

# Sobriety Sentinel

JANUARY 2021 - TRICOUNTYAA.ORG

*"It will seldom matter how haltingly we walk..."*  
- **12+12, Step Six**



The practice of labyrinth walking dates back 4,000 years, over a variety of faiths. The above is an 11-circuit design, which is featured at Chartres Cathedral in France. The center of the Chartres labyrinth is known as "New Jerusalem."



BRENDA F/Sobriety Sentinel

Bursts of tall grasses and bushes line the center of the labyrinth behind Trinity Episcopal Church, at 318 S Duchesne Drive in St. Charles. There, you will also find a tree, several stone benches, and quite strikingly, the presence of God.

## YOUR SPIRITUAL PATH

*A sacred labyrinth lies in wait for you,  
directly behind Trinity Episcopal Church*

By **BRENDA F**  
**Group 451**

Tucked behind Trinity Episcopal Church, a familiar Tri-County location for both AA and Al-Anon meetings, is a community labyrinth, open to all.

The labyrinth is a sacred path, designed in a specific circular pattern based on sacred geometry. Its purpose to help seekers connect to Spirit, emotion and intuition, and to balance the three.

If you decide to walk the Trinity Episcopal labyrinth, you will find a mailbox at its entrance. The mailbox contains a spiral-bound journal with entries dating back to 2013.

My last trip to the labyrinth, I flipped through the journal's pages and noticed an entry that said, in essence, "I think I'll let go of my worries about marketing and leave that up to God."

On that particular December day, I was worried about marketing for my business. Worried that our monthly newsletter was going out two weeks late, that Christmas was coming up in 12 days, that there would be no income for the next two weeks, worried about bills that had been mounting since we'd closed our store in March.

I entered the labyrinth silently. The entry phase begins a process of letting go of your worries and troubles. It's what we often refer to as "surrender" in the program.

As you walk the circular path, turning left, then right, and

making semi-circles and turns, your rational mind unplugs. You might feel "lost." Much like in other forms of meditation, your mind gives up its endless noise and focuses more intently. The quiet part of you emerges. Your intuition, the still, small voice inside you, can be heard.

Then you arrive at the center of the labyrinth. Here you find a tall tree and a few stone benches to sit upon. To pray, to reflect, to let your mind wander. It is in that free space of non-attachment, that many will most strongly feel God's presence.

When the time feels right, you walk the path again in the reverse direction and emerge where you entered. Sometimes, the insights come later in the day or later in the week.

For me, God was radical and swift in his answer to my worries about marketing and income. We received six orders on our website that day. Never in five years had we had six orders in a single day. The next day, another order; the day after that, a few more. I was given income and plenty of work to keep me busy through the end of December. I was also given a renewed sense of purpose with my Art.

My spiritual path had led me in uncertain circles, but through the precise literal circles of the Trinity labyrinth, I found the answers to my prayers were right there before me. And yours can be too.

You and I just need to stop rebelling long enough to try something new. Open ourselves up to new awakenings. And know that the journey continues.

### TIPS FOR WALKING A LABYRINTH

-Inventory your blessings before entering. Prepare.

-Shed expectations.

-At the center, receive guidance and sense of peace.

-Make a resolution for next steps.

## Featured Birthdays

### 90 DAYS

A year ago, things were okay, if you wanna look at it that way. I had a good job, my boyfriend and I were looking to buy a house together, and I didn't think I had a problem at all.

Four months ago, though, it was completely different. My drinking had become more severe. I was hanging out with people who drank like me, because then it didn't make me feel so bad. I had quit my job that I'd been at for 10 years. My relationships were deteriorating with my boyfriend, my best friend and my mom. My daughter's father wasn't letting me see her. It wasn't good. At all.

Today, my life is 150 percent better. My cup is so much more full now. I have better thoughts and feelings because my judgment isn't clouded by alcohol.

My thoughts are more clear and rational, and I can feel more, if that makes sense. A lot of my emotional issues would come out while I was drinking, but that definitely wasn't the time to solve anything.

I'm happier now, which I didn't think was possible. I thought that you could only have fun while drinking, but I have so much more fun now, and I remember it, so that's an even bigger plus. And I don't wake up feeling hung over.

I'm really happy about having a relationship with my Higher Power today. I pray every morning and every night. It makes you realize how small you are in the scheme of things, that there's a bigger picture and a bigger plan for you.

**Nicole**  
**Group 762**

For more, please see **BIRTHDAYS, Page 2**

## Once upon a time: the humble origins of the *Sobriety Sentinel*

by **ANDREW H**  
**Group 968**

Our friend Keith approached us after a recent meeting of Group 228.

"I used to publish the *Sobriety Sentinel*," Keith said, "back in 1985. My sponsor got me started doing it."

