Hello Central
Los Angeles A.A. Central Office Magazine

IN THIS ISSUE

LACO: A Brief History Parts 3 & 4

WORD! With Jen W.

Group Highlight: THANK GOD I'M SOBER

STORIES of Experience, Strength and Hope

AND MORE!

80 Years of Fellowship

For Fun & For Free
Introduction

I recently read the rare pamphlet, How AA Came to Los Angeles, which tells of how alcoholics hoping to find a solution to their drinking problem founded our local fellowship. It’s interesting to note that the very first meetings were organized by two wives of alcoholics, (not the alcoholics!) and that these determined women had first found AA by reading a mimeographed copy of the Big Book prior to its publication.

The first L.A. meeting was held on December 19, 1939 and there were only 15 people present. Soon, area AA meetings were being held in private homes and jails, and from there Los Angeles AA took off.

Now, 80 years later, there are reportedly over 2000 meetings in the LA area each week - a testament to the enormous need for AA in LA, and of its success in keeping people who have the willingness to stay sober, do just that. No matter where your meeting is in Los Angeles, central office is here to serve our vast and varied community as never before. Use it.

- Pete A.
Manager’s Corner

Service is the twelfth principle of A.A., correlating with Step 12th: Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and practice these principles in all our affairs. We only need to try to carry the message; try/tri/verb: try; make an attempt or effort to do something.

“AA is more than a set of principles.”

Bringing my conscience, my voice and my vote to the discussion might be an effort, but A.A. is a democracy, everyone has a say. From the pamphlet The AA Group, “The group conscience is the collective conscience of the group membership and thus represents substantial unanimity on an issue before definitive action is taken. This is achieved by the group members through the sharing of full information, individual points of view, and the practice of A.A. principles. To be fully informed requires a willingness to listen to minority opinions with an open mind.”

In A.A., service and participation are the same thing. AA is still around because members keep showing up. In fact, isn’t attending an AA meeting truly the greatest service? I know AA was there for me when I was ready because people showed up that day. Someone was at the door to greet me, someone had arranged the chairs and a secretary had asked the speaker to speak. From our Legacy of Service by Bill W., “Our Twelfth Step – carrying the message – is the basic service that the AA Fellowship gives; this is our principle aim and the main reason for our existence. Therefore, AA is more than a set of principles; it is a society of alcoholics in action. We must carry the message, else we ourselves can wither, and those who haven’t been given the truth may die.”

Thank you Central Service Representatives for your willingness to serve and bring the voice of your meetings to Intergroup, to our Delegates, Central Service Committee chairs, members and liaisons, and our Executive Committee members, for your perseverance, integrity and support, and to all of you who answer phones at LACO, thank you for another year of courageously showing up for the newcomers, AA Central Office is what it is today because of all of you.

With gratitude, your LACO staff, Joe M., Nina F., Chris B. and Kate M.
Being the chairperson for central office has given me an opportunity to be of service in my recovery in “upper level service”. My first sponsor told me that participation at all levels was part of my responsibility in my recovery, and that there were three ways to work the 12th step:

1. **Sponsorship** - work with others. I cannot keep what I do not give away;
2. **Have a commitment** at my home group, show up and ask someone else about their day;
3. **Have a commitment in upper level service structures**, this ensures that AA will always be there for the still suffering alcoholic.

I remember when I first got sober, I looked forward to getting two years of recovery so I could start participating as a GSR, CSR, or on panels with H&I. Over the last 15 years of my sobriety, I have had the chance to participate in service in all of these ways. When I was a kid, I loved to look at old maps in National Geographic, trying to figure out what all the marks and symbols meant; to have a deeper understanding about how it all worked. I found this same satisfaction in my work in upper service. Learning how it all works, and how these systems keep AA going and moving.

