her message with us. She has 50 years in the program and was an inspiration. She was big on analogies and told us a story of "talking turkey". She had the crowd laughing with her "turkey talking" antics.

On Saturday morning, Barb M. from Middletown, PA shared her story. The challenges she has overcome and her enthusiasm for AA was an encouragement to all. We are thankful she was able to attend.

Our afternoon speakers were Rich B. from Ocean City, MD and Ann C. from Annapolis, MD. Rich's story was incredible in the fact that by working the AA program, he was able to overcome some of the biggest adversities we see in active alcoholism. He too loved analogies and keeping in line with the "bird" talk, shared the story of the geese. Ann C. was our guest Al-Anon speaker.



Next year's conference will be held June 3—5 and will feature Clancy I. from Venice, CA. Remember to register early!

She gave us insight to how much of a family disease this is and how she is using the 12 steps in her life.

Saturday evening brought us Dick A. from Lithia Springs, GA. He spoke from the heart and gave a strong message of how well this program can work for you. He brought the crowd from laughter to tears. My favorite part of his story was when he got the bright idea of having a "ménage".

Throughout the weekend, there were open AA discussion meetings held during the breaks. The hospitality room was open the whole weekend

and a wonderful place for food and fellowship between meetings. Friday evening we had cake and coffee and Saturday evening was the Ice Cream Social.

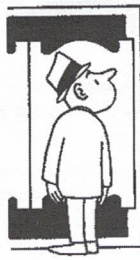
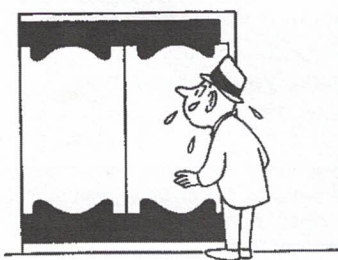
The Reading-Berks Intergroup Archives Committee was present this year and had a nice display of local AA history set up for our enjoyment. Looking back over the years of our development was very interesting and informational. We thank our Archives chair Henry H. for bringing this information to the conference.

Thank you to all who attended and we look forward to seeing you next year. The conference will be held June 3-5, 2011. Clancy I. from Venice, CA will be our featured speaker for the weekend and we expect to sell out. Please confirm your space by downloading the registration form from our website www.circleofhoperoundup.com in the near future.

A special thank you to God and the entire committee for making this all possible. Committee members are: Beth B., Lori G., Greg G., Kenny T., Dave C., Steve W., Gary H., Jennifer W., Sharyn W., Katie K., Kevin S., John H. and Diana D. All of their hard work paid off and made for a wonderful weekend.

— Beth B.

VICTOR E.



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commitments INTERGROUP TWELFTH STEP

**Caron Adolescent
Extended Care - Men
Sundays 7 pm**

July 4 Caron Alumni
July 11 Leesport Group
July 18 Oley Group
July 25 Time To Start Living
Aug. 1 Caron Alumni

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

July 5 Sober @ Six
July 12 Boyertown Group
July 19 New Life Group
July 26 New Life Group
Aug. 2 Alpha Group

**Reading Detox Unit
Every Other Tuesday 8 pm**

July 6 Happy Hour Group
July 20 Courage To Change
Aug. 3 YASNY Group

**Reading Detox Unit
Thursdays 8 pm**

July 8 Boyertown Group
July 15 Oley Group
July 22 New Millenium Group
July 29 Hilltop Group
Aug. 5 Alpha Group

**Caron Adolescent
Extended Care - Women
Sundays 7 pm**

July 4 Caron Alumni
July 11 Sober @ Six
July 18 Happy Hour Group
July 25 Time To Start Living
Aug. 1 Caron Alumni

**St. Joe's Hospital MH Unit
3rd Floor Reed & Walnut Sts.
Mondays 7:30 pm***

July 5 Alpha Group
July 12 Congo Big Book Group
July 19 Walnut St. Group
July 26 Walnut St. Group
Aug. 2 Birdsboro Group

**Caron Foundation
Young Adult Female
Fridays 8 pm**

July 2 Hilltop Group
July 9 New Millenium Group
July 16 Shillington Lifeline
July 23 Walnut St. Group
July 30 Sober @ Six
Aug. 6 Hilltop Group

*Note New Time for St. Joe's Monday Meetings. Call 610-378-2000 and ask for Berkshire Pavilion before going.

*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!!*

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.