Keith didn't have a computer with a top-rate page design and pagination program, like we do. Keith had to cut and paste *Grapevine* articles, with actual scissors and glue, and he would type the steps and traditions on a typewriter. That's how he learned what they actually said.

Keith told us he wasn't sure how long the

*Sentinel* existed before he became involved with it, but he said he'd ask his Group 5 buddy Don. And so Don told Keith, who then told us: When this newsletter started, back in March 1978, it didn't have a name, and its founder didn't have a typewriter.

"The first two newsletters were hand-written," said Don, and he should

know, since it turns out he was the founder.

Don started this publication to boost donations after a particularly ambitious New Year's party had wiped out all existing funds and sank Tri-County AA into debt.

"The third week of May, we finally broke even after having to use our own funds to pay rent and buy books," Don said.

# Virtual Variety

**On Zoom, Group 762 warmly welcomes newcomers and visitors**

by **ANDREW H Group 968**

On the first Thursday night of the new year, Nicole chaired a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous for the first time. It was a Zoom meeting of Group 762, her homegroup.

When it came time, Nicole asked if anyone was celebrating an AA birthday. One group member announced that he was celebrating 30 years sober. That was not unusual there—762 has a lot of long-term sobriety, particularly among its women.

After the applause died down for the 30-year birthday, Nicole cheerfully announced that she had reached the 90-day mark in her sobriety. The group applauded again. Beaming, Nicole held her 3-month coin to the camera for all the attendees to see.

Was Nicole nervous chairing a meeting for the first time? Yes, a little bit, she later told the *Sobriety Sentinel*. But she was also prepared.

"I did sit down and practice several times before we actually had the meeting, the day prior and then that day," Nicole said afterward. "I kinda was going over it in my head."

Then she paused and released a quick, un-self-conscious laugh, adding: "It's just reading off a paper, really, so..."

Group 762 was Nicole's point of entry into AA. She found the group in a roundabout but purposeful way—her best friend had, at



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one point, worked with a man named Tim that she knew was involved with AA. Nicole's non-AA friend connected Nicole with Tim.

Tim then connected Nicole not just with Group 762 but also with Nicole's fellow homegroup member and sponsor, Lisa. During a phone interview, Tim told us it was a natural match: "Lisa has a ton of

## WHERE AND WHEN:

**Thursday, 7 pm**

**Zoom ID: 762 2845 1662**

**Password :352109**

sobriety."

Lisa has longevity in the program, 25 years sober, but she also has a contagious youthful energy and enthusiasm. Lisa said taking on Nicole as a sponsee has invigorated her.

"If you're gonna sponsor someone with 90 days, you gotta be on your best behavior," she told us by phone, chuckling.

Lisa has been with Group 762 for 14 years. She was originally introduced to her current homegroup by a woman she knew who had been involved with AA as long as Lisa had, but who would drift in and out of the program.

"She ended up in a motor vehicle accident that killed an elderly couple. I was working as a nurse in an emergency room at the

time. She came in as a trauma patient, and so did that other couple," Lisa said. "I couldn't believe it. She had a daughter my age, she was a fellow nurse, she lost her license. She's in prison as we speak. So I knew that I needed to be serious and stay in a group that was active in AA."

Lisa said Group 762 is a "strong home base" that allows her to "feel safe and 100 percent be myself." That gives her the confidence to venture out to new meetings, a task that has been made much more convenient in the Zoom-meeting era. Often, Lisa and Nicole attend meetings together.

"Now I have all this other content to bring to my homegroup that I've been in for 14 years, so it works to benefit all of us," Lisa said. "And we're attracting new people now, which is really hard to get on Zoom. It's all word of mouth."

Group 762 is a closed, mixed meeting. The third Thursday each month is devoted to the corresponding step chapter from the 12+12. Otherwise, Group 762 is a Big Book study. The group began 2021 at the front of the book, with the preface and forewords. It will continue reading in sequence from there.

The *Sobriety Sentinel* can attest, Group 762 makes visitors feel very welcome.

Nicole said the group also highly values its new members: "Everyone's so nice and willing to talk to you about anything. I've had some long conversations with people I've never even met in person. Everyone's story is a little bit different, but we're all the same."

## Service study attracts a crowd

by **ANDREW H Group 968**

Pat D of Group 392 jokes that *The AA Service Manual* should be called "The Secret Service Manual," because no one ever reads it. But the East Coast organizers of a six-week collaborative speaker study were "absolutely thrilled" recently that almost 400 people showed up to a Zoom meeting that placed the service manual front and center.

"It is quite the pedigree of speakers," said Terry H, event co-organizer and AA delegate for Delaware. "It's being done by people who have held the positions, which is kind of fun, and are respected throughout the AA fellowship for what they have done."

