

BETTER TIMES

spotlight on

Beyond Belief Agnostics & Freethinkers

Thursday, September 24th, 2009 at 6:30 PM, the first meeting of Beyond Belief Agnostics & Freethinkers Group took place at the University of Toronto. There are now 14 GTA meetings “without a prayer.” I’m a regular around the A.A. History Lovers clan and periodically, I write and speak about our collective history. Eddy G from Toronto archives was excited to show me a late 1990s meeting list with a We Agnostics

search for it, or their rejection of it.

In keeping with A.A. tradition, we do not endorse or oppose any form of religion or atheism. Our only wish is to ensure suffering alcoholics that they can find sobriety in A.A. without having to accept anyone else’s beliefs, or having to deny their own.”

There was no praying; some groups recited the Responsibility Declaration or “Live and Let Live” and some just close with “Our next meeting is ____; who’s going for coffee?” A lot of the early Toronto members came from Midtown, Stepping Stones and other groups in the Annex. Alcoholics from Ajax to Mississauga joined us. A lot of long-timers found a refreshing way to talk about A.A. recovery, not fitting their beliefs into G.O.D. acronyms or start every share with, “I don’t mean to offend anyone but...”

There are those newcomers who tried faking it and repeatedly not made it but have now found sobriety in our gathering of mostly nonbelievers. Some A.A.s never have the experience of a prayer-answering, sobriety-granting higher power. At Beyond Belief, we just share from our heart, unabashedly.

There are 400 secular A.A. meetings around the world. From 2009 to 2017, we went from zero to over 25 Canadian meetings for atheists/agnostics.

The International Conference of Secular A.A. is coming to downtown Toronto, in 2018. Many of us are busy with our first local gathering called SOAAR (Secular Ontario AA Roundup) September 16, 2017.

A.A. History isn’t something that happened “way back when.” A.A. evolves before our eyes. It’s an exciting time to be sober in Toronto A.A.

— Joe C., Toronto, ON

DID YOU KNOW?

that on March 3-4, 1951 Bill W. spoke about the proposed General Service Conference at the ORC held at the Royal York Hotel?



Group on the Danforth, in District 22. So, if any East-enders remember We Agnostics, I’d love to hear from you.

At the turn of the century, I found an active group of A.A. atheists/agnostics from around the world, online. I found an international website of agnostic/atheists AA groups that included New York City. “Great,” I decided, “Next New York trip, I’m going.” I told some of my homegroup friends. I got to a couple of New York agnostic groups and I couldn’t wait to help start a Toronto group with my fellow A.A.s. Many agnostic groups had web pages with meeting scripts and readings. Living Sober is a popular reading. We adopted this popular opening:

“A.A. agnostic meetings endeavour to maintain a tradition of free expression, and conduct a meeting where alcoholics may feel free to express any doubts or disbelief they may have, and to share their own personal form of spiritual experience, their



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Opinions expressed in **BETTER TIMES** are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of Greater Toronto Area Intergroup.

How To Reach Us: Submit group news, medallions, other event notices, letters to the editor or articles to **BETTER TIMES** (before the 7th of the month prior to the 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 or subscribe at: www.aatoronto.org

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

The Better Times publication strives to offer its readership the voice of the Toronto AA community. Your article submissions are a vital part of the Better Times publication and allow you to share your experience, strength and hope with your fellows.

Submissions should be between 200-500 words, and may be made online at www.aatoronto.org or by emailing bettertimes@aatoronto.org directly.

For any inquiries or comments, please send your name and phone number to the Editor at bettertimes@aatoronto.org. Your anonymity will be protected.

Yours in Service,
The Better Times Staff.

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Jobs & Notices...

■ Treatment Committee is seeking anyone interested in volunteering at the Toronto East or OCI.

■ Volunteers are needed for both Phone Greeters (1 year of continuous sobriety and 1 phone training session required) and 12 Step List (especially women and speakers of languages other than English).

■ Phone training is now the first Sunday of every month - call the office at 234 or contact the 12-Step Committee to book an appointment.

