

Sobriety Sentinel

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Pandemic life brings rewards, challenges

by KELLY W
Group 435

I was just coming off an emotional rock bottom when Covid first struck almost a year ago. I was not exactly in the middle of the boat at the time. But I decided to throw my all back in. I re-packed my toolbox and prepared for battle. One thing my dad has told me since I was a little girl: "If you fall down seven times, get up eight."

When Zoom was presented, let me tell you, I started Zooming. I Zoomed every day, sometimes twice a day, and my spiritual life again became great. I was talking to God and connecting with my sponsor daily for the first time in a very long time. I had regular Zoom calls with my sponsee sisters, and we grew a bond like no other. I'd never seen half these women before Covid, but thanks to the new normal, my relationships were deepening through the phone and computer.

The lack of in-person human connection eventually began to take a toll, though, so once meetings began to safely reopen, I attended them once more. I was asked to speak three separate times, and it brought me a fear I walked through. The list of fears I've walked through goes on for days. If God brings you to it, He will bring you through it.

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My stress has been up and down on the homefront. Recovery comes first so that I can be the best mom I can be. But, having three kids who also are going through the stress of a pandemic, all I can say is I do my best to live my program and practice the principles at home.

I am a nurse, so there have been days where I have been under pressure and days I have cried. I've changed jobs. I've had to go weeks without seeing my kids. Sometimes, our only interactions are through Facetime playdates.

I've had to wave to my parents from the sidewalk while they are on their balcony. I've attended funerals. But every morning, I thank God for my sobriety and my health, and I ask that He show me what His will is for me that day.

We have all gone through struggles similar to the ones I've mentioned here. The bravest thing we can do is ask for help. We don't have to do this alone. The hand of AA is always there, and for that I am grateful. I will continue to show my gratitude by carrying the message to the best of my ability, one day at a time.

AA comedy night goes Zoom-only

by ANDREW H
Group 968

Less than a month before this year's Comedy Night fundraiser--an annual favorite now in its sixth year--treasurer and co-organizer Susan B found out the event would have to be held on Zoom rather than in person. Quickly, she had to figure out how to adjust to the logistics and confines of the new platform.

"I had to get a four-year education in a week," Susan told us. "It is unbelievable how difficult this all is. But we're doing it!"

The comedians on the bill are also having to adjust their acts to fit the Zoom format. One of those comics, Tim Laffey, has never performed virtually. He said he's thinking about setting up stage curtains and a microphone stand at home, even though the microphone won't be plugged in or turned on.

"I'm expecting it to be pretty awkward," Laffey said. Then he added, wryly, "Which is fine. I'm used to being pretty awkward onstage."

Joe Lancey, another of the comics performing Saturday, has done his act on Zoom before. His approach to virtual comedy is more basic.

"I'm holding my phone, usually, unless I can get it up on my laptop," Lancey said. "It looks a lot better on the laptop. I've got Parkinson's, so when I use the phone, I shake so bad it looks like I'm in an earthquake."

For more, please see COMEDY, Page 2



An empty, sanitized room awaits the attendees of Group 589's brand new Thursday 6:30 pm open AA meeting at the Community Connection Hub, 140 Weldon Parkway, in Maryland Heights. Attendance so far has ranged from four to six people.

EASTWARD EXPANSION

Group 589 of O'Fallon adds second meeting in Maryland Heights

by ANDREW H
Group 968

At 6:29 on a Thursday night in early February, three homegroup members of Group 589 were still deciding on the format for their new 6:30 meeting. They'd agreed it would be a Big Book meeting, but where to start? With a personal story from the "entertainment section," picked at random? With "The Doctor's Opinion," or with the Preface/Forewords section at the very front of the book?

It was an informal group conscience meeting, and they invited our input, as we had just walked in to visit. By 6:31, we'd decided we would start with the Preface and Forewords, and the meeting began. It was the group's second-ever Thursday night meeting, it was just the four of us, and it was spectacular.

Group 589 goes back more than a decade, and it has been meeting at 212 Club on Monday nights at 7:30 for more than three years now, with the exception of a period of about two months last year when meetings were Zoom-only.

Before Covid, the Monday meeting would burst at the seams with young people and newcomers. Some weeks, they would have upwards of 100 people, with attendees crammed into the room and lining the entry doorways and surrounding hallways.

It's a little different these days. In-person attendance at the Monday meeting ranges from 20 to 30 people. Masks are optional. The group's hybrid Zoom connection attracts another 10 to 12 people.

