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Looking for up-to-date information on meetings and events?

Visit the GTA Intergroup website for all the information you need on AA in Toronto.

www.aatoronto.org

The Meaning of Christmas

As I think back on all the Christmases I've spent, more often than not, my memories migrate to the times when I was a child. How we so looked forward to the snow, the lights, the excitement and speculation. I wondered if this was the year I would get the Hot Wheels® set or perhaps the sequel to my already burgeoning Lego® collection. They were heady times indeed! Most of all, I look back and remember the underlying happiness and innocence in the belief that on this day, our Savior was born, which paled all the toys by comparison and made us feel all warm and fuzzy in anticipation of all things becoming new again.

Now folks, please keep in mind that this article is not about religious disposition. Nor is it an attempt to convert. Judeo Christianity is the basis for MY higher power, as it is for many others. I have an equal regard for all religions, and hope that this perspective will be looked upon as innocently as one would when choosing a Chevy over a Ford. My religion is my choice and I would like you to respect it as equally as I do yours.

As I got older Christmas became a shopping nightmare and a burden to impress. In hindsight, I cannot help

but believe that my alcoholism especially flourished due to the unavoidable parties, gatherings, social functions. It became my stress reliever and so much so that, in the last few years, I am ashamed to admit that I could not remember the season, never mind the event!

Today, things are different. I am heading into my third Christmas sober and this year, it comes with some anticipation. This year, I feel more confident in my sobriety because the obsession to drink has been lifted. This year, I have new friends in the program with whom to commemorate the season, friends I have come to love as they have come to love me. More than ever, this year is different for I truly have come to believe that a Power greater than myself has relieved me of my insanity. I will celebrate His birth with great wonder, awe, praise and thanks for giving back to me my life that was lost.

Thank you, my friends, for being there for me in my time of need and helping me to understand MY true meaning of Christmas!

Peace on Earth, good will towards men and another 24 hours for each and everyone

Cpt. Peter A. J., Markland Wood

Staying Sober Over the Holiday Season

The holiday season is stressful for most people, alcoholic or not, sober for days, months or years. Too many people, places and things demand our time and attention. Keeping it simple is a good concept to keep in mind.

If you are newly sober and concerned about how you are going to handle upcoming social events without the aid of your old friend, alcohol, here are a few suggestions:

Look Back

Remember making a fool of yourself in front of family, friends, colleagues and even strangers? How much respect and admiration did that buy you? If you drank and behaved like I did, your status as life of the party was stripped from you years ago. I became a liability that was rarely invited anywhere and never a second time.

Look Forward

How will you feel tomorrow if you get drunk tonight? Do you want that old nightmare back in your life?

Now visualize yourself starting a New Year with your sobriety intact and your life getting better every day.

Take a Time Out

Find a place to be alone — maybe outside in the fresh air. Pray to your Higher Power for serenity. Call your sponsor or an AA buddy. Don't feel obliged to rejoin the others unless you want to. They managed without

you in the past, when you were passed out or too drunk to participate.

What Will People Say?

A common concern — what if people notice you're not drinking? Serious drinkers are busy drinking and social drinkers are glad to have someone sober to talk to. Keep your glass full of pop or juice and if anyone notices you're not drinking alcohol, tell the truth: "I've already had my quota" (for a lifetime). People don't ask, "Why aren't you smoking?" or "Why aren't you eating a third piece of cheesecake?"

The Best Tip of All

There are many meetings during the Holiday Season. Enjoy the companionship and support of those who share your journey. Laughs and treats are also guaranteed — that's a promise!

Have a sober and happy Holiday Season.

Stella M., Erin Mills Group

Holiday Greetings from Toronto Intergroup

Hello, my name is Bill, and I'm an alcoholic. I was recently was honoured by being named your new Operating Committee Chair of GTA Intergroup.

We are embarking on an interesting journey that, if accepted, will change just about everything in the way of duties at 234. It is similar to what I was told when I arrived at the doors of AA — that I would need to change some things, and when I asked what, I was told "everything".

One thing that won't change is the phone service. As always, we are looking for



volunteers to answer the phones responding to the still suffering alcoholic, or the out-of-town visitor looking for a meeting in our fair city. Training is the third Sunday of each month at 1:30 pm at 234.

