



December 2020
Volume 15 | Number 12

A PUBLICATION OF THE INTERGROUP CENTRAL OFFICE OF SANTA CLARA COUNTY

In this December issue: Step Twelve, Tradition Twelve, and Service



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Writing for the COIN

Q: Who writes the COIN?

A: You do.

This is a publication forum for your personal stories celebrating sobriety and recovery. We welcome your stories, opinion pieces, learnings, questions, thoughts and ideas.

Q: What about sketches, photos, art and flyers?

A: Yes, please!

These are all welcomed and appreciated. We want to give A.A. members a chance to publish their original artwork and photos. We are not a glum lot and love humor, so please send in jokes and cartoons as well. We want the COIN to have a comprehensive listing of all upcoming events and flyers; email your event info as early as possible.

Q: What do I write about?

A: There are monthly newsletter topics that can be found in the COIN.

Each month's topic is Step X, the Principle behind Step X, and Tradition X, where X is the number of the month. January=1 and December=12. For example, January's topics are Step One, Honesty, and Tradition One. Stories about a month's holidays or historic events are also accepted. For example, articles pertaining to a new year/new start in January, relationships and romance in February, stories about the founding of A.A. in June, independence in July, gratitude and giving thanks in November, etc. can all be fitting subject matter.

Write your stories in the first person (using "I" statements). Share your sobriety experience, strength, and hope: the wisdom you've gleaned, the mistakes you've made, the fun, the troubles, and humor you've found in recovery. If you hear something at a meeting that makes you see things in a different light, write about it. If you have stayed sober through a difficult experience, write about it. Help us teach and learn from each other. Most importantly, help carry the message of A.A.

Q: What are the submission deadlines?

A: Deadlines are published in each month's COIN.

If you miss the deadline, you may still send materials, but they may be saved for inclusion in a future COIN publication. Stories and art are published at the discretion of the COIN editor and the Central Office executive director.

Q: Anything else?

A: Yes.

Please keep the Twelve Traditions of A.A. in mind as you write. Take special care to respect other members' anonymity. Have fun!

Send your contributions to: coin@asaanjose.org

Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

Wishing you all a sober, joyous, and safe holiday season as we close out this incredibly eventful year of 2020. Thank you to the many members who contributed to the COIN this past year. I am extending an invitation to the rest of the fellowship to send your stories, artwork, cartoons, and ideas. You will notice some changes to the format of the COIN moving forward. Geena Louise has joined the COIN team as a fellow editor, and I am incredibly grateful to her for all the work she has put in over the last few months. I could never have imagined how abundant and beautiful a sober life could be. I did not believe you when you told me. It has been something I have had to experience for myself. The beginnings were painful, but I held on to what a fellow A.A. told me my first week of sobriety ~four years ago. She told me to hold on, "It gets better." It has, and it does. As we continue to shelter in place here in Santa Clara County, I pray for blessings and peace for our fellowship. Happy Holidays to All!

Sincerely,
Mel M
COIN Editor

COIN Editors: Mel M and Geena Louise R

Central Office Executive Director: Bruce K

Sunlight of the Spirit Art Corner: Elizabeth M, Website: Phil W

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COIN Schedule of Topics

Newsletter Issue Month	Submission Deadline	Step & Tradition	Virtue
January	15-Dec	1	Honesty
February	15-Jan	2	Hope
March	15-Feb	3	Faith
April	15-Mar	4	Courage
May	15-Apr	5	Integrity
June	15-May	6	Willingness
July	15-Jun	7	Humility
August	15-Jul	8	Love
September	15-Aug	9	Justice
October	15-Sep	10	Perseverance
November	15-Oct	11	Spiritual Awareness
December	15-Nov	12	Service

Next Month's Issue (January 2021)

Topics: Step One, Honesty & Tradition One

Please email all submissions to coin@aasanjose.org.

A Life of Joy and Happiness I Reap More Than My Share

Understanding is the key to right principles and attitudes. And right action is the key to good living; therefore, the joy of good living is the theme of A.A.'s Twelfth Step (*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, pg. 125). How appropriate it seems that there are twelve months in a year, and we have twelve steps in the program. The joy of good living is the theme, which blends right in with Thanksgiving in November and all the religious holidays in December. It is topped off with the New Year's Eve celebration. This time of year does bring a lot of joy to most of us. But it also brings distress to some of the less fortunate ones, inside and outside of A.A, who haven't yet been blessed with the gift of sobriety and peace of mind.