The Alternative is published monthly by the Reading-Berks Intergroup of Alcoholics Anonymous. Serving Districts 33, 66, and 67 of Delegate Area 59—Eastern Pennsylvania. Reach us by mail at P.O. Box 12157, Reading, PA 19612, or you can email us at Alternative@ReadingBerksIntergroup.org

On the 7th Step...

"Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings"

Few are so fortunate that the change implied in this Step comes about easily or quickly. For the majority, considerable effort is required to gain the desired outlook.

Both intellectual and emotional conditioning is called for here. The intellectual seems the easier, as it is so often in applying other Steps and other A.A. principles and propositions. Getting the intellectual understanding usually comes first; getting "the feel" of the idea is more difficult.

Another way of expressing the difference between the two degrees or departments of understanding is that the idea may be accepted in the conscious mind without penetrating to the subconscious, and it is in the subconscious that the emotional drive is generated. The terms used to define the process differ according to individuals, but apparently a full understanding of the 7th Step needs to be achieved on two levels which some call intellectual and emotional, or conscious and subconscious.

Getting the intellectual understanding usually comes first; getting "the feel" of the idea is more difficult.

From the experience of many who did not achieve this full understanding easily comes much encouragement. They testify that the mind and the spirit, the conscious and even the subconscious, can be conditioned favorably even as the body. Though the process requires perseverance, many have done it.

First, they point out, the myth of man's own self-sufficiency needs to be dispelled. This is not too difficult if one begins by listing only a few of the things on which man depends for his survival and which are beyond his own limited power to supply. Even such an elemental thing as oxygen is enough to lay the premise that man depends on some other source or power greater than himself.

The distance from this premise to the idea of a Supreme Power is not as great as when the individual was still entertaining the illusion that he was self-sustaining, that he could do it himself, his way. Once this point of development has been reached, common sense points the rest of the way. Having discovered that there is a greater Power, it's no more than good sense to make use of it in all possible ways, and to ask for the removal of those defects that we could not remove ourselves.

The mystery of the 7th Step is that it works with a fairly simple technique. The secret of some magic formula does not first have to be discovered. Rather, results are obtained merely by reminding oneself of the existence of the Power which he already admits does exist, coupled with a reminder of one's own desire and willingness to rely on it.

Frequent enough reminders develop a new way of thinking, as many who once were skeptics, cynics, agnostics or even atheists, now gladly testify. The new way of thinking is the way to the "personality changes" that are common in A.A.



Step Seven simple? Not on your ego!

FOR ME, at first glance Step Seven seemed a cinch, especially in comparison to some of the preceding Steps. As is often the case, on closer examination the seemingly simple proved to be anything but! I thought this Step was only a kind of mopping-up maneuver or an interlude where I could rest on my laurels. (I was wearing them in the wrong place at the time.) Steps One through Six had shown me how inadequate my own powers and resources were--as far as my alcoholism was concerned. Besides, I had to be entirely ready to part with my defects (Step Six), and I wasn't at all ready.

The earlier Steps, however, had removed some of the careful padding from my ego, and a remark made by an old-timer and dear friend had helped. I had heard one member complimented by another for a wonderful talk. The speaker said, "Don't thank me or give me credit. Give God the credit." I was determined that if ever anyone thanked me for my talk, I would say the same thing (humbly, of course).

Finally, my old-timer friend did compliment me on my talk one night, and I did say, "Don't thank me. God did it."

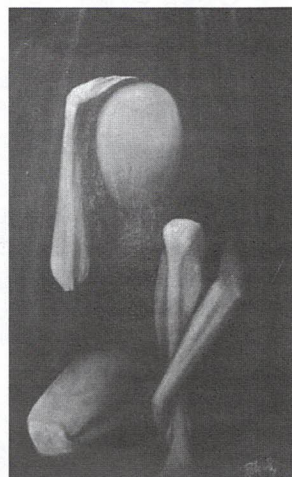
The old-timer smiled, put his arm about me, and said, "Honey, it wasn't that good!" Up until that time I had thought "humble" was some kind of pie.

I knew from the beginning that my vices were 'way ahead of my virtues. That was bad. Worse, some of my vices were being classed as virtues. But, since other members seemed to be gaining on their vices, I could hope for myself. By this time, introspection had become somewhat habitual, and I realized that I would have many hang-ups in working these Steps, as I'd had hang-overs during the wet years (or should I say the monsoons?).

In Step Seven, the word "humbly" threw a monkey wrench into my sensitive emotional gears. Oh, what it did to my poor id! It seemed I was forever searching feverishly through all the dictionaries I could lay hands on for a definition of "humble" that I could accept. Even the excellent coverage of this aspect in the "Twelve and Twelve" availed me nothing. Humble? Humbug! Hadn't I always been the one put upon? The doormat type? Was I now to wear sackcloth and ashes or a hairshirt?

