



The AA Tourist

Let me start by saying one of the best things that I have discovered in AA is being an 'AA tourist' – attending meetings when traveling. I started doing this when I was away feeling alone, restless and worried I might drink. The first meeting I attended was in Florida, and it was a little scary – instead of saying "No Pets" they said "No Guns". I decided to check out another meeting in a nicer part of town and found a great meeting in a great location. The rest is history.

Since then, I have been to meetings in Dublin, Ireland among other places.

There, I heard what I think is the best line I have ever heard in an AA meeting. It came from an old Irishman who said, "It is just good manners to thank your higher power at night, after he's kept you sober all day long." The other nice feature about going to meetings in Ireland is that the Irish are pub drinkers and seem to like to drink in public. After every meeting I attended in Ireland, I was invited for coffee afterward. I have since been to meetings in Hawaii and California as well, which has added to my serenity while traveling and offered a practical source of local knowledge.

While in Florida recently, I was at a meeting and saw a flyer on the table asking for donations for turkeys and hams for Thanksgiving. This was going to be served at the Triangle Club. I was going to be alone on Thanksgiving and I thought to myself, "I should see if they need volunteers." Then I had an internal debate about whether to actually volunteer or not. It was outside of my comfort zone to ask strangers to be a volunteer. Instead of doing what I usually do I thought, "to hell with it," and went to the snack bar to ask if they needed any volunteers and how many people usually showed up. The girl wasn't sure but took my number and said she'd pass it on. Three days before Thanksgiving, I got a call from the organizer. He said they could use the help as they usually get between 350 and 400 people for the noon meeting that is followed by the Thanksgiving dinner.

I showed up and served stuffing to 350 alcoholics. It was a great way to spend Thanksgiving. I was no longer alone. By changing my normal behavior, I helped others, helped myself, met some very nice people, and stayed sober one more day.

- Peter T.

masthead & service

BETTER TIMES is published monthly for AA members in the Greater Toronto Area.

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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 bteditor@aatoronto.org. Your anonymity will be protected.

Yours in Service,
The Better Times Staff.

Jobs & Notices...

- The **BETTER TIMES** is seeking a new Desktop Publisher/Graphic Designer with knowledge of Adobe products or equivalent. Please email communications@aatoronto.org
- 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!
- Finance Committee seeking Chair and committee members. Please forward resumes to the Finance Committee c/o the Intergroup Office | e-mail: office@aatoronto.org
address: Suite 202 - 234 Eglinton Ave.E., Toronto M4P 1K5
- 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)
- Access Ability Committee seeking members for a "Buddy List" for members who are homebound or otherwise can't access meetings
- Twelfth Step Committee seeking secretary and volunteers
- ORC 2016 needs volunteers as greeters, registration, etc. Website is online!
- Info AA Day 2016 will be held on May 28th, 2016. A few committee positions still need to be filled
- Correctional Facilities seeking people for "Bridging the Gap" program

- GSO Social Media Survey is online until December 31st. Please visit the Area 83 website.
- We have upgraded the GTAI (Greater Toronto Area Intergroup) website! The site has a new look to allow for greater ease of access to information, such as meeting times, submitting events, finding out about the various GTAI committees, etc. It is also more 'mobile friendly' for smartphone and tablet users. The new site is also available in French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Polish, and Russian, with the translations automatically being provided by Google Translate. Behind the scenes, this upgrade provides greater security and stability by allowing us to use the most current web technologies. Please send us your feedback!

NOTICE:

Eglinton Crosstown construction is at the block which includes 234. Parking in the area will be further restricted and it is being suggested that anyone coming to the Intergroup Office leave plenty of time or take public transportation.

TO CONTACT COMMITTEES PLEASE EMAIL:

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Thoughts From the Editor's Desk

It took me almost fifteen years of heavy drinking and using, and another four of doing it my way, to finally admit defeat and accept help. For this alcoholic, neither external circumstances of loss and humiliation, nor inner realities of misery and hopelessness seemed to be enough to propel me over the edge of surrender. For years, I had either deluded myself that I could one day control and enjoy my drinking or resigned myself to a life (i.e. slow death) of active addiction.

