



“I am grateful for the freedom to live life on life’s terms!” – Bailey

“I am grateful for the joy of living sober!” – Ramona

“I am grateful for being one year sober.” – Carlo

October is GRATITUDE MONTH

“Gratitude is being constantly aware.” – Deqa G.

“I am grateful for sobriety.” – Rebecca
“I am grateful for my relationship with God.” – Brian
“I am grateful for good health.” – Meaghan

“I am grateful for St. Joe’s Detox - they let me extend my stay to help me recover.” – Arthur

“I am grateful for people recovering, getting well, and making bigger contributions to the Canada Pension Plan.” – Peter

“Gratitude is opening my eyes to all that I have instead of what I don’t” – Karin B.

“Gratitude is the emotion that keeps me grounded.” – Jeff C.

“Gratitude is focusing on gifts in life.” – Mark O.

“Gratitude is living a full life in sobriety.” – James B.

“I am grateful to have my family back and a job.” – Candace K.

“Gratitude prevents self-loathing over shortcomings.” – Kyle B.

October is Gratitude Month

“Gratitude makes me humble and happy.” – Alison S.

“Gratitude is learning to live my life as if everything I receive is a miracle.” – George D.
“Gratitude is the power of now.” – Bert J.

“Gratitude is not comparing yourself to others, rather being in the now.” – Robert B.

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.



WE NEED YOU ... for Service!

■ 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!

■ The Public Information Committee is seeking volunteers

■ Correctional Facilities seeking people for "Bridging the Gap" program

■ Volunteers are needed for both Phone Greeters (1 year of continuous sobriety and 1 phone training session required) and 12 Step List

■ Is your Home Group interested in a web page on the Intergroup website?
If so, please send an email to communications@aatoronto.org

NOTICE:

Eglinton Crosstown construction is coming to 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 to leave plenty of time or take public transportation.

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Thoughts From the Editor's Desk

The inventory process, along with acceptance of and willingness to change our unhealthy life strategies, becomes second nature as we trudge the road to happy destiny in sobriety. What at one time seemed like an insurmountable tangle of resentments, fears, negative judgments, guilt and remorse, has over the years become much easier and softer to examine and discard.

Although Step 10 can almost seem like a free pass to commit the same mistakes and injurious behaviours of the past, in my experience it has served as an unraveling and cleansing force. Insights into the survival strategies that were once developed to

serve and protect a fragile younger self have helped clear the way for a more authentic and loving Self. Growing up in AA, I have been shown how to A) take responsibility for my choices, B) create new ways of being in relationship with God, self, and others, and C) be more gentle and forgiving when I fall back into old patterns and limiting perspectives. It's as if I'm continually playing Steps Four through Nine like the notes of a most magnificent piano concerto.

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

Scraps of Love: From Scarcity to Abundance in AA

When I was a little girl, I would sometimes stare at myself in the bathroom mirror for what seemed like hours. I don't believe this was vanity, but rather that I wasn't entirely certain I existed otherwise. Living in a traumatic environment of multi-generational abuse and addiction, I felt unseen, unloved and unworthy. My life seemed to depend upon my ability to sense what another person wanted or needed me to be, and upon my ability to become 'that'. To survive, I fashioned an ill-fitting, uncomfortable costume worn until I came into AA.

Many of us weren't taught how to know what we wanted or needed, or how to take proper care of our wants and needs without feeling ashamed and guilty. And we might understand that our parents also were born into cultural and familial circumstances in which they were wounded—separated from the core of their true selves. In many ways, this is our shared human condition, though some have experienced more direct forms of abuse and neglect than others. What matters is what we do about it. For years I denied my pain, finding relief in the warm oblivion of alcohol or food (starving or binging and purging), running, or perhaps most consistently, relationship—a dependence upon someone else's approval of me. There are so many ways to hold together a fragile masked self. When I hit bottom, I feared I would die, but from the depths of despair, the process of re-connecting with my authentic self could begin. And though I had the grace of my higher power, and the support of family, my therapist, and minister when I entered the program, still at times I felt terrified and alone. Thankfully, I did not have to drink. Instead, I called someone in AA, or dropped to my knees in prayer, or went for a walk, and always back to another meeting.

