Introduction

It’s mind-boggling to me that AA Central Office of Los Angeles has lasted for 75 years, or that any AA intergroup manages to hang together for even a day considering the obstacles that threaten our unity.

Our Intergroup’s staying power is a testament of the application of Tradition 1 and the 12 Concepts of Service, especially when placing “principles before personalities” in service to the greater good.

In this issue, we offer something very special - the first two parts of a four-part history of LA Central Office by our cherished 25-year employee Joe M. There are three stories of experience, strength and hope in our new, long-form articles. We also offer information about how to be of part of LACO’s legacy as a phone volunteer, as a CSR, or on one of our service committees.

To me, LA Central Office has lasted because it’s fulfilled a vital need in our city, and will continue to do so because alcoholism isn’t going anywhere - but then neither is the best solution to it. When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. at LA Central Office always to be there.

- Pete A, Co-Editor, Hello Central

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Over the years, the Los Angeles Central Office of AA has provided many sobriety coins and tokens to help AA’s celebrate various lengths of sobriety. These “chips” usually bear a unique symbol: a circle around a triangle. In case you don’t know its significance, AA.org addresses it in ‘Frequently Asked Questions about AA History.’ It states that the circle represents Alcoholics Anonymous as a whole, and the equilateral triangle signifies the balance required of all 36 principles (The 12 Steps, 12 Traditions and 12 Concepts) in order for us to stay sober.

They are:

- Recovery - the foundation, taking the 12 Steps and endeavoring to practice the principles in all our affairs.
- Unity - making sure the doors of AA stay open for the newcomer. And,
- Service - we participate and serve. Concept 1 states, ‘Final responsibility and ultimate authority for AA world services should always reside in the collective conscience of our whole fellowship.’

From the amazing new AA publication Our Great Responsibility, (on sale at LA Central Office) Bill Wilson is recorded at the 1955 A.A. General Service Conference saying, “…luckily we have now come to the point we know enough of recovery, of unity, of service, to say we can stand on our own two feet. We can function. We deeply feel that we have approximately the correct principles to guarantee the spread of recovery, to hold us to unity. And enough organization of the services so they’ll stand up and function no matter what the crisis.”

Please let your Los Angeles Central Office know how we can help your group carry the message. And, chips are always available!

- Kate M. your L.A. Central Office manager

Become a CSR!
Volunteer as your group’s CSR, then show up at our Intergroup meeting to bring your group’s voice to LA Central Office. Check the site for more info.
On June 30 2019, LACO celebrated its 75th anniversary, where all who attended were treated to a fascinating oral history by long-time employee Joe M.

So, we wanted to present Joe’s research with you in two parts. Thanks Joe!

75 Years of L.A. Central Office
A Brief History by Joe M.

Part I - “The First 12-Step Call in Los Angeles”

In March of 1940, a thirsty but sober alcoholic stood outside of a house in West Los Angeles holding a bundle of letters sent by other alcoholics, or their families requesting help to stop drinking. The man’s name was Mort J, and he had just received the correspondence from a non-alcoholic woman named Kaye who had unsuccessfully tried to start an AA meeting in Los Angeles.

She told Mort that she was giving up trying to help alcoholics and was moving out of state. Now all of the problem drinkers that she had tried to help were drinking again, and there were no other AA meetings within a thousand miles of Los Angeles.

Any future that AA had in Los Angeles now rested solely on Mort.

What should he do with the contacts? Mort had heard of 12-step calls, but he had no experience of them since he had gotten sober by himself. He noticed that one of the letters was from an address right on his way back home.

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Mort wanted a drink, so he headed to the address on the envelope and knocked on the door. The letter had come from a woman seeking help for her husband who was in the grip of an addiction utterly beyond his control. He answered the door and Mort started to carry the message by saying “My name is Mort and I am a member of Alcoholics Anonymous.” The man’s name was Cliff W, and he recalled 40 years later that on that day that he had no interest in stopping drinking. In fact, he had to interest in AA at all, but something about Mort attracted him.

