GRAPESCEIN //

The Cherry Pie

By Jean W., Aptos

t Mattison Lane's annual holiday party one year, I brought my homemade cherry pie, with its secret recipe. The pie was lovely as I packed it up at home.

I was dismayed when I unpacked it at the meeting. The pie had collapsed into a cherry-colored lake in the pie pan. A pool of juice had escaped the crust, and the pie was soggy.

Oh, dear.

What to do. I stood by the garbage can at the potluck and considered just throwing the whole sorry mess into the trash. No one had seen me unpack it; no one would know. Then I saw the dessert table just a few steps away, with all the annoyingly pretty desserts. I stood by the garbage can for a moment, pie in hand. Put the pie on the dessert table, and hope no one would notice?, Or just give the poor thing the heave-ho? After a bit, I figured, well, I'd come this far. I might as well just leave the thing on the dessert table, where it had been intended. I put my poor cherry pie – or what was left of it – on the table and scuttled away, hoping no one had seen me.

The dinner proceeded, then the annual holiday party meeting. Each individual in the large group stood and said just a few words, to give everyone a chance to speak. It's always special.

Then came Mary's turn to share. Mary was an old-timer in A.A., a long-timer and loyal A.A.-er, who had once gone by the name Vi. Mary (formerly Vi) was very, very honest, almost blunt, in whatever she said. When Mary stood to speak, she offered the usual "happy holidays," to everyone, and said she was glad to be sober. And then very-honest Mary asked the entire room, "And who brought the cherry pie?"

I wanted to sink under the table.

But I raised my hand. I managed to say, "I did." I wasn't sure what was coming next from honest, blunt Mary. To my great surprise she said: "That was the best cherry pie I ever had."

Now, Mary never said something that was not true. Apparently the juice from the pie had subsided over the course of dinner. By dessert time, it was not only servable, but tasty too. My secret recipe had unexpectedly emerged from the debris after all.

To me this is an A.A. story indeed: Like the cherry pie, when we show up at Alcoholics Anonymous, we may be in very poor shape – embarrassingly so, and not at all as we had intended originally. The choice seems to be, do I just throw out this so-called life and give up; or somehow creep into the meeting, try to join the others and give this recovery thing my best shot?

When we do the latter, what happens is more than we ever could have expected. We are of use and blessed in ways that seemed impossible before. It may not all look the way we had imagined, but the outcome will be just as it should be, sometimes better than we can even explain. Like the cherry pie, we come here and recover in ways that don't quite make sense.

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

I Could Be Wrong...

By Anonymous, Santa Cruz

Istarted in A.A. at the 7th Avenue Fellowship, in the early '80s. I didn't want to get sober. I wanted to avoid jail after I'd wrecked a '58 Chevy pickup, sneaking home on the back roads from the Aptos Club. And I hoped my girlfriend might reconsider. But sobriety seemed stupid. Who wants to live without drugs and alcohol? And it seemed impossible. Who could live without them?

So I didn't get sober. But I had to attend meetings ... I had to fill a card for Judge McAdams. I kept coming back because I had to.

Tom B. assigned himself my sponsor. And he pursued me, rousting me from my farmworker shack, drunk, loaded or hung over. He dragged me back to meetings.

Tom insisted on steps, literature, and prayer – He believed in unvarnished, old-school A.A. Eventually, I tried to stay dry.

I couldn't do it. It became a challenge. I wanted to get sober, to prove I could, I think, and to fit in with a crowd I recognized and that recognized me.

So I got honest; I got drunk. I prayed; I bought an eightball. I worked steps with Tom; I got loaded. I couldn't do it.

I was driving up to Tanner Heights one sparkling day. My girlfriend had moved there when she'd pulled out – she'd found Al-Anon. When I started attending meetings, I sometimes was allowed to visit. I drove slowly, trying to figure out what I was doing wrong, why I couldn't stay dry.

It struck me in a moment of clarity. I couldn't work Step Three. Impossible, when there is no God. How do I trust my life to a cultural myth, an imaginary respite for desperate, undiscerning people? I'd studied Christianity, pre-Christian history, the historical Jesus, eschatology, monotheism, polytheism, pantheism – On and on, looking for a way to make sense of it all, or to prove God didn't exist. That's what I'd settled on.

