

GRAPESCCIN

December 2023

Steps to Freedom	p. 1
Twelve Ways to Spend a Happy Holiday	p. 2
Three Poems	p. 3
A Desire...The Result	p. 4
K.O.'d by Alcohol	p. 5
The Lower & Higher Spirits of Step 12	p. 6
From the General Service Chair	p. 7
Sobriety Milestones	p. 8
Events.	p. 9

Intergroup minutes and reports are now published on our website:
<https://aasantacruz.org/documents/>

Steps to Freedom

By Sean T., Santa Cruz

My innumerable failed attempts to control or abstain from drinking can be traced to the absence of any kind of God in my life, I believe. Any determination to quit, no matter how fierce, had been doomed. Coming to after another emotional bottom, my mind was always made up: I had changed, and there should never be a reason to drink again. But, seemingly without my consent, my mind would revert, a drink would appear in my hand and alcohol would flow through my blood.

I lacked a God that could restore me to sanity; alcohol was the only God I'd ever known. I prayed to it day and night. Alcohol watched over me and kept me safe in my darkest moments. It was my savior, my only solution. After another spree, I would swear never to drink again and vow to abstain from alcohol.

Unfortunately, I had no conception of God, so alcohol remained my God no matter how determined I was that this time would be different. And alcohol could change my mind. So when the going got rough, as it does, I had no savior but alcohol. Against all better judgment, I would drink again. That cycle would have continued until I ended up in a hospital, in jail or dead.

The cycle would be broken only by doing the 12 Steps with my sponsor, and by identifying and building a relationship with a God of my own understanding. He who presides over us all. He who has all knowledge and power. A God who is loving, forgiving, and teaching. A God who can restore me to sanity, upon whom I rely, and who keeps me from taking the first drink.

When my God has changed - not just me - I am truly ready to abstain from drinking, one day at a time. The drink is no longer my guiding force, and this new God consciousness allows me to ask what I should be doing, who I should be helping, and how I should go about doing it. I must maintain the sequence of my spiritual life: to God, to myself and to another human being. This sequence is stated many times in A.A. literature, and it is a rule of thumb my sponsor has shared with me. I use it to maintain conscious contact, to ensure God is a part of my life, and to let God work through me so I may be of maximum usefulness to others.

I am grateful this God is available to all who seek. I hope all those who haven't experienced what it is like to freely give themselves to this kind of God can one day become at least willing to do so. We don't have to commit forever and we don't have to be ready; we just have to do it. Surrender our will, surrender alcohol, surrender our lives, and suddenly the intense responsibility we thought we had over these things can vanish; we can begin to feel at peace. We can think about people other than ourselves. We can experience true freedom from worry about relapse, and from the seeming doom we face when we think about tomorrow, or yesterday. God exists in the present moment. That moment is where we have the opportunity to experience, understand, grow and be useful. We can surrender and let God work through us in the simple way outlined in the 12 Steps and Traditions. This is available to anyone, if they are willing.



Twelve Ways to Have a Happy Holiday

By Michaela W., Aptos

My very first sober holiday came just days after I got sober. After getting loaded in the bathroom before a short trip to the Watsonville Hospital Alcohol and Drug Treatment Center, I established the super-cool sobriety date of 12/20/99. This means a couple things: First, I can claim I got sober in the '90s! Second, I spent the full-moon solstice, Christmas and the Y2K Millennium New Year in rehab.

I benefited greatly from H&I. Every day I engaged with 12-Step literature, especially that little yellow book "Living Sober," and a wonderful woman took me to my first "outside" meeting before I was released. Otherwise, I recuperated with a wild case of insomnia, smoking cloves on the porch, and listening to my portable CD player with only three CDs on hand as I watched the fireworks across the bay over Monterey.

Sobriety anniversaries can be funky, let alone celebrating them during the holidays, a challenging time for us alkies. I am so grateful for all the people who are of service during this time, and I take their example to heart. It's been a few years now since those old rehab days, and I've come to rely on a few lessons, given to me by other alcoholics, for surviving the holidays.

This year I've been rocketed into the 4th dimension in so many ways. This is helpful to remember in years that are particularly challenging. Those difficult times don't last forever. According to the Big Book, all we have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition. One day at a time, just 24 little hours, and some days just a minute at a time, I get to live, thanks to Alcoholics Anonymous. Wishing you all a very happy and sober holiday season!

ADVANCE PLANNING

I check out meetings in advance or arrange for online meetings. I also let folks know our plans in advance. And it's OK to change plans and say NO.

1.