All my life, I'd been taught that I alone was responsible for my character, including my shortcomings--responsible for self-discipline and self-reliance also. That reminds me of the fellow who claimed that he was a self-made man, whereupon his friend remarked that this belief certainly relieved God of an embarrassing responsibility!

Still, I could plainly see the golden



thread of true humility running through all the Steps, and I knew how very important humility was to my continued sobriety. I became reconciled to the definition I found in a new, revised dictionary: "Humble indicates a personal realization of smallness, without loss of respect, and differs from humiliation, which implies public shame in front of others or being made to seem foolish or inferior" and "to be neither inordinately proud of our talents and assets, nor ashamed of our defects or failures, nor unduly on the defensive over them." Also: "free from vanity."

In other words (I quote Tryon Edwards): "True humility is not an abject, despising spirit; it is but a right estimate of ourselves as God sees us."

My willingness to have my defects of character removed was bolstered by the realization that little, if any, spiritual growth was possible as long as I held on to my old ideas and defects. The words in our Big Book keep appearing before me: "Burn the idea into the consciousness of every man that he can get well, regardless of anyone. The only condition is that he trust in God and clean house." This is what Step Seven is to me; it means I am going to clean house and I will have all the help I need. By taking this Step, I am not giving up anything; I am getting rid of whatever might lead me to drink again and whatever might prevent achieving real serenity. Now, with God's help and my own cooperation, via Step Seven, I can become on the individual level a first-rate power, instead of the second-rate power that I was before AA. (I was truly suffering from an immense power failure--or bad wiring.)

I have a favorite reminder which helps me keep Step Seven in view: "At moments she discovered she was grotesquely wrong, and then she treated herself to a week of passionate humility." This quote from the works of Henry James has become part of my inventory.

I believe that through the first six Steps I have gained some knowledge of my character defects and that I know (at least in part and at times) what I need to get rid of! It is certainly no problem for me to humbly ask my Higher Power to remove them, either. I never did know what to do with them before. Besides, my pride is the only thing I can swallow any more that is nonfattening. In fact, this diet tends to reduce the ego and eliminate fatheads--mine, anyhow.

M. U.
Brighton, Colorado

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Outside Looking Within

A Professional Perspective From Outside The Rooms

By Lloyd G Wertz, PhD., MD

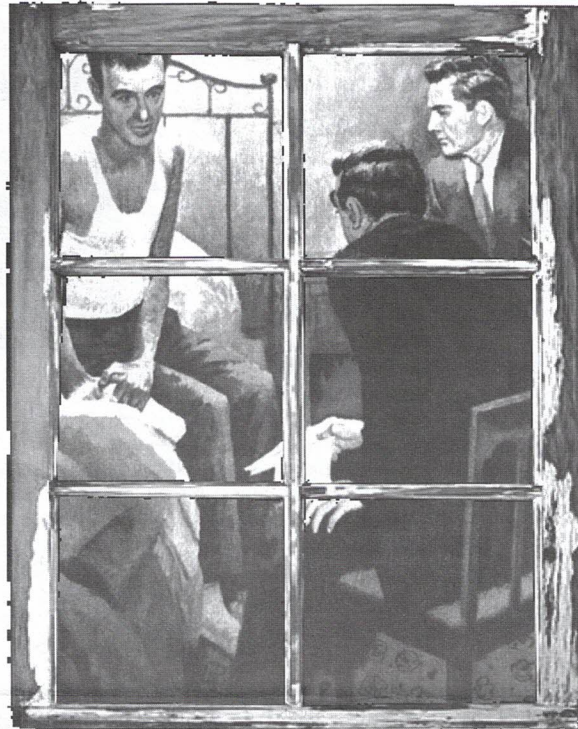
Like the audience, I've had no exposure to AA as part of training in undergrad, grad, nor orientation to the many positions which I have held "in the field".

Upon my invitation to attend the General Service Assembly as a Guest Observer, my wife and I had no idea of what to expect!

Knowing that NO OTHER method of addressing the issue of addiction to alcohol could cite similar success, I wanted to find out anything I could.

