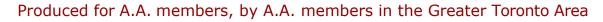
BETTER TIMES



"pioneering together through unchartered waters



Nina L., GTA Operating Committee Chair made this remark recently;

"pioneering together through unchartered waters"

It stopped this alcoholic in her tracks because it captured the reality of the era in which we are living like none in our time, up to this time.

World calamities, wars, natural disasters, and pandemics have tested the spiritual principles of Alcoholics Anonymous only to prove that a dependence upon a Higher Power is a source of strength and not a weakness.

Draw on that source now

Let it carry you through this unprecedented era and keep you.

John Silk

THE PANDEMIC HAS STRENGTHENED MY SOBRIETY

If there is anything I have learned in Alcoholics Anonymous, it's that I must change. This pandemic has forced me to change, in ways I could never have imagined. I must embrace technology or remain isolated and trapped in my own thinking. The later sounds like a one way ticket to picking up a drink.

I had to confront and overcome my fears of looking stupid, and not knowing how to do this online stuff. Those first few meetings on zoom were not comfortable or natural for me, but I kept with it. There was a big learning curve; I needed to learn the features of the software, but also the etiquette of how to conduct myself online. It wasn't long before I was looking forward to online meetings. I have been given a new found appreciation of my home group, and its members since attending our online meetings.

I can relate my zoom experience, to my experience of first coming into Alcoholics Anonymous. I was forced to come to AA and I hated it, then I needed to be in AA, and finally I wanted to be in AA. That's pretty much a mirror image of my zoom experience. I jumped on the zoom platform out of necessity, and then wanted to be on it, and finally loving it. Yes I may be physically isolated in the world, but that's not where my head is at, I am free to go wherever I want. Yes I enjoy local meetings, but I also go to meetings all over the world, see people I've never seen before, hear how other members stay sober. I believe my sobriety is expanding and becoming stronger because of this pandemic. I am willing to reach out to people more than I have ever done before; personal recovery depends upon AA unity.

One thing I've noticed since this virus outbreak is that I am more forgiving, less judgmental, and I try to treat people with respect. Early on in my sobriety I was taught the principle "love and tolerance, and I try to put that into my daily living. Sometimes it slips away from me, or I just do a terrible job of it. So I ask my higher power to remove those character defects that stand in the way of me being a more useful person.

Now that our province has moved into stage 3 of its recovery, I'm finding a greater appreciation for things I took for granted before COVID-19 hit. I now make a determined effort each day to stop and smell the roses, literally. I have rekindled my joy for nature and the outdoors. I love the sight of flowers; it reminds me of my mother who was an avid gardener. That puts me in a happy and serene place! **Dave R.** Long Branch Group BETTER TIMES / 2

HITTING BOTTOM

What does the term "hitting bottom" mean to members of Alcoholics Anonymous? A term that is not mentioned in the first 164 pages of the Big Book, but bandied about by members as though it is. There are two references to the word "bottom" in these 164 pages and neither has anything to do with the alcoholic hitting something!

If you are new and just starting your journey of recovery or if you have been a member of Alcoholics Anonymous for sometime, you will no doubt hear or have heard the term "hitting bottom" and you will hear many descriptions by members as they recount their journey into the depths of alcoholism, as examples of hitting bottom.

In my opinion these are a series of events, transgressions and circumstances that took place while actively engaged in the terrors of alcoholism. These stories are not a true accurate definition of hitting bottom. They are accurate stories of life events while suffering from the inability to face life on life's terms. Hitting bottom, I would suggest is the act or realization of despair which occurs when the alcoholic reaches that point in life where as written in the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous Chapter 3, they arrive at this juncture of life **"which led in time to pitiful and incomprehensible demoralization**".

Each one of us has a story to tell, gut wrenching, shameful, funny, or sad, and the roads we travelled but each one is different. These are not the things which bind us together. If they were, then each of us would be required to travel the same road, which is not the case. We are not different because of our journey, if that were the case then how would we be able to help each other? Whatever we lost or didn't, we are not different at all.

