



Sobriety in Stumptown

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Portland Area Intergroup
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May Stories and Art

Step Five and Tradition Five

by Eric K., Sobriety in Stumptown Editor

This month's newsletter submissions are focused on the Fifth Step and Fifth Tradition, as well as the second part in a three part series on relapse, and a section for art, inspired by the Big Book and the meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Step Five

by Kristen D. from Sherwood, OR

Reflecting back to my active drinking days I can remember being filled with depression and unbelievable anxiety. I would ruminate about calling friends the morning after a blackout drunk to find out what happened the night before. Those thoughts used to send shock waves throughout my body and paralyze me with fear. For me, crossing the imaginary line into obsession was when alcohol became a daily need to numb the pain of my depression, anxiety and to fuel my alcoholism. I found myself in a place where I was experiencing panic attacks and hopeless depression; the combination dominated my life on a daily basis. Not having or wanting the proper coping mechanisms to deal with life on life's terms was the catalyst for my true destruction. I didn't know how to live life. I spent a decade self-medicating with alcohol and it wasn't too long before the effects stopped working. I found myself in jails, hospitals and many other unfamiliar places, but I still was not willing to admit that I had a problem. However, I was willing to quit drinking on my own for long periods of time but they would soon follow by a destructive relapse. My final trip to the emergency room was September 8, 2012. I was told by the detox physician if I continued down this destructive road I would die. By the next morning, I was willing to admit total surrender to my disease. My mind, body and spirit were completely dominated by the mental obsession for alcohol and I felt a sense of extreme hopelessness when I

walked into my first twelve step meeting.

I spent a few 24-hours going to meetings and working the 12 steps work with a sponsor. Finally, I reached step five - "Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs." And when I first read it I was terrified. It felt like I was going to be like a confession and it gave me a ton of anxiety. For weeks I created the illusion that this step was impossible, and it was going to be the worst experience of my life. How was I going to be vigorously honest about all my deepest and darkest secrets with another human being? What I learned was that this step is designed to help you get honest and unload the weight of deep resentments, debilitating fear, escalated anger and consistent dishonesty. But I was willing to go to any lengths for my recovery so I pressed on. The fifth step wasn't easy but it brought everything dark in my life, to the light. It allowed me to let go of anger and resentments that I had been carrying on my shoulders for years. The action around this step gave me my first real taste of freedom. The ruminating thoughts about alcohol and all the terrible things I did lifted from my shoulders and my mind. Sitting across from another woman, looking her directly in the eye, and sharing thoughts and experiences I've hidden for years was a liberating experience. I traded in my ego for a taste of humility.

What I learned is that no matter what I had done in my past, I didn't have to carry the guilt and shame on my shoulders for the rest of my life. I was able to let go, turn it over to my higher power, and look the world in the eye again. Step five taught me how to forgive others and also how to forgive myself. I was able to move onto step six with hope and light in my heart and in my mind. AA is a miracle...

Step Five

by George D. from Portland, OR

Taking a big gasp of air, followed by the utterance, "Oh boy, breathe George, breathe." For those who know me, they know that is exactly what I do. But if we have to do this step, then let's get going. Working through Step Four, I came away learning a great deal about myself and my many shortcomings.

Step Four and Five revealed much of what led me to drink, and what kept me drinking: I am an alcoholic and that's we do. Step Four and Five also gave me the willingness to trust in a sponsor. How many times as an alcoholic have I thrown my hands up in the air and screamed, "I will never trust another human being for as long as I live!" And now this step is asking me to admit my innermost secrets to another individual? "Sure, let me know how that works out... Hey! I know; being an avid liar this shouldn't be hard."

However, I am no longer that same old liar; the guy that didn't give a crap about living. I was no longer that broken soul, stuck drowning in the bottom of a whiskey glass. Slowly peeling back the calloused layers of my heart, I found the human being I once was. Was it easy? No. Were it so, most people would've done it long ago.

If the Big Book had never have been written, the world would never know the goodness

contained in the many souls that Alcoholics Anonymous has revealed.

