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BETTER TIMES

Published monthly for A.A. members in the Greater Toronto Area

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How to reach us

Submit group news, medallions, other event notices, letters to the editor or articles to **BETTER TIMES** (before the 10th of the prior month of issue), by mail, fax or email. Only signed submissions with a means of contact will be accepted. For subscriptions call Alexx at 416-487-8110. Not responsible for hyperlink content.



A Home Group: The Heartbeat of AA

What do three university professors, a Rosedale lawyer, professional helpers, an architect, a graduate of Russian Studies, many single mothers, drop outs, illiterates, those suffering from 'dual disorders' and actors, etc., have in common? They all, at one time or another, belonged to the *St. Jamestown Group*.

The *St. Jamestown Group* will be celebrating 25 years of service on August 1, 2004.

St. Jamestown began like AA itself; a couple of recovering alcoholics decided to carry the message of hope to where it was needed. In its 25-year history, *St. Jamestown* has put on approximately 2,600 meetings. That means there have been about 1,300 speakers, and approximately 50,000 people have attended this meeting over the 25 years. We have had up to four discussion rooms for our Friday night closed meetings. *St. Jamestown* also has a strong commitment to service, represented at all levels. I, personally, have been involved in service to jails, detox, hospital service meetings and treatment centers. *St.*

Jamestown also had one of the biggest Christmas candlelight meeting and dinners in the GTA.

I joined the *St. Jamestown Group* in August 1991, when we had approximately 60 members. The membership would eventually grow to 100 in 1996-98, and as you would expect, this meant for rather contentious and long business meetings!

My 13-year relationship has

gone through ups and downs. Fortunately, I decided early on that my recovery meant doing things differently than I had in my alcoholism. This meant not running away from difficulties, but hanging in and trying to make things work. I needed a home base to anchor my recovery's roller coaster ride. Those early beginners' meetings at *St. Jamestown* formed the foundation of my early recovery. Older members, like Charles M. and other stalwarts, left a deep impression on me. Later, I

meetings. A couple of my sponsors were *St. Jamestown* members, and I myself have sponsored many members there. Some have are still around and some have died. Others went out never to be seen again, while some were 'golden slippers'.

There are hundreds of groups like *St. Jamestown* in the GTA, and it is these home groups that are the heartbeat of AA; a heartbeat that keeps the lifeblood of our AA fellowship and program flowing. Healthy and strong home groups produce



attended the Big Book meetings in the kitchen. These, too, became an invaluable part of my recovery.

I have made many long-term friendships during my years at *St. Jamestown*. Had I not belonged to a home group, I would not have had the blessing of meeting these people, creating strong bonds, and working side by side with them to put on

healthy and strong sponsors, recovering members, and ultimately, a vital AA fellowship at large.

To the members of *St. Jamestown* over the past 25 years, "Thank You"! To the current and future members, "Thank You" for insuring there is still a meeting there!

Lynn B.

January 11, 1994, on NBC. It's hard to believe that was more than 10 years ago.

That night, I watched in disbelief as the character 'John Hemingway' discovered that his sponsor had gotten drunk and subsequently ended his own life. 'Chester' had (as I recall) drunk a bottle of bourbon and rode his Harley Davidson off a cliff, after several years of sobriety in AA.

This is not an article to praise the media for creating shows like 'The John Larroquette Show' and 'Hill Street Blues' around our fellowship, though I believe that credit is due. Their impact on my own sobriety arguably exists, yet I would not reach my first meeting for more than two years after this particular episode aired. So what

The Editors Say...

Chester's Last Ride

is this about?

Well, when the character 'Chester' died, I found myself asking, "Why the heck would he do that? Just because he drank? This doesn't make any sense at all."

A few weeks ago, I learned that two members in my neck of the woods suffered a similar fate as 'Chester', one of whom I would consider a friend. I found myself asking the very same thing.

Truthfully, and God willing, we may never know why, but if the past seven-and-a-half years

have taught me anything, it is this. I believe the only reason I will ever take a drink is because I feel my case is different. This sense of "terminal uniqueness" may cause me to do certain things, such as miss meetings, refuse to share and ignore AA principles. Some would say that these are causes for getting drunk, but they would be wrong. Just as alcohol is merely a symptom of our disease, these behaviors are symptoms of the quintessence of alcoholism - The Loneliness of the Alcoholic.

If I were to envisage how empty my life would be, separat-

ed from everyone and everything I treasure, to succumb to the relief and rapture (or as the Big Book would say, the illusion) that is contained in the golden hue of Jack Daniels, I could not imagine carrying on. To choose between insanity and death would not be a difficult decision.