Moments of grace and willingness would come and go, but rarely at that sweet spot of convergence when we finally give up and cry out, "I'll do whatever it takes! Please help me! I can't go on like this and I want to live!" When I reflect back, I sense there

was a moment of clarity – a small crack in the insanity of that life – where the light of hope from without met with a spark of self-love from within. And it was those who have walked this path before who fanned the flames of willingness to carry on, one day at a time. You who had awakened spiritually held out your hand and carried me towards a better life, the moment I reached out to you.

Marc S. – Editor-in-Chief (bteditor@aatoronto.org)

In Memoriam Gordon M.

Gordon M. was District Committee Member for District 14 for 2013 and 2014. He passed away suddenly on November 18th, 2015. He was the eldest of three sons born to John and Marlene M. who became parents of this precocious young boy on November 18th in 1951. Raised in Richmond Hill, Gord showed tendencies towards a level of excellence in business from a very early age. He became a persuasive and credible salesman and his reputation in his own sign business was sound.

Anyone who has entered the world of service in our fellowship knows the time and effort that goes into doing the job well. Gord was more than competent regardless of what the job required. As a member of the Aurora Group for nearly twelve years, Gord focused his energies for the past ten years by being of service in AA and carrying the message of recovery to others. He did this with his own precision and meticulousness. Organization was his trademark. His dedication to AA service elevated others to his very high standard. His model was always to do the job flawlessly.... and his extensive understanding of Robert's Rules and parliamentary procedure expedited his efforts. His talents served us all well.

Gord was direct, brash, adventurous, self-confident and often impertinent. These enviable virtues were tempered by

his intrinsic honor and decency. The definition of integrity is doing the right thing even when nobody's watching. His integrity shone in matters that mattered. He was beyond generous with many and gave his time to be of service in the many facets of our AA community.

Gord leaves a void in the service structure of Alcoholics Anonymous in the Greater Toronto Area. We know that positions are filled and service work goes on, but there are those individuals who are designed to get the job done in an efficient and expeditious manner. Gord was one of those.

Norman Cousins wrote: "The human spirit cannot be diagrammed or dissected; it can't be seen by tomographic scanners and it can't be represented by numbers on a medical chart. Yet it is the single most identifiable feature of human uniqueness. Unless it is understood and respected, all other facts are secondary." Gord's spirit will live on in the hearts of his family and among his many friends. His light has simply moved to another room. May God bless & hold him tenderly in loving arms.

– Bernadette M., King City Group

spotlight on ...

Westmoreland Group

The Westmoreland Group, which recently celebrated 36 years of service and fellowship, had its beginnings back in the late 1970's. Ken D. of the Golden Mile Group and Stephen G. of the Friendly Group were putting on a service meeting at the Law Courts at Dufferin Mall. Also participating were Terry H. of the Friendly and Chris M. and his wife Evelyn (who was not a member but attended every meeting). Chris and Evelyn knew Rev. Creighton of St. Mary the Virgin Church on Westmoreland Avenue in the city's west end. Stephen G. and Ken D. were interested in starting a new group in the area, and space at the church was available.

First, Stephen went to his sponsor Walter P. and asked him if he could start a new group. Walter asked if he had any resentments against the Friendly group, as these would have to be resolved before moving to a new group. There were no resentments, so Stephen G. and Anna C. went to Intergroup and became co-signers to officially register Westmoreland as a group.

Every new group has its dedicated supporters, such as Norma of the Etobicoke and High Park Group. Though not a Westmoreland member, Norma regularly attended meetings at Dufferin Mall and Westmoreland. She helped to set up and clean up the meetings, as well as bring in sandwiches.