“My name is Mort, and I’m a member of Alcoholics Anonymous”

The Harvard educated Mort was neatly dressed, well-groomed and had exquisite manners that charmed Cliff. Cliff said that this first impression had drawn him into AA. Mort told Cliff about his years of blackout and violent drinking, explaining that Cliff listening would help Mort to stay sober. Then, Mort asked Cliff if he would go to a regular AA meeting if Mort could get one started. With some misgiving, Cliff said yes just for Mort, and then there were two carrying the message of recovery to Los Angeles.

Cliff said later that he always did his best to be well presented when he made 12-step calls so he would be an attraction to the prospective member.

Within a week they held an AA meeting at The Cecil hotel in downtown LA. Neither of them guessed how quickly the chain reaction they had just started would reverberate through all of Los Angeles.

> End Part I <
Mort and Cliff quickly incorporated the group as a non-profit corporation. Mort gave his address to Bill back East to use as the official LA AA contact. Steady enquiries came in through Bill, the LA Probation Department and word of mouth. Mort and Cliff struggled to fill these 12-step calls. Cliff recalled years later that he was painfully shy at this time and found the calls to be a real challenge for him. Luckily, help was soon on the way.

Mort quickly received a letter from a man in an Arizona sanitarium seeking help if it would not cost him anything. Mort invited him to come and see for himself at no charge.

The next week he came - an angry but silent man guarded by a white coated attendant from the Compton sanitarium where he had just moved. His name was Frank R, and he had a consistent history of violence when drunk. Cliff recalled him then as the hardest and coldest man that he had ever seen.

After several weeks of attending the meeting without stopping drinking, he stood up one night at the meeting to announce loudly, “I hate God” before disavowing his family faith. He then said that he now believed that some kind of good intelligence had brought about the world. He then asked Mort if this was enough to keep him sober. Mort told him “that is all you need.” Frank never drank again.
Frank believed that his life had been returned to him so he could help other drunks receive what he had been given. Early member Al M. recalled him as vivacious and driving. Al said of Frank that although he had an angry demeanor in front of a group, he was wonderful to talk to one on one. Cliff said that Frank always had the right answers for the issues that faced the new fellowship. Frank took this charm with him on 12-Step calls. No neighborhood was too rough for him to carry the message.

One day in front of Cliff, a man offered Frank $500 for helping him get sober. He turned the cash down cold. He told Cliff that they should never get obligated for more than a cup of coffee. Frank went on hundreds of 12-step calls, and brought dozens to the meeting and started to sponsor them.

By July of 1940, the LA group numbered 170 members. Mort moved the meeting to the Elks Club Patio Room to accommodate all of its members. More referrals continued to come in and Frank now oversaw the 12-step calls. He determined that sending 3 sober AA’s on a call yielded the best results, so it became the accepted norm. As there was still only one meeting in town, 12-step calls proved a good way to keep the newcomers sober between meetings.

Although many members slipped out of the program, more came in to replace them. By the end of the year, other fledgling meetings started to form. One of these was the Studio Group in Culver City, which still meets on Friday nights. Cliff summed up 1940 as a good year which had not always felt like a good year at the time.

He said his experience was a blur of 12-step calls, meetings and an ever increasing amount of newcomers to help. By the end of the year, they fellowship was getting used to its fast pace and things were heading in the right direction.

Then Bill called from New York in January 1941 to say that the Saturday Evening Post would be publishing a feature article about AA in March of that year. Cliff recalled that he, Mort and Frank had no idea what they were getting into.

> End Part II <

In our next issue: Parts III & IV
On a hot July afternoon after a spontaneous 24-hour cocaine and Jack Daniels affair, I came to on the living room floor of the small, dilapidated house that I was renting with two other roommates half my age. For some reason, that was the day when due to sheer desperation, I summoned the Alcoholic’s Prayer, “Somebody help me.” I had suddenly realized while surveying my circumstances, I was 41 years old, I had no job, no car, a bag of dirty laundry as my sole possession, and my extremely meager portion of the rent due the next day, that couldn’t pay it.