When I approached the BETTER TIMES Committee about running "The Editors Say" on suicide, they frowned. While I did convince them, I was asked to keep it on the lighter side. I'm not sure if I did my job, but if you want to know why I wrote this, it was simply to say to my Brother in Spirit, Chester,

"I understand now."

Now ... go to a meeting.

Gord MacK.

Attitude of Gratitude

VOICE OF A NEW MEMBER

During my five years in the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous, I have heard of the joy of encountering a spiritual awakening and the miracles that happen with the power of prayer, but it wasn't until now that both have come together for me as one.

I became a member of *St. Jamestown* in February of this year. There was a time, a number of years ago, when the *St. Jamestown Group* was very large and an entity onto itself, but then, after some time, the walls started to crumble, and many members who formed an integral part of the group found other paths to follow.

St. Jamestown then became quite small, but did not lose its significance, as its main objective was, and still is, to focus on the newcomer. The magic I see today at *St. Jamestown*, witnessing the suffering newcomer who

is totally disenchanted with life, comes an hour later when that same newcomer leaves the meeting with a hint of sparkle in his or her eye. The seed has been planted. That, my friends, is my spiritual awakening: The miracle of a soul disillusioned with life clutching to a glimmer of

meeting, and the love that filled the room. I truly believe that those who could not attend in person were there in spirit, as the warmth swirling around me seemed overwhelming at times.

Then, on the last Sunday in May, a miracle happened! Low and behold, like a shining star, Charles appeared at *St. Jamestown*! It was at that moment that I came to realize that the flicker of light that I thought might journey elsewhere was only resting, and all it needed was a little oxygen, or in this case, a little prayer. I sincerely wonder if the prayers of all of those who love Charles had something to do with our dear friend returning to *St. Jamestown*. I like to believe that it truly does.

As Charles said, "this is a we program and all of us need one another." Thank you, Charles.

Irene H.
St. Jamestown

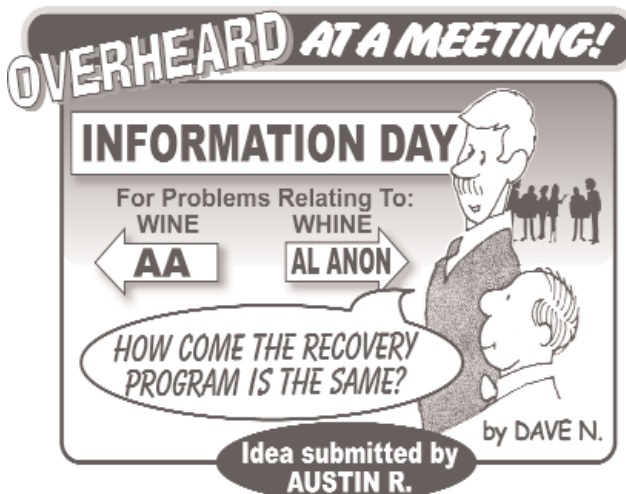
Amends

After sobering up in September '88, for many years, Steps Eight and Nine were not on my itinerary. I was a happy-go-lucky-drunk for most of the time. My misery surfaced only after I tried to control my drinking. I did apologize to my wife every time I came out of detox. In Madras, India, it's expensive. The money spent on detox for three days, could have kept me gloriously drunk for one month. Matter of fact I felt that this was the only thing that hurt my wife. The money spent on myself could have been put to better use.

Now, as a landed immigrant in Scarborough since March of '02; I have come here to baby sit my grandchildren. I have taken on this job as 'making amends' (or mortification) for years of 'wasted days and wasted nights' I did not spend with my 'own' children. I do this to the best of my ability. It leaves me drained at the end of the day. The feeling is good, though. I feel I am making my self useful to members of my family.

I came to Alcoholics Anonymous with a problem. I found God in Alcoholics Anonymous with a Solution. That Solution is Hope.

Ronny H.



hope. Who would have thought?

In late April of this year, *St. Jamestown* organized a 'Tribute to Charles M.', making all who knew and loved Charles aware that our beloved friend was suffering ill health. I was in awe at the people who attended the

Archives Alley

Bill Wilson learned much from a man who influenced the direction of his life. His business and legal studies, along with his inherent love of the outdoors, were the direct result of his loving grandfather.

Fayette Griffith was a Civil War veteran from Vermont, one of the fortunate few to return after the struggle of 1861-1865. Vermont was an abolitionist state and half of its able-bodied sons enlisted in that war.

