



ON MY WAY

*I ENTERED THIS WORLD IN THE MIDST OF A FIGHT
MY EARLY DAYS FILLED WITH CONFLICT AND STRIFE
THE BULLETS FLEW IN THE FORM OF WORDS, SMACKS AND SHOUTS
I RESISTED, REBELLED, BUT COULDN'T MAKE MY WAY OUT
AS TIME PASSED I FOUND COMFORT IN THE MISERY AND PAIN
IT WAS ALL THAT I KNEW FOR ME WHAT SEEMED SANE
GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS OF LIFE STRUGGLING AND DISTRESSED
MY DRINKING BROUGHT ME TO NEW LOWS AND LEFT ME A MESS
FRAGILE AND YET HARDENED MY NERVES WORN RAW AND THIN
DENIAL AND DESPERATION URGED ON THE TURMOIL WITHIN
BEATEN AND BROKEN WITH NO LEADS JUST DEAD ENDS
I YEARNED TO ESCAPE THIS LIFE, TO MAKE MY AMENDS
TEETERING ON THE EDGE ENVISIONING MY OWN DEMISE
I FINALLY LIFTED MY HEAD DESPERATELY SEARCHING THE SKIES
I CRIED OUT TO GOD SEEKING HIS SAVING GRACE
IT WAS THEN I FELT THE WARMTH OF HIS MERCY SHINE UPON MY FACE
DIRECTION AND PURPOSE IN ME I PRAYED TO BE REBORN
TO REPENT, TO RECOVER TO HAVE MY LIFE TRANSFORMED*

BLAIR K., WILLOWDALE GROUP

“ QUOTE OF THE MONTH

True humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less.

C.S. Lewis ”

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

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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!

- Public Information Committee seeking volunteers
- Correctional Facilities seeking people for "Bridging the Gap" program
 - TOYPAA Elections: July 19th @234
- The deadline for articles for the **Better Times** is the 7th of each month before the month of publication.
- The AA Grapevine Corporate Board will have an opening for the position of Nontrustee Director following the General Service Conference in April 2016. They are asking for completed resumes by July 20th, 2015.
- 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!
- Twelfth Step Committee is seeking phone greeters, as well as volunteers for the 12 Step Phone List - especially people who can speak languages other than English (sobriety requirement is two years)
- Access Ability Committee informing Fellowship of special service meeting for single parents (child care available)
- Is your Home Group interested in a web page on the Intergroup website?
If so, please send an email to communications@aatoronto.org!

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Thoughts From the Editor's Desk

Steps Six and Seven take up a mere two paragraphs in the Big Book. Thankfully, Bill W. expanded on them when he wrote the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, as they are steps of great change and transformation. These are steps we can use everyday to practice and pray for courage, humility, honesty, and a loving heart.

The character flaws and coping mechanisms I have uncovered in my inventories over the years continue to weaken and fade as

I take these steps. With the help of my Higher Power, I learn to love and accept all aspects of myself – both light and shadow – so that I can align more with God's will. I can grow spiritually by nurturing my character assets to become the person God intended me to be.

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

Food: the Shadow side of Alcoholism

Managing my functional alcoholism before my sobriety involved a number of different strategies. One of them was constructing a pact with another devil – food. I discovered that if I drank a “moderate” amount of alcohol and then turned to my favorite foods (like cake and twizzlers) for a “moderate” amount, I could get through an evening without overdoing it on either. Sometimes I could settle for food and leave the alcohol behind completely. But it seemed that I suffered the fewest consequences whenever I found the ‘happy balance’ of both.

This ‘program’ of controlled co-use had worked for me ever since I returned to school and found the need to curb my drinking. It was the perfect compromise between my need to soothe myself with something and my need to reduce the consequences of getting either too drunk or too caught up in a bulimic cycle.

One particular evening I hosted a party. I had already drunk my designated share of alcohol for the night and I was still feeling pretty loud and boisterous. The party was not over yet.

Putting down my Martini glass, I headed for the buffet. I stuffed my plate with cookies and nuts and chunks of high-priced cheese, knowing that I would soon slip downstairs to the basement laundry room where I could purge. I would probably do that a few times over the course of the evening. This was my pattern: four double-double drinks and four binge-purge cycles usually got me through a party night.