Alcoholics can identify with other alcoholics and how they felt because we all in our own way, have all reached that terrifying state of **pitiful and incomprehensible demoralization** where we found ourselves unable to live with or without alcohol. This state is what I believe is what is meant by "hitting bottom". **Tom M.** Keep It Simple Brampton



AN A.A. WORLD OF ONLINE MEETINGS BEFORE ZOOM

My name is Anthony and I have been sober for over 16 years. I was born in Canada, moved to England when I was 18, and then eventually moved to New York. When I turned 30, my journey into sobriety began. After eight years, I had cemented my program with a solid home group, a sponsor, and an amazing support group of diverse people.

My career constantly moved me around the globe. I had the opportunity to try meetings all over the planet, which was incredible. The connective tissue of A.A. is amazing. Even though the meeting may have a different format, it always carries the same message.

Around 2010, after many years in the program, with a solid foundation in A.A., I took an opportunity to work in Asia, in a city called Xiamen. I did my homework and realized there was one A.A. meeting in city I was moving to. This was great, because I wanted to make sure I was connected when I moved.

Sadly, when I arrived, the meeting no longer existed! I managed to stay connected to my sponsor through Facetime, which was a challenge with such a poor connection, but I held onto this lifeline. I did manage to get to Hong Kong once in a while where the sobriety was great. The expat community was so welcoming and the fellowship after the meeting was incredible. I was hesitant to find new meetings, but when I discovered them, I wondered what held me back for so long.

Back in Xiamen, I was on my own, in a foreign city not knowing the landscape or language. I practiced morning meditation and tried to use all the tools I had been taught through the program. The isolation was pretty intense. Being in an opposite time zone meant picking up the phone was an event, not a casual daily occurrence.

Eventually, I was so frustrated I started to search the internet for any kind of online access. Zoom didn't exist 10 years ago. I did however find an online meeting that allowed you to participate, no video access only audio. It was like I had plugged into a foreign dimension! I suddenly was in a meeting where someone in LA was hosting a speaker from Australia, while I was listening in from a small city in China. It blew my mind. I was so happy to hear people sharing, hearing my story, and hearing the message.

I just needed to know I was able to connect – that I wasn't alone. One of the greatest fears I had about AA was that I was going to be alone, and in fact – the truth was the opposite. I was going to have a global connection, and the ability to find my tribe wherever I went! The idea that I was able to tune into the program no matter where I was, was unbelievable.

There were moments while I lived in Asia where I had no access to online. In those moments, I would read whatever literature I had access to. I remember being on a train that had broken down. After an hour or two of frustration, I realized I had a copy of the Big Book in my bag and I just started to read, and slowly – my frustrations subsided.

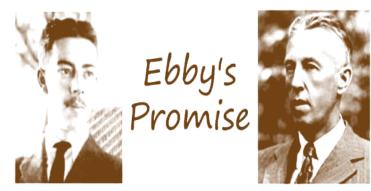
AN A.A. WORLD OF ONLINE MEETINGS BEFORE ZOOM

Cont'd.

I have no idea how it works, but it did. These days I try to never forget those lessons of how to find my feet, connect with my higher power and program, and be present.

Over the last few months, the world has become a very different place. We are all being forced to learn how to connect and communicate through new technology, young and old. I find it interesting to watch everyone discover the global connection we have at our fingertips. We have definitely evolved as a sober community. We have found ways to move through our obstacles and remain connected, which is the foundation of this program. For this, I am forever grateful.

Anthony K. Morning Discussion Group



Ebby Thatcher

Bill Wilson

My friend promised when these things were done I would enter upon a new relationship with my Creator; that I would have the elements of a way of living which <u>answered all my problems</u>.