Fayette was a stoical, practical, taciturn man. He had difficulty in forming intimate relationships and when his grandson Bill and his granddaughter Dorothy came to live with him as small children, he found himself in an influential role.

Their father, Gilman Wilson, had abandoned his family after his divorce from Emily, Fayette's daughter. When she departed for Boston in 1906 to pursue osteopathic studies, Gilman headed to Canada.

At the age of 64, Fayette was an embittered old man who had led an honest and principled life. Yet all it seemed to yield was pain and grief. The loss of his own ten-year-old son had devastated him. Now, having to care for his poor, lost grandson was difficult, especially since this was a grandson who had lost everything that was truly important in his eleven-year-old life.

Fayette's emotional distance was breached by one remarkable accomplishment. In remarking to his grandson that no one in North America had ever designed a boomerang that worked, young Bill took to making one. After many weeks of effort, Bill made one that not only worked, but also almost took off his grandfather's head during its demonstration. This turn of events softened the old man to the extent that he opened up on a deeper level to his grandson, even sharing stories about the Civil War.

Bernadette MacL.

Have You Heard?

RECENT MEDALLIONS

Bob C., 25 yrs., *St. Clement's Group*, May 13.

UPCOMING MEDALLIONS

Steve C., 5 yrs., *Saturday 2 p.m. Meeting (at the Scott Mission)*, July 3.

Charlie MacD., 30 yrs., *Pathfinders Group*, July 7.

Tim O., 1 yr., *KF Group*, July 10.

David C., 1 yr., *Agincourt Acorn*, July 13.

Derick L., 5 yrs., *Weston Group*, July 18.

Larry V., 15 yrs., *Don Valley Group*, July 20.

Ed R., 15 yrs., *Scarborough Group*, July 23.

Doug B., 5 yrs., *Welcome Group*, July 25.

Sean McC., 10 yrs., *Wexford Group*, July 27.

Ron L., 15 yrs., *St. Clement's Group*, July 28.

Ann O., 10 yrs., *Wexford Group*, August 3.

Ann P., 10 yrs., *The Paisley Group, formerly Glenview Group*, August 3.

Ray B., 5 yrs., *Rexdale United*, August 6.

THINGS WE CANNOT CHANGE...

Jim A., *King City Group*, over 4 yrs. sober, passed away recently.

Mark P., *Agincourt Acorn / Thurs. East End*, over 9 yrs. sober, passed away recently.

John McL. *Newmarket Group*, over 29 yrs sober, passed away recently.

Bob D. of Barrie, over 45 yrs. sober, *Tuesday Night Collier Group*, passed away recently.

MEETING CHANGES

Jean Tweed Women's Meeting 1:30 p.m. (O) Mondays (WEST): **NO MEETING held last Monday of each month.**

Free to Be Group 10:30 a.m. (C) Saturdays (EAST): Meeting has **INFORMATION CHANGE** – Eastminster United Church, 310 Danforth Ave., at Jackman. Use Jackman entrance, downstairs around gym, then upstairs to room C17.

York Central Hospital Meeting 8 p.m. (O) Tuesdays (SUBURBAN NORTH): **INFORMATION CHANGE** – meeting now held in room 198, Adult Day Care room.

Tuesday Noon Drop-In Disc. 12:15 noon Tuesdays (CENTRAL): **DISCONTINUED.**

The Energy Group 8 p.m. (C) Fridays (SUB-URBAN EAST): **DISCONTINUED.**

No Name Group 8 p.m. Tuesdays / Thursdays (NORTH): **NO THURSDAY MEETING.**

Tuesday Meeting to be held temporarily at Lansing United Church, 49 Bogert Ave. (Yonge and Sheppard). Meeting still at 8 p.m. Both Tuesday and Thursday meetings will be back at old location [undergoing renovations] as of the end of August 2004.

SPECIAL EVENTS, CONVENTIONS, and CONFERENCES

Joe & Charlie's BIG BOOK STUDY presented by **Joe McC. (Tulsa, OK), Jim B. (Jamestown NY), and Wes B. (Toronto)** Saturday, July 31 (9 a.m. to 5 p.m.) and Sunday, August 1 (9 a.m. to 4 p.m.) at O.I.S.E. / U of T, 252 Bloor St. West (Bloor and Bedford), Toronto. Tickets \$20. Refreshments will be supplied. FOR MORE INFO / TICKETS, see event flyer, or contact 234.

