Fall 2020

The Newsletter for Alcoholics Anonymous - Area 86

Focus

Carrying the Message During Difficult Times

Putting the Pieces Together Again

Hi, my name is Kirk and I am an alcoholic. I have been in and out of the AA program a few times over the last decade, so this time I am going to stay a bit longer and try a bit harder as my sponsor often says.

As I write, I am currently sixty days into ninety meetings in ninety days. I would wholeheartedly recommend this to anyone in early recovery as it really shows you how well this program works in so many different ways for so many different people.

I was recently at a meeting and 'judging/being judgemental' was the topic. The very next day at a meeting 'patience, tolerance and understanding' was the topic. I found it awesome that an issue was brought up in one meeting and what seemed like the answer was given in a completely different meeting.

This program reminds me of the time I started a jigsaw puzzle while in treatment. As I worked away at it, different people would periodically pop by and put a few pieces together. Even during the times when I was away for whatever reason, the pieces kept being placed in the puzzle. Needless to say, it didn't take long for the puzzle to be completed, not by one hand but rather through the effort of many. AA works beautifully in the same way because no one individual has all of the answers, but the fellowship will put the pieces together again.

Kirk G. St. Thomas, Ontario

Newcomer in Pandemic Times

Hi everyone. My name is Rob and I am an alcoholic. With the hand of Alcoholics Anonymous, I was able to get sober during the COVID 19 pandemic. I attended meetings virtually. At one point in my life I felt like there was no hope, that I would drink until it killed me. I was struggling badly with my mental health; with PTSD along with this horrible affliction of alcoholism. I was struggling 24 hours a day with suicidal thoughts and tendencies. My life was worth spit and I could not stop drinking. Alcohol once helped me… and we were great friends… now we are not… and I hate alcohol more than anyone! My family left me and I do not blame them. During this time my Dad-in-law gave me the number to AA. This was a new beginning. One I would love to share with all of you.

I picked up the phone and called the number. After a few minutes a gentleman called me back. It was interesting to see how many parallels we had. It was astonishing actually. Quickly I trusted this individual and joined an

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AA meeting online to see what it was all about. I was in a chat room filled with many loving individuals. They were so genuine, and I felt connected to them immediately. I bawled my eyes out the entire time. They were compassionate. They helped and held me. They gave me courage. The power of this group was overwhelming. They gave me strength. The tools I was able to acquire from this fellowship has truly changed me. I am a new man! I am so appreciative of AA. that words cannot express these feelings. I have experienced something completely new, a spiritual journey that will never end. A life filled and led by love. Incredible! I did not know this was possible. I have hope now.

Today is my sixth month of sobriety and I owe it all to the fellowship of AA. If you asked me six months ago if you could get sober virtually during COVID 19, I would have laughed at you! My prior thinking was completely inaccurate. The power of working this program with your sponsor and the fellowship provides results…. Period. My sponsor changed my life. I love the guy! I am so thankful for the time he has spent with me showing me the light, restoring my inner strength as well as my sanity.

There are many of us who have gotten sober virtually during this pandemic. To the old guard we are affectionately called Zoomers. I look forward to my meetings every week; to being surrounded by this fellowship of loving, inspiring, beautiful individuals. We are all on a journey together, experiencing something new. A journey I am honoured to be a part of.

On another awesome note, my family came home and my house filled with love!!

Thank you for my sobriety! Happy 24 hours to everyone.

Rob B District 6

Maintaining Anonymity During a Global Pandemic

To start off, thanks to the Area 86 Newsletter/ Website Chair for asking me to write this article. I was hesitant about writing this when I was asked to. I hadn't been very active in AA and felt very guilty about that, so the invitation to write this was very meaningful to me and got me back in touch with members.

As part of the research I did for this article, I spoke with two friends, one a past delegate (whom I'll refer to as P.D. from here on), and another who is a volunteer for the Telephone Answering Service for the District 19/Halton Service Office.

Thinking about what to write, my memory recalled what P.D. said to the area members at a fall assembly. He related that he had been talking to a friend of his who is a doctor, and that his friend assured him that a much greater pandemic than the original SARS would hit the world one day and it would "shatter the anonymity" of the Fellowship. The arrival of this pandemic, the doctor stated, was not a matter of *if* but *when*.