TAKE MY OWN TRANSPORTATION

This is a big one. I don't have to worry about being in anyone's car. If any situation is too uncomfortable or feels like a sobriety threat, I can leave.

2.

AVOID ISOLATION

It's so difficult for this introvert NOT to isolate during the holidays. But alcoholism loves isolation. If all I do is reach out to other members to ask how they're doing, it will benefit my recovery.

3.

TAKE TIME FOR REST

Plan down-time for rest and relaxation. Prayer and meditation are critical. Feelings and grief are big for me at this time of year, and paying attention to this is vital. So is sharing how I'm feeling and thinking.

4.

GET MY BUTT TO A MEETING

This is a no-brainer. There are so many great alcathons & 24/7 meetings. I can access our fellowship at any time. Anything I can do to get into conscious contact with HP is great.

5.

BRING LITERATURE

Every once in a while I'll be on a long trip, or far enough away that I don't have easy access to meetings. Having my phone or favorite literature on hand is fabulous in a pinch.

6.

BRING A FRIEND

Luckily I usually travel with my best friend, who also is a recovering alcoholic. Before that, it was helpful to bring a buddy who is also doing the deal, and to hang out with family and friends who are sober.

7.

KEEP A CUP ON HAND

Early in recovery I wasn't confident enough to turn down offers of alcohol. I didn't know what to say. A full cup in my hand let folks know I was good. I didn't need to explain anything.

8.

REMEMBER THE SLOGANS

"Easy Does It" and "Keep It Simple" have been lifesavers. Also, "H.A.L.T." I try to make sure I don't get too hungry, angry, lonely or tired during the next few months.

9.

BE OF SERVICE

I can avoid events I don't want to go to by taking a commitment. Being a secretary for an alcathon meeting, party planning or H&I are all ways for me to pay it forward in recovery.

10.

BE GRATEFUL

Making a list. Checking it twice. When I look around at all my blessings, especially in our Santa Cruz County fellowship, how can we not be in awe?

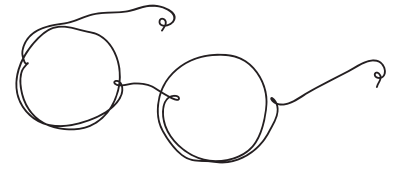
11.

ABSOLUTELY INSIST ON HAVING FUN

We are not a glum lot. I did not get sober, and wouldn't have stayed sober, if I didn't experience the incredible joy recovery brings.

12.

“I” Glasses



Be careful where you step
My glasses were the victim of
An assault
Not to worry. I picked them up piece by piece trying to
Save my dignity
Don't drink and drive
Don't walk and talk after you drink and drive
Some things cannot be pieced back together,
I see now, but only through one eye

Three Poems

By Tom D., Aptos

I Open My Mouth and ...

I open my mouth and
“I” fall out
My teeth stay in
They are loyal soldiers
Perhaps I'll be quiet
Next time

What Is Life?

What is life?
An easel with pictures
Overlapping.
Where is God?
Oh ... he's just clapping.

A Desire ... The Result

By Tom W., Santa Cruz

Okay, bear with me here. It's not like I'm one of those (ewww, those!!!) who think the Big Book was some kind of lost tablet on Mt. Sinai, or that the Steps are "God's will in the world" (heck, I don't even buy the notion that God has something we should call a "will" - which probably makes me a marginal A.A. myself ...) or even that Bill and the gang had "divine inspiration" - whatever that is. But something keeps coming up for me when I sit in A.A. meetings and hear How It Works, and the Traditions, and the Preamble - and it's about the way that particular details of language make up the "language of the heart", and it's about ... well, the definite article vs the indefinite article. As I said, bear with me.

We begin (welcome!): "The only requirement is a desire to stop drinking" (Preamble, Tradition Three). This phrase employs, with reference to this desire, the indefinite article "a": it's not an "honest desire" (a phrase briefly used and abandoned by early A.A.), not a consistent (or even persistent) desire, but rather an indefinite desire. Any desire to stop drinking will serve the purpose: and not merely a non-defined (= indefinite) but actually a desire drawn from an infinitely broad spectrum. So, welcome to A.A.: we issue an invitation to the infinite!

Eventually (hopefully!) we reach Step 12: "... a spiritual awakening as the result". We have arrived (dangerous word!) at the use of the definite article: this awakening, whatever it is, is "the" result. Our experiences through early sobriety, sponsorship, meetings, and the Steps are as (infinitely!?!) varied as those desires that got us here, but here we encounter some version of definition (thus the definite article, "the"): the sober being that we now are (the result, this present experienced reality and no other one) is one of spiritual awakening. We may still find ourselves as unable to describe this as we were to describe the desire: but what a difference! (As anyone can tell you who has tried it.)