There's no one way to describe the crisis of transformation that brings us to AA. And as we share our truths, our lives forever change. We face together the feelings of isolation or separation that are a part of the paradox of a spiritual being living in a human body, and we experience that we are no longer alone. We come to feel worthy of so much more than only the scraps of love. Slowly, we act in new, self-caring ways such as saying 'no' to the needs of others when those needs prevent us from taking proper care of our own, or saying 'yes' to our healthy needs with less shame and guilt. We all fail and fall down sometimes, but we rise again with the loving hand of a recovering alcoholic by our side. To listen to our heart's truth, to live without our costumes, is a courageous gift received through living sober. Being vulnerable with others is the gift we give and receive by healing together in AA.

- Julie L., St. Clement's Group



spotlight on

St. Clement's Group

My first memory of St. Clement's was when I was six months sober and a friend asked to me to come and read at her 10-year medallion. That was 33 years ago! What my young AA eyes saw was a group of very happy and caring people. Like most groups, St. Clement's had a banner at the front that read, "St. Clement's 1952". When I asked my sponsor, Rene, how the group was founded, she thought it might have been a spin-off from the Hill or the North Toronto Group, but no one seems to know our whole history. At 63 years old now, it does not seem to really matter because St. Clement's is a well-loved and established group in the city.

Five years after that first visit, when I was looking for a new group to join, I knew it had to be St. C's, even though I didn't know anyone there other than my friend from the medallion night. It didn't take long for me to be embraced by a loving group of people.

At St. Clement's, we have a number of long-time members from the late 60's and 70's. In the following decade, it was known as 'Hollywood North' because of the number of visiting actors who had heard about our wonderful group. Then in the late 80's and early 90's, St. Clement's was sometimes called 'St. Closets' because of the number of gay men and lesbian women who joined our group. I believe St. Clement's was one of the first groups to hand out 'group medallions', where all members celebrating a medallion are recognized at the last open meeting each month, instead of individually.

St. Clement's has always been a home for anyone – it is an all-encompassing group where everyone is welcome. My friends often ask me when I will graduate from AA. My answer is simple – never, because I want and need to be there for the newcomer, and because the folks at St. Clement's are my family. When I look back at my years with St. Clement's, I look at all I have received from this group – lots of unconditional love, understanding, knowledge, great hugs and long-lasting friendships.

– Pearse



DID YOU KNOW?

that on
October 15, 1948
the Hill Group
started at
Timothy Eaton
Memorial Church?

I'm a newcomer who is grateful to all the people who have stayed in AA! When I came to St. Clement's 18 months ago, I was full of fear, shame, rage and grief, and too proud to let anyone see. But as I heard and saw men and women willing to share with honesty and humor, the truth of their spiritual imperfection along with their gratitude for the many gifts of sobriety, my frozen heart began to melt. Six weeks later, when I became a member, I could not have known how much this group and the people in it would come to mean to me.

When I stopped drinking, I began to face everything I'd hidden in those bottles of wine. For the first eight months I felt completely raw, and though much of my erratic and unpredictable behavior ceased, the inner pain and torment was nearly unbearable. For the first time, I realized how much I needed connection with other alcoholics in recovery. They say staying sober is something we alone can do, but we cannot do alone. St. Clement's is a safe, welcoming group where every person is accepted, appreciated and encouraged to participate in the miraculous journey of recovery, one day at a time.

In April, when it was my turn to receive a first-year medallion, I shared the night with several other members, some with decades of sobriety! Celebrating the group's achievements opened me up to the greater purpose and promise of AA. I was overwhelmed by a stack of cards and notes given me that evening. My belly-button birthday had been a very difficult time after my mother took her life on my 31st birthday. When I read the cards, I felt my sobriety B-day was like being born into a new life. As I continue in the program, I'm slowly learning to set healthy boundaries, and to speak my heart's truth with conviction and compassion.

I've made friends with folks whom I'd never have had the chance to meet were it not for facing the truth of my alcoholism. In AA we share the doubts and darkness of life and celebrate the joys and promises too as we learn to live sober one day at a time. I'm very grateful for the wit and wisdom of my fellow travelers. St. Clement's is a group that lives the traditions of anonymity, diversity, respect, and kindness, and we welcome anyone with the desire to stop drinking!

– Julie L.



sharing & word search

Program or Fellowship

Some time ago, I conducted an informal experiment, asking some fellow-travellers what they thought AA really is. Many suggested that the twelve steps are the core of “the program”. But, in the summary “What is AA” that is read at the start of most Open meetings, there is no mention of the steps. Simply, AA is a fellowship which shares its collective experience, strength and hope to solve our common problem.