I used to be very uncomfortable about the holidays as I never knew how to act around normal people. I felt like a charity case and never got into the spirit of reaching out to others. My family always celebrated Christmas. Due

to my discomfort, I always would put a damper on it by complaining about the tacky gifts that people would buy for each other, the mad rush to go shopping, and all the commercializing. I explained this to a dear friend once, and he asked "*Does the rest of the family enjoy it?*" I said *yes*. He then said "*Why don't you just take a back seat and watch the joy in their eyes as they experience these things?*" I did that exact thing, have been doing it ever since, and it has changed my appreciation of this time of year.



This change of attitude has inspired me to apply the unselfish lessons that I've come to understand, and I spend the holiday season looking for the opportunity to brighten the lives of those less fortunate than myself. I often do these things

anonymously and without fanfare. I also consider how I used to feel when I was the one on the receiving end of a charitable gesture and am very careful to do these things in a way that preserves their dignity. I don't have to wait for the holidays to do these things. Every day is Christmas at my home.


 The image shows the Chinese characters '申' and '暢' (shēn chāng) in a large, bold, black font. The character '申' is on the left and '暢' is on the right. They are both in a traditional, slightly stylized font.

Chinese Symbol for Happy,
Joyous, Free, Unimpeded, Fluent

More recently I started to contemplate the difference between Joy and Happiness. I always thought that they were synonymous, and they are in some respects, but they do have some different qualities. I am generally a very happy person as the result of being very diligent when it comes to working the steps of the program and practicing the principles in all my affairs. I am not without the little inconveniences and irritations that come with my day to day

living activities. But they are nowhere near the problems I encountered prior to becoming a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. They do not lower my level of happiness because I simply take them as they come. Over a period, as I mature in this journey, my *mean* level of happiness continues to rise, and I am generally very happy as the result.

When I look at the word Joy, I do not feel that I am in a constant state of Joy, but I do have many little things that happen on a day-to-day basis that rise above my state of happiness and they sometimes bring tears to my eyes. We all can identify with the term "tears of joy." Even unhappy people can have tears of joy occasionally. I was introduced to the principle that "happiness is a byproduct of right living and not an end in itself." I have been living by that principle ever since and you can believe me when I tell you that I reap more than my share of joy.

- Rick R

Focus on Women: Step Twelve

Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

One of the many phrases we hear in the rooms of A.A. that sounds like a paradox is *“We keep our sobriety by giving it away.”*

Sobriety is not something that we use up. The more we practice it, the larger it gets. Sobriety is not a physical object, but rather it is a spiritual entity.

We are all Recovery Amateurs

For us, there is so much power in one alcoholic helping another. Many of us have had conversations about our drinking with family and doctors only to exclaim *“You don’t get it. How can you possibly understand the complexities of my life?”* But when speaking with another alcoholic, we hear believable similarities. An alcoholic in A.A. does not have special interests as a family member might. They are not a paid professional with an agenda.

They are just an alcoholic who has found a solution to the drink problem by practicing the A.A. 12-Step Program.

We share our stories of shame, humiliation, anger, or depression. We realize we are not unique and don’t have to try to get sober alone. Sobriety is a gift that helped us get our life back. It is fulfilling to share this gift with those who are still suffering from the alcoholic disease.

In carrying the message to other alcoholics, we describe our recovery journey of experience, strength, and hope. We don’t try to save them, give them advice, nor criticize them. We offer the wisdom that we ourselves learned from other alcoholics who stay sober.

One of the Promises says, *“God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.”* Unsaid is that *“God will not do for us what we can do for ourselves.”* We must remember that we carry the message, not the alcoholic. Also, we need to continue to practice self-care to stay sober. As they announce on airplane flights, *“Put on your own oxygen mask before assisting others.”*

In telling our story, we may see more deeply into ourselves. Sometimes we don't know who we are or how we got from there to here until we describe our journey to someone else. So, our sharing continues the upward spiral. — Dr. Stephanie Covington

A Women's Way Through the Twelve Steps, (Center City, MN: Hazelden Educational Materials, 1995).