So: "a" desire (indefinite), "the" result (definite) - whether by skill or genius, luck or magic, it feels more and more to me like someone was paying attention. And that perhaps we should, too.

A final note. Two, actually (you are bearing with me so well!)

1) These passages are often read aloud, inaccurately, in the reverse: they thus become "the desire" and "a spiritual awakening." Harmless enough, no doubt. (Hey, it's A.A., not linguistics 1A!) And it's not like I have a resentment or anything like that ... but my suggestion here is, do check it out. Why?

Because:

2) This very interplay, this dynamic experienced tension, between the definite and the indefinite - between the specific and the general, between the particular and the whole, indeed between (as the sutra puts it) form and emptiness - is, just possibly, at least arguably, the very stuff (technical term!) of which that "awakened" state is made. I would make that argument ... but another time, perhaps.

(Except, of course, that it isn't a state at all...)





KO'd by Alcohol

By Steve A., Seattle

In early spring 1999, I was still some months away from the doors of A.A. I was living – existing – in Brooklyn. I was living with a girlfriend – a hostage – who wanted nothing more than to be rid of me ... for good. She had an insistent mother in Queens who also was advocating for this. Given the type of alcoholic I had become, my leaving would answer their prayers.

My boss believed there could be a place for me at the business. But ... he made it clear this was conditional on me “taking care of the issue” – drinking.

All in all, I concluded, life was probably about as good as it could be for a 44-year-old man, right? I had a girlfriend, sort-of, and a job, sort-of ... I'd be ungrateful to expect more, right? I had been raised in a non-alcoholic home with loving parents, but life turns out how it turns out, right? You play the cards you're dealt; life hits you, you punch back.

That's what I thought. And I was willing to concede I didn't have much fight left in me.

I didn't know I'd already been KO'd by alcohol. I kept climbing off the mat while the crowd was urging me, “Stay down!” When I got to the rooms, I was relieved to discover I need not fight anything or anybody; I could have a different design for my life. I'd come from a childhood and early adulthood full of hopes and aspirations to a life where a review at the end of each day meant that if not too much bad had happened, it was a “good day.”

Pitiful and incomprehensible demoralization had taken me to a place where my physical self manifested my intense inner pain. Our family is large. I'm the oldest; my youngest sibling is 18 years younger. She was 26 when she came to visit New York in spring, bringing a friend. She told me her friend was having a hard time “wrapping her head around”

our relationship. She couldn't reconcile the person she saw before her as a sibling to her friend. My sister said I looked like a father, or an uncle ... maybe a grandfather.

I was an old, old man at 44, drinking alcohol with both hands, self-pitying, mournful, embarrassingly melodramatic. My life was near its end, I thought, and would dissolve into the ugliness of an alcoholic death. “What a pity,” I could hear the nameless people saying ... “What a waste.” As I said, my mind was full of melodrama.

By December of that year I finally had become “honest, open-minded, and willing” enough to walk through the doors of the rooms.

About six months later, I traveled home for a family event. My sister's friend was there. We had a lovely talk. I shared with her that I'd taken steps toward not drinking since her visit. She wished me well ... I wished her the same.

Afterward, my sister told me her friend had come to her before talking with me. She wanted to confirm that I was in fact the same person she'd met in New York. She told my sister I looked 10 years younger; she said I looked like a person in a sci-fi movie who ages backward. And, she said, I looked like I wanted to be there! I was becoming comfortable in my own skin, and I hadn't realized it was happening.

At meetings we hear comments such as: “Often we don't see changes in ourselves. But we do in others, so we can conclude we are changing also.” This unsolicited confirmation showed that yes, I was a changing person. Bob Dylan fans may think of “My Back Pages”– “I was so much older then, I'm younger than that now.” Page 88 of the Big Book has provided my personal code: “It works – it really does.”

The Lower and Higher Spirits of Step 12

By an alcoholic named Dave, Soquel



As I write this, it's the morning after Thanksgiving and I'm grateful for 28 months, 11 days of sobriety.

"Having had a spiritual awakening ..."

I've been reflecting on just how similar, yet opposite, the later months of my drinking were to my early months of recovery. When I was drinking, I was in the grip of my Lower Powers – those powers that are far greater than me and drag me down. During that time, my spirit was fully awake, but it was dwelling in the realm of my Lower Powers, willingly following them down into anger, shame, resentment, isolation and more and more drinking.