■ Accessibility Committee seeking members for a “Buddy List” for members who are homebound or otherwise can’t access meetings.

■ Correctional Facilities seeking people for “Bridging the Gap” program. Also, volunteers are required for the correctional facility in District 02. Toronto West also desperately needs volunteers; they have expanded to ‘A’ Tower with special needs and protective custody and hold meetings directly in the units. Donations of literature are also needed: soft-cover materials are accepted (no staples in the binding), as well as Grapevine donations (without staples).

Communications Committee is seeking volunteers for the following:

Helpers to assist with managing and updating the website.

The Communications Committee (Better Times, Website, etc.) continues to seek two or three dedicated members to help us carry the message of recovery in print and online. If interested, please email communications@aatoronto.org. We’d be delighted to welcome you!

ALSO: We are no longer using the bteditor@aatoronto.org email address. Please send all correspondence to bettertimes@aatoronto.org. If you’ve sent any articles for consideration, comments, or questions to the old address, please resend.

Thank you!

A Note from GTAI Executive Committee

On January 30th, GTA Intergroup arrived at an agreement to settle a complaint that had been initiated under the Ontario Human Rights Code in 2014 against Alcoholics Anonymous World Services. GTA Intergroup was added as a respondent to the complaint in October, 2015. On January 31st, 2017 the following report was made to the Floor of Intergroup by the ad hoc sub-committee that had been formed to advise the GTAI Executive Committee in responding to the complainant’s application.

The settlement agreement may be found at <https://aatoronto.org/about/meeting-minutes/>

GREATER TORONTO AREA INTERGROUP

REPORT OF THE AD HOC SUB-COMMITTEE

RE: HUMAN RIGHTS COMPLAINT

This is the report of the ad hoc sub-committee that was formed by your Executive Committee in March 2016 to respond on behalf of the GTAI to this complaint which had been filed with the Human Rights Tribunal in September of 2014.

Result
Through mediation assisted by a vice-chair of the Human Rights Tribunal, the GTAI has achieved a settlement of this matter. It is an agreement between the GTAI and the complainant and comes without the need for a ruling or a finding by the Tribunal.

The terms of settlement are attached.

Effect of the Settlement
The provision in the GTAI’s *Procedures and Guidelines*’ setting out the requirement for a group to be recognized, remains unchanged. That provision states:

An AA group needs to adopt **only** the 12 Steps, 12 Traditions and 12 Concepts of AA, as adopted by the AA General Service Board, in order to be recognized as an AA group by GTA Intergroup.

In keeping with the settlement agreement, GTA Intergroup acknowledges that any group that adopts or acknowledges the Steps, Traditions and Concepts may be listed and that the manner in which individual A.A. members or groups of A.A. members interpret and apply the Steps and Traditions in their own lives is a matter for those individuals alone.

In achieving this resolution GTAI acknowledged it contributed, in part, to the difficulties in communication that in turn served to prolong the process. The GTAI has agreed to pay the complainant \$5,000 as a goodwill gesture. That payment is described, for legal purposes as “general damages”. It is not a payment in acknowledgement of any violation of the Ontario Human Rights Code.

It has been, and remains, the GTAI’s position that there has been no discrimination against the complainant, or indeed anyone else, let alone on the prohibited ground of creed.

Conclusion
While this has been the result of a lengthy legal process, the stated objective of the Executive Committee was to achieve a result consistent with the fundamental principles of the A.A. programme and fellowship. We believe that has been accomplished.

It should be noted that the result is in keeping with the GTAI ‘Procedures and Guidelines’, the document that reflects the collective conscience of the Floor of Intergroup. It should also be noted that the complaint against A.A.W.S. & G.S.O. was withdrawn.