Fourth Annual 11th STEP PICNIC Saturday, August 21, 2004, at Centre Island (Olympic Island / follow signs), 12 noon to 6 p.m. All AA members and their families welcome! Snack bars near site, or bring your own picnic. **Speaker Meetings** at 1 p.m. (AA speaker), 2:30 p.m. (AI-Anon speaker), and 4 p.m. (AA speaker). Cost is free! *Donations are appreciated.* FOR INFO, call Rick (416) 201-8573, Steve (647) 888-2921, or Barb (416) 747-9495 or log on to www.11thsteppicnic.com. (*If raining, event will be cancelled.*)

8th Anniversary, WE GROW TOGETHER Creemore, Stayner, Wasaga Beach AA Roundup Saturday, August 21, 2004. Stayner Community Centre. 9 a.m. doors open. Registration \$10. for the day and \$20. for Dinner and Dance. Call Ivanna at (705) 429-0899 or Barry at (705) 428-0471 for more information. **Pre-Registration a must!** (Dinner /Dance by August 13)

'Welcome Home and More in 2004' 35th Annual CENTRAL WEST ONTARIO CONVENTION August 13, 14 and 15 at the University of Guelph / Guelph, Ontario. AA, AI-Anon, and Alateen Speakers, Discussions, and Talkathons. Sobriety Countdown, and Saturday Night dance to follow banquet. FOR MORE INFO, Contact CWOC Convention Chair Janice F (519) 650-5745 / yeomen@golden.net. Registration Chair Ann P. (519) 353-5600 / aep@computerwriter.com, or Publicity Chair Kim L. cwopublicity@sympati-co.ca.

'Courage to Change' TORONTO GRATITUDE CONFERENCE October 8, 9, and 10 in Toronto, Canada. FOR MORE INFO, see www.torontogratitudeconference.org.

SOBER SAILORS CONVENTION in the Caribbean on the Celebrity Cruiseline ship *The Century* October 23 to 30, 2004. Speakers Mildred F. (Toronto ON), Keith L. (Wilmington NC), Bob D. (Las Vegas), Kathy H. (Cincinnati, OH), Bill P. (Centre City MN), and Dan Z. (West Palm Beach, FL). FOR MORE INFO, call toll free (866) 678-8785 or log on to Friend_of_Bill_W.@mail.vresp.com.

'Everything Old Is New Again!'

It was 'Show & Tell Time' at Intergroup on Tuesday, May 25th. Incoming Chair Matti H. (Wanstead Group) will continue with what Dan McK. and Derek F. did - be as honest and open as possible with members of GTA Intergroup. Matti mentioned that the Operating Committee is looking at ways to get more Groups to attend Intergroup, and outlined to Floor members several ideas to achieve this, such as requesting AA members in the GTA take an 'Inventory' of Intergroup, more due diligence in communicating important information, and having dialog with other local Intergroups such as Hamilton.

There was a healthy turnout, with many attending their first Intergroup meeting, and the 7th Tradition pulled in \$180.00!

The **Finance Committee** reported a deficit of about \$5,000, which is better than last year (\$8,315 down). Year-to-date income is down slightly from 2003, but expenses are also down. Intergroup needs "regular contributions", and requests groups (especially those groups who make a one-time contribution in the Fall for Gratitude Month) to spread that payments out to stabilize cash the flow. They have borrowed another \$13,000 from the Reserve Fund to "keep the bills paid", making the total taken \$23,000 this year. Fixed expenses (office lease, payroll, telephones, etc.) are watched, and if members expenses cut, they should suggest (to other Floor members) how to do this. Inquiries came regarding rent (which is the lowest in the Yonge/Eglinton area due to a long term lease), equipment purchase (rather than lease) and a Spring Gratitude month (now there's an original idea). The GSO (Self-Support) pamphlet suggests contributions be 60% to Intergroup, 30% to Area, and 10% to GSO.

It was then time for the "Show and Tell" workshop.

The **Self-Support** Mandate is twofold: TIME (that can be spent in loving service by AA members) and MONEY (which is needed to keep Intergroup going). "We need your help in carrying the message to the still-suffering alcoholic." Self-Support helps keep members

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aware of opportunities in service, and also informs members about how they can best support Intergroup financially. Self Support meets on the first Monday every month at 7:30 p.m. at 234.