In my experience, the fellowship creates a relatively safe space for members to practice connecting with each other and, over time, with the rest of the world, without the aid of alcohol.

Alcohol is widely considered a social lubricant. The reason I drank in the first place was the sense of ease and comfort it gave me, particularly around other people. But I came to rely on it to the exclusion of learning other social skills. It was the easier, softer (and often more exciting) way.

Eventually I couldn't safely drink – and I also couldn't safely not drink. Without alcohol I was restless, irritable

and discontent. I either avoided people or drove them away, including those who loved me the most. Eventually it was loneliness and despair that were my real bottom.

We tell newcomers to “go to meetings, join a group, get a sponsor, get active”. Is it any wonder that these all involve starting to connect with our fellows? We think not. Most relapses seem to start by falling away from the fellowship.

Although it is suggested that we find a higher power of our own understanding, it is my experience that what we believe is almost irrelevant - it is what we do that counts. If we practice love and service (Dr Bob's summation of AA) we will eventually forge strong connections not only within our fellowship but also with our loved ones, work mates and people whose paths cross in daily life. We will no longer be alone.

- JDM

Peace

“Give War a Chance”, proclaimed the truck bumper sticker in Baltimore MD - along with a phone number for Sgt. Grit, presumably to order more bumper stickers.

I never gave peace a chance, though I certainly could have used it. I wanted peace as an add-on, a cover to smooth over the jagged edges as the spiral of substance abuse became uncomfortable, unpleasant, and unmanageable. Other than an intellectual concept, the idea that surrender brings peace remained an enigma. When suffering became so great that not even a dedicated alcoholic could hold on anymore, surrender came with a profound thump - and a momentary experience of a silent deep peace.

Any spiritual practice, particularly the Twelve Steps, requires investigation, ownership and finally the subtraction of personal traits, dependencies and resulting behaviours that inhibit peace. The pursuit for that one more ‘thing’ to add to the suspect mix that would make it better, becomes a fool's errand. As the process of discovery unfolds, the newly uncovered excess

baggage can be happily discarded as a sense of purpose and usefulness to others brings a feeling of worth and of having a valued place in the universe. As the veils are discarded, the way we Know how to live - the way we have really always Known how to live - becomes revealed in quiet simplicity.

All spiritual practices have one thing in common – practice – and if consciously followed, moments of deep, still peace can be invited while simply ‘playing our part’, ‘doing our job’. In my experience, I found making an effort to look for peace was ineffective. Stilling the mind in meditation and staying in the moment seem to be an invitation for peace to come alongside. Such peaceful experiences provide the compass to guide, the yardstick to measure, the awareness to comfort. Give Peace a Chance.

- Christopher D.

sharing & service

DID YOU KNOW?

that on
October 5, 1988
Lois Wilson
died?

31st Annual GTA Archives Breakfast

On Sunday, November 8th at the Oasis Convention Centre, located at 1036 Lakeshore Rd. E. in Mississauga, the GTA Intergroup Archives Committee invites you to our 31st Annual GTA Archives Breakfast. Coffee will be served at 9 am, buffet breakfast at 10 am, and at 11 am the Open Meeting will begin.

On August 6th, 1981, Tommy H., then Alternate Delegate Eastern Ontario Area 83, convened a meeting on behalf of the Ontario Provincial Committee to discuss the development of an Archives Repository: a place to gather, preserve and protect our AA history. Present at the first meeting were Al B., Bob D., Whit H. and Neil McV.

The Sub-Committee Archives First Annual Breakfast Meeting was held on October 22, 1985 and present were Tommy H., Pat B., Orville G. and Don MacD. The First Archives Breakfast took place on December 1, 1985 and the purpose was to attempt to raise funds for the Archives Committee and

to do this without obtaining any funds which are earmarked for any other purpose.

The GTA Archives Breakfast celebrates the rich history of the Fellowship, acknowledges the dedication of those who have gone before us, and brings awareness about archives. This year the Open Meeting chairperson will be Ben W. from the Thorncliffe Park Group, who has 53 years of sobriety. The guest speaker will be Paul G. from Cleveland, Ohio, who has his story "Gutter Bravado" in the 4th Edition of the Big Book.

We would like to thank you all for attending and supporting this event over the years. This year, tickets are \$25 and are available from members of the GTA Archives Committee – see our flyer for names and phone numbers.

- GTA Archives Committee

SERVICE OPPORTUNITY!

Are you looking for a new service challenge?