But that day, when I told myself, "... there is no God," a voice asked: "What if you're wrong?" That day, that stopped me. That was an entirely new proposition.

First, it was extremely unlikely I was wrong about anything. I'd dropped out of four institutions of higher learning, some more than once. I was pretty well-educated. Second, if I was wrong ... how could that be?

That day, I realized my conclusion was an unprovable thesis, not fact. It was a 50-50 chance either way, with no way to know which way. I had to consider: I could be wrong.

And if I was? Yikes. I might have to become a Christian! If they were right, I might have to become a Baptist. Or a Mormon ... or a Jehovah's Witness, knocking on doors wearing a clip-on tie and a short-sleeve white shirt, carrying a handful of Watchtowers! Then what?

I'd stopped the truck. I sat there. And finally I said to myself, "If I have to crawl on my knees to kiss a ring, I'll do it. I'll stand on a corner preaching come-to-Jesus to passers-by. I'll convert. I'll go to India – or Mecca. I don't care. I'll do anything I have to. I just want to get sober."

A thousand pounds lifted off my shoulders. I was light and free. I'd surrendered.

I quit drinking and using drugs. I got teachable, somehow. I let people show me how to live. I started on a path to near-normal life in a society I'd spurned, abjured and ridiculed, a life beyond my wildest imaginings. I'd never understood how happy, exciting and rewarding a mundane, middle-class life can be.

I didn't have to turn Christian, or anything else. But these days, I pray. Long-sober people say it's necessary and it helps. It can't hurt, anyway. And, they might be right.

I have faith the program works; I've seen it work in others, and here I am – sober for the last 24 hours. The really tough times come, unimpeded. Eventually, the hard times pass ... or are passing.

I trust the power of the group. I feel it, I seek it and I depend on it.

I still think the surrender is more important than whatever it is one might be surrendering to. But if I ever see a burning bush, or get struck blind on the road to 7-Eleven, I'll stop and check things out. If I'm ever clearly shown a path, I'm willing to try it out.

And I'm willing to stay willing, to do whatever it takes to stay sober today. That includes thanking you and everyone else who's helped me stay sober over the years.

I could be wrong about all of this. So far, it doesn't seem so.

How the Story Ends – And Begins

By Dan F., Aromas

It was a brief story about a teen-age boy who climbed a telephone pole late at night and fell to his death.

It was three or four paragraphs on an inside page. I was a reporter at the small daily newspaper that ran it. I had been sober for two years.

I asked the city editor if he was curious about the story.

"There might be a bigger story," he said. "It's also possible no one will talk to you. Go ahead. Drive out there and find out, if you like."

I lived on the outskirts of the small town where the boy died. I'd been there for two months. My attendance at Alcoholics Anonymous meetings had tailed off. I didn't have a sponsor. I didn't know the kid.

The town was 10 miles from our newsroom, a mile from my house. There was a school, a library, a post office and a handful of small businesses. Downtown traffic was regulated by a single stop sign.

This was 36 years ago. There were no cell phones, no Google Maps, no streaming.

I wondered if the kid had been drinking.

I drove to the town in the afternoon, parked, and walked around. People were willing to speak with me. In the course of a few days I talked with emergency responders, a friend, a brother, the boy's mother, a few residents.

The friend who was with the boy the night he died said they'd been drinking. They'd been drinking for hours, in the small park by the stop sign.

He said his friend had talked about scaling the 40-foot utility pole. He helped boost his friend to the first metal climbing rung of the pole. When his friend reached the top, or near it, he turned and gripped a wire with one hand. He pivoted away from the pole to grab the wire with both hands, leaving himself hanging.

The boy swung his body. His midsection struck a lower, live high-voltage line. He plummeted to the street.

A responder told me the boy was dead before he hit the street. He showed me a photo, a horizontal burn line three inches deep running across the boy's midsection.



I sat with the boy's mother, brother and cousins in their living room. The mother told me her son's grandfather had died weeks before. She said her son was despondent.

A young resident of the town told me the boy had been a troublemaker. In grade-school, the boy had stopped him, forced him off his bike and taken it. He said he "didn't feel much" when he heard of the boy's death. I did not include this in the story.

