

Newsletter

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Working the Back of the Room – A View from the Past Delegate’s Table

I came to my first area assembly in September 1987 at the ripe old age of 10 months. It was a real donnybrook of a business meeting that year, lasting all day Saturday, and reconvening on Sunday morning. Lots of anger was displayed at the microphones - even to the point of yelling. I had just hugged a man for the first time in my life, and was thinking AA was this warm wonderful place where even men were able to display affection in front of others, and I left that assembly feeling so disappointed. I told the person I was with I would never go to another. A few days later I was asked to serve as the GSR of the new group I had just become a part of. I didn't know what a GSR was or did, but had already been told I should not refuse a request by AA to do service. When I ask what my duties were, I was told how to order a service manual, where I would find all the answers. I was not the happiest of campers at the November 1987 assembly, but twenty years later I can tell you it was what I think of as the second miracle in my life.

At that November assembly I was standing in a lunch line when the man in front of me turned around, poked his finger into my GSR ribbon, and said “I see you are from Bend. If you ever need a talk on the traditions up there I would be happy to do that.” Now comes the part that makes me think there really is a higher power.

My new group had just volunteered to produce a speaker for the monthly potluck speaker meeting, and I had been assigned the task of finding someone. It was scheduled for the next weekend, and I had been procrastinating. He asked me if I could put him up at my house if he came. I said yes without having the slightest idea my life was about to change in a huge way. Thus I met Mr. Clint Ice, who was then the PI chairman for the Oregon Area. He was soon to become my sponsor, and service sponsor, and from then on I was told my job was to stand up and say “I am available” whenever a term of service had ended and a new one was being offered. What a gift that turned out to be. After Clint moved up to the big meeting, I became the service sponsee of Jim J., whose wife was Kathy J. and thereafter I was sponsored by two past Oregon Area delegates. They also encouraged standing up to the plate for service.

Serving the Oregon area as DCM, Treasurer, Alternate Chair, Chair, Alternate Delegate, Delegate, and sitting in the Grapevine chair part time kept me occupied, somewhat busy, and helped me stay sober for nineteen out of twenty-one years. Would I do it again? In a heartbeat.

At the May 08 assembly I did my first shift at working the back of the room. What a fine experience it was. And like anything else in AA, I was mostly unprepared for it. I made some mistakes, or what looks like it in hindsight. I learned from them, and hopefully

grew a little. If you were one of the people who came to the back and asked my advice on the virtues or detriments of a motion, please forgive me if I gave it. Next assembly I will try and stick to sharing my experience and memories of how things have gone in the past, and leave my opinions where they belong, between my ears.

Thank you Oregon Area for allowing me to serve!

With much love from a recently retired member of the Oregon Area Committee,
Bruce L.

A New DCM's View of Service

My name is Chris N and I am an alcoholic. I am presently serving as DCM (District Committee Member) for district #5, replacing Doris T., who rotated out in Sept. Thanks and kudos to Doris for her devoted service. Thanks to all the trusted servants that helped this anxious and self-doubting alcoholic feel welcome in a new service position. The fear thing is getting better, but it's not gone yet.

If you want to know more about what is going on in the district or area or have questions about general service opportunities in District #5, please feel free to contact me. If I do not know the answer to your questions, I will ask my service sponsor or one of the many more experienced trusted servants in the Area.

Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob left us with three legacies in AA: Recovery, Unity, and Service. These are written on most of the coins that we present to members for times of continuous sobriety. Service is giving back to the fellowship what has been so freely given to us. It takes many forms: 12 Step Calls, chairing meetings, acting as a group secretary or treasurer and volunteering for the AA Hot line, to name a few. General service is standing for a position in the general service structure, such as Group GSR (General Service Representative), DCM or member of the Area Committee. All of these service positions work in tandem to assure that the fellowship will remain functioning, stable and available for us and for the still suffering alcoholic. You might be wondering how a fellowship of unstable drunks is capable of accomplishing this amazing feat, successfully, for decades. The tools that we use are the 12 Steps, 12 Traditions and the 12 Concepts for World Service. The Traditions and Concepts were written by Bill Wilson as the result of episodes of turmoil within the fellowship. Some of these conflicts were serious enough to threaten the continued existence of AA.

The 12 Steps protect us from drink and the 12 Traditions and Concepts protect us from each other!

In order for AA to function, decisions have to be made. The question remains. How can a group of self-centered, self-serving, egotistical, mentally and spiritually challenged alcoholics agree on anything? Often the business of AA proceeds slowly and with great difficulty, yet somehow successfully and with the spiritual growth of the fellowship as a wonderful by-product. Business meetings of groups that are not grounded in the Steps, Traditions and Concepts often result in chaos, argument and resentments. Some of these resentments drive individuals back to the bottle or cause dissolution of the group. Cries of the "perils of AA politics" come up. Many AA's shun general service for this reason. But, when the Steps, Traditions and Concepts are employed, politics take a back seat and service remains.

