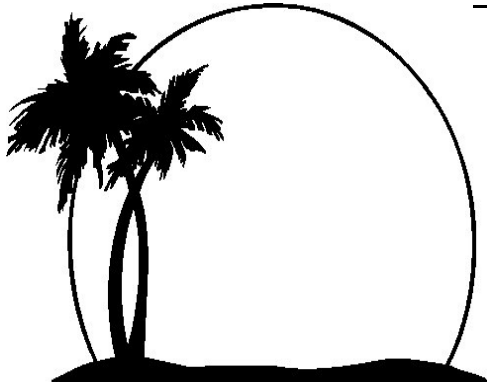


February, 2021



Your Santa Barbara Central Office

Presents

The Messenger

14 W. Anapamu Street, Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 962-3332 www.santabarbaraaa.com

Language of the Heart



The Manager's Corner

BY TIM W.

I have come to believe that the Second Step of our program may be the most important and meaningful one out of the entire Twelve. The great unsung Second Step, on which everything hinges.

I mean, anyone with enough gumption and diligence can drink themselves into pitiful and incomprehensible demoralization. Especially if they be alcoholic. In some ways, that's actually the easy part.

But coming to believe, relying on that, learning to utilize that in your life, that's the part that can be extremely difficult. The Twelve and Twelve says, *"Some of us won't believe in God, others can't, still others who do believe that God exists have no faith whatever He will perform this miracle."*

I think I fit in that last category, or used to. I knew in my heart of hearts that Power existed but I had many misconceptions that turned out to be my own thinking rather than the Will of that loving Presence.

It wasn't until things got worse faster than I could lower my standards, when I couldn't imagine a life with alcohol or without it, when I realized that

I wasn't going to die as quickly as I wished, but would instead be stuck in that demoralization for God knows how long, that I finally hit that moment of surrender of my own will and reached out.

What I found was Alcoholics Anonymous. A place quite unlike the other places I'd been where they had tried to introduce me to God. The problem I had with those places was that it was always their conception they promoted. When I got to A.A. and you suggested I find my own, it freed me up to actually begin the process of coming to believe.

For me it began with belief in the Group. I sat, listened, heard the stories, and began the magical process of identification. It caused me to realize something was at work that was allowing these self-confessed drunkards, people like myself, to stay sober one day at a time.

That belief, that Second Step, has allowed me to stay here and do the rest of the work necessary to stay sober in A.A.

The great unsung Second Step, where it really all begins.

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Donation to Your Central Office's Lending Library

Do you have extra Big Books, Twelve & Twelves, or other A.A. literature? Donate these to Central Office's lending library!



Member Submission

GHOST IN THE SHELL

BY OMID B. (SANTA BARBARA, CALIFORNIA)

Before March 21, 2014, I thought my life was bound to remain the way it was. Miserable, depressed, anxious, useless, physically ill upon awakening, committing crimes every day, causing physical and emotional harm to others, and waking up every morning hoping I could muster up the courage to kill myself that day.

I got sober when I was 25 years old after spending just under a decade of my life--starting at 15 years old--drinking and using alcoholically. It was off to the races pretty much right away. That's not to say I didn't have some good times, but the brightness of it all quickly dissipated like a star collapsing into a black hole of despair, misery, self-pity, and suffering. I had accomplished very little. Barely graduating high school, barely attending college, barely sane, barely alive. A person of no use to anyone or anything. Frankly, barely a person and more like a cornered animal. Was it always like this?

Looking back on being a child, I always felt some degree of discomfort. Always restless, irritable, and discontent inside. Always "bored" and looking for a good time. My family life wasn't very functional, but it wasn't horrific. I experienced a lot of anger and frustration in the home coming from my parents at a young age, and it only contributed to the way I already felt. These emotions grew worse over time as I had to deal with the natural challenges of growing up and dealing with people, places, and things, which was something I couldn't really come to terms with. Really it was just the reality of the world and the dimension I was living in. Something was always off or terrible.

The "solution" came along far too late. It should have come sooner. A couple drinks and I stopped caring about others, the world, what "they" thought of me, how to get the cute girl, how to fit in. All of those anxieties and fears, poof, gone. Or so I thought. It was only temporary. And after a few years of that, and never allowing myself to attain or set goals for the things I now cherish, I needed something else. Something a little stronger for me, which set me down another rabbit hole. I turned my body into a pharmacy and eventually focused on painkillers, opiates, and finally heroin.