The night my story ran in the newspaper, I drove past the site on my way home. I noticed a group of small, lit candles under the utility pole.

Whenever I drove past the site I thought of drinking. I thought of the many times as a teen I'd put myself and others in danger.

I began attending meetings again. Only at meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous have I heard diverse viewpoints on behavior, from a wide range of people, all seated in one room, all looking directly at one another.

These days I have an A.A. sponsor. His sponsor told me I cannot think myself into sobriety. There must be action. All kinds of action. Mostly small actions. I have to wash dishes and take out the trash. I have to listen and to notice. I also have to remember to lighten up. That sometimes feels like a big action, the world being what it is these days.

My sponsor told me he prays every morning for protection from his enemies: "fear, anger and carelessness."

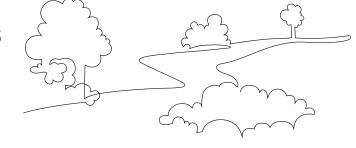
Sobriety keeps me curious. Yesterday, I read online that as frozen permafrost melts it will release zombie viruses that will cause plagues. Several new wars have started. Politics. I'll try to stay sober for these big things.

I also have learned that actions outside A.A. will help keep me sober. The death of a drunk kid taught me the threat of my own carelessness with recovery.

Our ways of seeking and getting information have changed in 36 years. But alcohol has not. I'll face the zombie viruses at A.A. meetings, whatever form they take. There, I discover how stories end, and how new ones begin.

Group of Drunks Shows the Way to Sanity

By Kerri F., Santa Cruz



remember the day. At a park in Capitola, it was noon. "A beautiful day" would be understatement. The sky was the bluest of blues – a glorious blue you could dive into and float. Green-leaf trees seemed to support white, billowy clouds.

After we had read Step Two, the meeting opened for discussion. A friend simply, plainly read the definition of "insanity." Until that day, I'd glazed over this step. It seemed too simple. I wanted to just skip to Step Four, as I had in the past.

The meeting was outdoors; the shelter-in-place mandate had just been lifted. I had a PhD in Netflix and a really bad case of anxiety. I felt as if I would instantaneously combust if I went into the open, in public. I had lost hope in myself, faith in others and had no idea what or who "Grace" was. I was a little jealous everyone knew her but me.

So, there I was finally outside again. In a social setting! All I had to do was look up and breathe, see the sky, feel human again and listen.

"Perhaps it is me getting in the way," I thought. "Maybe I'll shut up now. ... Maybe I can stop thinking about those childhoodtrauma remnants that haunt my brain."

It finally clicked. I was the one holding on to all this junk! My thinking was keeping me from healing. My ego and fear-based rationalizations blocked my willingness to see that I was powerless. Once I heard at group level the definition of insanity, I thought to myself, "Well, my behavior and actions have clearly been insane." I rationalized and justified my behavior in a premeditated loop, over and over. I'd caused so much pain and anguish for myself, my family and anyone else who got in the way, I was clearly insane too.

My pride and ego were so deeply embedded that I couldn't grasp I was powerless over

something. So I removed my vicious, egodriven resentful mind-set.

Gratitude lists and humility are invaluable tools. They allowed me to let go, and to see I could be free.

It didn't take much work to understand I was the problem. It took someone at group level reading at this meeting in the middle of the day, no booze, in an open, public setting. I couldn't believe this. It hit me like an explosion. Someone at group level read the definition of insanity, and that was all I needed finally to get it.

I went home that day with so much to write about. I filled several pages with all the things in which I found serenity: nature and animals, art and music ... and all those things are of me. This higher power was in me, through me, had been beside me all my life. All I had to do was remember I had grace – even when I didn't think I had.

I had picked up the phone and said I needed help. I had the faith to show up to the meeting this stranger had recommended. I believed that if I did the work, I could have hope again – not in Netflix, but in myself. I'm on the journey to recovery, and to caring about myself and others. It is not about me, it isn't about me and them. It's about me and GOD. The Group of Drunks restored my faith; the group conscience instills faith; I am grateful and humbled.

I listened to the group that day. I removed myself, my ego and my resentment for an hour and listened. Thank god for this group of drunks. I bring grace, faith and hope to every meeting.