The early days were a challenge and relatively unstructured. Quite often the group business meeting ended up being held on the way up the church stairway as the members were leaving the meeting! Westmoreland grew, and its members welcomed many new members as they began their journey in sobriety. Notable in the early years were Bill M., Charlie McD. and Blackie B. Of course, there were many members who got their start in A.A. at the Westmoreland Group and later moved on to other groups. After about a decade, the group was asked to vacate the church due to renovations.

A committee including Lionel L., Francis H. and Carl began a thorough search that found the Alexandra Park Community Centre in the Spadina and Dundas area. The Saturday Noon Service Meeting (which had shared space with the Westmoreland Group at the St. Mary the Virgin Church) also moved there. However, it was only a matter of months before circumstances at the Community Centre forced us to relocate once again. Another

search ended with the Salvation Army Hall on Dovercourt Road.

With the kind help of Major Bowers and his wife, once more the Westmoreland Group was active in the Bloor-West area (actually one block from the group's original location). However, after a couple of years imminent renovations to the hall meant the group had to find another new home. At this time, the Saturday Noon Meeting (which had separated from the Westmoreland after Alexandra Park) was also looking for a meeting place. Their search led them to St. Paul's Presbyterian Church on Dovercourt road. Fortunately, the church had Tuesday and Thursday evenings open, so the Westmoreland and the Saturday Noon meetings were reunited.

The Westmoreland has certainly had an exciting history. Membership has grown over the years, while some of the early members who worked so hard to keep the group going have passed away. We have them to thank for their care and devotion. The Westmoreland has been in its "new" location for over a decade now, and its dedicated and enthusiastic members are committed to carrying the message of sobriety to the still suffering alcoholic – a tradition that has been kept alive for over thirty-five years

– Rob M., Westmoreland Group

DID YOU KNOW?

that on
January 24, 1971,
Bill Wilson died?
He was 36 years
sober.



Women in Recovery

AA is for everyone – men and women, young and old, of any race, sexual identity, religious affiliation, socio-economic background – everyone. Alcoholism crosses every line and pays no heed to physical, psychosocial or cultural boundaries. And although being an alcoholic woman is not nearly as stigmatizing as it might have been when AA was founded, and throughout its growth into the world-wide organization it is today, we now know that women and men face some similar and other quite different patterns of behaviour associated with addiction and recovery.

Research from Stephanie Covington suggests that along with being addicted to alcohol, many women suffer from a lack of healthy relationships and from a history of trauma — physical, emotional or sexual abuse, poverty or some form of oppression due to cultural prejudice or bias. Women in recovery may also face a multitude of issues such as eating disorders, single parenting and child care stressors, and low self-esteem.

Historically in our culture, little tolerance and less acceptance has been afforded to the drinking woman. Shame and guilt, common to all addicts, may be felt and exhibited differently for women in a society still largely patriarchal. In the

Big Book, dated by the generation and culture in which it was born, often women are spoken of as the long-suffering partner of the alcoholic in the family, namely, the man. Less attention and voice are given for the unique realities of being a female alcoholic.

Today, in the rooms of AA, women share openly about the personal struggles, histories and environmental constraints which have influenced the progression of their relationship with alcohol and their struggles when coming into the program. They also share the triumphs and tribulations that make up the journey of contented sobriety. To give voice to these experiences, over the the course of this year the Better Times will publish a monthly column called “Women in Recovery”. This will be a space for women to share their stories. We invite you to participate and share from your heart about your experience being a woman in recovery. Your contributions may be anonymous, and will most certainly make a healing difference to us all. Please contact the Better Times (bettertimes@aatoronto.org) if you are interested. No writing experience is required, only your story - your experience, strength, and hope - in your own words.

Three Bottles of Ale

During late August or early September of 1934, the future of AA, to be or not to be, rested in the delicate balance of Ebby Thacher's (yes, only one “t”) decision to drink, or not to drink, three tempting basement-cooled bottles of Ballantine Ale which would have calmed his alcoholic shakes and impending DTs.

