



Contents

2 Million Years of Sobriety	1
Service IS Sobriety	1
The Editors Say	2
Stop, Look and Listen	2
Archives Alley	3
Have You Heard	3
Intergroup Report	4
Bill Who?	4

BETTER TIMES

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 10th of the prior 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. Not responsible for hyperlink content.



2 Million Years of Sobriety!

On Sunday April 25, 2004, a special event celebrated the experience, strength and hope represented by 2 million years of sobriety. Yes, by my conservative estimate, that figure lives behind the celebration of the 2,860 Sundays of the 55-year anniversary of the Toronto Sunday Morning Men's Meeting.

In the early days of the program in Toronto, around the late 1940s, a gathering place and meeting location was established at 1170 Yonge Street. Those Sunday morning meetings became the Toronto Men's Meeting.

Various meeting locations over the years included the basement, and later the upstairs, of the YMCA building at 130 Eglinton Avenue East, and the Leaside Gardens on Millwood Road. Since 1993, the York Banquet Hall is home to this historic meeting.

The anniversary celebration was extended to women to help mark the occasion. I am sure that those who were there felt that their husband, boyfriend, or any male gathered there that day was in the

right place to experience the spirit of the Fellowship.

The meeting was chaired by John C., and the speaker was Frank O. In the Chairman's opening remarks, special mention was made of the contribution of the late Tom Gilchrist, the founding member of the Toronto monthly newsletter **BETTER TIMES**. It

often said by the Chairman "Don't leave this meeting with your problems. There are plenty around here today that can help." And for the newcomer, there is always special attention and support. It is often said that those who attend this meeting every Sunday stay sober.

Out of town visitors are impressed by the library, which is rumoured to be one of the most extensive on this continent! There is also a good deal of humour at all these meetings. Treatment programs send those in recovery to this meeting to see how it works.

I estimated 2 million years of sobriety were represented. I did this by multiplying an estimate of the number attending each meeting times 2,860 meetings, times a conservative average of years of sobriety that would average out over 55 years.

Today at this meeting, sobriety for individuals can range from 1 hour to over 50 years!

Try your math and estimate what the past totaled to that Sunday April 25, 2004 !!

Dennis O. and Jim H.



was noted that Tom wanted to carry the message in as many ways as possible. One method was through a Toronto newsletter, available to all groups who want to subscribe. This has become known as "Toronto's Own Meeting in Print". Current and past copies were made available at no cost to mark the occasion.

Giants among us is a reality at this Sunday meeting. It is

Service IS Sobriety

One could say, 'Idle hands are the Devil's workshop,' and there are a thousand homilies that say the same thing. For people like us, extra time on our hands can be a very dangerous thing. It can lead to introspection, self-focusing, sometimes a general loosening of formerly rigidly imposed standards, lassitude and self-satisfaction, etc. 'Cunning, baffling, powerful...' gives way to 'I'm OK, Jack' type thinking, which leads into a trap of laziness, maybe leading downward onto a SLIPpery

slope!

So, what to do? Get involved and stay busy as Hell; so busy you don't have TIME to think about the way things WERE - just the way they ARE NOW, and WHAT you're doing to make them better! Throw yourself into something positive - and what's more positive than Service?

Here's a case in point. Last month, I wrote the "Special Workshop Review" Intergroup Report and ran off at the mouth so much about the various

Committees that our Editor, Gord was ready to kill me. Why? Well, it was waaaaay too long. Even the 'cut back' version took up the whole back page! But the real underlying "Why" is important. I rattled on about all those Committees last month because I believe in what they're trying to do. I believe it's important that you, as members of our Fellowship, should know, too, and help out if you can. How are you going to do that if you don't know

See Service page 2

The BETTER TIMES Committee was recently asked by another AA newsletter if they could reprint some of our materials. As alcoholics are primarily ego-driven, the unanimous response was "yes".

As the Editor, I feel somewhat responsible for the content of our little letter of news here, I believe that whatever is printed should read well and satisfy our Constant Reader's appetite for information. While I don't always agree with opinions expressed (as I'm sure some of you don't agree with mine) I believe it is our responsibility to bring "Open Mindedness" to the diversity of our topics.