After two full, glorious years of complete sobriety, Step Two and Tradition Two saved me from myself.

Life Finds a Way

By Becca Z., Santa Cruz



razy people don't know they're crazy" was my sponsor's attempt to soothe me in early sobriety. The intense emotional ups and downs had me wondering if I might be losing it. Per my sponsor's logic: if you're worried about being insane, you're probably more sane than you feel.

So maybe I wasn't certifiably "crazy," but I certainly wasn't feeling stable; my life felt messy. Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. When I try to manage my life – or yours, or theirs – life quickly becomes unmanageable.

I used to think if I just tried harder, you would act the way I needed you to, and I would be OK. It was managing, controlling, manipulating and orchestrating everything and everyone. To be restored to sanity is to relinquish control – to see the fallacy in my old way of thinking and opening to something more.

On Saturday, Dec. 1, 2007, I accidentally got sober. The guy I was obsessed with at the time stopped drinking, and I innocently followed him into the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous.

I didn't know what an alcoholic was, so I didn't know I was one. I thought an alcoholic was someone living on the streets, with a 40-ounce in a brown paper bag and cut-off, fingerless gloves, warming his hands by a fire in a barrel under the freeway. I didn't look like that. I never got a DUI, never got arrested. I went to school, got good grades, kept jobs and friends. I didn't look like an alcoholic.

I knew that when I drank, I got insanely drunk. I never had just one. I understood the "powerless over alcohol" part of Step One – I always drank to forget, black out, reach oblivion. And this flimsy understanding of Step One was enough to make a beginning. God's grace and my own denial protected me from seeing the devastating, overwhelming unmanageability of my life.

And God knows just what to dangle in front of us to get our attention. The only reason I took any right action was because my obsession-of-the-season was doing it. So I thought I would too. I got a sponsor, went to 90 meetings in 90 days, got commitments, did the steps, called other alcoholics and pretended to concede to my innermost self I was alcoholic, whatever that meant.

I did not believe in God. My thinking was logical, scientific, rigid. I thought religious folks were ridiculous, mistaking their own fabrication and invention of God as "evidence" of his existence.

I was the "intellectually self-sufficient woman" who could "float above the rest of the folks on my brain power alone," as discussed in Step Two in the 12x12.

Alcohol had stopped working. I knew I didn't want to drink, but got somewhat stuck on the God Thing. But our literature says, "You can, if you wish, make A.A. itself your 'Higher Power." Strength in numbers; this made logical sense. The lot of them as a group were more powerful than I was alone. This was a concept I could get behind, I was fine with having a totally uninteresting logical, educational experience of Step Two. I would use the A.A. group as my higher power and that would be that.

God had a different plan.

When I pulled my last geographic and moved to Los Angeles, I had this little 10-gallon fish tank in my Manhattan Beach apartment. Among some aquarium gravel and fake little sea plants I had a bright yellow sea snail named Goldie and little brown spotted plecostomus, Spot, one black and one white molly fish, Ebony and Ivory, and a small school of neon tetras – maybe seven, all named Pat.

Unfortunately, the tetras inexplicably, one after another, kept dying. I love animals, so this was nothing short of tragic grief and

loss that my newcomer coping skills were unequipped to handle. Talk about powerless! Every morning I would come downstairs to where my fish tank was kept, and another tiny body would be floating belly up. I tried adjusting food, adding fresh water to the tank, but they just kept dying.

Shortly, there was only one left. I had surrendered to the idea that soon it too would be dead. The next morning, as I descended the stairs to check, I braced myself. I was astonished to find a delightful, inexplicable sight: a small, vibrant school of brand new baby neon tetras! I gasped and excitedly quoted "Jurassic Park" to myself: "Life found a way!"

For those unfamiliar with "Jurassic Park," Dr. Malcolm (Jeff Goldblum) discusses the attempt to control life and manage the island's population. Malcolm is all about chaos theory and life spontaneously existing. He expresses this theme with his well-known line, "Life, uh, finds a way."

I was resigned to a perfectly boring Step Two experience. What I got was miraculous: The tangible before my very eyes - proof that life force is god. Coming to believe involved birth amidst death and magic mixed with '90's nostalgia.