Later, downstairs, I was in a panic. Sometimes I just couldn't vomit quickly. I worried that I would be away from the party for too long. How would I explain my disappearance? I heaved

and heaved, jabbed my fingers to the back of my throat, only grateful that the basement door was locked and the noise of the dancing and shouting upstairs hid the sound of my efforts to retch. I started to whimper aloud with frustration.

“What's wrong?”

Mortified, I turned and saw an old friend staring at me with a mixture of confusion, disbelief and concern. “How did you get in here?” I coughed. At first I was more embarrassed than I had ever felt before, then I lashed out. “This isn't what you think!”

He sputtered that my partner had given him the keys to the basement so he could get more ice for the drinks from our deep freeze.

“This isn't what you think,” I repeated. My eyes dropped. I could not look directly at him. The shame was too overpowering. Sometimes the shame of my behavior around food felt worse than the shame of my drinking.

Using food to control my drinking ultimately failed. When I got so embarrassed by my feral relationship to food, I found myself back to daydreaming about alcohol again. The glamour of drinking beckoned and before I knew it, I was planning to skulk back to the bar down the street, hopefully not noticed by anyone I knew. It was not until I made the commitment to stop both alcohol and food that I finally was relieved of the obsession to drink or overeat. Thirty years to recognize that food was the shadow side of my alcoholism.

Vera T., St. Clement's Group

spotlight & archives

DID YOU KNOW?
that
International
AA Conventions
are held
every 5 years?

Spiritual Kindergarten

I moved to Toronto 10 years ago for work and was eager to transplant myself into the local AA. In Northern California, there were many young people's meetings I was a part of. It's where I felt comfortable. I was nearly 30 years old and five years sober when I arrived in Canada but still yearned a good connection with a young, social fellowship. But there wasn't a single meeting in the Toronto Intergroup guide with a "YP" denoting young peoples.

That's where the idea of Spiritual Kindergarten was born. I met Joshua H. in what would become my homegroup, The Primary Purpose Group. We reminisced about the large fellowships in California and decided to launch a Friday Night meeting where young people would feel welcomed.

We decided to model it after the popular "speaker discussion" format in California, where a speaker shared for only 10-15 minutes after which the rest of the meeting could comment and relate to the share by show of hands. In order to keep it solution focused, we also decided to have a "topic" frequent in the literature (fear, letting go, etc.).

Initially the meeting was comprised of young people from the large popular meetings (PPG and Welcome Group) but eventually started taking a life of it's own. It became a place where people of all ages could do something fun after a Friday Night meeting. We'd meet for dinner before and head to a movie or ice-cream afterwards. We eventually decided to celebrate Spiritual Kindergarten's birthday with an anniversary meeting which switched the format to three speakers (short, medium and long term sobriety).

The meeting room location changed occasionally, depending on the size of the group and availability at the church. I recall one night in particular where the only available space was out back in the grass. After the first couple years, we hit our capacity and decided to move a few blocks away to a church on the U of T campus. Although the space was amazing, the distance from the action on Bloor street affected membership and numbers dwindled, proving once again it's the people who make the meeting.

We moved back to the original location after that short stint, and the meeting has thrived ever since.

- Neal S., Thursday Solution Group

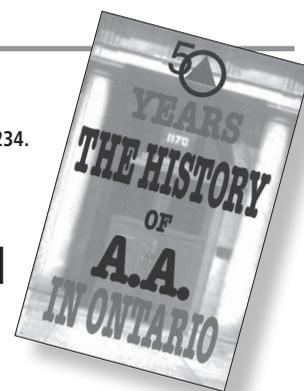


**I FOUND IT IN
THE ARCHIVES**

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.

**INTERNATIONAL AA CONVENTION DISPLAY
PHOTOGRAPHS, PROGRAMS & SOUVENIR BOOKS FROM
1950 to 2010 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 don't forget...