The human being I chose to share these things with was my sponsor, Gary T. He had never steered me wrong and I felt he never would. In addition to choosing him, I knew he cared about me and therefore he should know about me. “So with all the earnestness at our command, we beg of you to be fearless and thorough from the very start. Some of us had tried to hold onto our old ideas but the result was nil until we let go absolutely.” (Big Book, Pg. 10)

My sponsor had keys to the church where this new journey began so we sat down and worked out the Fifth Step. Gary impressed upon me the concept of, “just do the next right thing and in doing so, you’ll never have to do this step again.” There are of course instances you will remember that is resolved in the Tenth Step, but this foundation is critical to continuing the path of recovery.

Step Five

by Mike B. from Portland, OR

Personally, I think Step Five is one of the game changers in the process of becoming a RECOVERING alcoholic, because at this point your eyes have been opened and what remains is to declare to the universe that these are your faults, the choices you've made, the wreckage you've created. Here you own it, and you say so to God, to yourself, and to another human being. Perhaps it's your sponsor, or a trusted friend in the program, and you're sitting on a couch – you know God is in the room, so now you're ready to unburden yourself. It is very freeing and cathartic, and when you've done, you will know you've reached another milestone in your recovery.

I was raised in a very angry, guilt-ridden, harsh, strict brand of old school Catholicism, and I can tell you that this program has shown me true spirituality, as well as a concept of a LOVING God. For me, this step goes beyond the "sacrament" of confession, and is more meaningful and lasting than those religious rules and rituals. Going to meetings is my church, where I get the good word, and that word is honesty.

Tradition Five

by Riley S, Portland, OR

My home group calls itself a “primary purpose” meeting, which I struggled with for a while. In my mind the only thing that made it a primary purpose meeting was that we weren’t supposed to talk about drugs. My interpretation of the 5th tradition was this: anybody suffering from alcoholism would benefit from just about any message so long as it talked about recovery from alcoholism. In my case, my alcoholism took the form of ecstasy, mushrooms, LSD, marijuana, and a host of other substances and methods for checking off the planet. I believed that anybody suffering from alcoholism would be happy to hear about those substances because it might help them understand that alcoholism is really about our thinking and how we interact with the world. I was explaining this all to a sponsee as we were going through the 12 and 12, and he listened to what I said, then responded, “I think there’s plenty to talk about if I just talk about alcohol.” It was as if he hadn’t even heard my well thought out argument—one that I’d been working on for months—in response to what I viewed as the misconstrued interpretation of the fifth tradition by

my home group.

When I got asked to chair a meeting that also identified itself as a primary purpose meeting, I gave my sponsee's notion a shot and I chaired the meeting without talking about drugs. I experienced a lot of fear around that. I was afraid that without talking about drugs, I wouldn't be able to prove I was an alcoholic, that I wouldn't have experienced enough unmanageability or whatever else it is that we think qualifies us to be alcoholics. Turns out it was all in my head. I had plenty to talk about during the meeting, and my friend told me afterwards it was the most cohesive chair he'd heard me give.

I'm still forming my interpretation of the fifth tradition. Sometimes I might let it slip that I did a lot of drugs, or other times I might strictly focus on alcohol. It depends on the meeting and the people in the meeting. Like everything else in AA, I'm sure my understanding and interpretation of the meeting will continue to evolve. I know if someone comes into AA and wants to get sober from alcohol, and he only drank, he might be confused if I were to share the peculiarities of being arrested while high on mushrooms. It's a funny story and might get some laughs, but I can save that for the pizza restaurant after the meeting. For now, I need to remember that I can't ever drink alcohol normally, and focusing on my drinking during shares helps with that a lot. Maybe that's the reason the fifth tradition exists.

RELAPSE: HOW TO PREVENT IT... PART TWO: THE FIRST 40 YEARS OF AA

by Luke F. from Portland, OR

The early 1980's was a time of great upheaval in AA. I was working in Ventura California as a Facilitator in a DUI, Second Offender Program. I didn't start working in the Alcohol/Drug field until I was almost 8 years sober. When I worked in the Field I increased my AA Meetings, which is the opposite tact of most Counselors who either stop or decrease their number of meetings. This is why the recidivism rate amongst counselors is so high. They will tell you that they are immersed in the problem at work and meetings are either a buzz-kill or it left little time for other activities. Not true.