Ebby was living in his family summer home in Manchester, Vermont, and had been arrested for shooting at pigeons on his roof on a rainy evening. This was just not that sort of upscale neighborhood, i.e., Todd Lincoln, Abraham's son, once lived directly across the street. Vermont law mandated that Ebby was to be confined in Brattleboro Asylum for this – his third – drunken offence (He already had slammed his car into the side of a house and laughingly asked the owner for a cup of coffee

– she called the constable instead). However, the judge allowed him to remain free if he returned to court without drinking the following Monday. Ebby picked up those three tempting ale bottles, but his honesty prevailed; he surrendered them to a neighbor. He then prayed sincerely that God help him stop drinking and amazingly, he experienced an immediate release from his mental obsession which lasted for two years and seven months... and as we know, this was time enough for him to carry his sober message to Bill Wilson the following November (p. 9) who then, launched the AA fellowship with Dr. Bob Smith in June of 1935.

– **Bob S.**

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

The principle that we will find no enduring strength until we first admit complete defeat is the main taproot from which our whole Society has sprung and flowered.

Singleness of Purpose Amend

I used to identify myself as an alcoholic and a drug addict. I do not anymore because I now believe my other addictions are irrelevant at AA meetings. But, more than that, I also used to insist on talking about my other addictions beyond what was necessary to relate them to alcohol. I justified this by saying that alcohol was just another drug and so it was unfair to expect me not to talk about all my addictions. I also refused to attend any other fellowship because I claimed to prefer the wisdom and sobriety in AA. I realize now how inconsiderate and self-centered this position was. It's not a question of what is fair or whether alcohol is just another drug – the Traditions and primary purpose of AA are what they are whether I agree with them or not.

In the past, when I was actively using, I often had dinner at the homes of people who did not use drugs, but who did drink. I never considered insisting that I had the right to smoke a joint at their dinner table because they were drinking wine. And imagine if I had, and then added insult to injury by saying, “and not only do I have a

right to use any drug I want to around here if you're going to drink, but I'm going to keep coming back and I'm going to keep using any drug I want to in your home because I like the food you serve and your company better than the food and company I find in the homes of my drug addict friends!” (And, in my opinion, I have the right to do this because all drugs are the same and I don't care rules or customs you keep in your home.) Such a gross abuse of hospitality sounds preposterous to me now, but that is essentially what I was doing by insisting that I had the right to violate AA's singleness of purpose. I was abusing the hospitality of this Fellowship. This is not an apology – I was too sick to realize how selfishly I was acting, and a mere apology is not necessarily an amends. I am hoping to amend the harm I did by stating clearly what I did and, further, by not doing it again. I hope this will also help others with similar struggles.

– **Anonymous**

Beginner's Dilemma

We may be asking him to believe some pretty hard-to-swallow AA facts.

MANY a relapsed AA has been written off by his group with the summary verdict: “He doesn't want to stop drinking.” Maybe so. But maybe he is mentally unprepared, at first hearing, to believe in those strange, new, believe-it-or-not principles and practices that have made AA successful.

The reputation of AA and its power of example combine to bring him to us with a favorable, hopeful attitude. At his first beginners' meeting, he listens for what he expects to be “rational, common-sense answers.” But when we start to spell out the mechanics of AA, the how-it-works part, we are asking him to believe some things that conflict directly with his past experience. Let's look at two examples of these hard-to-swallow AA facts:

1. **Willpower:** All his life, Mr. Alcoholic has been taught that success at anything requires a power of will strong enough to sweep all obstacles aside. Now AA tells him that human willpower, based on ego and worldly objectives, is a liability, not an asset. To get sober, he must now discard human willpower and generate something new: spiritual willpower based on personal humility and on surrender to the fact of his powerlessness.
2. **God as a Higher Power:** Mr. Alcoholic goes along with us when we tell him that he is powerless over alcohol and that he must turn his sobriety over to some external power stronger than himself. But when we hang a label on this power--God, as we understand Him--we provoke conflict, even though the newcomer may not express it. The word “God” has a particularly negative effect on the nonreligious person. As for the religious alcoholic, he has tried previously to reach God through formal prayers and other religious rites. Is AA trying to tell him that we have some exclusive influence with God?