Belief in the power of God, plus enough willingness, honesty and humility to establish and maintain the new order of things, were the essential requirements. Simple, but not easy; a price had to be paid. It meant destruction of self-centeredness. I must turn in all things to the Father of Light who presides over us all.

AA p13 "Bill's Story"

TURNING THE PRAYER OF ST. FRANCIS UPSIDE-DOWN

Last night I watched several videos on YouTube that all had the same plot. Starving and sick dogs in India were nursed back to health by activists who managed an animal shelter. The dogs were found abandoned and close to death. They were often no more than skin and bones, covered in waste, wounds, and a parasitic skin disease called mange. Tears came to my eyes to see volunteers tenderly wash and feed the dogs, even administer intravenous medications, fluids, and nutrition.

More importantly for healing, the care-takers gave copious amounts of love to the dogs by stroking and holding them throughout the day. The poor animals were too traumatized to resist any of this, and received care and affection into their limp bodies with vacant eyes. After just a

week or two, the videos brightened and showed the dogs gaining in weight, strength, and personality until they became the lively, tail-wagging, eye-sparkling pets like those in the streets and yards of Toronto. Perhaps because of my A.A. experi-

ence, I expected a plot twist in the videos. I waited for the recovered dogs to "give back" to their rescuers and the community. Since there were always incoming sick creatures, I anticipated seeing the regulars licking, nuzzling, and helping newcomers in their own doggy ways. I also thought the healthy dogs would become the doting companions and trusted servants of the shelter's workers, in gratitude for their life-saving efforts. But, again and again, the videos showed the now-flourishing "senior" dogs lolling in the arms of the staff, positively basking in their continued and bottomless goodwill. To my surprise, the shelter workers nurtured and cherished the healthy dogs more than ever. In fact, it seemed they could not stop pouring love into the animals, who had become vortexes of love.

This made me think of one of A.A.'s favorite prayers, "The Prayer of St. Francis". It appears in the chapter on Step Eleven of A.A.'s book, *The 12 Steps and 12 Traditions*. In this prayer, St. Francis seems to say that there are two sides to any encounter, and one—the giving side—is better than the other—the receiving side. He goes on to remind us that we should seek to console rather than be consoled, understand rather than be understood, and love rather than be loved. Many times in my life, I have tried to follow St. Francis' instructions to shift my role in a situation towards the giving side. What if good old St. Francis showed up at an A.A. meeting? Would he stand up and share, "We should seek to eat chocolate ice cream, not vanilla.

We should hold hands, not hug. We should go to morning A.A. meetings, not evening A.A. meetings. We should repeat The Serenity Prayer, not the Third Step Prayer." All of us would politely say, "Thanks for sharing!" but in our heads we would be thinking, "This Francis guy needs to get a sponsor and work the steps."

We would probably realize he was stuck in the judgementalism and egomania that is the hallmark of alcoholism. Astute readers of our traditions might also notice he was botching those, too, since we aim to "have no opinion on outside issues". What is more, the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, *anonymity*, recognizes the goodness, equality, and unity of *all* and seems to point away from black or white, and good or bad thinking.

maybe my impulse to be on the giving side of every equation has a touch of egomania & superiority that is related to my alcoholism.

Maybe St. Francis was mistaken in his prayer. Perhaps receiving is absolutely as good as giving or even better! The healed dogs, who accepted love from everyone, leave me wondering if it may be so. After

all, being a recipient brings out the positive qualities in others and becomes an engine of goodness in the world. Being a recipient places us more firmly in positions of humility, surrender, and acceptance. Being a recipient also may help us be in "right relation to God", our loving Higher Power, who excels at being the giver.