When I worked, I was an authority figure, a guy who provided answers for people who have often no clue on how vulnerable and precarious their situation actually is. The more they looked to me for answers, the more inflated my ego became. There was a time I really believed I was a *Savior* for those poor unfortunate other alcoholics. You see the problem is, as a Counselor, you really do have answers – but those answers, if you're not careful, can make you see yourself as less vulnerable and less in need. Meetings, and in my case, strong relationships with people who were not afraid to tell me the truth, helped me keep my "hats" separate. One hat said COUNSELOR and the other hat said AA MEMBER. I never had a problem separating the two because I knew it was a matter of life or death.

Some of the people I started sending to AA through my Counseling work were being told that their particular group did not sign court papers. "We are not the Court. Nobody can tell us to monitor you. If they start sending people to AA, then people will be arriving before they hit a bottom and wind up hating us. People will think AA is making money off the Courts." Many of the arguments made lots of sense and many of the people who attended back then (and now) had

no real interest in AA and were only there because they had to be. The Groups became very divided; half felt that AA would plant a seed that, even if it didn't work today, would be a catalyst to propel people back to AA when they were ready. Others saw it as ruining the program and filling meetings with people who knew nothing and didn't want to be there. Much of the early struggling within groups eventually settled into a workable framework, and for those who have been around a while, recognize that some of our most trusted servants started out with a court paper and a meeting schedule. For them it worked and for a greater number it did not.

I respect the fact that AA is a spiritual journey, which few want in the beginning. The book emphasizes over and over that without a "bottom" and without a "Higher Power" it is much more difficult to find success with us. It was not, in my opinion, a great notion to send people to AA against their will. Bar rooms are full of those who proclaim loud and clear: "AA doesn't work. I've been there." On closer examination, these same people rarely go beyond the Third Step, obtain a Sponsor, or become a part of a complex process, which, in the beginning, requires a commitment which many don't seem to understand. And AA is being rather cavalier in not realizing that the people who are sent to AA would certainly have at least some disgust for the process, since being at an AA meeting was not their idea in the first place. They need to be incorporated into the group with some modifications from people who arrive on their own. AA is like a minefield for anyone, but there are ways to make the transition easier. Some groups provide what amounts to a buddy system, which can be called anything, but is really just temporary sponsorship. I think many groups do not see the struggle newcomers have with just learning the lingo, or simply the identification and the differences and nuances between "addict" and "alcoholic". Without a person being instructed in the most basic AA protocol, how can they NOT wind up in a heap of trouble? This whole process would be much better off if it were formalized – and the groups who have taken the initiative have proven to be far more effective than those who do not.

Ever heard of a Group Inventory? No, it is more than just an individual spouting off opinions about his group or one that he has witnessed and not cared for. The actual Inventory process of a particular group is the same in importance as an individual inventory in the 12 Step process. In this case, a person is sent (usually by a Central Office) to a particular group, because they have requested it, and a formal meeting is held of the membership to determine (primarily) how effective the group is, particularly in the area of attracting new people into its fold. There is much more to it, but that is the major reason it is a worthwhile fact-finding process.

One of the major problems I face with people I sponsor, as compared to my own newcomer status, is the complete lack of available sponsees. My initial enthusiasm for AA was rooted in the intense work that AA provided to communities, work which is currently being usurped by Treatment facilities. We got new members right off the street and we figured out how to care for them, often poorly, but it helped us to gain our own sobriety and most important for all of us – a genuine process which kept us busy with AA for the first year. How exactly are those hours filled without 12 step work?

Next Month: How can people with time or people brand new to AA best survive and avoid Relapse

Art

by Kari F, Portland, OR



Monthly Business Meetings

For details about monthly business meetings, contact the PAI Office at 503-223-8569. Or send your questions or concerns to: 1212@pdxaa.org

Portland Area Intergroup (PAI): Business Meeting, 2nd Monday of every month, 7:00 PM, 4524 SE Stark St. (Unity of Portland), Portland.