I was told when I got here to get active, and I try to do that to the best of my ability. I have learned so much in my time on the Operating Committee, and hope to continue to do so. I am well aware of the divisiveness of the referendum currently under way, and have no vested interest in its passage or rejection. My only interest is that the voices of you, the AA Group members, have your say on the matter through the vote. We will carry on, doing the best we all can to help the still suffering alcoholic no matter what; for it's my belief that each and every one of us are here to give freely what was given to us.

It is in that spirit of giving that, on behalf of YOUR Operating Committee, I wish each and every one of you a safe, happy and sober holiday season.

Yours in Service,

Bill M., Westmoreland Group

Report from the Archives Breakfast

On the morning of Sunday, November 2, 2008, 175 hardy souls braved the crisp, sunny weather and journeyed to the Oasis Convention Centre in Mississauga to attend the 24th annual Archives Breakfast, hosted by the GTA Intergroup Archives Committee. We came from as far away as Akron and New York City and from as close by as Port Credit and North Toronto.

Those attending were treated to a delightful buffet breakfast that included platters of Danish pastries and sticky buns that even we were unable to finish!

We heard from Ben W., Thorncliffe Park Group, who regaled us with his experiences getting sober in Toronto and New Brunswick 46 years ago. Ben also gave us glimpses (literally) into his personal archival collection – pamphlets, meeting lists and pictures from those long ago times.

Then Kaye H., who is 56 years sober and an active member of the Thornhill Group, shared her experiences as a woman getting sober in the early 1950's. She told of meeting Bill W. in our New York office, of spending time chatting with him, and of carrying the message into the Womens' Penitentiary in Kingston.

Following a sobriety countdown and raffle and door-prize draws, the Breakfast was closed with the Lord's Prayer. All in attendance left with a richer appreciation of the history and growth of Alcoholics Anonymous since it's founding.

The next breakfast is tentatively scheduled for November 8, 2009. It will be our 25th — a quarter century of sharing. Please mark your calendars and plan to attend.

In Service,

**Roy R.
Chair, GTA Intergroup Archives Committee**

Reflections

Christmas is a time for nostalgia and remember whens. I can remember when, as a child, I dreaded Christmas. My father, who had moved out of our home, would visit on Christmas Day and my sister and I would have to wait until he arrived to open our gifts; sometimes we waited noon! My Mother was always upset because his lavish gifts for us outshone her gifts. All in all, it was an upsetting day.

The thoughts of Christmases past stayed with me through the years. I grew into adulthood, married, had children of my own and gave little thought to the true meaning of Christmas. The holidays seemed to revolve around the gifts. As time went on, I became addicted to alcohol and, as with most of us, Christmas became the season of lots of parties, visiting and drinking. Now I was the one who was spoiling Christmas for my family.

One Christmas I fell down a flight of stairs, and landed in hospital; I chastised my husband for causing my condition. Another Christmas, one of our daughters ran away from home, no longer being able to tolerate my drunkenness and her parents arguing. Ah, Christmas's past!

Through the Grace of God, I found myself in A.A. The month was May and of course. I asked about Christmas. Members told me to live a day at a time. When Christmas arrived that year, I was told that it was just one day. If I dropped the turkey on the floor, I was to say nothing. If I needed to, I was to phone my sponsor and pray, if I could. Well, it was a miracle day for me and I did not drink.

I have had many Christmas Days of joy and happiness since then. My family has healed and I now look forward to Christmas for the right reasons. I attend lots of meetings during the Christmas season, encouraging the new comers, assuring them that they will be okay and giving them my phone number in case they experience a moment of panic. As a member of A.A., I experience a sense of being loved and accepted and I wish you all the same wonder of a safe and sane Christmas Day.

Norma L., Erin Mills Grp.