Now I know we try to focus on alcohol around here, but alcohol-ISM is so much more than what I put in my body. That's just a symptom of the real problem re-

siding in my head and in my spirit. I relate to the feelings, generally demoralizing and humiliating situations I put myself in, the consequences, and the solutions that lead to recovery that people talk about in here. The specific events others share about in their past don't matter as much to me. They definitely matter, but I hear the message of Alcoholics Anonymous in the feelings, pains, and recovery.

Let's rewind to the story. I'm now 24 years old and I have a seemingly powerful moment of willingness to surrender. I'm confronted by my family, and looking back I now understand that something greater than me and some part of the universe told me I'm done. I reached out to a friend of mine who had gotten sober, I asked them what he did, and I did it. He took me to meetings and introduced me to some good people that I am still close to to this day, but it didn't keep me sober. Why? I didn't work the steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. That's where the recovery is. I stopped midway and centered my whole life around a relationship and when that person drank, I found it easier to drink as well. I was off once more and it took me four months of an even deeper level of pain than before to be TRULY willing to do something about it.

This brings us back to my current sobriety date. March 21, 2014. I'm coming up on 7 years and it has been a wild ride with ups and downs because that's just how life is. Today, I know how to handle it. I'm happier than I was in the past, I'm employable, I'm a better member of my family, I'm more responsible, I'm teachable, I like to have a good time in a healthy manner, and I'm more willing to enjoy and pursue life. I see things differently and thus the world isn't as ugly anymore.

Take note that all of this was only possible because I worked the steps of Alcoholics Anonymous and found a Power greater than myself. I'm grateful I was able to choose what that was, and even though I haven't always been in line with it, I'm always happier when I am. Doing the things that were suggested to me saved my life and gave me a foundation. Going to meetings, getting commitments, finding a sponsor, working the steps, and having a group of people I can spend time with were tantamount to my recovery. If you're reading this and you're unsure about whether or not you're an alcoholic, but something rang true to you, then give it a thought. If you are an alcoholic and you follow those suggestions I just mentioned, then your reality will improve. Your spiritual, mental, and physical selves will be resurrected, and I hope that fulfillment for everyone.

On the Second Step

"Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity."

THE PAYOFF IS PEACE

After a phenomenal amount of pain, he came to believe and a little darkness lifted off his soul

BY TRAVIS C. (GENEVA, ILLINOIS)

The Second and Third Steps are gradual and gentle. Like Step Two says, we "came to believe," not that we just "believed." Believing in a power greater than myself is something I "came to" do. It took time. It took seeing a power work in my life; it took personal, hands-on experience.

My biggest growth spurts, my biggest shifts from pretending to believing came after moving beyond a phenomenal amount of pain. When my soul shifted from being shrouded in darkness to being illuminated with sunshine. When Nine Inch Nails wasn't something I wanted to listen to every day.

The one treatment center I went to was Twelve Step-based. Their treatment plan was to have patients complete the first five Steps in order to graduate. When working Step Two, a great deal of emphasis was put on making lists of how and why we were insane. Those lists were all too easy. Insanity is fairly obvious when you're ready to stop...

There was the Christmas Eve the family and I were decorating the tree, and I kept sneaking down to the basement every 15 to 20 minutes to take a big pull off my whiskey bottle. And then before the night was over, my teary-eyed wife was asking me, "Are you drunk?"

Then there was the time I woke her up at 6:30 in the morning because I had lost my mind and I needed to tell her that she was part of the problem. Most alcoholics do go crazy when they first sober up. I was alarm clock crazy.

Insanity—I know it all too well. I'm much more interested in looking for hope, in returning to sanity now that my jugs are plugged. And with Step Two, this gets my attention: It's not "will restore," but "could restore." I have to let that power in, and of course I get no

guarantees.

Then one night, after being sober for a while, I was having dinner by myself at a diner and I looked around. I could see I was the only person flying solo. Eating alone isn't my favorite thing to do, but whatever. I have my phone and the whole internet.

While perusing my phone, I saw a picture of my now ex-wife go by—with her boyfriend. They were smiling at each other. As I sat there looking at the photo, by no choice of my own, I honestly felt happy for them. I could see that she hadn't had that kind of happiness for a long time. I had always wanted the very best for her. I realized that the "very best" wasn't me; she had found it elsewhere. And because I had closure with all of that, walked through my program and dealt with all our breakup's phenomenal pain, I could be sincerely delighted for them both.