Groups that are practiced in the use of these tools still encounter troubles, but these only challenge the members to use the tools laid at their feet. The tools work and repeated success in using them fosters faith in the process and the group. Its members and its trusted servants grow stronger as the result of the experience. The Steps, Traditions and Concepts are merely suggestions. The phrase used is "we ought to", never, "we must". There are no punitive measures taken. One AA can never punish another. Love of the fellowship and the trust in a power greater than us as it is expressed in an informed group conscience is all that is required for this group of erratic people to work together in harmony. Even greater dividends follow. AAs that have tried using these same tools (The Steps, Traditions and Concepts) in their daily lives find that they begin to mature emotionally and spiritually. We claim progress, not perfection. I don't know about you but this alcoholic has a lot of catching up to do and could use all the help he can get!

Some of you may be wondering what's in it for me. As a self-serving alcoholic, I know I asked that question when I started service work. I can only speak for myself but others that I have had the pleasure to meet in general service tell a very similar story. General Service greatly improves the quality of sobriety. One of the main reasons that I drank was fear and the inability to get along with my fellow human beings. To live life on life terms was too much for me to handle. Alcohol made my life bearable for a while but ultimately let me down. I have served in general service for over four years, as Alternate GSR, GSR, and now DCM. I have worked with a service sponsor in addition to Step work with my AA program sponsor. I have come to see that people who have been involved in general service consistently over time have the promises come through for them in spades! The promises don't come automatically. They are conditional! The promises begin and end with qualifying statements. The first is "If

we are painstaking in this phase of our development we will be amazed before we are halfway through" (Pain being the touchstone of spiritual growth), and the second, that the promises will always come true "if we work for them". To discuss and problem solve while practicing the principles of love, tolerance and acceptance is a challenge. Service work consistently puts our trusted servants in those challenging situations. They have countless opportunities to practice the AA program and spiritual principals and they grow personally and spiritually as a result of the practice.

When I am afraid, I can "do it afraid" in the company of alcoholics that have been where I have been and have felt what I feel. They lend me strength and support as I attempt to, "practice these principles in all my affairs". I learn by the example of those that have been serving AA for a long time. I find that I really want what they have. It becomes perfectly clear how these principles can be used in and out of A A. By observing and practicing what long time service members do I eventually "know how to handle situations that used to baffle me". I also can hear how other groups and districts have dealt with challenging circumstances and situations (both successfully and unsuccessfully). There is no need to reinvent the wheel if I can take to heart and employ others "experience strength and hope".

The overall result is that faith in the process grows. The members of the fellowship grow stronger as their bonds with one another solidify. It is true that the purpose of general service is to perform the business of A A. Yet the importance of reaching a decision pales in comparison with the growth of the members as a result of trusting and engaging in the process. To put it plainly, it is more about the journey and less about the destination.

Yours in love and service,

Chris N., District 5 DCM

How I spent my (Sober) Summer Vacation

Summertime's here, and I'm sober. When I put the plug in the jug for the second time almost eight years ago, it was the middle of August, and my concept of how to spend a hot leisurely afternoon did not extend beyond imbibing a 40-ouncer of Old English 800 on the banks of the Willamette River rather than in a squalid basement bedroom. For a lot of practicing alcoholics, summer revolves around BEER, and never gets very far from that center of attraction. How do we enjoy the season when beer is no longer an option?

Aside from being dragged to my home group's annual picnic, where I sat as far away as possible from the dogs, kids and hearty volleyball players chugging Pepsi and scarfing hot dogs, I didn't partake of much in the way of fun and games that year. By the following year (2001) I became aware that there are many wonderful opportunities for sober summer recreation here in Oregon, including officially sponsored AA events, group functions such as my home group picnic, informal activities involving friends I meet in AA, and community events which are alcohol free or at least do not feature drinking as a central theme.

How does a person tap into resources for sober recreation? The best advice I can give is to keep your ears open in your home group, and check with your intergroup office if one serves your area, because the sponsors of these events are not always diligent about publicizing them. Our Oregon Area calendar currently lists no summer recreational events. Clicking on the Portland Intergroup, Emerald Valley Intergroup, Willamette Valley Intergroup and District 5 sites produced links for information on a number of AA campouts. For EVI, at least, the list is incomplete.

I received two responses to my request for descriptive information about summer recreational activities at the last assembly. The Vancouver, WA intergroup asked me to publicize the Southwest Washington Jamboree, August 1-3, at Hudson's Bay High School in Vancouver. The event features speakers, workshops, and entertainment. For more information see their website: www.swwjamboree.org. Anita B sent a description of an N.A. Fourth of July Picnic, which appears below. Emerald Valley Intergroup sponsors a Fourth of July Picnic in Eugene, which is well attended. Your own District or Intergroup may well have such an event. Several Districts combine Delegate's Post-Conference reports, which usually fall in the summer, with a picnic, ice-cream social, or other recreational activity.