Spiritual Awakening

A “*spiritual awakening*” sounds like a big mystical event such as a “*burning bush*.” It is rarely that dramatic and usually happens gradually as an educational experience. Sometimes we may have an epiphany: a sudden realization, understanding, or enlightenment. These essential awakenings take on many forms among different people, but also within a single individual. We awaken to the idea that alcohol gets in the way of our freedom to make good life choices.

You may feel that your spiritual journey is confirmed and validated as you hear other women speak of their own spiritual awakening. You may recognize new aspects of your

spiritual awakening as you hear similarities in other women's stories.



We Carry the Message in Many Ways

In some circumstances, we may make a 12-Step Call either in person or over the phone. We speak to someone in need of support about how our recovery works for us. We explain what it was like, what happened, and what we are like now. If needed, we can reassure them that A.A. is not a religious program. Emphasize that they can forget about other people's idea of God and truly form their own concept of a Higher Power.

There are many ways we carry the message. We may share a 15-40-minute summary our whole recovery story such as when we are the main speaker (chairing) at a meeting. But most often, we carry the message in 3-4 minute nuggets of wisdom in topic discussion, step study, or book study meetings. When we are an A.A. Sponsor working the steps with

another woman, we carry the message in our one-on-one meetings.

A.A. meetings must be safe zones for anyone to feel safe to honestly share their experiences. We don't advise or criticize someone's share. We may say that we identify with them and share our own experience. It is important that newcomers honestly share their struggles at A.A. meetings. It enables the newcomer to learn using their own words. And, it reminds the long-timers of experiences they may have forgotten.

We allow ourselves to depend on others and enable them to depend on us. We don't have to do it all alone.

- Geena Louise

Jingle Bells

It was a cold clear night in December. The stars were blazing across the sky and my breath was making fog. Another A.A. member and I were waiting outside the Santa Clara County Correctional Facility for the other H&I (Hospitals and Institutions) teammates to show up so we could take a meeting inside. Up they came and we entered the clearance station together.

"Well Mr. J, it appears that your clearance has expired" said the

guard! Oh no, I had forgotten to get my paperwork updated in time for a smooth clearance renewal. Disappointment washed over me. It looked like I was going to have a meeting for one in the waiting room while the rest of my team entered the facility. Oh, well, I was sure my clearance would be good by next month and I settled down with this month's latest Grapevine to pass the couple of hours until the boys returned.

As I was musing about an article on being of service, I heard far off in the distance the twinkling of sleigh bells. There was a sort of rhythmic pulse to the ringing, as though someone was dancing with bells on their shoes. I rose to the window to see who was coming and I saw what appeared to be a young mother with a small boy and slightly older girl coming towards the Facility entrance. The children were dressed up as for a



Christmas parade; the girl had a fairy outfit with small wings and the boy was dressed as an elf with bells on his shoes. The mother

led them up the guard station as the kids danced around her.

At first their discussion was low key. Then I heard the mom raise her voice and say, *"But we came all the way from Fresno, over 2 hours and the traffic was horrible!"* There was so much emotion in her plea; the bells stopped ringing. *"I'm sorry mam but you must be here before 8 pm in order to get on the admissions list. It's 8:15 and I simply cannot allow you"* I heard a wail from the little boy *"Mommy we are going to see Daddy, right Mommy?"*

I sort of slunk down in my chair, knowing a lost cause when I saw one. The correctional facility has rules, and they are inviolate, can't be bent no matter the reason. I saw tears in the little girl's eyes and looked back at my Grapevine. *"But we can't come back tomorrow",* said the mom, *"I had to take off work to get here in time. Please?"* *"I'm sorry mam, I cannot allow you to enter, you will have to return another time."*

I watched as the mom with the two children walk back to the parking lot, all the spring out of their step. I thought about how

many dads that were locked up because of some stupid mistake, one often having to do with drinking alcohol, that led them to having to miss the holidays with their young children. I thought about all the men I had talked to while in the facility who said that it would be different this time, only to see them back in jail a few months later. There was so much frustration and missed opportunities wrapped up in those decisions which affected not only the inmate but their partners, children, siblings, parents, co-workers, not to mention the people who may have been hurt or killed by those unthoughtful and often selfish choices. I was so glad to be sitting in the waiting room, not sitting inside waiting for a loved one or my family to show up for a brief holiday celebration. You know we really do have it all in the program. It serves us well to remember how close to disaster we are when we stray from the principles of the program.