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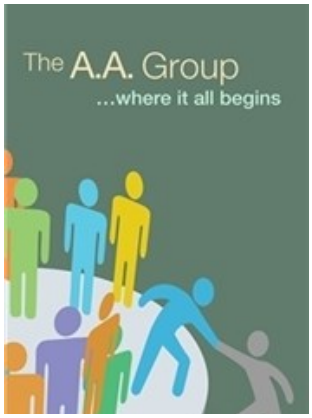
Well the *when* was this year. The disease spread rapidly and as the Province declared a state of emergency and things shut down, AA members scrambled to figure out what to do. Online meetings seemed to be the answer and it seemed to me that the General Service Office in New York supported this idea. But what about anonymity the P.D. asked me? He pointed me in the direction of the pamphlet, The AA Group ... where it all begins (P-16), where on page 8, under the heading 'Maintaining Anonymity at the Public Level' it says: "When appearing on radio, television, film or on the Internet, as A.A. members, we refrain from showing our faces or revealing our last names". Reprinted with permission of AA World Services Inc. The above graphic is used with permission of AA World Services Inc. ©



Every A.A. member should read this pamphlet and its reference to the internet. I had been thinking that our Founders would not have considered a pandemic and the internet when they wrote the Traditions. The P.D. reminded me that while they could not have foreseen the internet, they had both lived through two pandemics and two world wars. The A.A. Traditions were born because of difficult times in the fellowship, not because of the good times.

Even though G.S.O. (the General Service Office) includes online meetings on its website, it seems clear to me that those attending are breaking Tradition 11, myself included. But what about the newcomer and the still suffering alcoholic? You may ask, 'Is it worth breaking one Tradition if it spares a life?' A very good question and one I'm struggling with as I write this. The P.D. was adamant that he was not going on a crusade against those that attend online meetings, but he would not attend one himself. He has been meeting at least once a week with other members outdoors in a park. When asked how we could help a newcomer at the beginning of the pandemic, he suggested a simple answer… the phone, and now that the restrictions are being lifted, meeting in person.

There is one more caution about online meetings. There are many pieces of software that allow the user to copy screen images (print screen captures) and/or record video from the screen (video screen captures) without anyone else being aware that it is happening. I've used these programs in an effort to create online videos (nothing to do with A.A., simply something I've used as a teaching method). They are very easy to do, certainly well within even a novice computer users' capability. I don't want to scare anyone, but just want people to be aware.

In addition to online meetings, some groups have been manning the doors of their church every week at their scheduled meeting time, and if a newcomer arrives, they talk with him or her outside while social distancing from each other. This is your basic 12th step work.

Just as the P.D. had, I also became aware of meetings popping up outdoors as the weather grew warmer, and the restrictions as to gathering sizes were adjusted. I have been to a few of these meetings, with between 5 and 15 people attending, some of whom were very newly sober.

Wanted: Area Newsletter Committee Members
Must have a desire to give back to AA. Only minimal computer experience is needed. Please contact Rhonda at WebNews@Area86AA.org

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Lastly, there is a plethora of information available on the internet regarding A.A. Do yourself a favour and stick to official A.A. sites and don't go down the rabbit hole of conspiracy theories that are out there. A good place to start is your district's website, the Area website www.area86aa.org, G.S.O.'s website www.aa.org, and the A.A. Grapevine website www.aagrapevine.org. These four sites will give you plenty to read. Also, the Big Book and the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions are available on A.A.'s official website www.aa.org in a variety or formats including .pdf and audio. There are additional resources regarding meetings during Covid-19 at the A.A. website as well.

So what lies ahead? Once the cold weather sets in we can hope that some churches will allow us to meet. (Note: John wrote this article in August, before any churches had reopened). Other than that, I suggest we meet in small groups at members' homes or wherever possible, and participate in online meetings to whatever extent each person is comfortable.

The P.D. also said that we have a major rebuilding period ahead of us. Our service committees have not been able to meet and the very valuable work they do is going to require a lot of effort to get caught up. There is another major struggle - *money*. Those who are able, are encouraged to find a way to make 7th Tradition contributions in whatever manner they can. While your group and district may not have had to pay rent, literature must still be bought and websites paid for, to name a few of the usual costs. The Area has those costs as well and G.S.O. (the General Service Office in New York) has many, many more costs, so they need all the financial help we can give them.

Webmaster wanted: Must be an AA member with stable sobriety. Some website experience is necessary. Contact: WebNews@Area86AA.org

Thanks again to the Newsletter Chairperson for asking me to write this, and to my two friends who helped and provided guidance to me in the writing of this article. I couldn't have done it without you! I wish everyone well, and please stay sober and safe.

John P. District 19

Walking and Talking Recovery

A year ago, I didn't know the phrases 'global pandemic' and 'social distancing.' I had never worn a surgical mask and only used hand sanitizer on camping trips. The idea that the world would be fighting Covid19 and I would be self-isolating at home was unbelievable. The reality of the pandemic hit me in mid-March with closures happening across the Province. Like many alcoholics, I was overwhelmed with fear and uncertainty and asked myself, 'How am I going to stay sober without my meetings?' I'm the Accessibility & Remote Communities chair - and now we are ALL remote communities! Talk about irony.