The Editors Say...

What's News?

But just how do we decide on what we report? does the Grapevine.

The 'process' begins at the previous month's meeting, where the Committee decides on Top Stories, main content and assignments. Our regular contributors (like Bernadette) can be counted on to provide quality columns on a regular basis. Alexx puts together the Medallions and Events for our Have you Heard, and the extra spaces are filled with articles from You. Oh, by the way, we don't print poetry, and neither

As you may have noticed in the past few months, I am somewhat controversial, leaning towards stories and opinions that will 'raise eyebrows'. Many of my articles in the past have been rejected for they bordered on the offensive. For example, when I wrote 'Appropriate Topics for Discussion - Stop Whining, Nobody Cares' the Editor at the time thought the article might have done more harm than good.

Last month, we were asked on what authority we print Medallions, Events and other news. Usually, we rely on Groups and Committees to inform us of these items, but we have been known to add things that are announced and/or known to us. It is within anyone's right to ask us not to report something, or correct us on misinformation, but otherwise, news is news. We report it.

As always, your input is greatly appreciated. Send us articles, news items, cartoons, ideas or just tell us how we're doing.

Gord MacK.

Stop, Look and Listen

How many of us remember these signs at every railroad crossing, and were often urged to follow the warning by our parents? When I was small, I lived on a street that had two railroad crossings. I don't ever remember heeding those signs, because even then I was not a great lover of authority. This was one of the faults that stayed with me, and made the slogan 'Easy Does It' so difficult for me to live up to when I came to AA.

At the time, I was always in too much of a hurry to get to the other side of the tracks, because that was the road that led to the pleasure of meeting my friends at the ice cream parlour 'McCoy's Cozy Corner', to enjoy kid things. The same applied later in life when I was drinking and 'McCoy's' was sold and changed to a local tavern. I even thought of those tracks as an easy way to end it all, but I was too anxious to get to the tavern.

When I joined the Scarborough Group, I heard the same warnings (appearing as one of their slogans), and this time I chose to follow them, because my sobriety (and my life) depended on it. I was always deathly afraid of having a slip, because I knew that I would never recover again. I had my first and last

chance at recovery when I first called AA and I still feel that way today.

Today I have to 'Stop and Look' at all the sobriety around me, 'and Listen' to every story that may have other suggestions I can use to help me continue to stay sober. It is only with continued sobriety that I can go on working at the Steps to continue the spiritual (but not saintly) way of life.

You may think I am overdoing the fear of drinking again, but from the beginning I was blessed with the gift of finding AA. If you had trod the same road to alcoholism as I did, filled with fear of losing everything I had, you too may realise that you had hit bottom, and that this would be your last chance.

So Stop, Look and Listen ... well.

Love In Sobriety.....Joe C.

Service from page 1

what they are doing?

Wiser heads than mine have come up with phrases like 'You've got to give it away to get it', and I believe that one. Of course, sometimes the 'giving' hurts, especially when you've just remembered you



think we can paraphrase that for the Fellowship to read something like 'Half of Service is just getting it done'. At least, that's my excuse! And that leads me back to the focus of this article. Although I covered the whole back page last month I didn't cover ALL the Committees, so we're going to run a series of articles on these Committees and their activities throughout the year. It's important for you as a member of the Fellowship to know that the Twelve Step Committee IS 'The Voice of AA' helping anybody who calls. It's often the first and best contact in helping save someone's life! Important enough? The Winter Season Open House Committee volunteers create Christmas for hundreds of the less fortunate every year, and that's giving it away to get it! Info AA Day is a constantly updating source of Fellowship Information. The ORC Committee puts on a terrific Conference every year, except for next year when we've got the World Conference coming here! Thousands of volunteers will be needed then - so I'm trying to 'Soften you up' in advance!

So 'You've got to give it away to get it'. Get involved. Give some time and you'll have the time of your life doing it! And stay tuned for the next "Mystery Committee" Report!