The same incredulous attitude often confronts the exposition of other believe-it-or-not AA facts: the day-at-a-time sobriety plan; the selfish-unselfish pattern of AA living; the power of group sobriety as against the lone-wolf approach.

How can we bypass the intellectual sparring match that ensues when we suddenly toss at the beginner these new word images and propositions that directly contradict his past teachings?

You might try this: The next time you are conducting a beginners' meeting, I suggest that, instead of telling the usual personal-recovery story, you emphasize three points of persuasion:

1. An outline of the general success story of AA.
2. A forewarning that AA is a new learning experience, that some of its principles, such as those cited above, will contradict his past beliefs.
3. An explanation that AA is not just academic knowledge. It is wisdom that can be proven only by personal experience.

Wouldn't we take the wind out of our beginner's argumentative sails if we conceded right at the start that some AA truths are hard to believe at first hearing? If we could persuade him to learn by doing, instead of learn by learning, wouldn't we dodge the analyzing bit, and get him started more easily on his day-at-a-time program? I think so.

– **G.O., Chicago, Illinois**

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BETTER TIMES announcements

PAST MEDALLIONS

Jamie B.	20	Keep It Simple Group	Nov 29
Rich T.	25	Bellamy Group	Nov 30
Will H.	5	Mount Albert Group	Dec 1
Kathryn G.	1	New Anchor Group	Dec 3
John M.	40	Willowdale Group	Dec 3
Tim W.	5	Open Hands Group	Dec 9
George F.	15	Bellamy Group	Dec 14
Doug G.	1	Agincourt Acorn Group	Dec 15
Jon X.	25	East York Group	Dec 15
Frank P.	5	Keep It Simple Group	Dec 27
Susan P.	15	Crossroads Group	Dec 27

UPCOMING MEDALLIONS

Heather Y.	10	Keep it Simple Group	Jan 3
Matthew T.	1	Crossroads Group	Jan 3
Jackie M.	45	Mississauga Group	Jan 3
Glenn C.	18	Friendly Group	Jan 3
Carole P.	1	Mt. Royal	Jan 5
Kara M.	1	Reaching Out Group	Jan 5
Charlie A.	5	Scarborough Group	Jan 8
Bob K.	20	Bellamy Group	Jan 11
Jean F.	35	Reaching Out Group	Jan 12
Caroline S.	5	12 Traditions Group	Jan 13
Jaz M.	5	Willowdale Group	Jan 14

Annie A.	1	Markland Wood Group	Jan 14
Jaz M.	5	Willowdale Group	Jan 14
Timo M.	35	Scarborough Group	Jan 15
Gord H.	5	Traditional Group	Jan 11
Kristen B.	1	Lakeshore Group	Jan 17
Helen O.	5	Reaching Out Group	Jan 19
Wayne O.	35	Anniversary Group	Jan 20
Brian F.	10	Willowdale Group	Jan 21
Pat Q.	20	East York Group	Jan 26
Darryl F.	5	Noon Rap Group	Jan 29
Marlene F.	25	Leslie Group	Jan 30

ANNOUNCEMENTS

■ Tuesday Night Discussion Group 35th Anniversary

Thursday, January 28, 2016, 8 pm

Downsview United Church, 2822 Keele St.

All are welcome!

■ 73rd Ontario Regional Conference: No Longer Alone

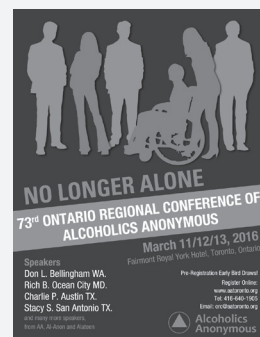
March 11, 12, 13, 2016

Fairmont Royal York Hotel, Toronto

AA, Al-Anon, Alateen speakers

Register Online: www.aatoronto.org
416-640-1905

ORC@aatoronto.org
Pre-registration Early Bird Draws!