"Every year Sellwood Riverside Park in Portland" (writes Anita B) "is reserved for July 4th by NA, and they welcome members of the AA Fellowship to join them (many are dual diagnoses members). We have a "regular spot" where we set up our BBQ, coolers,

potluck/picnic food, shade canopies and lawn/lounge chairs. A local couple, Earle & Kim, bring their boat and water sport items for the enjoyment of anyone who wants to participate; they are very generous with their time and "toys". This is a very helpful way to show AA "newbies" how to have FUN, FRIENDS, & FIREWORKS in sobriety. By late afternoon we gather at "the Big US Flag" (hanging from the canopy) for an impromptu AA meeting. This year we planned to hold it at 6PM (kids and dogs are napping, so it's a bit quieter). Within minutes of our starting with the Serenity Prayer, folks begin to drift over from other areas to join us. One year we started with 6 of us and ended with 36 people fanning out from the original circle. Wonderful sharing, laughter, love and tolerance prevailed. We call our AA portion of the Independence Day picnic the "Bobby C. Memorial Picnic", since he was an ardent participant in the event, but sadly he died of an overdose a couple of years ago. We honor his enthusiasm by naming our celebration after him, and we all have fun in his memory.

Events of this nature are rewarding and fulfilling for this oldtimer, as I observe the growth and maturity of others in the program. This is what makes me keep coming back! This is what makes me want to stay sober."

Anita B., sobriety date 09/28/83.
District 27 Alternate DCM

I interviewed Sylvia and Denna, former and present Activities Committee chairs at Emerald Valley Intergroup, both of whom spoke highly of the EVI Fourth of July Picnic. Neither has children, but both commented that it was wonderful to have an annual event that included families, because they got to see kids growing up in the program. Denna enlisted her 11 year old nephew to help with preparations. He doesn't qualify for membership in the program, and hopefully never will, but meanwhile he loves the fellowship.

Many districts, areas and regions have events like Eugene's Summerfest, which this year happens July 11-13. Such weekend events feature guest speakers and entertainment, and, because they are social events charging a registration fee, are not directly sponsored by AA. Many people do find them enjoyable and useful in maintaining sobriety. I have heard a number of people say that their sponsors strong-armed them into attending

Summerfest when they were new to sobriety, and that the effort paid off.

Denna and Sylvia both attend the Sisters in Sobriety Campout (Lane County) and the Alsea Falls Campout, sponsored by the Monroe meetings, which is an intensive review of the twelve steps in a rustic setting with (according to Sylvia) the worst restroom facilities in Oregon. Campouts encourage cooperation and fellowship.

My home group had a subgroup, no longer active, which organized hikes, camping, and even a rafting trip. Informal and spontaneous recreation often occurs during in an AA summer. Finally, among the innumerable opportunities for a sober person who has rejoined the human race, allow me to put in a plug for your local county fair. I wouldn't miss all the prize animals, the crafts and baking, and the giant zucchini for the world. Consider entering some product of your sobriety. It's easy to do, and who knows – that muffler you knit in a meeting might just get a blue ribbon.

Martha S.

WORD SCRAMBLE
By Anita

Below are some scrambled words pertaining to AA service. Unscramble them, write the letters in the boxes/circles, and use the circled letters to form another AA-related word.

S N A T T I R I D O
○□□□□□□○□□
L I S M E P
□□□□○○
M O A T T I D I N E
□□□□□○□□□○
E E N O F C C O R E
○□□□□○□□□□
T I M E C O M E T
□□□□□□□○□
ANSWER
□□□□□□□□□

Images of Sobriety:

This sketch comes from Jane H., of Eugene Oregon, a retired school principal who got sober in 1985 and is finally expressing her artistic talent in earnest. "My sketch of a glass bowl of fruit seems reflective of my sobriety - it's full of light, color, and wonderful nurturing flavors, with just hints of what might be ahead - and I'm a participant! What a gift."

Jane H.



Gravity doesn't give you a break because you're a nice guy. *Georgine, Eugene*
[When I was newly sober] I got a lot of advice that apparently nobody else was using, so they were giving it to me." *Adrian, Eugene*
I thought I was protecting myself from rejection by isolating, but maybe I'm protecting myself from some absolute devastating form of acceptance." *Shanta, Eugene*
God, if I can't be a shining example at least let me be a dire warning." *Lynn, Eugene*
What I wanted was to look like I was ready for service, and then not get called on. *Chris, Eugene*
It [**a sales convention in LA**] was like a boot camp for saying **no** to stuff. *Todd, Eugene, 30 days sober.*
Two sarcastics can equal one serious. *Chase B., Oregon Area.*



Peanut Gallery June 08

Remember, if you hear some bit of wisdom at a meeting, send it on to the newsletter chair. Eugene meetings are witty, but we don't have a monopoly on the AA one-liner.

The courts assigned me punitive impecunity, therapy, benevolence (community service), and punitive fellowship - which means y'all here. *Spencer, Eugene*

One thing I've discovered is that the 12 steps work a whole lot faster in reverse - in no time you're at "I'm powerful over alcohol." *Sheila, Eugene*