I also owed $180,000.00.

Where I came from was the exact opposite of that situation. An upper class suburban hamlet. Private schools. Didn’t have to work during summer vacations, the works. A loving supportive family. I just loved to drink, do drugs and hideout, avoiding the world in the dinghy, dark confines of the nightclubs of New York City. I just wanted to run away - every day, and not deal with life. I simply couldn’t get enough.

The problem with living like that for 28 years, is that eventually life will either leave you dead, or saying that prayer I so desperately shouted. The next day I found myself at my first A.A. meeting and those next 60 days were a complete blur. Due to those outside circumstances, I realize now that I came to A.A. with a gift of desperation. G.O.D.

The good thing about being that desperate was that the one thing I heard during that time was to go to a meeting every day. It was also suggested that meeting was to be my home group, even though I had no idea what a home group was.

Continued on next page
I’m proud to be able to say that the next 16 years of my life has been spent going to that same morning meeting along with many others. I got a sponsor, worked the 12 steps, had a spiritual awakening as a result of doing the 9th step, and became a member of the “No Matter What” club. That’s the club where membership requires not drinking when life gives you everything, and not drinking when life takes everything away.

I’ve learned in A.A. that real happiness occurs when you can become willing to do the things that don’t make any sense.

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“A.A. has taught me is to celebrate and appreciate this exact moment we are in”

It’s been several thousand meetings from that faithful day when I came to on the floor of that dilapidated house. I have experienced the high of the highs and the low of the lows over the years. I have had the pleasure of helping some of my fellows in their quest for sobriety, and I’ve become a part of a group of people who have all dug themselves out of their own personal pits of despair, and to have their lives completely turnaround.

My life is nowhere perfect, but I’ve learned in A.A. that it’s absolutely perfect, warts and all. I’ve lean to accept my shortcomings as well as to celebrate all of the good stuff as well. Most importantly, what A.A. has taught me is to celebrate and appreciate this exact moment we are in as I write my story.

It is right in this moment that my higher power has me completely surrounded, safe and finally free.

I owe all of this new found freedom and emotional security to Alcoholics Anonymous, and to all of the great members that have come before and for those who will come long after I am gone.

- Charlie B.
I grew up of the “too much love” variety. Two loving parents, 3 kids, and a dog, but I couldn’t wait to get out. I hated my normal life and resented my family’s normalcy. I felt different, and managed my discomfort by leading a double life. By day, I was the Best Little Boy In The World by day, but at night, I’d climb out of my bedroom window to sneak out to the gay nightclubs.

When I drank and smoked pot, I didn’t feel anything. For an overly sensitive kid who worried about everything, not feeling anything was great. It wasn’t until college when I realized I did not drink or use like other people – they could stop, but once I started I was unable to stop. Meth helped me get through law school, but I wasn’t showing up for work. Soon I was a lawyer working as a waiter, but because of my sticky fingers, got fired from that job too.

Then, I got sober and I stayed sober for 14 years. During that time, I managed to cobble together a career, buy a house, marry a terrific guy and even become a Dad. However, when I got very busy with that life I forgot about my AA life.

Around the time my back went out, my doctor prescribed medications that I shouldn’t take. He assured me that, even though I was an alcoholic, I’d need it after the surgery. Well, I didn’t have that surgery but took the medications anyway. And all of a sudden I was using again, and drinking straight from the bottle.

I told myself that if it got bad enough, I’d go back to AA, but I kept lowering the bar to keep going. I lost my job, my house, my marriage and my teeth. Then Child Protective Services took my son, and I asked God for the second time to hear my prayer, so familiar to all of us: “please help me.” I surrendered. This time, I was truly desperate.

This time I worked the steps like I worked a job, mostly because I didn’t have a job. After a couple years, I got a part-time job, then a full-time job, and was later granted visits with my son, then finally joint custody. My relationships began to repair, and if I hadn’t been given an abundance already, I met the love of my life. I’m almost 4 years clean and sober, in the middle of a 90 in 90 because, as my sponsor reminds me, meeting makers make it.