**When I first moved to SoCal**, I found my first couple of meetings through the LACOAA website. It directed me to a location that was close to where I was living, and fit my schedule. It was perfect – a room full of Alcoholics, crazy in the way I totally understood and completely accepting of me.
Being the chairperson for Los Angeles Central Office pushes me to frequently reflect upon the 12 Traditions, as well as the Third Legacy, that has held Alcoholics Anonymous together for 80 years.

During long business meetings, I work to maintain my sense of humor, remembering that we are all alcoholics just trying to get through the day; and often showing each other how to behave with respect and kindness. My primary purpose throughout these meetings is to keep the group on task, keep the discussion civil, reminding everyone involved that the 12 Traditions & 12 Concepts of Service are here to help support us, all while still trying to keep us on time!

This commitment continues to deepen my knowledge and practice compassion, empathy, and patience for my fellow alcoholics, and myself. I am grateful to my first sponsor for setting me on the path to this level of service and to LA Central Office for the opportunity to participate in my sobriety.

~ Jen W, Chairperson of AA Central Office of Los Angeles

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The Road not taken

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,
And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

- Robert Frost
Part III - “The Great Boom”

In March of 1941, when the Saturday Evening Post published Jack Alexander’s article about AA, it was a major nationally circulated weekly magazine. It possessed an impeccable reputation for the honesty and scope of its articles. Bill W. knew that this article would place AA in view of main stream America. The fledgling LA Mother Group needed a plan, and quickly.

Mort J. realized then that they needed a phone for incoming calls, and Cliff agreed to have it installed in his kitchen. As soon as the article came out, Cliff finally became employed, so his wife answered all of the calls while Cliff worked.

Cliff W. later said that he was grateful to help people over the phone since it helped him feel useful for the first time in years. The calls started at about 500 per month and kept increasing. Frank R. took the callers’ contact info and dispatched the 12-step calls.
A t first he could only send one person on a 12-step call. Long-time member Harry C recalled that he went on a solo 12-call before he went to his first meeting. Neither he nor the caller ever drank again. As soon as possible, Frank sent three on 12-step calls. Cliff recalled that there were issues when a man was sent on a 12-step call to a woman.

Mort moved the now burgeoning Mother Group to an auditorium at 2200 W 7th St. It held 900 and it was packed during the meeting. Cliff noted that by the second half of 1941 there were 700 sober members in the group.

At the start of the “Post Rush” a young woman named Sybil showed up to the meeting on March 23d 1941. She recalled that at the start of the meeting the women were asked to leave, as they were presumed to be wives of the members. Sybil left and got drunk.

Later she called the AA phone number and got Cliff. He told her to go to the meeting again and tell them that she was an alcoholic and she would be able to stay at the meeting. She did, and became one of the first dozen women sober in LA AA, and the only one on the West Coast.

Sybil said that women started showing up to the group in droves. From then on, Sybil took all of the 12-step calls for women, and she sponsored the women in the group. Within four years she had started two women’s stag meetings in LA. Sybil also became one of the managers of the LA AA Central Office.
Part IV - “Difficult Choices”

Although the Mother Group was a great success, it was not without problems that would later be addressed by the 12 Traditions, which were not adopted until 1950. Early on, the group’s members became concerned by the number of members who got drunk again. They were fearful that this could threaten the existence of the group, which was the only one within a thousand miles. The group came up with the “B Squad” which was comprised of 12-steppers determined to bring slippers back to the fold. Cliff remembered that they could be quite aggressive.

One day Mort sent out the squad to get a member that they did not know. When no one came to the door, they looked in the windows to see a man passed out in a bedroom. They broke in and took him to sober up in the meeting. When he came to, they found out that he was the wrong drunk. Cliff noted that as of 1977, the man was still sober!

Eventually the squad ran out of luck. Two drunk members called Mort for help and he sent the squad, who promptly got drunk. When they called for help, more were sent, and they too, got drunk.
When they called for help, more were sent, and they too, got drunk. This was what was called a “whoppee party” back in the day, and the squad was deep-sixed for more spiritual practices.