How can I be a more graceful and effective recipient? Like the listless dogs in their early days, maybe I need to *slow down* in order to receive gifts from others. Sometimes I am moving so fast that the world has no opportunity to give to me, or I am distracted and fail to notice the blessings. Perhaps I need to outgrow any feelings of unworthiness that make me deflect gifts such as attention, compliments, or offers of help. Or maybe I can recognize that my impulse to be on the giving side of every equation may have a touch of egomania and superiority that is related to my alcoholism. Going forward, my new prayer may be, "St. Francis, grant that I may learn to receive." Jenna H. Morning Discussion Group



A PANDEMIC IN EARLY RE-COVERY...OH DEAR, WHAT NOW?

Looking back now after some nine months of sobriety I remember fondly the events of early March 2020, when after a 14-day detox at the Ossington Men's Withdrawal Management Centre, a 14 day stay at Camh, and a 28day inpatient alcohol abuse treatment program at Renascent House, I find myself listening intently as the CBC announces that we and the world are facing a pandemic. Oh dear, what now? How is this going to affect me?

During those early months, I had been presented with the opportunity to get and remain sober, and more importantly learn how to reinvent myself as a healthier, happier, sober version of me.

A tall order you might say and rightly so since I have spent the better part of thirty years in some form of altered state. Whether from alcohol or some other drug, being clear headed has been more a wish than my reality.

The two-plus months that began my journey afforded me the opportunity to learn not only some of the causes for my insanity but gave me the tools to remain focused on moving forward in the life I was meant to lead, not the path I had been following for all these years.

I had been very fortunate to have been introduced to more than a few kind and caring people who taught me the importance of self-acceptance for what and who I had become but also introduced to the fellowship that is Alcoholics Anonymous without whom I would not have had a safe place to go when the dark early days of the pandemic made something as simple as getting to a meeting become an acrobatic chore. One that notwithstanding I wanted even more so needed.

As Toronto began to go into lockdown mode and most in-person meetings were canceled, it became harder to stay focused as without my daily early morning OISE meetings I did not have the structure of getting my day off to a positive start.

Then my higher power or just some very good people suggested we continue to meet in a small group outside in the parkette of the OISE building. Just brilliant I thought, and so there we are a group of 6-10 suffering and freezing but grateful alcoholics meeting just as we had been doing at 6:50 am ever since being introduced to Alcoholics Anonymous.

Being in early recovery is difficult at the best of times but then, introduce a global pandemic to the mix and it can become a toxic and dangerous place for anybody, however to an alcoholic this is an even more treacherous place without easy access to the fellowships and facilities that help beyond measure to keep one safe from harm, previous behaviors can find the small crack needed to fester in the mind and rain havoc with one's thoughts. Early on in the pandemic, before Zoom meetings, these folks, my new found fellowship helped to keep me grounded and get through the first few weeks of darkness.

Today I, like most survive and continue to maintain my hard fought for sobriety with our Zoom meetings and my AA based aftercare for which I will be forever thankful for. Remembering also to always look back fondly at our motley little group as I look forward longingly to in-person meetings as they start up next week.

David R. The Hill Group

FEAR ITSELF

When I walked into the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous for the first time I would not have described myself as a fearful person. And yet, as I did a searching and fearless moral inventory of myself, fear was a common denominator in all that I had done or failed to do.

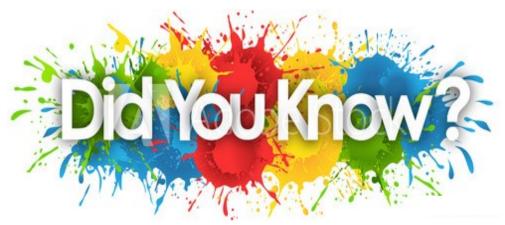
When I looked back at all the obstacles I'd faced in my life it was fear that had prevented me from trying or pushing through. It didn't matter if the obstacle was real or imagined - I'd quit for fear of trying. In recovery, I set about doing the "do" things - sponsor, home group, service, step work. While the obsession to drink left me almost instantly, my fear never left me. What I know now is that I was trusting only in myself to solve my problems.