Life finds a way = belief in god = came to believe = Step Two.

RULE 62 TRIVIA TEST

By Damien M.
The answers are given later in this issue.

- 1. Who was Ebby T.?
- 2. How can you find local A.A. meetings?
- 3. According to "The Doctor's Opinion," the phenomenon of ______ is found in every alcoholic, never in normal drinkers.
- 4. What event started A.A.?
- 5. What part of the Big Book inspired the Preamble?
- 6. Dr. Bob and Bill W. had attended what organization before they met?
- 7. What committee brings A.A. meetings and literature into rehabilitation centers, hospitals, jails and prisons?
- 8. How frequently does A.A. hold its International Conventions?
- 9. What does HALT stand for?
- 10. What was Dr. Bob's last drink?
- 11. Where did the first Alcoholics Anonymous Group start?
- 12. What are the full names of A.A.'s two co-founders?

From the General Service Chair

By Deb. A, Santa Cruz

This is an exciting time of the year for General Service Representatives. The final list of Agenda Topics for the 74th Panel of the General Service Conference should be available soon.

Your GSRs will be asking for group consciousnesses as we decide the future of Alcoholics Anonymous.

We told the conference two years ago we wanted a 5th Edition of the Big Book; and a plainlanguage one. We recognize that many find the spiritual language of the traditional text difficult to read and understand. Those changes are in development.

"Why should we change anything?" you might ask. "It worked for me."

We need to change and grow. Each new generation of suffering alcoholics changes. The changes to the book are for those still out there, not for us already here. Problem drinkers must hear the hope that Alcoholics Anonymous can offer. We need to see them, hear them, help them identify so they stay, and find help.

At inception, A.A. was a small group of guys. Gradually, our membership changed. But the message of recovery through the 12 Steps remained solid.

When your group discusses an Agenda Topic, ask yourself: "Could this help my younger brother, or my daughter, or my grandchildren someday? Will this help the young person at work who arrives disheveled after a night of partying? Or the disabled person at the grocery store with a cart full of bottles?" So many out there wait to be reached, to be helped. "Let the hand of A.A. always be there, and for that, I am responsible"

I am forever grateful to Alcoholics Anonymous for welcoming this alcoholic.

Deb, DCMC Santa Cruz District 03

- 1. A longtime friend and drinking buddy of Bill W. who told how he got sober under guidance of the Oxford Groups.
- 2. Visit the Santa Cruz County Intergroup website, https://aasantacruz.org, or visit the Intergroup Central Office, 5732 Soquel Drive, Soquel CA, 95073. Or pick up a printed schedule at a meeting. (needs "out of town.", call the local A.A. hotline, or check A.A. online?? Or something more comprehensive.
- 3. Craving (pg. xxviii).
- 4. Bill W.'s meeting with Dr. Bob in Akron, Ohio, arranged by Henrietta Seiberling on May 12, Mother's Day 1935.
- 5. Forward to the First Edition (p. xiii).
- 6. The Oxford Groups.
- 7. Hospitals and Institutions, or H&I Committee.
- 8. Every five years.
- 9. Hungry; Angry; Lonely; Tired.
- 10. A bottle of beer the morning of June 10, 1935.
- 11. Cleveland, Ohio, at the home of Al G.
- 12. William Griffith Wilson and Robert Holbrook Smith M.D.



General Service Monthly Meeting is Now Hybrid!

Second Wednesday of each month at 7:30 p.m. at the Mid-County Senior Center or on Zoom