Despite the frenetic growth of the Mother Group, many members relapsed regularly. Mort and Cliff feared for the group and came up with draconian solutions - they excluded all wet drunks from attending the meeting, and kicked out anyone in the meeting who even talked about drinking again.

As members relapsed, they created the now infamous Membership Committee. They put Frank R. on it even though he did not approve of it. He told the group that AA already had the ultimate membership committee working overtime - John Barleycorn and Mama Fate.

The committee had the power of judge, jury and executioner, and Cliff said they constantly fought over who would get banned from the group. The committee reached a low with the tragedy of Irma L, who was sponsored by Sybil.

On December 5th 1941, the committee, including Mort, Frank and Al M, wrote a letter to Irma banning her from AA for unstated reasons. They gave her a few days to appeal or otherwise her membership was terminated. Sybil said that Irma never came back and died drunk. Sybil let Bill W. know about this incident.

The power of the committee grew until their hammer fell on Mort himself and he was removed from the group that he started. Frank left the Mother Group in disgust, and Cliff started the Central Sunday Night Meeting to escape the politics of the group.

In retrospect, the Mother Group not only suffered from a lack of the 12 Traditions, but also from being geographically isolated in an era of expensive traveling and phone calls. The group members realized that their common welfare was important, but they reacted on their fears rather than the best practices of established AA back East.
When Bill W. first visited LA in November of 1943, he noticed LA AA’s growing pains, which he stated in AA Comes of Age as “appalling”. At the time, he suggested that AA start a Central Office. The sober community formed a committee, and it successfully raised the funds for the office.

LA Central Office opened July 1, 1944. It followed Bill’s advice, including fairly distributing 12-step calls to the groups closest to the caller. It also published a directory listing 43 meetings in 1945—a major accomplishment.

Bill wrote the 12 Traditions in 1946, the office circulated copies of them, and when the Traditions were approved, they brought an end to most of the issues which plagued the Mother Group.

The Mother Group closed its doors a few years afterward, but left a legacy of the many groups that its members started throughout the Southland.

By 1957, AA membership in LA totaled 14,000, and Bill described them to be “as solid as the Rock of Gibraltar.”
The earliest memory I have of my father is when I came down the stairs and saw him washing his underwear in the sink. I was little, but for some reason I knew he had peed himself. I can still remember the shame on his face when we locked eyes. I vowed never to turn into my father or to drink. I held true to that promise until I had my first drunk at the age of 15.

My first drunk made me feel like I could breathe for the first time in my life. I felt cool. I felt grown up. I felt like I had been given a secret key that I had been looking for my whole life. In college I found others who drank the way I did. We spent the better part of the 90’s traipsing around NYC’s queer scene. I bought into a prominent lesbian bar on the lower east side and drinking became intertwined with my “work.” Not surprisingly that business failed.

I was a full-blown alcoholic by then, and my business partners were both addicts. In time my drinking friends expressed concern for me. I thought they were hypocrites. I began to puke up blood when I drank. Every morning I woke up drenched in my own urine and shame trying to piece the night before together. Wash, rinse, repeat. I was stuck in Groundhog’s Day and had no way out. The promise I had made years before lay broken at my feet.

My anxiety skyrocketed. My therapist talked me into “auditing” AA. She said, “Just go and listen.” It was the best advice I had ever been given. I hated how much I related and between meetings I would drink to oblivion. But somewhere in there I finally admitted that I was an alcoholic. My sobriety date is October 4th, 2008. I have a sponsor, sponsees and we all work the steps. I’m a father to two kids who have never seen me drunk and with the help of this program, one day at a time, never will.
Denial is a powerful thing. But so is coincidence—or what we refer to as “happy accidents”.

When I was a teenager, drinking alcohol was a “naughty pleasure”. Everyone I knew did it, but unlike them, I didn’t do drugs, so why shouldn’t I give myself permission to indulge in a drink—or five? I wasn’t hurting anyone (except maybe myself).