Kevin. M.

promised this article and you're two days PAST the deadline and look like an idiot. Yet you grit your teeth and bash it out ASAP and apologize - that's Service.

Woody Allen said 'Half of Success is just showing up'. I

Archives Alley

Who is a member of AA?

Fortunately, Tradition Three states unequivocally who members of AA can be. As it reads, the only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. Then again, it wasn't always that way.

Bill W. had some troubling times with groups denying membership to newcomers to AA prior to 1950. Early in the '40's, two black men came to AA on Bill's invitation. When challenged about making a decision about this on his own, Bill replied it hadn't occurred to him that there was any decision to be made. When women first attended meetings, there was a ground swell of resistance. Similarly so with gay and lesbian members, who over time sought and obtained their own special interest groups.

Alcoholics Anonymous was gaining momentum in the 1940's. Many groups across the United States had formed and alcoholics were turning their lives around and families were being reunited. However, in some groups there were membership requirements. When asked to submit these lists to New York, it was ascertained that collectively, according to these arrangements, there was virtually no one who would be eligible to join AA.

The first international convention of AA in 1950 in Cleveland, Ohio, presented the Twelve Traditions for a vote. A lot of years of groundwork had gone into the evolution of what has been referred to as the 'Twelve Steps for Groups'. Illustrated beautifully was, that according to the Third Tradition, anyone who said they were a member of AA was a member of AA.

Often there is speculation as to whether a prospect has a sincere 'desire' to stop drinking or whether or not a drug addict has an alcohol problem. Dr. Bob and Bill W. nullified all objections to admission to AA by implementing a simple set of traditions, allowing AA to be accessed by anyone with an alcohol problem.

Bernadette MacL.

Have You Heard?

RECENT GROUP MEDALLIONS

Eero Y. 15 yrs. *Thorncliffe* July 23

UPCOMING GROUP MEDALLIONS

Ron L. 15 yrs. *St. Clements* Jul. 28

Elaine V. 10 yrs. *St. Clements* Jul. 28

Elizabeth S. 15 yrs. *Agincourt Acorn* Aug. 3

Ann P. 10 yrs. *Paisley* Aug. 3

(formerly of the *Glenview Discussion*)

Ashley 1 yr., *Don Valley* Aug 3

Ray B. 5 yrs. *Rexdale United* Aug. 6

J.R. 1 yr. *Friendly* Aug. 9

Ann O. 10 yrs. *Wexford* Aug. 10

Cathie D. 1 yr. *Fifth Tradition* Aug. 10

Glenn G. 1 yr. *Fifth Tradition* Aug. 17

Alan D. 15 yrs. *Agincourt Acorn* Aug. 17

Zipporah R. 1 yr. *Scarborough Centenary* Aug 19

Joyce W. 20 yrs. *Scarborough Centenary* Aug 26

Myles M. 1 yr. *Friendly* Aug. 30

Bob M. 10 yrs. *New AnchoR* Sept. 9

Angela M. 5 yrs. *New Anchor* Sept. 16

GROUP ANNIVERSARIES

St. Jamestown, 25 yrs., Aug. 1 (CENTRAL).

THINGS WE CANNOT CHANGE

Martin M., *No Name Group*, over 3 years sober, passed away Friday, July 2.

Abraham ('Abe') S., *Brentcliffe Group*, over 17 years sober, passed away Sunday, July 11.

MEETING CHANGES

Spirit of Women Discussion Meeting 4 p.m. (C) Sundays EAST: **DISCONTINUED.**

Big Book Discussion Group (at Community Centre 55) 7:30 p.m. (C) Fridays EAST: **DISCONTINUED.**

SPECIAL EVENTS, CONVENTIONS, and CONFERENCES

Fourth Annual 11th STEP PICNIC

Time and Place: Saturday, August 21, 2004 at Centre Island (Olympic Island / follow signs), 12 noon to 6 p.m.