— haveyouheard —

Recent Medallions:

Nelson L.	1	Pine Hills Group	November 17
Len N	1	Erin Mills Group	November 17
Joy M.	5	Unionville Group	November 19
Marilyn L.	25	New Life Group	November 19
Steve P.	5	Chartwell Group	November 27
Jane W.	5	Unionville Group	November 26

Upcoming Medallions:

Russel J.	15	Active Group	December 3
Greg C.	1	Golden Mile Group	December 10
Chris H.	5	R&R Group	December 12
Bill P.	25	Start Today Group	December 20

Meeting Changes:

Markland Wood Group (C) Tues/Thurs (SUB WEST): Starts at 8:00 pm.

The Gravel Pit (C) Friday (NORTHEAST): Mtg is at the end of Ellesmere 95 bus route. The bus loop is at the back of the church lot.

Brampton Recovery Group Wednesday (SUB.NORTHWEST): Address should be 10446 Kennedy Rd, not 10246 Kennedy Rd.

Pine Hills Helping Hands Discussion (C) Wednesdays (EAST): Meeting starts at 8:30 pm

Strength in Recovery (C) Mondays (SUB.WEST): Located at Mosquito Grill, 66 Lakeshore Rd E (north side), Port Credit, between Elizabeth and Stavebank.

Keswick Miami Beach Wednesday & Saturday (SUBURBAN NORTH): Meeting starts at 8:00 pm.

Park Royal Group (C) Monday (SUBURBAN WEST): Meeting time has changed to 6:30 at Sheridan United Church, 2501 Truscott Dr, Clarkson (Southdown & Truscott) beside the Park Royal Community Center.

Steps Place (C) Wednesday 12pm (SUB. NORTH): Now a closed discussion.

New Anchor Discussion Group (C) Tuesday 8pm (EAST): Entrance is Church Entrance. Discussions include Newcomers, Topic Discussion and Step Mtg.

New Meetings

Vision of Hope (C) Monday 2:00 pm (SUB.WEST): St. Mary's Ukrainian Catholic Church, 3625 Cawthra Rd., 1 block south of Burnhamthorpe Rd., Mississauga. Step Discussion, no meeting on Holiday Mondays, accessible.

Discontinued Meetings

Fort York Group Wednesday 7:30pm (CENTRAL): Meeting is discontinued.

C.L.U.E. (Women's) Sunday 12:30 (CENTRAL): Mtg has been discontinued.

M.I.A.A. (Mothers in AA) (C) Wednesday 1 pm (CENTRAL): Mtg discontinued.

Announcements

17th Annual Toronto Winter Roundup will take place Saturday, January 10, 2009 at 9:00am the York Reception Centre at 1100 Millwood Road, Toronto, Ontario. For full details see flyer on www.aatoronto.org.

MONTHLY BOARDROOM BOOKINGS FOR SUB-COMMITTEES

Correctional Facilities: 1st Monday of the month at 7 pm

Self-Support: 1st Wednesday of the month at 7 pm

Archives: 2nd Friday of the month at 7:00 pm

Website & Better Times: 2nd Saturday of the month at 1 pm

Cooperation with the Professional Community (CPC): 2nd Monday at 7 pm

Access Ability: 3rd Sunday of the month at 11 am

Phone Training Session: 3rd Sunday of the month at 1:30 pm

Public Information: 3rd Monday of the month at 7:30 pm

Treatment Facilities: 3rd Thursday of the month at 7:30 pm

Information AA Day: Last Monday at 7:30 pm

Twelfth Step: Last Friday of the month at 6:30 pm

Finance Subcommittee*: Second-last Tuesday of the month at 4:30 pm

Operating Committee*: Second-last Tuesday of the month at 7:30 pm

Monthly General Meeting of GTA Intergroup is held on the last Tuesday of the month at 8 pm at the Glebe Road United Church – 20 Glebe Rd E, off Yonge St. (near Davisville subway)

*Non-committee members: attendance by appointment only.

October '08: Intergroup Report

Finance Report: Gregg W. (Rox Glen Traditional), Finance Chairperson
Individual Gratitude donations are down by almost \$13,000. Overall Gratitude donations are currently ahead of last year's figures by several thousand dollars. The committee produced a more simplified Profit & Loss comparison for 2008 and 2007.