Some homegroup members found themselves facing a dilemma--the in-person meetings felt too crowded and unsafe, while the Zoom meetings felt too emotionally distant and homogenized.

"I see the same faces joining Zoom each week," said Jordan, a 589 homegroup member since 2017. "I love everyone who joins, but I wasn't bumping into new people, hearing little bits of their story. That was always something that helped get me out of self,

going to a big meeting where I see all of my friends, but I also run into this person that I've never seen before, and all of a sudden I feel connected to them."

Jordan and fellow 589 homegroup member Dan began scouting potential meeting venues and visiting existing in-person meetings in St. Louis County, which requires mask-wearing and social distancing. Michael, a third homegroup member, suggested the spot the group conscience eventually settled on: the Community Connection Hub in Maryland Heights.

Adjacent to and affiliated with Sana Lake Behavioral Wellness, an outpatient substance abuse and mental health treatment center, the Hub has multiple meeting rooms, open gathering spaces, ping-pong, even a meditation room. Having only recently opened, the Hub also has wide availability for groups to establish new meetings.

The Hub also has an existing emotional connection to Michael, who is re-entering the AA program after a relapse. At one point, he had multiple years sober; now, he has just over 100 days, having completed inpatient treatment at Sana Lake's facility in Dittmer, Mo.

Michael is happy to return to in-person meetings not just because of what he calls "human interaction support," but also because they offer service-work opportunities that don't physically exist on Zoom.

"It's important for me to show up before the meeting and see where I can be helpful," Michael told us. "I can make coffee. I can make sure the room's cleaned up, straighten up chairs."

As of press time, Group 589's new Thursday meeting was not yet listed in any local Where and When directories, but its first meeting still attracted three newcomers who saw it listed on the Hub's bulletin board.

"Most of the reason I'm going is that new person, whether it be a newcomer or someone who's looking for something different, being able to get to share that experience with them," Dan said.

Step Two

On October 6, 2007, I got and stayed sober for 11 years. That last year of sobriety, I became lax. My homegroup dissipated; I didn't replace it. My sponsor moved; I didn't replace her. This program only works if you work it. I wasn't working it.

Now, after a painful two-year battle with active alcoholism, I find myself again at Step Two: "Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity."

I felt absolutely insane and full of fear--head down, nose stuffy, face stained with tears--when I walked back through the doors of AA and into my new homegroup. Already, with my 30-day birthday behind me and my 60-day one still ahead, I walk into my homegroup meeting with a smile and a sense of belonging.

Step Two requires that I get down on my knees every morning and connect with my Higher Power, even when my faith is precarious or doubtful.

I know that, if I actively pray, if I listen to content that expresses God as a loving God, and if I repeatedly remind myself to turn it over and know that I am never alone, eventually my brain will catch up. I will automatically start my Step Three and move forward.

This is the solution. I have to believe, I have to turn it over, and I have to learn to serve others once I reach Step Twelve, so I can continuously go back through the steps with a future sponsee and with my own sponsor.

Today, I believe. Today, I get down on my knees. Today, I am not alone.

Jackie H
Group 632

RESPONSIBILITY STATEMENT

When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there. And for that: I am responsible.

BIRTHDAYS

GROUP 164

John A	29 years	7/1/2020
Mary M	28 years	7/22/2020
Susan G	1 year	11/4/2020
Emily E	12 years	11/27/2020
Marilyn P	9 years	1/1/2021
Nan H	30 years	1/23/2021
Richard W	2 years	1/24/2021

GROUP 340

Mike W	30 years
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GROUP 1023

Leo A	4 years	12/17/2020
Kristi I	11 years	12/20/2020
Kathleen W	15 years	12/26/2020
Cindy C	3 years	1/1/2021
Shannon	3 years	1/2/2021
Laura J	3 years	1/2021

GROUP 1118

Jason B	30 days
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DECLARATION OF UNITY

This we owe to AA's future: to place our common welfare first; to keep our fellowship united. For on AA unity depends our lives, and the lives of those to come.

Concept Two

In the second Concept for World Service, we AAs entrust the actual "voice and effective conscience of our whole society" to the General Service Conference through our elected area delegates.

A little history—in its humble beginnings, AA was reliant on its co-founders Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob to "create overall services which could spread the AA message worldwide."

The Akron and New York groups soon realized that they needed help, so they found trusted servants (alcoholic and non-alcoholic) and formed the Alcoholic Foundation in 1938 to handle AA's funds and later to manage Works Publishing, Inc. and Grapevine magazine.