I've always loved meetings, especially my Tuesday home group. Without that support I knew I'd have to find contact with other alcoholics in alternative ways. Virtual meetings and phone calls were great, but I'd also have to get out of the house or I'd go bonkers. So on St. Patrick's Day I posted on my District's online page "St Patrick's Day Ladies Walk 'n Talk…

Area Officers

Area Delegate: Sandi W.

Area Alternate Delegate: Jeff S.

Area Chair: Janice F.

Interim Area Treasurer: Dan D.

Interim Area Secretary/Registrar: Tammy S.

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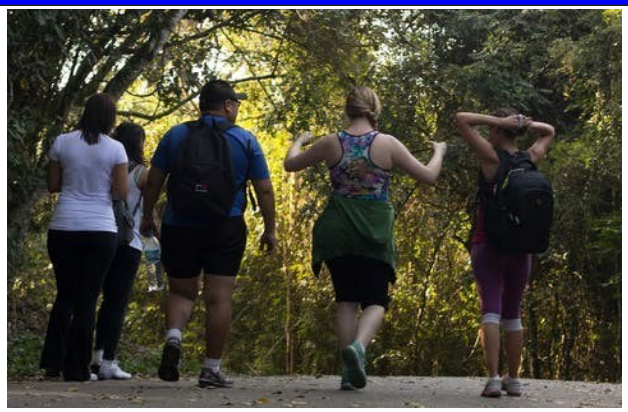

Today… 10 am at Springbank Park. Social distance walk. Dogs welcome. Wear green." To my delight, twelve ladies with various lengths of sobriety (and in various shades of green) showed up and we walked in a very noisy 'marching band formation' all over the park. It was wonderful.

We still meet every Tuesday morning. Lately we've been walking around a beautiful local cemetery supervised by deer, owls, and all kinds of woodland creatures. And do we talk! Sometimes about recovery, sometimes about life on life's terms, sometimes we just listen, and we always laugh. For me, it has saved my sanity and put some structure into weeks that have felt aimless and uncertain. I've made new friends and had more time with my sponsor. I always head home feeling better connected with my program and my Higher Power who I believe is walking with us. We started walking in the snow and then enjoyed watching spring bloom around us. This past summer, we melted in 35 degrees C, and now we are kicking through fallen leaves in our sweaters and mitts. What a gift these sober ladies are to my recovery during Covid. My walk 'n talk friends are carrying the message of recovery to me every Tuesday with fresh air, exercise, and love. I appreciate this so much.

~ Maureen T. Accessibilities and Remote Communities Chairperson for District 11

Going to Any Lengths

When COVID19 was declared a pandemic this past March, feelings of loneliness, fear, anxiety, and depression swept over me. 26 years ago, these same feelings of loneliness, fear, anxiety, and depression enveloped me. While not the same terror, despair, and powerlessness that I woke up to those years ago, I recognized this state. The fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous lifted me out of this place of restlessness, irritability, and discontent once again.

COVID19 has created a world entirely different from when I first walked in the doors of AA. It has robbed me of direct contact with other members where handshakes and laughter and pre-meeting chit chat were a given. More importantly however, the ease of welcoming newcomers and offering them the sense of belonging they are looking for has been taken away. Carrying the message of Alcoholics Anonymous has become an altogether different creature; yet I marvel as alcoholics in recovery have discovered ways to connect and make the seemingly impossible possible. We are getting sober and we are staying sober.

In the November, 1960 edition of the Grapevine, Bill W. wrote an essay that showed his remarkable foresight. In it he predicted that forms of communication would transform the way members connect with each other. Bill W. champi-

Newsletter Committee Members Wanted

Currently Seeking:

- Closet writers, proof-readers, editors
- Photography, design and technology buffs
- Recruiters, enthusiasts, and cheerleaders
- Team players and mavericks

Must have a passion for Alcoholics Anonymous, a desire to be of service, and a sense of humour. Contact the Newsletter Chairperson at WebNews@Area86AA.org

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oned these unimagined methods of joining together in order to carry our message of hope and compassion to those seeking a new way of life, providing our motives remained sound and unselfish.

What foresight our founder had!

Though reluctant at first, I joined my first virtual meeting in the very early days of the pandemic. Nerves and negativity over the newness of this meeting format vanished after my first few meetings and I sat back (in pajamas) and let go of judgement and chose to join in. How similar to the mindset I had when I went to my first meeting of AA and in time, let go of judgement and negativity and finally joined in. The message was carried and in despair, I received it. Through virtual rooms, the message is carried, and I watch in awe and gratitude as it is received by new friends near and far. A connection like no other that AA has given me at meetings is miraculously present in this new virtual world. Virtual tokens are presented and cheers are heard. Medallions and Big Books are delivered at the proper distance. Websites have become another channel to recovery. Newcomers have found us and remain sober. They are joining groups, attending meetings regularly, getting sponsors, and working the steps. They have joined this new way of life and are carrying the message of hope and healing to me and to others in these virtual rooms.