Old GTA meeting books are needed for the GTA Archives.

sharing & word search

AA Abroad

Moving to another country can be both exciting and daunting. Years in Asia brought me lots of new experiences but challenges. I was embarrassed by the look I encountered when asking a Korean co-worker where a meeting for “alcoholics” was, while pointing to the translation in my dictionary. Turns out the term emotionally translates to skid row bum.

Not finding meetings often led me back to drinking. Fortunately, I soon found my meetings abroad. An American from LA learned of my alcoholism and encouraged me to get sober again.

It was the fellowship in Seoul, about 50 people in total, that was fantastic. For many of us meetings are not only our sole access to recovery but to foreign friends. About 5% of the population are non-Koreans but there was one meeting daily. We learned to socialize with people we probably would’ve avoided back home in larger meetings. We often met after meetings and learned to deal with “personalities”. We had no Plan B.

Coming home was far harder than imagined. I was no longer that ‘special foreigner’ that drew eyes and conversations. In Toronto, people were busy and had less interest in socializing afterwards, and limited appetite to hear about the vast difference between Asia and Toronto, a topic I somehow felt compelled to share about for well over a year. Not only did I feel socially alienated, I found myself unemployable for a long period of time. Eventually I became depressed: unable to get out of bed most days, a major stress for my Korean wife whom I had uprooted for a ‘less than better’ life.

These times taught me invaluable lessons. I now appreciate that it’s not only newcomers that may be in bad shape at meetings: folks with lots-of-time, sometimes suffer in silence, with guilt, not working their steps. I gradually redeveloped a Higher Power, exceeding the expectations of my wife, my sponsor, and myself. I learned to be emotionally vulnerable once again and to ask for help, as I did when I first arrived in AA. I rediscovered meetings as a source of honest sharing, kind smiles, and a place to contemplate the next best step.

- John B., Saturday Morning Discussion



Find the hidden word with the letters left over after completing this puzzle. Email your answer to bettertimes@aatoronto.org or wait until next month’s Better Times. We will publish it there.

----- **THE TRADITIONS** -----

- AMBITION | BARRIER | CHERISHED | CONFORM
- CONSCIENCE | DECREE | DISCOVERY | ETHICAL
- FRAGILE | FRIEND | FUNCTION | GROUP | HELP | IDEA
- LEADER | LIBERTY | LOUD | MESSAGE | MONEY
- OFFICE | PRINCIPLES | RESENTMENT | SERVANT
- SOCIETY | SPIRITUAL | STRENGTH | TOLERANT
- TRUSTED | UNITY

Hidden word:

Last Month’s Answer: FORTUNATE

A	C	T	N	A	V	R	E	S	H	U	H	M	C	P
E	O	T	N	E	M	T	N	E	S	E	R	H	O	R
D	N	M	E	S	S	A	G	E	L	O	E	F	P	I
I	S	L	M	A	N	I	L	P	F	R	F	U	T	N
Y	C	W	E	V	O	I	K	N	I	I	O	F	Z	C
H	I	K	B	A	G	N	O	S	C	R	U	X	T	I
T	E	T	T	A	D	C	H	E	G	N	P	R	L	P
G	N	N	R	Y	R	E	V	O	C	S	I	D	A	L
N	C	F	O	G	D	R	R	T	T	E	Y	E	U	E
E	E	K	B	I	U	N	I	T	Y	T	D	T	T	S
R	L	O	U	D	T	O	U	E	R	H	E	S	I	Y
T	L	X	J	T	N	I	C	E	R	I	C	U	R	E
S	O	C	I	E	T	Y	B	J	U	C	R	R	I	N
F	R	I	E	N	D	I	J	M	T	A	E	T	P	O
T	N	A	R	E	L	O	T	E	A	L	E	D	S	M

DID YOU KNOW?
that in
July, 1985, the 50th
Anniversary International
AA Convention
was held in
Montreal, Quebec?

100 Happy Days

When I entered AA I heard ‘first things first’, attend 90 meetings in 90 days. That was almost a year ago and I did exactly that. But it was then suggested that once I reach my nine month milestone, I should do it again as a lead up to my 1-year mark. The challenge is that my life has changed dramatically. I now have rent to pay (yay!), a job which I love, and my volunteer work at a local charity helping folks learn how to use computers. I am also now able to spend weekends with my two boys - and any other spare time I can find! These wonderful things meant doing another ‘90 in 90’ was going to be difficult, if not impossible. But I did want to do something to mark my lead up to my one year, and to celebrate the wonderful gifts I have been blessed with in sobriety.