And I don’t know how I can ever thank AA for giving me back my life again, and again.

- Neil K.
I guess my childhood was not that bad. I look at it now, and I totally understand that everything that happened in my life, happened the way it was intended to. I unfortunately was the middle child. So I felt that it alienated me. My alcoholism is totally a disease of perception. My parents are from Guadalajara Mexico, and I am a proud Mexican-American.

My first language was Spanish, which is a prerequisite in our home. I had a funky-LA native-ESL accent, which I hated, and caused me a lot of internal turmoil. Now that I think about it, it was kind of great. It made me who I was, at the time.

My alcoholism began in high school with prescription pills and of course, alcohol. I loved the combo. It made me feel like I had finally arrived. I was pretty popular, hung out with the “in crowd” and celebrated my sexuality. My peers accepted me. I had the love and support of my family and friends, but still I hated myself. My drinking went from occasional to almost every day.

After a seedy binge, I landed in my first inpatient rehab for 30 days. But, I focused all of my free time on working out while starving myself. I was afraid to lose my “drug body”, which I thought was fabulous and quickly developed an eating disorder. What’s more fabulous than having an eating disorder with a alcoholism? Everyone who was anyone had one of those in LA.
My life for the next 12 years consisted of using, getting sober for 60 days at most, which was always followed by a much worse relapse. To support myself I became a masseur, and soon became sex worker. My parents wanted nothing to do with me and my brother kicked me out of his house. In hindsight, it was a blessing. All that was left was me, my bike, and my MacBook. Home was wherever I laid my head at night.

On the very last night in active addiction, I took a whole bunch of benzos and washed them down with whisky. I was in a hotel in a full blackout, but found myself on the Red Line in a full psychotic episode. I was looking for an outlet to charge my phone. Powerless.

I finally surrendered and checked into detox. I was spiritually bankrupt, jaded, and I had a dark disposition. I finally leaned into the people that were on “Team Jason” and on my side. I listened, and I learned the word “No!” I learned humility, and more importantly, I practiced Contrary Action.

I am 19 months sober now. I love my simple, sober life. I have everything that I need. I have a beautiful fiancé and best friend, and a circle of amazing trudging buddies. I work in treatment and I love being of service to the newcomer everyday.

- J.R.

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The Pacific Group
Wednesday, 8:00 pm
11960 Sunset Blvd.
Brentwood, CA 90049

One of the most well-attended meetings in Los Angeles, the Pacific Group draws people from all of Southern California to hear a strong message of AA.

There is stacked parking in the Synagogue, and across the street at the Catholic Church. Doors open at 7:00 pm but it’s best to be early to get parking. The meeting starts at 7:50, has 10 minute coffee break at around 8:30, a speaker until 9:20, then AA birthdays. People with commitments or taking cakes are asked to wear suits or dresses, but there is no dress code to attend.

The Pacific Group is the last house on the block for many struggling with sobriety, and continues to help anyone with a desire to stay sober.

- Carl B.
Tradition One:
“Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.”
Getting Involved

Volunteering at L.A. Central Office is a great way to make a positive difference in our community. Join us for any of LACOAA’s committee meetings, board meetings and events in the spirit of unity, service & recovery.

Become the C.S.R. for Your Group!
Bring Central Office News
To Your Home Group
Attend your local CSR meeting,
Check ‘service tab’ at lacoaa.org

Central Service Committee
2nd Thursday of the month
(other than Intergroup months)
7pm - 10pm.
4311 Wilshire Bl. #104 LA, 90005

Directory Committee
Direct AA’s to meetings
Check the ‘events’ page on
our website: lacoaa.org

Literature Committee
Reading Matters
Check the ‘events’ page on
our website: lacoaa.org

Policies & Procedures Committee
The Traditions at Work
Check the ‘events’ page on
our website: lacoaa.org

Public Information Committee
Reach Out To the Community
Check the ‘events’ page on
our website: lacoaa.org

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