Would you like to be part of a small, vibrant committee?

G.T.A. INTERGROUP Finance Committee needs your help!

FINANCE CHAIR NEEDED IMMEDIATELY!!!

Candidates with a business/accounting background would be a welcome addition to our team. A sobriety requirement of 5 continuous years is essential for this service commitment.

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

announcements

PAST MEDALLIONS

| | | | |
|-----------------|----|--------------------------|-----------|
| Jill B. | 1 | Sisters in Sobriety | August 26 |
| Patricia M. | 1 | Golden Mile Group | August 26 |
| Randy O. | 15 | Thornhill Group | August 26 |
| Victoria G. | 5 | Back to Basics (R. Hill) | August 28 |
| Jimmy B. | 30 | Saturday Night Live | August 29 |
| Mary Lynn C. | 5 | Lakeshore Group | August 30 |
| Jean L. | 1 | Mt. Royal/York Group | Sept. 8 |
| Kumar B. | 45 | Anniversary Group | Sept. 9 |
| Bert J. | 30 | Silverbirch Group | Sept. 11 |
| Pauline M. | 5 | King City Group | Sept. 14 |
| Brad H. | 5 | Kennedy Park Group | Sept. 14 |
| Eva N. | 25 | Joy Of Living Group | Sept. 14 |
| Steve A. | 15 | Six Points Group | Sept. 21 |
| Jan H. | 5 | Scarborough Group | Sept. 25 |
| Sister Gertrude | 40 | Glen Haven Group | Sept. 27 |

UPCOMING MEDALLIONS

| | | | |
|----------|----|---------------------|---------|
| Erika I. | 5 | Pathfinders Group | Sept 30 |
| Peter P. | 30 | New Anchor Group | Oct 1 |
| Jane J. | 1 | Scarborough Group | Oct 2 |
| Cy C. | 40 | Back to Basics | Oct 2 |
| Matt G. | 1 | Markland Wood | Oct 2 |
| Bill N. | 15 | Richmond Hill Group | Oct 9 |

| | | | |
|--------------|----|----------------------|--------|
| Bob S. | 10 | West York | Oct 11 |
| Ron S. | 25 | Bayview Group | Oct 11 |
| Gabrielle M. | 15 | New Anchor | Oct 15 |
| Denis T. | 1 | Willowdale | Oct 15 |
| Danielle C. | 5 | Lakeshore Group | Oct 18 |
| Joy G. | 35 | Lawrence Plaza Group | Oct 18 |
| Alva C. | 20 | Kennedy Park | Oct 19 |
| Richard O. | 20 | Fellowship Group | Oct 19 |
| Harry | 1 | Rexdale United Group | Oct 22 |
| Ed H. | 30 | Twelve Steps Group | Oct 28 |

ANNOUNCEMENTS

■ 31st Annual GTA Archives Breakfast

Sunday November 8th, 2015
 Coffee @ 9am / Buffet @ 10am /
 Open Meeting @ 11am
Oasis Convention Centre, 1036 Lakeshore Rd. E., Mississauga
 Tickets: \$25

■ Toronto Young People's Conference (TYPC)

Fri. October 16 (4pm start) ~ Sun.
 October 18 (closing at 3pm)
Steelworker's Hall, 25 Cecil St., Toronto
 Advance Tickets: \$15 / \$20 at the door

■ Anniversary Group celebrates 50 years!

Wednesday, October 14, 2015 @ 8pm
115 Orton Park Road, Scarborough

Founded on October 13, 1965.
 Please join us as we celebrate our Group's birthday, followed by fellowship and refreshments. We plan an entertaining, informative and reflective agenda for you to enjoy.

■ Toronto Gratitude Roundup

Thanksgiving Weekend: Oct 9 - 11
Downtown Courtyard Marriott
www.torontogratitude.org

■ Mississauga Fall Round Up

Saturday October 3
Vic Johnston Community Centre
Banquet Hall, 335 Church Street, Mississauga
 Free parking • Accessible by Transit
 speakers from AA, Alateen & Al-Anon
 Sobriety Countdown
 50-50 draw • \$20.00 per person
 includes coffee/treats and a hot/cold
 buffet lunch.
info@mississaugafallroundup.org
www.mississaugafallroundup.org

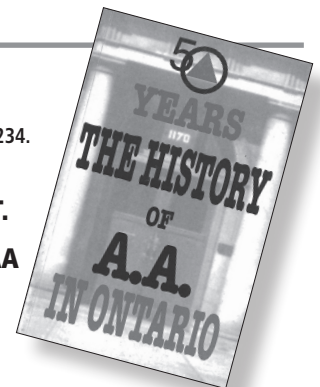
Due to ongoing submissions this list may not be current. For the latest information visit: www.aatoronto.org

I FOUND IT IN THE ARCHIVES

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

Come and join us in this rewarding aspect of AA service. Next meeting is Friday, July 10 at 7pm at 234.