In my 20’s, I drank mostly because I enjoyed it, although sometimes I drank to de-stress from work, or to cope with an emotionally challenging situation. By the time I was in my 30’s, I was drinking more than what was considered safe by most health professionals. So, I found a book at the library about “controlled drinking”, and started applying the techniques it outlined. I had a hard limit of 3 drinks per day, and it worked for a while. Until it didn’t. And suddenly I was drinking more than ever. But there always seemed to be someone around who drank more, and got way messier than I did, and whose life was way more tragic than mine!

I was in my mid 30’s when I happened upon Happy Accidents—Jane Lynch’s moving autobiography—that I started to have a sinking feeling that maybe I had a problem with booze. While I wasn’t ready to quit drinking, like hers, my hangovers were getting harder and harder to cope with. I related to the feelings of loneliness and exasperation that she described.

In 2016, I met a comedian named Zach, and I offered to buy him a “real” drink. To which he replied, “No thank you. I don’t drink alcohol.” When someone would say that to me, I would just roll my eyes and think, “Ugh, what a loser!” I asked, “How’s that going?” And he said, “Really well.” And I filed that away.

Later, I saw a free online seminar that caught my eye: “Taking Control of Your Alcohol”. There, a questionnaire asked 20 questions with just a yes or a no. I began to answer the questions, and most of my answers were “yes”. At the end, I hit “Submit”, and on the screen, I read the following: “Based on your answers, the likelihood is very high that you are an alcoholic.”

There had to be some mistake! The screen said: “We recommend that you immediately stop drinking alcohol, remove all the alcohol from your home, make an appointment to speak with one of our trained counsellors, and attend at least five meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous.”

I didn’t want to believe it!
Later, I found A.A. meetings near me, where people insisted that I get a “Big Book”, but I didn’t want to “waste” $6 dollars on a book I knew I didn’t need; so I picked up a copy at the library. Someone had told me to start by reading the personal stories in the section entitled Part II - “They Stopped In Time”. I didn’t know why, but I followed their suggestion. It began: 

*She finally realized that when she enjoyed her drinking, she couldn’t control it, and when she controlled it, she couldn’t enjoy it.*

As I poured over the words of this woman’s story, my heart raced, and my eyes began to well up with tears. I knew that her story was my story. I knew the truth: I was an alcoholic.

Had I never read Jane Lynch’s memoir, or met Zach, or taken that free seminar, or gone to those AA meetings… Who knows what might have happened? But on that warm day, in September 2016, sitting on that subway train, with the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous in my hand, I was finally ready to cross my river of denial—with the help of a few happy accidents.

- Robert K. Zone E Delegate

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**Thank God I’m Sober**  
Fridays, 7:30 am  
St. Thomas Episcopal Church  
7501 Hollywood Blvd  
Los Angeles, CA 90046

If it’s a lively, sober fellowship you seek, TGIS is the meeting for you.  
This 1 hour LGBTQ+ meeting has a 20 minute speaker, chips & cakes for sober anniversaries, as well as open, 3 minute sharing. There is also group meditation at 6:45 am in the smaller room.

The church is located on the corner of Gardner St. at Hollywood Blvd. There is ample street parking on Sierra Bonita Ave. Look for the building behind the church. Go to the larger room, which has sliding glass doors.

The meeting is open to all.

- Pete A.
Tradition Twelve:

“Moved by the spirit of anonymity, we try to give up our natural desires for personal distinction as A.A. members both among fellow alcoholics and before the general public. As we lay aside these very human aspirations, we believe that each of us takes part in the weaving of a protective mantle which covers our whole Society and under which we may grow and work in unity.

We are sure that humility, expressed by anonymity, is the greatest safeguard that Alcoholics Anonymous can ever have.”

Twelve Steps & Twelve Traditions Pg. 187
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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