Yours in service,
The Members of the GTAI Ad Hoc Sub-Committee

Roman R., GTAI Executive Committee Chair
Carol J., GTAI Executive Committee Vice-Chair
Alex M., Executive Committee Member
Mark C., Welcome Group
Barbara H., Rox Glen Traditional Group
Sharon W., East York Group

BETTER TIMES

announcements & archives

PAST / UPCOMING MEDALLIONS									
Colleen B.	10	New Anchor Group	Dec 29	Dec 29	Ray R.	10	Last Chance Group	Jan 29	Jan 31
Mary S.	25	High Park Group	Jan 4	Jan 5	Jamie O.	15	Willowdale Group	Jan 30	Feb 2
Sue C.	15	Willowdale Group	Jan 2	Jan 5	Susan S.	1	King City Group	Jan 8	Feb 6
Kate B.	10	New Anchor Group	Jan 2	Jan 5	Brad W.	1	King City Group	Jan 12	Feb 6
Victoria M.	15	High Park Group	Jan 2	Jan 8	Robbie R.	35	King City Group	Jan 26	Feb 6
Jim H.	1	Pine Hills Group	Dec 12	Jan 9	Mark P.	15	Erin Mills Group	Feb 7	Feb 13
Jeanne E.	5	Markland Woods Group	Jan 7	Jan 12	Valerie B.	35	North Toronto Group	Feb 14	Feb 14
Angela J.	1	New Anchor Group	Jan 4	Jan 12	Mike S.	10	West York Group	Jan 6	Feb 19
Jennifer M.	1	New Anchor Group	Jan 4	Jan 19					
Meta G.	25	Markland Woods Group	Dec 27	Jan 19	Gerry P.	35	Markland Wood Group	Mar 1	Mar 2
Michelle S.	1	High Park Group	Jan 14	Jan 22	Gord H.	30	Bloordale Group	Feb 27	Mar 5
Kingsley I.	1	New Anchor Group	Jan 20	Jan 26	Ed H.	45	Pine Hills Group	Feb 9	May 1
Ray P.	20	East York Group	Jan 1	Jan 31	Jesse P.	1	Pathfinders Group	Mar 14	Mar 15
Steve S.	10	East York Group	Jan 22	Jan 31	Lance C.	30	Willowdale Group	Mar 27	Mar 30
Heather N.	1	East York Group	Jan 23	Jan 31	Steven M.	20	Willowdale Group	Mar 18	Mar 23
Joan A.	40	Half Century Group	Jan 1	TBA	Doug M.	5	Saturday Night Live	Mar 30	Apr 8
Sunny S.	30	St. Clement's Group	Nov 15	Jan 25	Steven S.	1	Last Chance Group	Mar 19	Mar 28
David M.	35	St. Clement's Group	Jan 11	Jan 25	Emily L.	1	Primary Purpose Group	Mar 6	Mar 8
Paula C.	10	St. Clement's Group	Jan 4	Jan 25	'Joan The Hat' 40		Half Century Group		Apr 30

IN THE LISTINGS, THE FIRST DATE IS THE SOBRIETY DATE, THE SECOND IS THE DATE OF THE MEDALLION CELEBRATION
Due to ongoing submissions this list may not be current. For the latest information visit: www.aatoronto.org

I FOUND IT IN THE ARCHIVES

BACK TO THE REPOSITORY... with GTA Archivist Eddy G.

Archives Committee meetings are held on the 2nd Friday of each month in the boardroom at the GTA Intergroup Office, 234 Eglinton Ave. E., Suite 202, Toronto.

Recent items donated to the GTA Archives:

- 46 Green Binders with Grapevines per year complete from 1968 to 2016 (no 2014) • 16 plastic bags with Grapevines per year incomplete from 1951 to 1967 (nothing for 1958) • 12 reprinted Oxford Group members books - The Washington Temperance Society, An Apostle to the Lost 1885, Down in Water Street 1902, Twice Born Men 1909, Souls in Action 1911, Religion and the Crisis 1913, Life Changers 1927, What Is the Oxford Group 1933, Discipleship 1934, The Common Sense of Drinking 1934, Life BEGAN Yesterday 1935, I Was A Pagan 1934.
- Books- 4th Edition Big Book 1st Printing, Pass It On 1st Printing, 2-Came To Believe, As Bill Sees It, 12 Steps & 12 Traditions pocket size 1st printing, Big Book pocket size 1st printing, GV AA Around The World: Adventures In Recovery 1st printing, GV A Rabbit Walked Into A Bar, GV AA In Prison Inmate To Inmate, GV Best Cartoons From GV, Lois Remembers, AA Today 25 GV Special 25th Anniv. Of AA, 50 Years History of AA in Ontario 1st , 2nd & 3rd Printings, 50th, 60th& 70th International AA Convention Souviner Books, 12 Concepts for World Service 1978,& 1980-81, The AA Service Manual 1978, The Service Manual & 12 Concepts 1985-86, A New Pair of Glasses, The Little Red Book 1957. • Box Set Cassette Tapes- Big Book 3rd Edition, 12 & 12, AA Comes of Age. • Cassette Tapes- 12-Local AA members talks & 7- Out of Town AA members talks. • ORC 2008 (12 speaker cd's), ORC 2015 (6 speaker cd's). • 4 Boxes-The Golden Recordings of Father John Doe 24 LP's. • Box Set AA Pioneers (9 cd's)-Bill & Lois W., Dr. Bob & Anne Smith, Ebby T.,Bill D., Ethel M., Marty M., Sister Ignatia.
- 25- AA booklets from Akron, Cleveland, Chicago & New York.

All of the above items belonged to Joe B. (Royal York Group) who passed away in July 2016 with 33 yrs of sobriety & were donated by Laurie B. (Royal York Group) wife of Joe.

50 YEARS OF THE HISTORY OF A.A. IN ONTARIO

TO DONATE AA/GTA ARCHIVAL ITEMS TO THE GTA ARCHIVES PLEASE CONTACT THE GTA ARCHIVIST EDDY G. at 416-536-7536.

50 Years – The History of AA in Ontario is for sale at the Literature Department at 234 for \$10.00. This book was produced in 1993 by the Archives Committee of Toronto Intergroup (today GTA Intergroup). It's a great gift to give to a member on their anniversary.

... and please don't forget ...

Old GTA meeting books are needed for the GTA Archives.

BETTER TIMES

editorial

WELCOME TO OUR INCOMING EDITOR

Welcome to March! For this alcoholic and grateful A.A.er, this month means Step 3, embracing spirituality and Tradition 3, recognizing membership. It also means the 2017 Ontario Regional Conference (ORC) is upon us. This year's theme "Action is the Key" was something I heard a great deal early in my sobriety. It is 100% true! The steps suggest it but that's not all the action the program asks of us.

Every so often our programs need a boost of energy and after a few months of cold and dark, for me, it often needs some action just about now. The ORC always fills me with a wonderful feeling of community and fellowship. It motivates me to attend new meetings in the city. It inspires me to revisit my service commitments beyond the group level to see what I can do to carry the message heading into Spring. Imagine my surprise when I was asked to serve as the Editor-in-Chief of The Better Times for a term! I am honoured to take on the challenge and look forward to sharing your "action" stories and inspiration. See you at The Royal York March 10-12!

— In Love and Service, Maija P.

Maija joins Better Times as of April 2017

DID YOU KNOW?
that in March 1941 the 2nd printing of the Big Book was produced?
GTA Archivist - Thanks Eddy G.

GTAI's Office Manager Retires

Tradition Eight: Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our service centres may employ special workers.

Intergroup's current Office manager, Gail Dobbs, is retiring after over five years of selfless service to the membership in the GTA.

Gail came to us from the private sector. A mother of two and a bookkeeper by trade, she came to us with an extensive background that included travel and the Arts. A passionate supporter of the artistic community in all its representations, Gail is a film buff who always attended TIFF yearly. Her creativity was certainly an asset to the office, and she never backed down from finding solutions to situations when they arose.

Although Gail is not a member of the Fellowship, she

quickly adopted the spirit of the Traditions in her work with us with dedication, humour, and an excellent work ethic. She has a compassionate nature and blended well with 'this outfit'. Always willing to help, Gail was very flexible with change and adapted as needed. She is a very good teacher.