The new **Access Ability** Pamphlet lists services such as Videos in American Sign Language (ASL), Interpreter forms for ASL Interpreters at meetings, closed meetings for the hearing-impaired, information about fully accessible meetings, contacts for reaching shut-ins, and publications in Braille, Large Print, and on Audio Cassettes. The Committee can assist those who are learning impaired/disabled, in addition to those who are illiterate, have dyslexia, or foreign language barriers. There is also a 'Buddies List' that has people available for those infirm/hospitalized who would like visits from AA members with at least six months sobriety, or want to be contacted by phone or e-mail. Access Ability meets every third Sunday at 11 a.m. at 234.

The Guidelines for the **Treatment Facilities** are in GSO's Treatment Facilities Workbook. The Mandate is to ensure that every treatment facility in the GTA, including treatment centres, hospitals, and detoxification/chemical dependency withdrawal units, has an AA meeting in some form, whether it is run by an AA Group listed in the Meeting directory or a supervised "in-house" meeting. This committee meets regularly at 234 every third Thursday of the month at 7:30 p.m. Volunteers welcome!

The Mandate for the **Archives Committee** is to collect, sort, store, and display valuable objects from deceased AA members. The Committee works on new projects like taping 'long-timers' stories with a new digital recording machine, and restoring materials by application of acid paper. In November, they host the Annual Archives Breakfast, and this year the Akron Archivist may attend. Members are asked to hold onto any donations of materials until the Fall. The sec-

ond printing of the 'AA in Ontario' is now available at 234 and the monthly General Meeting. This committee meets every second Friday at 7:30 p.m. at 234.

The **BETTER TIMES** Newsletter is put out "monthly for AA members in the Greater Toronto Area", reporting upcoming events to stimulate interest and attendance. BT covers events like the ORC, Gratitude Month and Service Days, all for the issue price of 25 cents. Call, write or fax for information (see our Editorial block for contact info, or drop off the info at 234). BT prefers signed emailed articles and information by the 10th of every month. Subscriptions are needed, as are people for a Subscriptions/Circulation Subcommittee. The **BETTER TIMES** Committee meets on the third Wednesday of every month at 7:30 p.m. at 234.

The **Correctional Facilities Committee** host a CF Day every year in January or February. CF helps carry the message to the still-suffering alcoholic 'on the inside', which is not only worthwhile, but continues to be an important part of 'Sobriety and Service'. The sobriety requirement to get involved is 1 to 2 years, and 'first-hand experience' is not necessarily required. AA members share their experience, strength, and hope as alcoholics in recovery to help those on 'the inside' to stay sober. The 'Bridging the Gap' program idea is still 'evolving', and they're looking at other ways this committee can make sure that 'the individual reaching out for help' is given the info/support they require. This committee meets every second Wednesday of the month at 7:30 p.m. at 234.

According to the CPC Workbook from GSO, "Members of **Cooperation with the Professional Community** inform Professionals about AA - what we are, where we are, what we can do, and what we cannot do. CPC attempts to establish better communication between AA's and Professionals, and to find simple, effective ways of cooperating without

affiliating." They try to get professionals as allies, attending Professional Conferences workshops and discussions, making literature available to them. CPC will have their display at the International Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence next fall in Toronto. The Committee continues to work with PI on the 'Folders and Holders' Beginner's Pamphlet Distribution Campaign which has been well-received elsewhere in Canada. This committee meets every second Monday of the month at 7 p.m. at 234 (no meetings in July and August).

The **Grapevine Committee** Display is available for Groups or Events though local Grapevine Committee Reps or 234. Orders for Pocket Planners and Calendars are being compiled for "One Big Order" at the Area Committee Meeting on September 4 in Belleville, and the items will be available for pickup at the Kingston Assembly in October. Intergroup received a donation of 40 Grapevine copies each month, which will be given away. Members are encouraged to recycle Grapevines "as this does a great deal of help in Corrections Facilities, Treatment Centres, and Detox Centres". This committee meets every second Thursday of the month at 7 p.m. at 234.

The **Public Information Committee's** Mandate 'is to act as a liaison between the General Public and the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous in the Greater Toronto Area; with the goal of carrying the message to the still-suffering alcoholic', including friends and families of the alcoholic. They liaise with the public, carrying the message into schools and community health fairs through Public Service Announcements on Television and Radio etc. The committee also deals with newspapers and magazines. Their next big thing is with the Police-sponsored 'Breakfast in the Park' at Allan Gardens, held on July 15. This committee meets every third Monday at 7:30 p.m. at 234.

And that's just part of what WE ALL DO - and 'Service Keeps ME Sober', so 'Be a Volunteer' - it works!

Kevin M.