The lineup includes a past U.S. trustee at large, a past general manager of the General Service Office and a current non-trustee Grapevine Board director, all giving talks rooted in their areas of expertise.

"I know all those people personally," Terry told us. "I've eaten dinner with them, messed around New York City with them."

The series started on the first Thursday in January, with Terry and his co-organizers—AA delegate for Maryland, Cynthia T, and Nikki O, AA delegate for Maine—leading off the talks with an introduction to the basics of service work.

"People kind of recoil from service. They run away from it," Nikki said later in a phone interview. "But if we don't have our service structure in place, how is AA gonna transport the message, you know?"

**Thursdays through Feb. 11,  
6-7:30 pm  
Zoom ID: 837 3047 2616  
Password: 462942**

## Birthdays: We stay sober one day at a time

### 5 YEARS

I got sober on New Year's Day. I'm one of those people, I didn't wanna get sober on some random Wednesday.

I'd had a car accident and DWI the preceding December 11. I still drank after, but it made me stop and think about, *What the hell are you doing? You got caught this time; how many other times could you have gotten caught? The next time, you might hurt somebody.*

I was down in my basement, contemplating life, and my daughters were so far away from me, the two most precious things I have in this whole world. *I'm losing them, I thought. I'm losing them to this vodka bottle. I'm putting it ahead of them.*

I woke up my husband and told him, "Tomorrow, I'm calling your brother-in-law, and I'm going to AA! I don't know what it's all about, but I'm going to AA!"

My husband and I went and talked to my brother-in-law. I

was a little nervous going over there. He started sharing, telling me all the things he did when drinking. I didn't know he did all that shit! My husband and his wife were looking at us like, *What on earth are you two talking about?! You two are crazy!* And I was like, *Yeah, pretty much.* You could totally tell that they were not "one of us."

My brother-in-law took me to my first meeting, which was Monday evening at 6:30 at The Office, and I've been with AA ever since.

My homegroup is Zoom-only right now. I miss the hugs, and I miss the fellowship of in-person meetings. You can't bottle that. It's intangible. There's that look you give a newcomer. That feeling you feel, inside your heart. All you wanna do is just hug them and tell them, "It's gonna be all right, just trust me. I know you don't wanna hear 'God,' but trust me on this."

You just know you're home when you walk into a meeting.

**Kathy Group 632**

### 7 YEARS

I remember waking up on one of my last mornings, after a four-day bender—running outside, looking at my truck to make sure I hadn't wrecked it, making sure I still had my wallet. My pictures were off the walls, my filing cabinets turned upside down. I didn't remember anything from the past four days. Today, I'm about to close on a house that my wife and I had custom-built on 31 acres in the middle of nowhere, and it's a home that I absolutely would have never even dreamed of owning.

My first sponsor had me make a list of things I expected out of Alcoholics Anonymous, and my list was pretty short: I wanna stop peeing the bed, wanna stop waking up in random places, and I wanted to be financially responsible. I sold myself so short of the things that were possible, that I've achieved with Alcoholics Anonymous.

When I walked into Group

777 for my first meeting, it was like a high-school reunion. There was all kinds of familiar faces in there. When I had a year, they said, "You know, if I was a bettin' man, I would've lost money!" And it made me so mad. But today, I completely get it. The odds are so stacked against us.

It's an absolute blessing to be married to somebody who gets it, too. Her mother suffers from it. She understands what I need to do to stay sober and appreciates me doing whatever it takes to stay sober.

**Craig Group 589**

### 11 YEARS

I became horribly, tragically dependent on alcohol. I believed the only way I could get relief was to put alcohol in me to ease that discomfort and discontent. I would wake up and drink to function and go to work. The worse it got, the more I drank. It was a

progression.

The last time I drank was at my work Christmas party. I was very consciously trying not to drink. I told myself I would drink two and no more, and I ended up in a complete blackout. I felt defeated, felt like throwing in the towel.

I decided to go to an AA meeting. It was the first time in a long time that I was able to be honest and say, "You know, I'm an alcoholic, but I don't wanna be. And I really like to drink. It makes me feel good, and I don't know what else to do."

Over the last 11 years, things have changed so much for me. I don't have to lie. My job stature and responsibilities have increased over the years. I'm married to a wonderful man; I had another baby in sobriety.

When I came into the program, I would lie to the company and say that I had a bachelor's degree, because I'd never finished. Now, today, I have a master's degree.

**Michelle Group 968**

To report Tri-County AA news or events, announce birthdays, recommend your homegroup for a feature piece, or just to share your experience, strength and hope with us, please email [sentinel@tricountyaa.org](mailto:sentinel@tricountyaa.org)