Election for Operating Chairperson: Bill M. (Westmoreland) was elected new Operating Chair. Aaron K. (Yorkville) was elected 1st Vice Chair, and Woody K. (Willowdale) was elected as 2nd Vice Chair. The three juniors moving up to senior positions are Florence B. (Noon Rap), John C. (Half Century), and Rick Mc.C. (Six Points). Election for Junior Positions: The three new junior members are Glenn G. (East York), Isabel D. (Trial & Error), and Peter J. (Markland Wood).

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

Access Ability: Donna MacQ. (Sunnyside), Chairperson
Accessible meetings are now listed separately on the website. Groups asked to provide addresses of their accessible entrances. The Buddies List now includes members willing to e-mail or communicate by phone. Next mtg: Sun. Nov. 16 at 11 am at 234.

Ad hoc Committee: Lynn B. (City Central), Chairperson
Lynn announced that the ad hoc committee is formally finished.

Archives: Roy R. (Trial & Error), Chairperson
Roy reminded all of the upcoming Archives Breakfast Sun. Nov 2 at the Oasis Convention Centre. Next mtg: Fri. Nov. 14 at 7:30 pm at 234.

CPC: Courtney R. (Living Sober), committee member
Committee has 1,000 cards, 2,500 Beginner Pamphlets and holders for members to distribute. We have contacted the Paramedic Assoc. about carrying our business cards. Next mtg: Mon. Nov. 10 at 7 pm at 234.

Information AA Day 2009: Florence B. (Noon Rap), Operating Committee Liaison
Volunteers are needed. Next mtg: Monday Nov. 24 at 7:30 pm at 234.

Ontario Regional Conference 2009: Lisa W. (Welcome), Graphics Coordinator
Placards, flyers & registration forms are now available. Event & registration information will be available online.

Public Information: Courtney R. (Living Sober), committee member
Letter to be sent to schools offering info. about speaking engagements. Presentations given at District 22 Service Day, at Seneca Residence, at a Wellness Fair and at East York Hospital Info Fair. Developing a database for schools, with location, guidance officer contacts, and principal contact information. Next mtg: Mon. Nov. 17 at 7:30 pm at 234.

Reception: Florence B., Operating Committee member. 53 reps and 8 alternates were present tonight. Collection of the 7th totaled \$142.34.

Twelfth Step: Florence B. (Noon Rap), Operating Committee Liaison
The committee is working on a needs analysis for the new phone system. Next mtg: Fri. Nov. 28 at 6:30 pm at 234.

Website/Better Times: Marvyn W. (Streetsville Action), Chairperson
George H. (Primary Purpose) will be the 08/09 Webmaster. Better Times: An In Memoriam Insert listing GTAI members who have passed in 2008 to be in Feb. 2009 edition. A form for this is included in our Nov. issue, all forms are to be completed and sent to us by Jan. 10, 2009. Send us all Candlelight/Gratitude Mtg info and holiday mtg cancellations by Nov. 15. Next mtg: Sat. Nov. 8 at 1 pm at 234.

NEW BUSINESS

Greg H. (Hill) stated that for the sake of anonymity, Intergroup should blind carbon copy (b.c.c.) all outgoing emails sent to groups and group members.

Deadline for Referendum vote: Dec. 29, 2008.

Next General Meeting: Tuesday Nov. 25 at 8 pm at Glebe Rd. United Church.

George H. is an Agnostic

I am an alcoholic so I found myself attending AA meetings, sharing and listening to others share... trying to stay sober. I settled on a home group, got a sponsor, and acquired a copy of the Big Book. It's all pretty straightforward.

I am also an agnostic, and my first inkling of difficulty (above and beyond the basic difficulty of staying sober) came when I was told that I had to pray to a Power greater than myself. I have no problem accepting the existence of greater powers than myself. Most things are greater than me as I am quite a puny creature. After all, I turned my will and life over to alcohol with disastrous consequences.

Although half of the 12 Steps mention God, I thought I could 'metaphor' my way around Him since I do believe I need help and that I cannot do this alone. I need spiritual growth. I need to admit all of this to myself and others, and to be honest. I need to understand my defects of character and to work at fixing them. I need to make amends to those I have harmed. All of this I need and want. I just don't know whether I need a God, whether He exists or not.