We would like to take this opportunity to personally thank Gail for her efforts in facilitating the membership's mandate to carry the message to the still-suffering alcoholic. Her courage, compassion, and humour made working with her these past five years an honour, privilege, and a pleasure. We wish her all the best for the future...and she will be missed!

Written with Love by Helen (Literature Department) and Alexx (admin. assistant)

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"This work kept me sober. It wasn't a question of those alcoholics giving me anything. My stability came out of trying to give, not out of demanding that I receive."

- GRAPEVINE, JANUARY 1958

Contact Us

Phone Greeters Needed

I am Responsible. When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there. And for that: I am responsible.

Phone training is now the first Sunday of every month - call the office at 234 or contact the 12-Step Committee to book an appointment.

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Feeling a New Freedom at the ORC

My first ORC experience was not so enthusiastic. One speaker spoke so powerfully about making amends to her father that I had to run off to cry in the bathroom. Thankfully, there were kind women around who checked on me and asked me the right questions.

Yes, I had a good sponsor and was working the Steps. It was just a big conference and the speaker's message amplified all my suppressed emotions.

After many years away and enjoying recovery in different places, here I was sober in my home town. Faces weren't so familiar 3 years ago, my life was still very unmanageable, and I felt guilty about it. How could someone with so much clean/sober time be such a mess?

The ORC is the perfect place to drop your shame and celebrate the solution together. A new friend told me "Creator wants you to be happy". It's one thing to read "Happy, joyous, and free" on a page but to hear it from someone you respect, telling it to your face? Completely different.

When you share some pain at a home group and people reach out it's wonderful. But people you've never met before and may never see again hugging you? How about a

lady sharing stories of how long their father has been gone yet they still feel it as deeply as ever?

That's just part of the ORC, the immediate connection or unconditional empathy, but I think it's the best part.

I felt that New Freedom walking around 2 years ago, talking with anybody and sharing many laughs. Volunteering made me more familiar with people I'd seen in the rooms. Hospitality suite hopping showed off the finesse of different groups. The Fairmont does inspire style.

Last year I spent more time at the ORC than ever - and it

“ Let go of fear and let the miracles happen. ”

was a good choice. The speakers were incredible. I bought share tapes and the inspiration did not fade. Especially Stacy.

I can still quote her: "I'm an alcoholic, I don't know how to let life be good, I sat in the car scared of accepting a scholarship until something told me 'I'm not doing this for you' and that got me to stand up and change my life." Goosebumps, every time. Let go of fear and let the miracles happen.

Going to the ORC is a big deal for me. It's part of welcoming spring. My gratitude gets reignited - and I get silly with sobriety. Come by the hospitality suite Stepping Stones puts on with the Not Saints group and you'll see what I mean!

— Another Grateful Trudger

**DO YOU KNOW YOUR GROUP HISTORY? IS IT WRITTEN OUT ON PAPER?
IF NOT, ASK YOUR GROUP LONGTIME MEMBER(S) IF THEY WOULD ANSWER THE GROUP
HISTORY QUESTIONS BELOW AND SUBMIT A COPY TO THE GTA ARCHIVES.**

- ☐ What was the founding date of the group: if unsure, when do you think the founding date was?
- ☐ What was the group's name when it was formed? Why was the name chosen?
- ☐ Has the group's name changed over the years? If so, when did it change and why?
- ☐ How did the group get started? Who were the founders of the group? (If uncertain, who may have started the group?)
- ☐ Were there any spin-offs of your group? Was your group created as a spin-off? What group did it spin-off from?
- ☐ When the group started, how often were meetings held? Has this changed over the years?
- ☐ What was the format of the meeting (open, closed, discussion, speaker, etc.)? Has this changed over the years?
- ☐ Any item(s) made by a group member(s) that is used at the meeting? (i.e. table cover, slogans, slogan board, wooden steps, book holders, painted pictures etc.) If so, who made them and in what year?
- ☐ Does the group hold social or special AA related activities? (i.e. holiday parties, candlelite meetings, picnics etc.)
- ☐ During the group's history has their location, date and time changed? If so, please list. (month/day/year)
- ☐ How many members are in the group today?
- ☐ Has there been an increase or decrease of group members over the years? Please describe.
- ☐ Does the group have any links with Al-Anon or Alateen? If so, what are they and when did they start?
- ☐ Does the group have any customs, traditions or interesting anecdotes? If so, will you share them?