Prayer became a way to address my fear. There's a proverb that says, "The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." God had miraculously removed from me the craving for alcohol. The Big Book says, "He has commenced to accomplish those things for us which we could never do by ourselves." Why would I not then trust that He could remove fear from my life?

As I began to accept God's companionship, His grace and His will for me, I focused only on taking the first next step. All of a sudden, the path ahead became manageable. Each day I get a little bit stronger. Each day that I trust in God my fear disappears a little bit more. Not every day is easy. Some days feel like great strides are made, others as though I am running on the spot.

But when faced with the gift of another 24 hours my choice is clear and described to me in the step 7 in the 12x12: "We're obliged to choose between the pain of trying or the certain penalty of failing to do so." More than 3 years down the road of a miraculous new existence I can tell you that the next step is nothing to be afraid of. All I have to do is try.

David B. Long Branch Group



In September of 1934 Bill W. entered Towns Hospital for the third time. Dr. Silkworth pronounced him as hopeless & told Lois that Bill would likely have to be committed. Bill left the hospital a very broken, frightened man. Sheer terror kept him sober but on November 11, 1934, he got drunk & severely injured. Lois began looking for sanitariums & asylums to place Bill.

In September of 1935 Bill W. returned home from his Akron trip and A.A. began in New York City.

On September 5, 1935 Hank P. the New York Group's A.A. No. 2 (Story in Big Book *The Unbeliever*) takes his last drink.

On September 13, 1937 Florence R. (story in 1st edition Big Book A Feminine Victory) is the first female A.A. in New York.

In September of 1938, Trustee, Frank Amos, arranged a meeting between Bill W. & Eugene Exman, Religious Editor of Harper Brothers publishing. Exman offered Bill a \$1,500 advance on the rights to the book. The Foundation Trustees urged acceptance of the Harper Brothers offer. On September 21, 1938 Hank P. & Bill W. formed Works Publishing Co. to raise money to write & publish Alcoholics Anonymous, A.A.'s Big Book & sold stock at \$25 par value. Of 600 shares issued, Hank & Bill received 200 shares each. 200 shares were sold to others. Later, 30 shares of preferred stock at \$1,000 par value. Nell Wing, A.A.'s first Archivist, later wrote, "If it wasn't for BillW. The Big Book would never have been written. If it wasn't for Hank P. it never would have been published". Hank is also credited with writing the Bib Book's chapter 10 entitled *To Employers*.

On September 22, 1944 Dr. George Little transferred the distribution rights which he had obtained in August of 1942 from the A.A. Office in New York for the sale of the Big Book in Canada to the Toronto A.A. Club.

In September of 1948 the first issue of the A.A. Grapevine in pocketbook format is published. It was also the first issue the Serenity Prayer was first printed.

On September 17, 1954 Bill D. from Akron, Ohio A.A. No. 3 Man on the Bed died with 19 years of sobriety.

In September of 1973, Archives was established at GSO in New York & Nell Wing, one of Bill's earliest secretaries became the first archivist.

On September 19, 1975 Jack Alexander, author of early Saturday Evening Post articles on A.A. died. The March 1941 article created a national sensation: A.A. membership will quadrupled in one year from 2,000 to 8,000.

On September 30-October 2,1977 the 1st Eastern Canada Regional Forum was held in Ottawa with about 500 in attendance. Dr. Jack Norris, a non-alcoholic & Chairman of the Board had introduced these in 1975 in order to make members more familiar with the operations of the General Service Board & the General Service Office.