PHOTOGRAPHS OF EARLY AA MEMBERS, FRIENDS OF AA, LITTLE DENMARK TAVERN, 1170 YONGE ST. AND MANY MORE • ORIGINAL LITTLE DENMARK LAMP • LETTER FROM BILL D. (MAN ON THE BED & AA MEMBER #3) • GTA GROUP TABLE COVERS • ORC PROGRAMS (HOW THE ORC NAME WAS FORMED)
ALL ITEMS ARE ON DISPLAY FOR VIEWING AT THE GTA INTERGROUP OFFICE BOARDROOM



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 in
October, 1954, the
Alcoholic Foundation
changed its name to the
General Service Board
of Alcoholics
Anonymous?

Step 10 *Continued to take personal inventory...*

My clean and dry date is December 1, 2008. It was a long, slow burn that brought me to a dire situation at the age of 61. I had been an anxious and exceptionally sensitive child with episodes of insomnia. Even though my parents were well educated, my dad a doctor and my mother a high school biology teacher, no one recognized my problems and so they worsened in my teens and young adulthood.

A broken marriage when I turned 30 was a bellwether of things to come. A mother of one daughter aged 5, I became cross-addicted to Valium and wine, a combo I found helped my anxiety and inability to sleep. That only lasted a year. Fast forward to 1988 and a spectacular break-up with a second partner with whom I had a second daughter and you have the beginnings of full-fledged addiction. But, because I was a high-functioning person in my work life, and did not drink excessively in social situations, no one, including me, realized that I was an accident waiting to happen. When it did, my daughters were 36 and 19, respectively. I had an empty nest, had made a geographical cure, quit my job of 18 years and, still in denial, wound up at CAMH's 24-hour clinic. Four months later, I was in rehab for six weeks where I was introduced to AA.

Since then, I have accepted my addictions and the heartwarming fellowship of AA. I attend meetings two to three times a week, have a sponsor and do service. I have re-invented myself career-wise and met a good man with whom I live. However, the wreckage of my past has loomed large in recovery. So has the shock of dealing with life un-sedated. The combo of pills (benzos) and vodka at night-time, at the end, taken in life-threatening amounts, has left physiological, emotional and spiritual damage that take a long time to heal.

The most healing part of my recovery has been making amends. The hardest one was with my older daughter, a psychotherapist. I was a young mother without good role models when she was born and was clueless. She took my amend, made

less than a year ago, well at the time and then "edited" my words in no uncertain terms via email. My amend to the younger daughter, made a couple of years ago, was easier because I was older, more mature and more nurturing in mothering her. In both cases, I made a heartfelt amend for being in denial at the end. Most of all, for terrifying them with my self-destructive behaviour.

Recently, I have felt the need to make amends for things I've done in recovery. A collaborator with whom I worked in early recovery was first. In that instance, she presented me with a contract that I found threatening. Instead of negotiating with her, I hired a hot-shot lawyer to deal with it. My (ex)collaborator had to hire a lawyer and it was solved. I realized recently that my behaviour was an over-reaction, to put it mildly. I wrote an amend and it was received well.

A year or so ago, I was discussing my family history with a woman friend of 40 years. I had sometimes found her too opinionated and, worst of all, judgmental. In this instance, she diminished and judged (wrongly) my feelings about my mother's escape from the Holocaust and the effect it has had on me regarding my addiction. I summarily dropped her. On my recent birthday, just as I was about to write her a card containing my amend, she sent me a letter wishing to re-connect. We have, and all is well.

In my recovery, one of my biggest flaws is over-reacting to others with a touch of paranoia. It is never too late or too soon, I've found, to right my wrongdoings. Others seem to understand. We're all on this planet together :)

- Marion, Sunnyside Group

Phone Greeter Training

will take place at 234 Eglinton Ave. East, Suite 202 on

Saturday, Oct. 10, 10:30 am AND Sunday, Oct. 18, 1:30 pm