Coming Home...to My Homegroup

The meeting format in my homegroup is a ten to fifteen minute speaker followed by discussion. Recently, one of our speakers chose to share on the topic of "Home". It was a very touching lead share and as we went around the room for the discussion period, I thought of the idea of "home" and what it meant to me in terms of my alcoholism. My first thoughts went to my actual home growing up. My father was an alcoholic so many of my memories of home are of fear, unpredictability and sometimes violence instead of the comfort and safety that perhaps should be associated with thoughts of home.

I have very little recollection of being out in the world and thinking I'd feel safe once I got home. As I sat in the meeting, I tried to remember when I started to have a sense of safety and of feeling at home in the world and realized it was, of course, the minute I discovered alcohol. Alcohol became the solution to my sense of unease in the world. No matter where I was or what was happening, if I had alcohol, I was home. Even though it put me in dangerous situations and created painful consequences, I felt untouchable and therefore strangely safe.

Eventually the booze stopped working and the reality of those consequences finally brought me to my knees and to AA. I am so grateful because it was in these rooms and with my fellow recovering alcoholics that I finally got to find out what home can be for me. A place where I can be all of me. A place where I can be honest about everything past and present, with people who understand. A place where I can finally grow up in safety using the tools of AA and learning from the experience of others.

The best part of having AA feel like home is that I have been able to travel and find my brothers and sisters in meetings almost everywhere I go. It feels like having a bunch of living rooms all over the world filled with various family members that I just haven't met yet.

The Steps have allowed me to know myself and a Higher Power so that now I have a sense of home inside me. If you ask me today where I feel at home, I can honestly tell you it's wherever I am. As long as I'm sober and working my program, I carry a sense of safety and home with me because Alcoholics Anonymous has brought me home to myself.

— Anonymous

Step Three is Only a Beginning

After twenty-eight years of mind-obliterating alcoholism, I finally attended my first AA meeting. Within a few weeks, I became capable of memorizing the Third Step Prayer that I had positioned on my refrigerator door. I would repeat it quite often throughout the day. My idea was that in so doing, I was turning my will, and my life, over to God . . . then, He would remove my problem—and that would be that!

This erroneous notion was justified by an overwhelming new happiness—please spell that (A. A. h-o-n-e-y-m-o-o-n). After all, my phone was ringing off the hook and I had new AA friends galore! Of course, I was surviving on the fellowship by keeping my telephone real hot and attending meetings every chance I had (I believe that was necessary because, otherwise, I would have headed right back to the bar room).

I thought this groovy-groovy (that was an expression back then) feeling was going to provide permanent protection from king alcohol, so I had sort of short-shrimped the rest of the steps and waited for that persistent nagging mental obsession to disappear. Well, it didn't! I was six-

months sober and just after a parade on Hollywood Blvd, I marched into a bar and almost ordered a drink! I didn't, but I was so terrified that I found a new sponsor to take me through the rest of the steps, el pronto.

The Big Book speaks of the Great Reality (God) deep within (p. 55). I believe this means I need to delve deep into my subconscious self by working the rest of the Twelve Steps with a sponsor. I believe that Step Three was only a beginning. This was only carried out by learning to do steps Four through Nine with my heart (not just my head), then continuing to put these directions into action by living in the spirit of Steps Ten, Eleven and Twelve. By the bye, the last three steps include the essential elements of the first nine.

At some point during the first year or so of my new-found sobriety, I experienced a release from all obsession to drink; inexplicably it no longer exists in my emotional vocabulary! However, I am convinced that if I lose contact with the "Great Reality deep within," I will be back where I started—or worse!

— Bob S., Richmond, IN