Details: All AA members and their families welcome! Snack bars near site, or bring your own picnic. Speaker Meetings at 1 p.m. (AA speaker), 2:30 p.m. (Al-Anon speaker), and 4 p.m. (AA speaker). Cost is free! *Donations are appreciated.*

For more information: Call Rick (416) 201-8573, Steve (647) 888-2921, or Barb (416) 747-9495 or log on to www.11thsteppicnic.com. (*If raining, event cancelled*)

32nd Annual LAKESHORE DISTRICT'S CONFERENCE 'Sobriety's Footprints'

Time and Place: August 20, 21, & 22. Polish Veteran's Hall, 1551 Stevenson Rd. N., Oshawa

Details: AA, Al-Anon and Alateen.

For more information: Lakeshore Conference C/O Lakeshore Intergroup, 192 Athol St. E., Oshawa L1H 1K1 or call (905)728-1020 or 1-800-921-3555.

NORWOOD and District 28th Annual ROUNDUP 'No Longer Alone'.

Time and Place: Saturday, September 11.

Norwood Town Hall, S of the lights in Norwood.

Details: AA and Al-Anon speakers. Starts at 1 p.m.; Dinner at 6 p.m. \$15.

8th Anniversary, 'We Grow Together' Creemore, Stayner, Wasaga Beach AA ROUNDUP

Time and Place: Saturday, August 21, 2004.

Stayner Community Centre.

Details: 9 a.m. doors open. Registration \$10. for the day and \$20. for Dinner and Dance.

For more information: call Ivanna at (705) 429-0899 or Barry at (705) 428-0471. Pre-Registration a must! (Dinner /Dance by Aug.13)

'Welcome Home and More in 2004' 35th Annual CENTRAL WEST ONTARIO CONVENTION

Time and Place: August 13, 14 and 15 at the University of Guelph / Guelph, Ontario.

Details: AA, Al-Anon, and Alateen Speakers, Discussions, and Talkathons. Sobriety Countdown, and Saturday Night dance to follow banquet.

For more information: Contact CWOC Convention Chair Janice F (519) 650-5745 / yeomen@golden.net, Registration Chair Ann P. (519) 353-5600 / aep@computerwriter.com, or Publicity Chair Kim L. cwopublicity@sympati-co.ca.

"Miracles of Honesty" ninth Annual MISSISSAUGA FALL ROUND UP

Time and Place: Saturday, October 9 at St. Mary's Ukrainian Catholic Church, 3625 Cawthra Rd., Mississauga, just S of Burnhamthorpe Rd.

Details: AA and Al-Anon. \$15. (includes lunch and refreshments).

For more information: Contact Steve at (647)888-2921 (anytime) or Francis (905)279-8182 (anytime). *See flyers.*

'Courage to Change' TORONTO GRATITUDE CONFERENCE

Time and Place: October 8, 9, and 10 in Toronto, Canada. Conference for the gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans-gendered members of AA and Al-Anon in the Toronto area.

For more information: see www.torontogratitudeconference.org.

SOBER SAILORS CONVENTION in the Caribbean

Time and Place: Celebrity Cruiseline ship *The Century* October 23 to 30, 2004.

Details: Speakers Mildred F. (Toronto ON), Keith L. (Wilmington NC), Bob D. (Las Vegas), Kathy H. (Cincinnati, OH), Bill P. (Centre City MN), and Dan Z. (West Pam Beach FL).

For more information: Call toll free (866) 678-8785 or log on to Friend_of_Bill_W.@mail.vresp.com.

I see another Operating Committee position opened up, and another vacancy was filled by acclamation. Lynn B., *St. Jamestown Group*.

I see the Finance Committee is still trying to get more regular donations, and are running well below budgeted income. I see that, once again, we have had to dip into the prudent reserve.

As a long time proponent of Intergroup, I am often challenged by those less enthused that "Nothing ever changes there – They are always short on money: then at the end of the year, they miraculously get by." These cynical people are somewhat correct, but they blame unfortunately is placed facing the wrong direction. He should be facing a mirror.

Nothing Changes if Nothing Changes, and the Finance Committee will continue to report they are short of finance until the membership at large TAKES ACTION to remedy it. It's only been this way for 50 years – I suppose we are just slow learners.