Enter 100happydays.com. In their words, a project that encourages ‘the ability to appreciate the moment, the environment and yourself in it’. As we in AA often hear, working the program can have positive results on many aspects of your life. One of my goals was to change my overall perspective – to choose happiness.

The 100 Happy Days challenge is to take a photo every day of something that makes you happy.

I started to do so, 100 days before my 1-year mark. This gave me an opportunity to really focus on each day. Like many, I all too often get weighed down with yesterday and tomorrow. But I began posting my pics to social media, each day, under the ‘100happydays’ tag. It has been a wonderful experience - my love of photography has certainly been rekindled!

I’m now learning to slow down, take a moment and really appreciate the everyday things in life. Our program of recovery has done, and continues to do, many things for me. I’m coming up on one year of continuous sobriety - I have friends, work colleagues, things that matter in my everyday life. I want to make sure I take the time to really appreciate and enjoy these things, as they are today.

- Sean D., Westmoreland Group

Finding Beauty in Everything

Now that I’m in the program I can see beauty in everything. I’ve been absolutely overwhelmed and awed by the beauty of the cherry blossoms and Magnolia trees over the last few weeks. Because of working the 12 steps, I now experience many of these moments of bliss daily.

Do we read a book, or does the book read us? Have you ever read a book – and then years later re-read it and found entirely new meaning? The book was the same but we saw it differently. The same can be asked of life: Do we live life? Or does life live us?

There’s a story about two fish and one asks the other, “What’s water?”

“I don’t know,” replies the second, “but I’ve heard that there’s an ancient fish in the Sea of Japan who knows.” So the two swim there and find the old, wise Zen fish.

“What’s water?” the two ask him.

“You’re born in water, you live in water, and you’ll die in water, but you will never know it.”

I lived in this world of awe and wonder, but before I came into the program I couldn’t see it. I can now find compassion where before I wasn’t able. My mother has Alzheimer’s and it’s getting worse. Late one night she asked me, “Who are you?”

“I’m your son, Mom.” I replied and while it broke my heart, there’s nothing that she can do that upsets me when I’m really working the program - I can find beauty everywhere and a deep peace even in the most difficult moments.

Life is life. What I see, experience, feel depends entirely on me and my spiritual condition.

- Jim H., The Hill Group

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

We saw we needn't always be bludgeoned and beaten into humility.

12 & 12, Step Seven, p.75

announcements

PAST MEDALLIONS

Catharine S.	1	East York Group	May 26
Sari S.	10	East York Group	May 26
Dora Mae M.	35	Golden Mile Group	May 27
Bob G.	1	New Anchor Group	May 28
Brad H.	10	Rexdale United Group	May 28
Judy B.	20	Scarborough Group	May 29
Ron M.	1	King City Group	June 1
Veronica H.	10	River Drive Park Group	June 1
Colin B.	1	Mt. Royal / York Group	June 2
Erin F.	5	Morning Discussion Group	June 6
Marlene S.	5	Morning Discussion Group	June 6
Scott W.	1	Morning Discussion Group	June 6
Randy	1	Principles Before Personalities	June 7
Chris B.	1	Glenholme Group	June 8
Ron M.	1	King City Group	June 8
Jack R.	1	East York Group	June 9
Jakub C.	1	East York Group	June 9
Marion S.	20	New Anchor Group	June 11
Natasha B.	1	Stepping Stones	June 13

Kyle	1	Stepping Stones	June 13
Tom M.	5	King City Group	June 15
Rose R.	1	Mt. Royal / York Group	June 16
Ciara C.	10	Principles B4 Personalities	June 21
Leslie H.	25	King City Group	June 22
Mark W.	1	King City Group	June 29