How and when does this kind of sanity restoration happen? How does one move from alarm clock crazy to peace? Time is certainly a key factor. I needed some distance, needed some room for my mind to breathe, to detach from the things that were making me crazy. It was hard not to see only darkness when I was living in darkness.

Before I could detach and let go though, I needed to feel all those feelings I'd kept locked up in me down in the basement. I can't move on from something if I've never dealt with it, never processed. Hence moral inventory and amends.

So the simple, and yet hard, answer is that I'm restored to sanity by staying sober and working the Steps. It's really that simple. And go to my AA meetings. And talk with my sponsor Jerry too. As he said not long ago, "The payoff is peace."

I had peace that night at the diner. Peace for me and peace for her. And that's what I always wanted. Illinois

—From the September 2020 Grapevine

"My biggest growth spurts, my biggest shifts from pretending to believing came after moving beyond a phenomenal amount of pain."



January Birthdays

<u>Member</u>	<u>Years</u>
Jimmy S.	1
Alana	1
Alina	3
Suzanna	3
Grant D.	3
Mike H.	3
Alice H.	4
James V.E.	4
Josh T.	5
Kay	5
Dennis D.	5
Annie H.	5
Sarah W.	5
Nikolai B.	6
Peggy D.	6
Sean	8
Ashley H.	9
Nancy G.	10
Kari A.	15
Cristi S.	15
Chucky U.	21
Tom W.	22
Jimmy C.	26
Barb F.	26
Danielle S.	28
Cathy M.	30
Tammy G.	33
Paul (PC)	34
Tim W.	38
Spencer	39
Niecie	42
Kurt F.	43
Gabe A.	43
Mike H.	44

The Messenger is published by
YOUR Central Office.

Please send submissions to:
manager@santabarbaraAA.com

***Have an AA birthday? Please let
your Central Office know so that we
can print it in The Messenger.***

Central Office Statistics

During January, your Central Office had:

AA Info Calls	108
Alanon Referrals	1
Other Referrals	0
12 Step Calls	0
12 Step Office	0
Out of Town Visitors	0
Office Walk Ins	101
Website Pageviews	6,200

"Yet no alcoholic, soberly analyzing his destructive behavior, whether the destruction fell on the dining-room furniture or his own moral fiber, can claim "soundness of mind" for himself."

On the Second Tradition

"For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern."

TIME TO ROTATE

BY DAVID S. (NEW YORK, NEW YORK)

Once a month, and sometimes more often, I would make a presentation to physicians in their first year of residency at New York-area teaching hospitals. I explained to them what AA is and what it is not and answered questions they had about AA.

For a number of years, this service had been provided by several subcommittee members of my area's Cooperation with the Professional Community (CPC) Committee. But it soon occurred to me, as the new chairperson of the committee, that the principle of rotation would have to apply to these three dedicated members. Awkward though it was, I asked them to leave. And so, without a strong, active committee, I had to fill the void created by their departure.

In general, gaining the ear of a medical doctor for any length of time as a patient is not easy, and yet here I was not as a patient but with knowledge and "expertise" to impart about AA to these young and attentive physicians. Why not continue on this course for a while I heard myself thinking, even as the months passed and the committee began to grow. Perhaps I was better suited for this work than other members of the committee and would be doing AA a disservice by turning the responsibility over to others less qualified.

Thus I was falling victim to a line of thinking that causes people like me to inflate our own worth while devaluing that of others. Fortunately, with the help of a sponsor, I did not have to travel very far down that road. Soon others on the committee were encouraged to step forward, and they provided the service at least as well and probably better than I had.

Sometime later in my CPC service, our committee was asked to provide volunteers for an AA booth at a three-day event celebrating the centennial of a national organization with a rich history but also a declining membership. Parents had brought their children, eager to impress upon them the important role the organization had played in American history.

But many of the children seemed to show more interest in the music they were hearing on their personal devices than they did in the illustrious legacy of the organization. And so the problem of generational continuity was clear to see.

Unlike the challenges faced by that particular organization, it's not likely that Fellowship apathy will ever be AA's undoing. The threat of a return to active alcoholism compels our obedience to spiritual principles, as Bill W. noted. But service, especially beyond—or below—the group level, remains an ongoing challenge. Those of us who have been entrusted with service positions may do the Fellowship and ourselves a disservice when we don't step aside and allow others the same opportunity for growth and when we don't do our very best to

attract others to follow after us.