The A.A. members came out of the facility and we got in our cars and drove home. I was again so grateful to be a member in A.A.

active in service. It is so much better being of service than being served.

Practice These Principles in All Our Affairs

Principles are Not Flexible

When I entered the program of Alcoholics Anonymous, I identified with just about everything I had read and heard. I began to recognize where I went wrong up to that point. I realized that I had no direction in my life, no moral compass to speak of. That the failure in my personal relationships manifested itself in low self-esteem (self-loathing). I felt inferior, unworthy, disrespected, isolated, unappreciated, disliked, etc. I was going to have to depend on something outside of myself to govern my judgment and my decision-making.

One of the first default positions I would take to surrender to these new realities was to concede to the fact that, as an alcoholic, my brain did not process information properly, and that I was going to have to trust in something more

reliable. Living by Principles, *What a Concept!* There are people who believe that if we all lived by one simple principle, we wouldn't need any other laws on this planet, and that principle is The Golden Rule: *"Do unto others as you would have others do unto you."* That simple statement gave me an understanding of how I could begin adopting a value system based on principles, where I did not have to originate my own rules.



While reading a book on economics, the author stated that *"A man who lives by principles has 99% of his decisions already made for him"*. With that in mind, I began to establish a system of principles that are consistent with the A.A. program, and, I might add, with most of the other successful philosophies of life. I

would read the St. Francis Prayer (*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, pg. 99) daily. I attend a step study meeting weekly to reinforce these principles. I try to make sure that I am not modifying these standards to evade the tougher actions.

I was complaining about another member of our group one day to one of my mentors at that time. He suggested that I try to place *principles before personalities*. I responded, yes, but I do not agree with his principles. He then said it was not his principles that we are talking about, but that it was my principles that needed to change. He then informed me that we cannot be selective about who and when we apply these values. I must treat everyone with respect, and that goes for the smallest, innocent child to the most errant rogue that I might encounter. I know that it seems like an impossible task, but I assure you that if you start with the child and work your way to the rogue, it will get easier, if you don't let your ego convince you otherwise.

There are many suggestions in the Big Book (*Alcoholics Anonymous*) and the 12 & 12

(*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*) that have given me plenty of material to work with so that this does not have to become a crisis management project. It is more like a lifelong pruning of my unwanted, destructive behaviors. Here are a few of those suggestions:

- Practice restraint of tongue and pen.
- Drop the word blame from your thoughts and speech.
- Stop fighting everyone and everything
- Cash-register honesty means I must be honest with everyone, not just the person at the Cash-register.

If we all had amnesia, we would all be pretty much the same. The only thing that makes us different is the things we carry around between our ears. It may be time to reprogram the mental software to default to the principles that have been proven to work so well for so many. No one could ever fault us for living by the principles that we learned in A.A.

- Rick R

Listening

G: So many things are difficult. In the last few months, I've been on the phone supporting some of my sobriety sisters. They tell me that I am a good listener, and they can tell me anything since I am non-judgmental. I am grateful that I can do that for people.

F: It's definitely a gift to be a good listener. I've found people in program - especially my sponsors - to be good listeners, especially kind, yet very truthful with me.

It was their willingness to listen without judgment, to get me to share openly with them (as honestly as I able to be) and then for them to pull my covers (with kindness). This is what got me to a place of self-acceptance, and to a willingness to look at the hard stuff I didn't want to face.

When my sponsors combined active listening with the ability to speak to me about the really hard stuff, to truthfully, yet tactfully (with loving intentions), to call me on my particularly stubborn nature, I discovered that I could do things I never thought possible: like put down the bottle, put away the pot, stop being a people pleaser, and stop picking up the sugar and flour. In other words, face my demons!

In the light of my sponsor's honest assessments, I could stop the denial and the delusions, and really see how I had been lying to myself about my addictions.