UPCOMING MEDALLIONS

Rod I.	40	Mt Royal / York Group	June 30
Gary H.	5	East York Group	June 30
Glenn G.	10	East York Group	June 30
Heinz F.	10	Maple Group	June 30
Donald O'N.	1	Scarborough Group	July 3
Marilyn H.	25	Crossroads Group	July 5
Peter R.	1	Back to Basics (Rmd. Hill)	July 10
Nazli E.	10	King City Group	July 13
Ron S.	1	New Anchor Group	July 16
Marvyn W.	10	Streetsville Action Group	July 22
Michael L.	1	Back to Basics (Rmd. Hill)	July 24
Jimmy H.	35	Keep it Simple Group	July 26



Phone Greeter Training

will take place on

Saturday **Sunday**
July 11 and **July 19**
10:30 am **1:30 pm**

at
 234 Eglinton Ave. East, Suite 202

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

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



Steps 6 and 7 – Part 2 *...continued from last month...*

Then something interesting began to happen. Instead of these defects simply ceasing to exist, I actually started to become more aware of them. So much so that it seemed that the opposite had begun to happen. I began to become painfully conscious of just how much of my daily interactions originated from my own flawed thinking and perceptions. The immediate spiritual cleansing I thought would happen was more like the metaphorical lifting of a rock that uncovered the worms crawling hidden in darkness of its shade. My defects hadn't been removed, they'd been exposed.

But it was in that discovery that I realized I could choose now. Did I want to continue living in the emotional isolation that my fears kept me in, or did I risk how things might be if I started choosing differently? For me, Steps 6 and 7 are more

about choice than absolution. They are about choosing the life I live today, where I question whether the motives I have and the actions I take seem to be in line with the principles and values I've acquired.

After nearly 20 years of sobriety I still don't always make the right choices, but I'm reminded of something else Bill W. said about the story of AA, where it "is not, after all, a personal success story. It is instead, the story of our colossal human failures now converted into the happiest kind of usefulness by that divine alchemy - the living grace of God."

– **Josh H.**

A Message of Hope

So I heard him ask, "Do you want to go to jail with me?" My mind seared with a resounding NO, but I heard myself say "OK". That's how it works in AA, at least that's what they told me, and it was gospel to me that when asked to do something in AA "for AA" we should always say yes. I had been around jails most of my drinking life, with companions who were in and out on drunk and other minor charges. I spent some time with a man who couldn't stay out of jail, and I stayed in overnight once paying off parking fines. Those places scared the life out of me, and I had no good reason to want to go to jail with anyone. But Murray J. asked me, and I respected his sobriety and commitment to service so I said yes and since then, I've been going to jail for over 25 years.

As with everything in AA, our primary purpose is to stay sober AND help other alcoholics achieve sobriety. I don't need to have more experience in a jail. I don't need to relate to 'clients' on that basis. I am not even sure that any one of the clients I have carried the message to wants what I have. When I first started going into the East Detention Centre (the East), a men's prison, I drove a beat up Chevette that could take me that far, but not as far as Vanier where the women prisoners were housed. What could a woman like me have to say to these guys? I brought the message of hope: if you want to stop drinking, AA offers a way of life that is doable. That is it.

In the East, there are 4 floors with 3 sets of ranges, and every Wednesday and Sunday AA arrives in teams. We don't do 12 Step calls on our own. I went to an orientation that provided all I need to know about security and safety in that jail. The meetings are like mini-12 Step calls: identify as an alcoholic, describe the solution, get some feedback from the guys and move on to the next set of ranges. There have been times when I felt unsure of myself. After all, it is a prison and God only knows what they are in for, but I hang close with my jail buddy and we put on a few meetings and I am fine.

I remember these guys. When they come off the range into our meeting room, they want desperately to have different lives. They want desperately never to return to jail, but when those doors open up and the outside is so alive with promise ... the resolve is gone. I fully identify with that, and so they offer me far more than I could ever to them. I want to have that gift of desperation every day I wake up. Not the 'get me out of here' kind, but the full and sure knowledge that I can stay sober just for today if I polish the precious jewel of sobriety through practicing the 12 Steps in all aspects of my life. Love and service is the key to sobriety and going to jail is an integral part of mine.

– **Maire O'B, Morning Discussion**