Portland Deaf Access Committee: Monthly, 2nd Sunday of every month, 6:30, The Alano Club, NW 24th & Kearney.

Dist 9: 1st Wed, 6:30 PM, 24th and Kearney, Portland

Dist 10: Last Mon, 7:00 PM, 12945 Beaverdam Rd., West Side Service Cntr, Beaverton

Dist 11: Last Thu, 7:00 PM, "URS" Club, Portland

Dist 12: 1st Tue, 6:30 PM, 12x12 Club, 7035 NE Glisan, Portland

Dist 15: 1st Wed, 6:45 PM, 710 6th St., Oregon City

Dist 18: 1st Sat, 9:30 AM, 215 N 6th St., St. Helens

Dist 23: 1st Tue, 6:00 PM, Emmanuel Presbyterian, 19200 SW Willamette Dr., West Linn

Dist 24: 1st Thu, 6:00 PM, 5441 SE Belmont St., Portland

Dist 25: 4th Tue, 5:30 PM, Immanuel Lutheran Church, 39901 Pleasant Street, Sandy, OR

Dist 26: 2nd Sun, 5:00 PM, St Charles Church, 5310 NE 42nd Ave., Portland

Dist 27: 1st Mon, 7:00 PM, 11631 SE Linwood Ave., St. Paul's Methodist, Milwaukie

Dist 31: 2nd Tue, 7:00 PM, 937 NE Jackson School Rd., Hillsboro

Dist 34: 3rd Sat, 5:00 PM, 485 Portland Ave., Gladstone

Dist 35: 2nd & 4th Sat, 7:00 PM, 18926 SW Shaw St., Suite A, Beaverton

Dist 36: 2nd Thu, 6:00 PM, St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, 2201 SW Vermont St, Portland

Dist 37: 2nd Tue, 7:00 PM, Sherwood Community Center, 21907 SW Sherwood Blvd., Sherwood

Committee News

We have several committee positions available. Portland Area Intergroup needs your help. Working on a committee is excellent 12th Step service work. If you are interested in being on any Portland Area Intergroup committee, send an email to pdxaa.org with "COMMITTEE INTEREST" in the subject field. Or, just click on **Service** on the Intergroup website. **Intergroup committees carry the message of recovery to the still-suffering alcoholic.** Please help yourself and others. Sign up. Thank you.

Bridging the Gap (BTG): Provides a one-time temporary contact for people transitioning from a treatment center to AA meetings. BTG meets the second Monday of each month at 6:30 PM at the Portland Intergroup Office basement, located at 825 NE 20th Ave, Suite 200, Portland. "We Bridge the Gap so alcoholics leaving treatment don't have to walk alone across that scary gap between the beginning of recovery in treatment and the continued recovery in AA." Please contact the PAI office via phone, 503-223-8569, or email 1212@pdxaa.org, if you are interested.

AA Hotline: The AA Hotline keeps the Portland phone number for AA active 24 hours a day, every day of the year. The way this is accomplished is by volunteer support. Calls to the AA number placed after Central Office hours and redirected to volunteers' phones, keeping the volunteer's number anonymous. A volunteer can elect to go on a 12th Step call or just provide the information the caller needs about meetings. Commitments are generally two times a month. In particular, if you're a night-owl, we'd really appreciate your help. Call the Central Office for more information at 503-223-8569.

Newsletter (*Sobriety in Stumptown*): The committee for the very publication you are now reading is looking for members. Send an email of interest to: newsletter@pdxaa.org

Events: The Events Committee needs committee members. Send an email to Events@pdxaa.org for more information.

Get Published!

If you have AA news, a meeting change, a big event, a story, a painting, a poem, or just a rant, *Sobriety in Stumptown* wants to hear it! Send articles of 1000 words or fewer to: newsletter@pdxaa.org

Deadline for the June issue: June 1st.

Step Five

"Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs."

Tradition Five

"Each group has but one primary purpose – to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers."

Serenity Prayer

"God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference."

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