There are some new things going on though. The Accessibility Committee is preparing a new pamphlet, and diligently working to get more meetings signed and people trained at '234' on the TTY machine (along with the Twelfth Step Committees).

And what's up with the Archives Committee? They are growing by leaps and bounds, becoming a well oiled machine.

Intergroup Report Nothing Changes if Nothing Changes



Not only have they recently got an "Archivist", but are looking to bring on a "Conservator" to care for and treat objects of historical significance. They also need a chairperson.

While we're on the topic of the Archives Committee, there is this matter of needing some extra space at '234' for storage. Now, this is a Committee that MAKES MONEY, and has bailed out Intergroup to the tune of "\$Thousands\$" on more than one occasion. Now they need to rent some floor space, and we hear objections relating to "deficit" and the like.

We elect, in good faith, an Operating Committee, who elects a Finance Committee, and these entities should be able to

make decisions on 99 per cent of what goes on. For Intergroup Reps to do so would require that they know all details of every aspect of the decision making process, which would likely have our General Meeting increased to twice a month, ending at around 2:00 a.m.

For what it's worth, the Motion did pass (as it should have).

Order forms are available for the available Grapevine materials through Intergroup, including Language of the Heart, Best of Bill, Thank You for Sharing and Spiritual Awakening. Orders are also being taken for Calendars and Pocket Planners through GSR's and District Grapevine Reps.

Each year, the folks wrapping up the Info AA Day event put out a call for an "Accessible" venue for the following year's day. Every year we end up back at Lansing United. Again, it's not that we're not listening, we're just not acting. Could someone reading this please find them a reasonably-priced spot for about 400 people, fully accessible (including washrooms), with a large kitchen facility and close to the TTC? Thank you.

Other tidbits of Committee Happenings include:

The 2004 ORC wrapped up, with just over a \$1,000 being donated to Toronto Intergroup. As most of you know, there will be no ORC next year (due to the World Conference).

The Al-Anon/Al-Ateen meetings lists are now available for groups who wish to carry this message as well.

There has been increased discussion on the "Bridging the Gap" program for Treatment Facilities, and more information is on it's way.

Matti (your Intergroup Chair) has created a 'Resentment Folder' for any Reps with issues against Toronto Intergroup to be heard. My suggestion would be to create another folder to list resentments against the groups and members, who continue complain that nothing changes at Intergroup, but won't do anything about it.

'Nuff said.

Gord MacK.

By the Book?

Bill Who?

Like many people I have spoken to, when I first read Bill's Story, I had difficulty relating to a guy who went to war, college, worked on Wall Street, traveled, and even played golf. None of these things had anything to do with me.

Looking at my coffee stained Third Edition today, I see line after line of yellow highlighter reminding me how much the two of us were alike.

"As I drank, the old fierce

determination to win came back."

I've learned that this does not happen to normal people.

"Was I crazy? I began to wonder, for such an appalling lack of perspective seemed near just being that."

Some days I think I still am (which is why I keep going to meetings).

"My brain raced uncontrollably and there was a terrible

sense of impending calamity."

By far, the sense of impending doom was the crux of my alcoholic life, forcing me to escape the fear of fear itself every day of my life.

It's also interesting to note that the majority of Bill's Story is, as commonly referred to today, a "drunkalogue". How often do speakers open with "I'm not going to talk about my drinking", believing perhaps that this vital part of sharing serves no purpose. The purpose being, of course, that these stories are what make us the same, and reinforce that bond against a common enemy.

Bill sets the stage here for a miracle in action, implying that if it worked for him, it can work for anyone. I appreciate Bill's Story more each time I read it.

There are times when we can all feel that AA may be not be the answer. Perhaps the ritualistic approach to the same readings and format becomes monotonous, or, more likely, our effort to perpetuate our constant vigilance wanes. We begin to feel that we should seek elsewhere to find the answers.

As Bill wrote, "Most of us feel we need look no further for Utopia." That's enough for me.

Bible Gord