Recently, I had dinner with a longtime friend who lived for over 20 years on an ashram, to which he contributed his considerable gifts in selfless service as a devotee of the guru. But something was lost with the guru's passing. A cult of personality grew around his successor and an oligarchy took control. There were rumored improprieties, both financial and sexual, among those who held power. A climate of fear developed and no democratic process was to be found. My friend had no choice but to leave and to this day mourns the loss of his spiritual community.

In AA, we have no oligarchies and no permanent leadership class. Everyone in AA rotates, from the officers at my home group to the trustees of the General Service Board. Titles come and go but the common ground on which we meet—alcohol, alcoholism and recovery from the illness—never shifts, ensuring that we relate to each other on a plane of equality and that in AA "sober is highest."

Those of us who balk at rotation can perhaps ask ourselves what qualifies us to be the exceptions to this principle and answer with all the honesty we can summon.

Some time ago an AA member, who was in a second consecutive term as his group's treasurer, expressed a desire to terminate his service but said the group could find no one to replace him. I suggested he leave the collection basket in the middle of the meeting room floor and walk out. Someone would step forward or someone wouldn't. Either way, it was the group's problem, not his. The pamphlet "The AA Group" addresses the matter more gently and thoughtfully in the section "The Principle of Rotation":

"To step out of an AA office you love can be hard. If you have been doing a good job, and if you honestly don't see anyone else around willing, qualified, or with the time to do it, and if your friends agree, it's especially tough. But it can be a real step forward in growth—a step into the humility that is, for some people, the spiritual essence of anonymity. Among other things, anonymity in the Fellowship means that we forgo personal prestige for any AA work we do to help alcoholics."

Service may foster personal growth but it doesn't render me perfect. And yet, a shallow motive—such as a desire for prestige—can be superseded by a higher one, essentially gratitude for a reprieve from the bondage of self that giving provides and for the sense of responsibility it fosters in all areas of my life. And of course I can pray that when the time comes to rotate out of general service, I will be able to let go without regret. Somehow, I suspect the adjustment won't be too hard. After all, there will always be chairs to set out and put away at my home group and newcomers to welcome and new lessons in humility to be learned.

—From the February 2016 Grapevine

Member Submission

LOOKING FORWARD TO LIFE

BY CAROLINE C. (SANTA BARBARA, CALIFORNIA)

As I go to write about my healing through recovery, I'm overwhelmed with gratitude. I have a solution today. I can choose to live in acceptance. I have peace within myself. I feel an overall sense that everything is going to be okay no matter what.

Those concepts were lacking all my life prior to surrendering to a power greater than myself in which I found through Alcoholics Anonymous, and working the 12 Steps with a compassionate sponsor. Before? I was a mess. Inside and out. Lost, always. Scared. Out of control. The thought "I'd be better off dead" ran through my head quite often.

It took what it took. A lot of pain, numbness, acting out, emotional instability, obsession, hospitalizations... until I met myself at my bottom. I was desperate

for help, to get a grip, some guidance... anything, at that first AA meeting. Little did I know it was going to lead me to a new way of life actually worth living. Sustainable. Full. Wholesome. One I can genuinely say (as hard as it still gets at times) that I'm in love with today. No, it isn't perfect. It's even better than that... it's imperfect and I'm able to handle it.

I have faith in something bigger than me. I have trust in the process. When things aren't good, I know this too shall pass and to put one foot in front of the other doing the next right thing. To reach out a helping hand meanwhile and get outside of my own head. When things are good, I appreciate it, spread the love and enjoy. I pray (which I never thought I'd find myself doing). I don't wish to die anymore; thanks to Alcoholics Anonymous, I actually look forward to life, which I truly didn't think was possible. After all, that's what working a program gave me: my life.

South Western Area Conference for Young People in AA SWACYPAA 7

Established as an annual gathering to promote participation, unity, and enthusiasm about recovery among young AAs in the region. We welcome all to help plan and prepare for a wonderful conference experience for AAs of all ages!

Regular Committee Meetings

Join us-everyone is welcome to attend!

- 2nd Thursday every month @6pm
- 4th Sunday every month @1pm

Zoom ID: 411 164 2021
PW: Whiskymilk



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Find us on Facebook to stay updated on events and meetings happening in or community leading up to the conference.

For further details or to register, visit us at www.swacypaa7.org

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