Little by little, then more and more, the anger, shame, resentment and isolation were being displaced by serenity, acceptance, forgiveness and connection. I didn't have a spiritual awakening so much as a spiritual reorientation.

"We tried to carry this message ..."

Back then I was a channel – a channel for my Lower Powers, spreading the message of anger, shame and resentment, spewing it all over people I hated, strangers unfortunate enough to come into contact with me, and all the people I loved most.

"And to practice these principles in all our affairs ..."

My drinking rapidly devolved deeper and deeper into the realm of my Lower Powers. They gained more and more power over me and negatively drove every thought, word and action in all of my affairs. By the end, my spirit was lowly and lonely.

Then the message of A.A. reached me, broadcasting from the realm of my Higher Powers – those powers that are far greater than me and lift me up. They were hard to hear at first. They were being drowned out by all those messages from my Lower Powers. Fortunately, a lot of people in high spirits were carrying this message and practicing these principles in all their interactions with me. I wanted what they had, and were offering me so willingly.

Little by little, then more and more, the anger, shame, resentment and isolation were being displaced by serenity, acceptance, forgiveness and connection. I didn't have a spiritual awakening so much as a spiritual reorientation.

Twenty-eight months and eleven days later, my spirit dwells in the realm of my Higher Powers. These grant me more and more power as they positively drive my thoughts, words and actions so I may carry the message and practice these principles in all my affairs.

From the General Service Chair



Those of us who have been around for a while like to joke that the holidays are recruiting time for A.A. When I hear that phrase, I chuckle and nod. Then my thoughts turn to hoping that active alcoholics are desperate enough to want to be recruited. I hope they come to us in Alcoholics Anonymous, and that we welcome and care for them, willing to share our common solution.

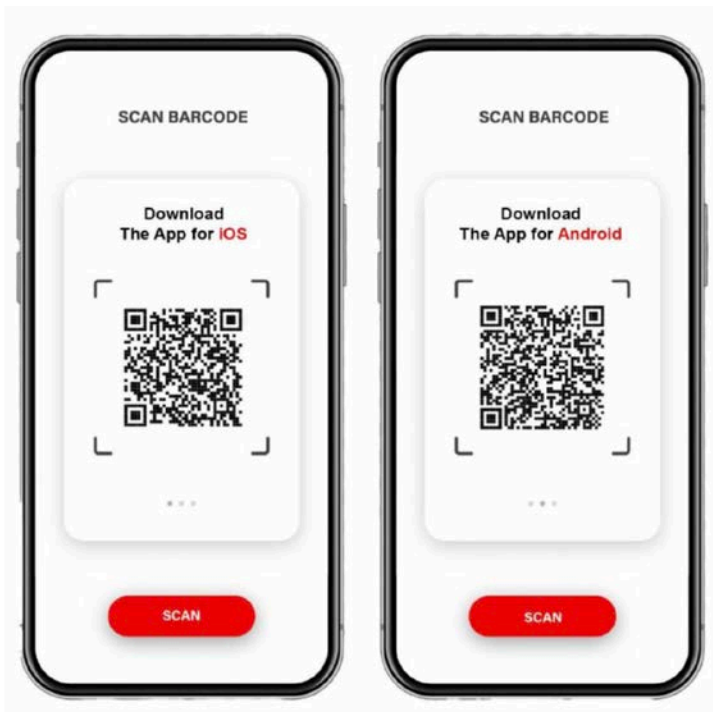
An inventory at our District meeting in November revealed we need to create a welcoming environment in our District and Group meetings, and to improve Group communication. On the Intergroup website, our District Webmaster now includes General Service Takeaways, which any GSR or A.A. member can access any time. The “Takeaways” are highlights of the monthly General Service District meeting, and include items for which a GSR can seek a Group conscience.

Holidays can be busy and crazy-causing. When I can pause long enough for God to enter my consciousness, I am calmed and able to remember what my life used to be like. I think of the many folks who still reach for a drink when holiday tasks seem overwhelming. I think of drinkers estranged from family and friends, and of that feeling of loneliness and insignificance that can paralyze. I think of potential recruits.

My priorities miraculously reorganize.

Gratefully yours in service,
Deb A.