On September 9, 1982, meetings of the six DCM's (today 8 Districts in the GTA) from around the Metropolitan Toronto Area & the GTA Intergroup Operating Committee (today the Operating Committee) of Toronto Intergroup started. Today these meetings are called "Joint Sharing Meetings".

search

GREATER TORONTO AREA INTERGROUP

234 Eglinton Ave. E. # 202 Toronto, ON M4P 1K5 416-487-5591 www.A.A.

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Please send us in your own words, your ideas, your journey, your experience, strength and hope in 200-500 words to bettertimes@A.A.toronto.org *

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Randy C. Secretary																					

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ALL MEDIA INQUIRIES ARE TO BE SENT TO THE OPERATING COMMITTEE CHAIR oc.chair@A.A.toronto.org

GROUP SPOTLIGHT

The <u>Sunnyside meeting</u> has been active in Parkdale since 1949 and I've been a member since 2011 says Karl K. as he shares on his home group.

We have great camaraderie at Sunnyside. We all have a need to connect, be of service to newcomers, give back what was so freely given to us. We share these

commonalities. When I was a newcomer I liked that I could go to Sunnyside and not be judged, I could just go in and be part of the group.

It's important that there's the connection, "Zoom meetings are better than nothing". We're able to get the message out and there's a lot of reach, but I miss the physical location where people can congregate and you don't feel so isolated.

We're all there to carry the message and help out in whatever way we can. We wouldn't

have a life if it wasn't for A.A. We gotta feel that we're a group and try to support each other. Sometimes the bond is strong, sometimes we can be scattered; we're all alcoholics right?

With the pandemic, the core group is always there. What keeps us together and what keeps us going is our primary purpose to carry the message. These meetings are the only place we can go where people really understand each other.

24th Annual Mississauga Fall Roundup

Serenity After the Storm

Saturday October 3rd 2020

Online Zoom Format – 9am to 12:15pm Hear the inspirational words of AA, Al-Anon and Alateen members from across North America. A gathering of alcoholics, their families and friends for the common good of us all.

Speakers: AA - Beth H, Destin, Florida

AA – Jimmy D, Dallas, Texas Al-Anon and Alateen Speakers also

"When I am disturbed, it is because I find some person, place, thing or situation – some fact of my life – unacceptable to me, and I can find no serenity until I accept that person, place, thing, or situation as being exactly the way it is supposed to be at this moment."

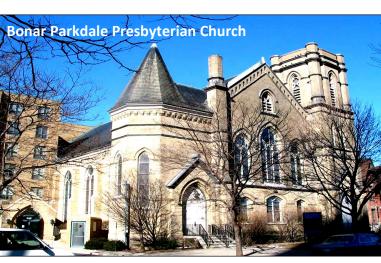
p 417, The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous.

FREE EVENT

Visit website for details

www.mississaugafallroundup.org

The Sunnyside closed meeting is on Tuesdays at 8 p.m. We have a Big Book study, and various Steps discussions. We do round-table shares. The Open Meeting has a speaker on Thursdays at 8 p.m. We have recognition with chips and medallions. Everyone can participate in the readings like *How it Works*, interpretations of the slogans etc. The Thursday night chairperson brings food for everyone to share afterwards, so people will stay and talk, and newcomers can ask questions. It allows for fellow-



ship, which is such an important aspect of A.A.

For now, during COVID, we have a Tuesday night Zoom meeting at 8 p.m.

For me, I did I set up every Tuesday. I'd set up the 12 Step meetings, I covered the library position and now I'm the Secretary. If you want to get involved the business meetings are a

great place to start.

We work with St Joe's detox, that's what we're doing for service meetings right now. We did Westmoreland Saturday noon meetings, sometimes they call us to the West Toronto Men's Meeting. We had other service opportunities but I don't know too much about what's happening now during COVID. You can park at the Dollarama nearby, and the Church is right on the Queen West streetcar line. **Karl K.** <u>Sunnyside Group</u>



NAME	YEARS	DRY DATE	GROUP
Meghan E.	20	Sep. 17 2000	Erin Mills Group
Michael D.	10	Sep. 19 2010	Erin Mills Group
John F.	5	Sep. 23 2015	Erin Mills Group
Howard M.	50	Sep. 20 1970	Richmond Hill Group

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