My concern is that the still suffering alcoholic is not reaching us and in these isolating times, they remain alone dying of this disease. My prayer is that alcoholics in recovery will continue to tap into their experience and creativity and find ways to attract those who want this new way of life. I gain confidence as I see sober alcoholics discover solutions to obstacles presented to them. I witness gratitude expressed not just through words but through actions.

Alcoholics Anonymous is a miracle born out of two alcoholics talking to each other and together, finding life out of their dark despair. For 85 years, AA has encountered problems that appeared impossible to overcome, but it has survived and life has been returned to countless alcoholics and their families. The message and spirit of Alcoholics Anonymous will continue to be passed on, one day at a time, to those who need and want it, COVID19 be damned!

Kathy H.
New Beginnings
District 6, Elgin

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Service Before, During and After COVID

In July of 1955, The Grapevine published an article written by co-founder Bill W. titled 'What is the Third Legacy?' (Language of the Heart page 160) In the article, Bill defines the third legacy as being the sum total of all the services provided by our fellowship. Bill describes service in AA as being anything at all that helps us to reach the still suffering alcoholic. It includes everything from a phone call to the operation of our General Service Headquarters in New York. It is our collective twelfth step in action. According to Bill, it is action that we *must* perform or our recovery may suffer and others will certainly die.

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So why did I get involved in service? Simple - you told me too. You said I needed to give back what was so freely given to me. But being at my home group for almost two hours on a Friday night before the meeting started? Setting up chairs and making coffee, this was giving back? This was helping the still suffering Alcoholic? Yes it was and it was also the start of me feeling as though I belonged.

I got to know the members and became a part of that group. I was there when a newcomer walked in the door. I was two months sober and I was able to take that shaking and scared person to the literature rack and share my experience (as little as it was at the time). Shortly thereafter, that man joined our Group and began helping me set up every Friday. I was there when a woman was brought in by an Al-Anon member. She had gone to the wrong program and Al-Anon brought her to us so we could help her. This is why I became involved in service.

Service is a lot of fun, at times a lot of work and even very challenging. I have learnt so much over the years and met so many wonderful people. I, like most of you, have found this year more challenging and difficult than any other. Saying that, I am so very grateful to be sober in 2020 and for the opportunities for growth.

I miss being in meetings and at events with all of you where the rooms buzzed with energy and enthusiasm. We must find ways to stay connected and keep the enthusiasm for service alive. Things may be different at the moment, but the need for our services is not going to go away. The prediction is that more people will be needing Alcoholics Anonymous and I for one want to do my part to ensure they find us and discover what I found when I entered the rooms for the first time. I found hope through a group of people who were recovering using the 12 Steps, who were united and living the 12 Traditions, and who were serving and following the 12 Concepts.

In the 70th General Service Conference Report, I read a piece written by the Area 93 Delegate, Jeff G. He would have to have submitted it around February of this year before everything began closing down. The article is titled 'Service: Keeping A.A. Relevant' and it hit home for me. You can find the Conference Report on our website . Jeff speaks about alcoholics being selfish people and how service takes us to a place of selflessness through helping others, and not just in the rooms but out in our communities as well.

I want to thank you, the members of Area 86, who are continuing on with service, who are trying new things, who are offering their assistance and support wherever or whenever possible.

We in Area 86 rocked before COVID. We will continue to learn and grow through the challenges that this pandemic has created for us and we will come out the other side. We may be different, but we will still be focused on our primary purpose - to help the still suffering alcoholic. As Bill said in 1955, we are a society of alcoholics in action and we must continue to carry the message, not only for others but to ensure we are sober for another day as well.

As always, your grateful friend in service and sobriety,

Sandi W.
Area 86 Delegate Panel 70

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Upcoming Events

Virtual Eastern USA and Canada Regional Forum December 5, 2020
The Theme Is: What It Was Like, What Happened and What It Is Like Now
There is no cost but we are asked to register in advance on www.AA.org website.

Area Committee Meeting on January 9 will take place on a virtually.

Area 86 Spring Assembly March 26 - 28, 2021 More information to come.

Many Thanks to All Who Contributed

- Kirk G. St. Thomas On
- Rob B. District 6
- John P. District 19
- Maureen T. Acc. Chair District 11
- Kathy H. Alt GSR District 6 (Co-Editor)
- Sandi W. Area 86 Delegate (District 19)

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A Declaration of Unity

This we owe to A.A.'s future; to place our common welfare first; to keep our Fellowship united. For on A.A. unity depend our lives, and the lives of those to come.

Reprinted from AA Service Manual combined with Twelve Concepts for World Service © 2018 with

Concerned about anonymity online?
Here are some links that will help you make informed decisions:

- Understanding Anonymity
- AA Guidelines on the Internet
- Anonymity online and Global Media
- The AA Group...where it all begins

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