At the International conference, held here in St Louis in 1955, Bill introduced the Twelve Traditions and the AA Concepts of Service. He essentially gave Alcoholics Anonymous to its members, with the notion that the groups would "delegate and distribute their own authority, responsibility and leadership" to keep AA going. Thus, the General Service Conference allows the group conscience of AA to be heard by chosen representatives who are fully trusted to speak for it respecting most matters of world service.

HOW IT WORKS

AA Groups around the world elect service representatives who are fully empowered to speak and to act for them, as established by Tradition Two—our leaders are trusted servants.

STEP-BY-STEP

1. General Service Representative (GSR): Elected by your homegroup; attends monthly GSR meetings at the District level and the Area Assembly.

2. District Committee Member (DCM): Elected by GSRs to represent the entire District in their Area; also attends the Area Assembly.

3. Delegate: Elected by the Area Assembly to represent the entire Area and attend the General Service Conference in New York City.

Julie S
Group 1118

Comedy: Changes affect organizers, comics

From Page 1

Lancey finds it more difficult to achieve a proper rhythm and timing when performing on Zoom versus doing a show live. He likes the "instant feedback" a live audience provides. On Zoom, Lancey tells more long-form stories now and fewer traditional jokes. He also misses being heckled from the audience, believe it or not.

"When somebody yells something stupid, I can play off it," Lancey said. "I'm more of a counterpuncher."

Lancey feels like people are more easily distracted when they watch a comedy show from home.

"You can't give it your full attention," Lancey said. "You're eating popcorn or worrying about the pizza rolls, or the dog's actin' up, the kid's actin' up. I'm just basically a Netflix show to them."

Another comic on Saturday's bill, Mike

McGuire, has been doing weekly improv shows on Zoom with his ComedySportz troupe since the end of March.

"It's kept us together, and it's been fun,

but it's nowhere near as much fun as doing live," McGuire said.

"The good news is, because you can be anywhere in the world, we've been having competitions against theaters across the country. So I've gotten to know people all over the place."

Difficulties aside, all three comics we interviewed are looking forward to Saturday's show. Laffey and McGuire both performed for the AA Comedy Night show

two years ago, and they say the fellowship crowd was fantastic.

"I remember the audience being really engaged and happy to be there and seeing a show," Laffey told us. "There was a good energy going on in the crowd."

McGuire said AA audiences are "good listeners, and that's what you need." He also told us he has "an affinity for people who are going through

recovery."

At age 28, McGuire said, he found himself going down a road of heavier and heavier drinking. He recognized it was becoming a problem, and he decided to take a

monthlong break from booze.

"I'm 57 now, I haven't had anything to drink since then," McGuire said, and added with a chuckle: "Not to brag, but I think I could have been a *huge* alcoholic."

Proceeds from AA Comedy Night benefit the Spring Fling Convention. In past years, tickets went fast. This year, however, sales have been a little more sluggish.

"We've always sold out at 300 tickets when we were doing it in person, because that's the most we could have at any venue," said Susan B. "I'm hoping we get to 300 because the whole point behind it is, it *is* a fundraiser."

As of press time, the Spring Fling Convention itself, which will be held the weekend of April 23-25, is still planned to be in person, Susan told us, "unless the county says otherwise."

"We signed a contract with the hotel," added Susan. "So, to them, we have to have it."

AA COMEDY NIGHT:

Sat, Feb. 20, 7 pm on Zoom

3 speakers/5 comics

Tickets - \$20

Visit springflingstl.com



Disease of More

One is too many, a thousand never enough...

by **MISSY R
Group 632**

I've always had the notion that if a little of something is good, more of it is better. How could that not be true? Who wouldn't want more attention, love, money, TV channels, chocolate, free time, clothes? Oh yeah, and more vodka?

I reasoned (with myself, of course—I'm not foolish enough to try to reason with another person) that if I enjoyed drinking *some* alcohol, I would *really* enjoy drinking a *lot* of alcohol. I'm logical like that.

That's how I ended up drinking a fifth or more of vodka every day. Trust me, there really is no circumstance in which drinking a fifth of vodka is okay. In fact, doing so *may* indicate that you *might* be an alcoholic.

The more I drank to cope with life, the more I had to

drink. I couldn't come up with any other ideas to deal with anything. Drinking helped me forget about or at least ignore whatever was worrying me at the time. I always thought, *Tomorrow, I'll come up with a better way to handle this.* The next day I always reverted to Plan Vodka.