District Committee Member Chairperson
Santa Cruz General Service District



**The Grapevine and La Vina apps are here!
Download for free from the
Apple App Store or Google Play.**



SOBRIETY MILESTONES

NOVEMBER

Cathy CM.	November 13, 1981
Pat H.	November 28, 1982
Chris G.	November 17, 1987
George E.	November 28, 1987
Valerie M.	November 24, 1989
Robin S.	November 22, 1990
Bobbie B.	November 1, 1991
Suzi S.	November 5, 1991
Rich L.	November 21, 1991
Steve D.	November 1, 1994
Robin B.	November 6, 1995
Michelle C.	November 27, 1995
Paul M.	November 5, 1996
Mary R.	November 15, 1998
John T.	November 22, 1998
Sharon H.	November 17, 1999
John A.	November 20, 2000
Kim F.	November 26, 2000
Garryowen G.	November 1, 2001
Maggie D.	November 7, 2001
Mike K.	November 9, 2001
Jim D.	November 23, 2001
Bradley A.	November 27, 2007
Lori P.	November 23, 2009
Brian P.	November 1, 2010
Glenn H.	November 11, 2011
Aaron W.	November 14, 2012
Tim W.	November 10, 2014
Janie N.	November 19, 2014
Katie B.	November 26, 2014
Joyce H.	November 30, 2014
Stephene F.	November 27, 2015
Bill R.	November 22, 2016
Maggie M.	November 12, 2019

IN MEMORIAM

Michael G.	November 21, 1975
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Want to list your A.A. anniversary in the GrapeSCINN?

Email your name and sobriety date to:
grapesccin@gmail.com



SANTA CRUZ INTERGROUP PRESENTS
BIRTHDAY SPEAKER
Meeting
SATURDAY, DEC 2
7:00PM / Doors Open at 5:30PM
MID-COUNTY SENIOR CENTER
829 NAY AVE, CAPITOLA
Speaker: Jerry C • Los Gatos
Sober Date: 10/10/80 • 43 Years
HOSTED BY GENERAL SERVICE COMMITTEE

The graphic features a dark teal background with various holiday-themed illustrations including a string of colorful lights, a snowflake, a teal sock, a gift box, a snowman, a Christmas tree, a candy cane, and lit candles.

DECEMBER EVENTS

For more information
about this month's events, visit
aasantacruz.org

December 2 @ 7:00 pm - 8:15 pm
Birthday Speaker Meeting
Mid-County Senior Center
829 Bay Ave., Capitola

December 3 @ 1:00 pm - 3:00 pm
CRUZYPAA Monthly Meeting
Harvey West Park
326 Evergreen St, Santa Cruz

December 6 @ 7:30 pm - 8:30 pm
Intergroup Council Meeting
Meeting ID: 828 1508 0970
Passcode: 588309

December 9 @ 10:00 am - 12:00 pm
Ben Lomond Fellowship 4th Step Workshop
Ben Lomond Fellowship
9496 Hwy 9, Ben Lomond

December 9 @ 11:00 am - 3:00 pm
Early Risers Holiday Party
Mid-County Senior Center
829 Bay Ave., Capitola

December 9 @ 7:00 pm - 11:00 pm
CRUZYPAA Winter Ball
Hope Church
4525 Soquel Drive, Soquel

December 13 @ 7:30 pm - 9:30 pm
General Service District Meeting
Meeting ID: 898 9003 8938
Passcode: 121212

December 14 @ 7:00 pm - 8:00 pm
Web Committee Meeting
Meeting ID: 884 7009 1801
Passcode: 2272

December 17 @ 1:00 pm - 3:00 pm
CRUZYPAA Monthly Meeting
Harvey West Park 326 Evergreen St
Santa Cruz

December 20 @ 7:30 pm - 9:30 pm
Intergroup Steering Committee Meeting
Meeting ID: 861 8723 8980
Passcode: 723088

December 23 @ 3:00 pm - 6:00 pm
SC Fellowship Birthday Speaker Meeting
Santa Cruz Fellowship
412 Front Street, Santa Cruz



CRUZYPAA PRESENTS

The Winter Ball

SATURDAY | DEC. 9 | 7 PM

SPEAKERS:
Leelee (WACYPAA)
Devin S (Santa Cruz)
Jude (ACYPAA)

MEETING 7 PM
DANCE 8-11 PM

COHOSTS:
ACYPAA
PENYPAA
SLOYPAA
SCCYPAA
SWACYPAA

Dress to impress.

Hope Church
4525 Soquel Dr. Soquel, CA 95073

Suggested Donation: \$20



**EARLY RISERS
HOLIDAY PARTY**

**TOY DRIVE FOR KIDS,
MR. & MRS. CLAUS,
AND FOOD!
GIVEAWAYS**

MID COUNTY SENIOR CENTERS
RIGHT ON!

Saturday, December 9th
829 Bay Avenue, Capitola
11:00am-3:00pm