Being a good listener is a valuable trait. When we can get gut level honest with members of the fellowship, it takes things to the next level.

Tradition Twelve

“Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.”

Long Form

And finally, we of Alcoholics Anonymous believe that the principle of anonymity has an immense spiritual significance. It reminds us that we are to place principles before personalities; that we are actually to practice a genuine humility. This to the end that our great blessings may never spoil us; that we shall forever live in thankful contemplation of Him who presides over us all

Practice these Principles

1. Why is it a good idea for me to place the common welfare of all AA members before individual welfare? What would happen to me if AA as a whole disappeared?
2. When I do not trust AA's current servants, who do I wish had the authority to straighten them out?
3. In my opinions of and remarks about other AAs, am I implying membership requirements other than a desire to stay sober?
4. Do I ever try to get a certain AA group to conform to my standards, not its own?
5. Have I a personal responsibility in helping an AA group fulfill its primary purpose? What is my part?
6. Does my personal behavior reflect the Sixth Tradition—or belie it?
7. Do I do all I can do to support AA financially? When is the last time I anonymously gave away a Grapevine subscription?
8. Do I complain about certain AAs' behavior—especially if they are paid to work for AA? Who made me so smart?
9. Do I fulfill all AA responsibilities in such a way as to please privately even my own conscience? Really?
10. Do my utterances always reflect the Tenth Tradition, or do I give AA critics real ammunition?
11. Should I keep my AA membership a secret, or reveal it in private conversation when that may help another alcoholic (and therefore me)? Is my brand of AA so attractive that other drunks want it?
12. What is the real importance of me among more than a million AAs?

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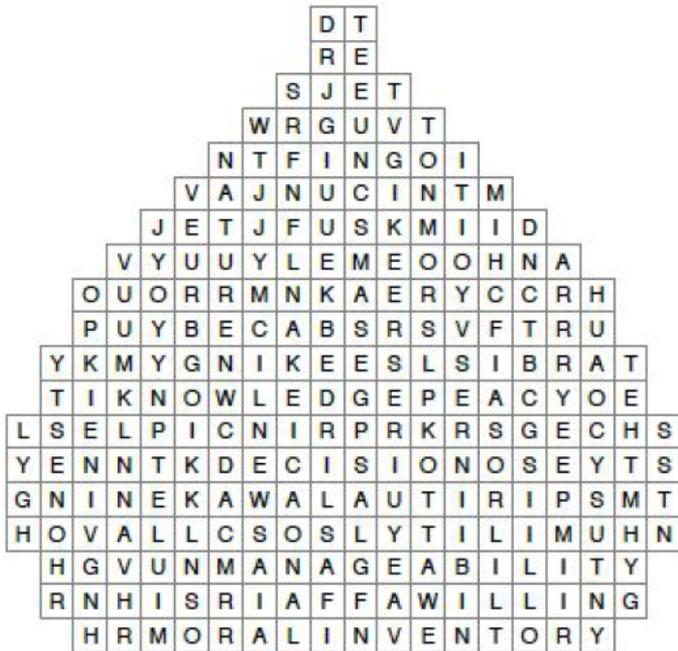
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www.aagrapevine.org

Recovery Word Search Puzzle

(Contributed by Polly S and Kyczy H)

7. TWELVE STEPS GUIDE US



ADMITTED
AFFAIRS
DECISION
FEARLESS
HONESTY
HUMILITY
INJURY

KNOWLEDGE
MESSAGE
MORAL INVENTORY
NATURE
PRINCIPLES
SEARCHING
SEEKING

SERVICE
SHORTCOMINGS
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING
TURN IT OVER
UNMANAGEABILITY
WILLING

The Twelve Steps give us a road map to a new way of life.

About Our Central Office

Central Office is *Physically* closed but open *Virtually*.

Monday, Thursday, Friday: 10AM to 4:30PM

Tuesday, Wednesday: 10AM to 6:30PM

Saturday and Sunday: Closed

Please [Click Here](#) for more Information about Central Office Holiday Hours.



Central Office now offers Curbside Service!

Here's How it Works

- **Call** Central Office with your order.
- We will take your order and credit card information.
- Your order will be available for curbside pick-up on:

Saturdays ONLY from 10am – 2pm