Everything just got worse and worse. I spent a ridiculous amount of time pondering my situation, deceiving myself about the direness of it all, until I finally surrendered. I can't tell you what the pivotal moment was. I just remember waking up one morning and thinking, *I can't keep living this way. I have to do something.*

I had avoided AA for many years because my dad was in AA, and if I went to a meeting, he might see me there. I couldn't have my dad knowing I was an alcoholic! But when I reached that low point, I called him. He took me to

my first AA meeting that day and introduced me to several people who welcomed me with open arms. I didn't feel judged. I was able to talk about what was really going on in my head, and people understood, even agreed with me.

I found a sponsor and worked the steps. I developed a relationship with my Higher Power. My Higher Power is now where I turn for comfort, help and answers.

Best of all, I've learned a lot about myself. I've learned how to love myself and I know I deserve to be happy and have a beautiful life. In AA, I found my tribe, my OG's! Serenity is awesome.

When I'm not feeling right today, I still believe I need more of something to feel better—more AA fellowship. That's where I find more of everything else good in my life.

Featured Birthdays: Experience, strength, hope

1 YEAR

I believe I was born alcoholic, just like I was born with brown eyes.

I didn't start drinking until I was in my early 20s, and it just kind of took off from there. It was a lot of fun, it got me out of myself, but then it turned not-good. I can't even see a line where it went from good to bad; it just did.

I was drinking every day, waking up with the shakes, not really caring about anything in my career. It destroyed my body, destroyed my mind, my relationship. I went through a divorce, and my drinking got a lot worse. I didn't think it could, but it did.

I came into work drunk, and they told me that I was fired until I went to rehab. So that brought me in the doors of both rehab and AA. It was very hard at first. It's still hard, but it was *really* hard going through a divorce, job on the line, I was getting ready to lose my house, my car, people weren't talking to me anymore, so I'm like, *Okay, this is all I got.* And I went in there full-fledged.

There was a lot of emotion, a lot of downs, but it just slowly started going up from there. With every 24 hours, I gained a little bit of strength

that I never knew I had.

AA has done wonders for me, absolutely. It's totally changed my life. I have my job, I have my car, I have my house. I don't have my ex-husband, but that's okay—that was a good thing! (*laughs*)

I've made some beautiful friends, and I have a place to call home, and I owe it to AA.

Tiffany K
Group 261

25 YEARS

I came to AA initially in 1977, after a four-day blackout. I was hospitalized in the Institute of Pennsylvania Hospital. After some time there, I went to my first AA meetings, but I was not ready. I ended up moving to the Midwest, and the drinking continued here.

During my drinking days, I hitchhiked across the United States with people I didn't know. I didn't have a car until I was 21. I was a terrible driver. I swore I would never drink and drive again, but every Friday, I'd be back at it. I remember being on UMSL's campus and going off the road, actually driving on the sidewalks in between the buildings,

looking for the party.

I had a long period of sobriety, from 1981 to 1995. I got a sponsor and had a homegroup who both helped me tremendously. I did all the things they said to do. I got very involved. We listened to Joe and Charlie and worked the Steps, analyzed them, talked them.

To make a long story short, I believe the reason I drank again in 1995 was that I picked up a glass of alcohol. I was able to get sober again, thank God, in January of '96. I was very fortunate to find a few people that were willing to be there for me after that relapse and help me pull my sobriety together.

I think the main thing this time has learning to listen before I speak. That's been really a big deal for me. Listening is an act of recovery.

Another thing that really helped me was a sponsor who told me, "Everyone in AA grows up in public, and that it's hard, but we all do it. We all go through the same process, and we can see it in each other but not in ourselves," and I believe that to be true, too, that the AA program gives us a method of growing up emotionally. That begins with not taking a drink one day at a time.

I really believe in the "right now" program for people who struggle.

Whenever there's a moment where they want to drink, it's just, *Don't drink right now*, and having a fire plan: *There's like 10 or 15 other things I'm gonna do before I pick up a drink.*

One thing would be, *Wait until tomorrow. I'm not gonna drink today.* Another one would be, obviously, calling my sponsor. Another would be calling every phone number of every AA list that I've accumulated until I get to people and talk to them and tell them what's going on.

Another thing is doing service work of some kind and getting out of myself. Being a greeter at a meeting, even if it's not your regular meeting. There's a long list of things that can be done that are a plan of action.

In terms of finding a Higher Power, one of the smartest things anyone ever said to me is, "Don't worry about it. Just keep coming to the meeting, and it will all come together naturally," and that's been what's happened. I am a garden-variety kind of alcoholic, where everything's happened slowly and over time.

Today, I live comfortably and peacefully with myself, and that is a real blessing from where I come from.

Jane D
Group 228

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@tricityaa.org