An evening and two days of immersion at the General Service Assembly held at Lancaster Host Resort last November showed me far more than I'd have learned in a careers' worth of peripheral contact. TWELVE of those observations will follow:

1. There are no secrets among the fellowship. These folks are brutally honest with each other, and show compassion in being so. They have walked in each other's footsteps and know the many pitfalls and the uncountable joys. They were, however, always kind to us as visitors.
2. There is no regard paid to a particular position or status achieved in professional life or due to educational achievement. Equally there is no specific disrespect to those achievements, they are, simply a non-sequitor. Any other approach can only deter one in recovery from honestly addressing the real issue of his/her addiction.
3. Their capacity for humor is beyond remarkable. These folks can laugh at themselves with boundless enthusiasm with the assured focus on creating a deeper and more meaningful bond between and among themselves toward the end of another day without alcohol. I did NOT notice any mean spirited "laughing at" another.
4. What they say, in the Twelve Traditions, Twelve Steps and other polity developed over the history of the fellowship is what they TEACH and, furthermore, what the LIVE.
5. The Tradition of remaining "unorganized" in deference to the sanctity of the pursuit of the common good is remarkable in two respects. This is a VERY ORGANIZED, long-standing and determined effort. It works and it works to a great extent due to its structure. The intentional disregard for any pomposity which might accompany hierarchy and status related to hierarchy is also a key to success- ANY member of the fellowship can, from the floor of the Assembly, introduce a concept which will be given serious consideration and, indeed, adopted if it has sufficient merit to gain the approval of the attendees.
6. The understanding and recognition for the efforts of the newly "sober" and those with years of sobriety is consistent and universal in appreciation of the members. The one attendee with SIXTY EIGHT years of sobriety was equally cheered as the attendee with, I believe, 18 days



It is also, I believe, a testimony to the absolute recognition that, without each other the chances of ending each new day free of drinking is significantly reduced.

as he was presented with his own copy of the Big Book.

7. The spirit of mutual support and cooperation among the members is as we've referenced, remarkable. It is also, I believe, a testimony to the absolute recognition that, without each other the chances of ending each new day free of drinking is significantly reduced.
8. The recognition of a higher power is very real and important to the overall fellowship yet NEVER, in my recollection, evangelized to any of the attendees. It seemed to matter more or less to different members but was never pressed upon another. There is clearly NO denominational approach but there is certainly a significant level of recognition that a power beyond one's self is present and will be a large part of the successful daily abstinence and recovery.
9. The sharing of one's story is an ongoing part of the success. The recognition, to a member very early in his/her recovery that the apparently successful, "pulled together" individual before him was, in the not-too-distant past just like, or even worse than, the newbie in level of addiction and appearance of despair. While it certainly

could be a method of playing "One-upmanship" it never appeared so in my recollection.

10. Anonymity without the enforcement of "HIPPA" does indeed happen and seems to work even better!

11. The universal accommodation and regard shown to us, non-members, was incredible and still a source of wonder to my wife and I when we reflect back on our experience and the way in which we were treated. These folks can, and truly should, offer lessons in genuine hospitality-equal, and at a very personal level, superior to Marriott and other nationally recognized leaders in this regard!

12. Finally, my Twelfth Observation and, of course, the Twelfth Step. During the Assembly, I was consistently in search of the "magic" or glue that seemed to hold this process together. I had a copy of the Big Book and began to read it during the second day. I was given copies of the Traditions and descriptions of the organization and the various supports offered to groups and individuals.

But I really didn't GET IT until the final evening's banquet. These folks reach out to the next alcoholic at any time of any day, often to the detriment of their own personal pursuits and apparent "happiness" because - THEY HAVE TO!! It is this constant outreach to those with whom they share a common and potentially lethal bond that keeps many in the fellowship healthy in their own recovery. Without helping others, they cannot continue to remain sober.

THAT is a summary of the learning that I found truly remarkable and which caused me to consistently remind our patients with addiction issues that seeking participation with AA or perhaps a similar 12 Step Program to address their individual addiction issues is a good idea, and might, indeed be the ONLY idea.

Having now read the Big Book two-and-one-half times, I have tell you, this way of life can be a prescription for success for anyone-with or without addiction issues. Recognizing our own lack of control and giving up that control to a "higher power" to be led and foster growth and service to others - HMMMMM not bad HUH?

I will leave you with those thoughts and thus, this encouragement to inspire any of those in our care or jurisdiction to, at the very least, give a genuine effort to entering this fellowship in their journey toward a healthier, happier, and very likely much longer life of service- to self AND others.

(Presented at the "AA and Co-operation with the Professional Community Informational Forum", June 3, 2010, Schmidt Training & Technology Center, Reading Area Community College.)