■ Did You Know? Corrections from December Better Times Issue...

– that on December 11, 1934 Bill W. takes his last drink & enters Towns Hospital in Akron, Ohio?

Correction: Towns Hospital is in New York

– from December 1934 to May 1938 Bill W. works with alcoholics, but fails to sober any of them?

Correction: May 1935

– Oooops! ;-)

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.

Happy 73rd AA Birthday Toronto, Ontario, Canada!

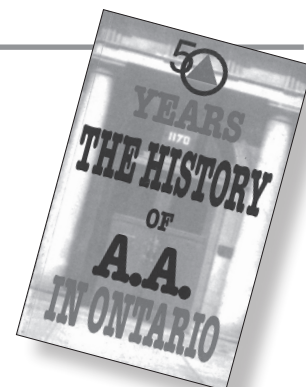
On Wednesday, January 13, 1943 at 6:00 pm the first meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous in Canada, Toronto, Ontario took place at the Little Denmark Restaurant on 331 Bay Street (on the west side) between Gerrard St. & College St. Present at the meeting were two non-alcoholics, Reverend George Little & Reverend Percy Price and six alcoholics - Tom E., Bruce M., Sam McC., Bus McT., Dorothy C. and Weems C.

We salute & thank all the AA giants who came before us to help us find AA in the GTA, Ontario & Canada.

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.



DID YOU KNOW?
that on
Thursday, January 28,
1943, the 1st AA meeting
took place at
Metropolitan United
Church in Toronto?

Step 1 *We admitted we were powerless over alcohol...*

Step 1 was for me the first step into a new way of life, but it wasn't a step I took willingly.

I came into the rooms lost and confused, knowing that I had a problem, but not really understanding what it was – alcohol, drugs, mental illness? In the treatment centre I went to, they talked to us about the disease concept of alcoholism and told us it wasn't our fault. They showed us pictures of a liver with cirrhosis. But I was 19 – I didn't have cirrhosis and especially as I came off the alcohol and drugs, I didn't believe I

had a disease. Despite the obvious evidence, that I had heavily used and abused alcohol and drugs, I still resisted the label of alcoholic or addict.

It was almost 10 years later, having tried different kinds of treatment, including controlled drinking and using, psychiatry, relationships, work, school and finally drinking and using (along with more consequences) that I came back to the program a bit more ready to listen.

How do I take this step? To work this step, sponsors and friends helped me keep it simple. There are two things I need to admit: my powerlessness and my unmanageability.

What does powerlessness mean? Admitting powerlessness is the hard part. It means I finally acknowledge I have a problem. I do things when I don't really intend to do them. I drink and drug when I intend not to. It's like I'm guided by another impulse that overrules any rationale. Some of us call that "the disease." Some of us think of it as something uncomfortable inside of me which goes away when I drink and drug – at least temporarily. This "dis-ease" is something that dissipates or subsides, but never really goes away. If left unchecked, it pops up in other ways – sex, gambling, etc. One of the ways I took this step was to give up the questioning. I had to stop trying to figure it out in my head. I had to write things down, work with a sponsor and look at the obvious evidence of situations where I was powerless. I was hiding out, scared to move forward and scared to go back – stuck in limbo.

What does the unmanageability mean? This part was easier. My life was a mess. On the outside: car accidents, job losses, relationship failures, no direction, no goals, no purpose. On the inside: fear, desperation, delusion, hopelessness, selfishness. I was fighting the world and it didn't make sense.

A new way of life. It is often mentioned that this is the only step that we have to do really well. Once we take it, we open the door to the wide possibilities that life presents for us. It's a hard step to take, but definitely worth it.

– Russ B.

WE
NEED A
Desktop
Publisher
Graphic Designer
to assist with the
creation
of the
**BETTER
TIMES**

communications
@
aatoronto.org



Phone Greeter Training will take place at 234 Eglinton Ave. East, Suite 202 on
Saturday, Jan. 8, 10:30 am AND Sunday, Jan. 16, 1:30 pm