I discussed this with my sponsor, and he asked me to read Chapter 4 (We Agnostics), from the Big Book, and to pray. I agreed to read the Chapter but, as I meditate regularly, I thought I could do that instead of pray. However, my sponsor informed me that meditation was not enough, that I needed to pray to my Higher Power for this to work. So I tried.

AA asserts that it is a spiritual fellowship, not a religious one, and emphasizes that it is *God as I understand Him* that is my Higher Power. However, an agnostic does not understand God, or even know whether He exists or not.

Agnosticism is very different from atheism. Atheism is a religion that asserts, as a matter of faith, that there is no God. Other religions assert, as a matter of faith, that there is a God. An agnostic doesn't assert because he doesn't know.

Agnosticism is an uncertain, uncomfortable state. One has to accept one's own ignorance,

and the limits of what knowledge can be gained in the time available. It is a perpetual spiritual quest.

Many of my discussions with others in AA about this issue include statements such as, "Don't worry, you'll be ok, doubts are common, I had them, but you'll get there, you'll come around, you'll find your higher power" which I translate to "You're wrong, but don't worry, you'll come around, and then you'll be ok". How can someone who doesn't understand, be wrong?

But even if I had an '*as I understand Him*' Higher Power in mind, there seem to be some attributes AA already has included in description: the ultimate authority, loving, can be asked for help, has a will for us, will guide us, can remove our defects, etc...

My own spiritual path has taken me away from the concept of a Higher Power that has a plan and a will for us (me), and that can be petitioned. The notion of a Higher Power as a 'personality' does not resonate within me. The notion and experience of the community of life, does.

I tried to pray (I told my sponsor that I would try), but I found that it made me feel dishonest. What's the problem? No one sees me. If there is no God, who cares, who will know, who will be hurt? If there is, maybe He will help. You don't even have to tell anyone except your sponsor.

The problem was me. I was doing something I did not believe in for a reward I don't want. I don't want someone to 'fix' me. To me, that seems a betrayal of the spirit. I want to learn and grow: through teachers, friends, community and experience; through being open and compassionate; through living my own life and through being connected to life.

I was unable to find the answers to my questions in Chapter 4. I told my sponsor I was not going to continue attempting to pray. I would continue to meditate, be honest, compassionate, connected, and to try to make spiritual progress.

The crucial question is, "Is this not enough?"

George H.

archivesalley

The 'Big Book' was first printed in April of 1939, about four years after Dr. Bob's last drink and the birth date of A.A., June 10, 1935.

The fact that it was published at all was somewhat of a miracle.

Getting a bunch of freshly minted drunks to agree on the material must have been a fun experience. Remember, none of the guys that were around then had been sober much more than a couple of years.

Bill W. took care of the problem of obtaining a consensus by writing pretty well all of it himself.

Then of course, they had no money.

No problem said the old stock promoter; 'we'll set up a company, sell some shares and find a printer who will give us credit until we have some cash'. The latter turned out to be Cornwall Press in Cornwall N.Y.

Planning 'only' 400 pages, the boys picked the cheapest, thickest paper stock the printer had and suggested the pages have unusually large margins to provide the size they suspected a weighty document should have. In fact, the book was so large it immediately became known as (you guessed it) "The Big Book".

On top of size, the publication was certainly colourful. Cornwall Press just happened to have an excess of red material and offered it at quite a discount so the book was red not blue as are subsequent versions.

Just to top it all off, an artist member living in New York designed the dust jacket. He provided a cover that was red, yellow with a bit of black and the title Alcoholics Anonymous in white across the top.

Folks referred to it as the "circus" jacket. The first edition was the only one with red binding and the circus jacket.

It is a matter of record that before a second edition could be printed; the gang had to raise the money to pay for the first run.

This they managed, despite the relative economic uncertainty of the time. In those days the price was \$3.50 and that would be over \$50 in today's dollar.

The initial press run for the "Big Book" is recorded as 4,730 copies.

Most "true" first editions have disappeared — but if you happen to find one in your weird Uncle Ralph's attic hang on to it. In recent times, these rare books have fetched well over \$10,000.

John G.. Unionville Group

Happy Holidays

From the
Better Times/Website
Committee