Meeting ID: 898 9003 8938
Passcode: 121212

SOBRIETY MILESTONES

JANUARY

Zoe January 1, 1980 Marcia K January 28, 1981 Ace S January 16, 1982 Diane S January 1 1983 Nancy G January 23 1984 Martin McC January 22, 1985 Danny I January 25 1985 Janet J January 23, 1986 Mary Pat O'C January 2, 1987 Marianne S January 6, 1987 Bob S January 18, 1987 Colleen H January 12, 1988 Mari R January 18, 1988 Mary Z January 5, 1989 Butch W January 6, 1990 Gary B January 10, 1990 Steve G January 19, 1990 Frank M January 21, 1991 Jimmy N January 2, 1992 Jill P January 20, 1992 January 13, 1993 Tom McK Rich G January 16, 1993 Rick S January 23, 1993 Kenton W January 1, 1994 Marion W January 2, 1994 Ron B January 25, 1994 Don S January 1, 1995 George H January 15, 1997 Lloyd G January 17, 1997 Dee Dee H January 26, 1997 Clarissa B January 1, 1998 Renee K January 1, 1998 Ben I January 2, 1999 Rhonda W January 6, 2001 Joanne M January 3, 2001 Mark O January 28, 2001 Allan C January 9, 2002 Bonnie W January 15, 2003 Amber J January 4, 2008 Todd I January 20, 2010 Scott S January 19, 2011 Kimi O January 1, 2013 Kevin R January 3, 2013 Glenna H January 5, 2014 Stephanie B January 28, 2014 Lisa A January 13, 2015 January 24, 2015 Chelsie O

IN MEMORIAM

Ron B January 25, 1994

in the GrapeSCINN? Email your name and sobriety date to: grapesccin@gmail.com





UPCOMING EVENTS

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

February 3 @ 7:00 pm - 8:15 pm **Birthday Speaker Meeting** Mid-County Senior Center 829 Bay Ave., Capitola

February 4 @ 1:00 pm - 3:00 pm CRUZYPAA Monthly Meeting Harvey West Park 326 Evergreen St, Santa Cruz

February 7 @ 7:30 pm - 8:30 pm Intergroup Council Meeting
Meeting ID: 828 1508 0970

Passcode: 588309

February 8 @ 7:00 pm - 8:00 pm

Web Committee Meeting
Meeting ID: 884 7009 1801

Passcode: 2272

February 13 @ 7:00 pm - 8:00 pm

Joint Committee on Safety Meeting ID: 892 3730 0658

Passcode: 857738

February 14 @ 7:30 pm - 9:30 pm **General Service District Meeting**

Meeting ID: 898 9003 8938

Passcode: 121212

February 17 @ 7:30 pm - 9:30 pm

Intergroup Steering Committee Meeting

Meeting ID: 861 8723 8980

Passcode: 723088

February 17 @ 5:00 pm - 9:00 pm

The Talent - No Talent Show

Mid-County Senior Center 829 Bay Ave., Capitola

February 18 @ 1:00 pm - 3:00 pm

CRUZYPAA Monthly Meeting

Harvey West Park 326 Evergreen St, Santa Cruz

February 24 @ 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm

SC Fellowship Birthday Speaker Meeting

Santa Cruz Fellowship 412 Front Street, Santa Cruz

February 28 @ 7:00 pm - 8:00 pm

H&I Committee Meeting

Trinity Presbyterian Church 420 Melrose Ave, Santa Cruz



PRAASA 2024 is in San Francisco!

Pacific Region A.A. Service Assembly

March 1-3, 2024

San Francisco Marriott Marquis, 780 Mission St., SF

For online registration, hotel reservations, volunteer opportunities & more:

WWW.PRAASA.ORG

Registration: \$40 (plus optional meals) • Hotel Rooms: \$189/night + tax
All A. A.'s Welcome • Al-Anon Participation • Spanish & ASL Interpretation

Join 1500+ A.A. members from all over the Western U.S. and Canada, plus GSO and Grapevine Staff!

Three-day program features a speaker meeting Saturday night, lots of panels, and roundtable breakout sessions for: GSRs, DCMs, Literature, Grapevine, La Vina, H&I/Corrections, Intergroup/Central Offices, Young People (YPAA), Bridging the Gap, Archives, Public Information (PI), Cooperation with the Professional Community (CPC), Accessibilities/Treatment, Remote Communities, Seniors/Cooperation with the Elder Community, Hispanic Women, Newsletters, Websites and Tech, Area Secretaries, Treasurers, Registrars, Chairs, Alternate Delegates, Delegates, and Past Delegates/Trustees.

The purpose of PRAASA is to:

- Develop greater unity among the members, groups, and areas of the Pacific Region
- Encourage the exchange of ideas and experiences
- Provide an opportunity for members to discuss pertinent aspects of Alcoholics Anonymou

The Assembly and the PRAASA Committee should always foster the Recovery, Unity and Serv



