

TAKE ONE DOWN, AND PASS IT AROUND!

Sobriety Sentinel

APRIL 2021 - SERVING DISTRICTS 14, 19 and 20 of AREA 38 - TRICOUNTYAA.ORG

Spring Fling to be held in person

by ANDREW H
Group 968

Lisa S had never attended the Spring Fling Convention before she volunteered to work on the committee. One year, she was chair of marathon meetings. Another year, she chaired the hospitality room. Last year, she stayed home. Everyone did. Because of, you know, Covid.

"We didn't have a convention last year," Lisa told us. "We've been looking to do a live convention this entire year, and it is coming to fruition! We're gonna have it live!"

We could easily hear the exclamation points in Lisa's voice, and we could hear them all through the last Spring Fling committee meeting we sat in on.

The excitement and urgency was partly because it had finally been confirmed that the convention would be held in person, and partly because the weekend convention dates were bearing down on the committee members. They knew April 23-25 was just around the corner.

"It is a whirlwind," Lisa said. "It takes an entire year minus one month to plan a convention of this type, in order for people to feel as though they're in a spiritual mindset. It's put together in a way that people know that this is something that

is important for their sobriety, and yet, it's fun."

The committee contains 28 members. There are at least 17 other committed volunteers. Circuit speakers are flying in from Nashville, Florida and California. There will be a banquet dinner, a barbecue, trivia, washers, bingo, a DJ and dancing. Also, an archives room, continuous AA meetings, an AI Anon luncheon.

Marian S of Group 1149 plans to attend as a civilian this year, after several years serving on the Spring Fling committee. She said service involvement on the convention level always gave her AA program a "supercharge."

"If I just attend, it's great, but to be a part of instead of apart from, it's amazing," Marian told us.

Marian told us she initially stepped up at the last minute in 2016, while just a few months sober, to replace a woman who had been involved in a car accident and could no longer perform her function. Marian then simply stayed involved, and over the next couple years became co-chair of the hosting committee and then chair of hosting. She said she enjoyed the mature sobriety of the other committee members as well.

"The ones that really do the program are involved at that level," Marian said. "Good serenity and spirituality are

byproducts of involvement when you're 'all-in.'"

That said, the Spring Fling committee is still looking for volunteers for this year's convention, and for future events. Visit springflingstl.com, and click the "service" tab to volunteer. There is no minimum requirement for length of sobriety.

During a walk-through of the Airport Hilton in mid-March, the hotel's event coordinator, Sharon, told us that the typical attendance level of the Spring Fling does not conflict with the 50 percent capacity requirements of St. Louis County. The hotel is offering event attendees more space than they've had in previous years. However, the Saturday night banquet dinner is operating at a lower threshold, and has sold out.

Lisa S, the past marathon-meetings chair and past hospitality chair, is currently a Spring Fling board member as well as chair of the greeter committee. If you show up this year, Lisa may well be the first AA person you encounter.

"It may be a little bit less in terms of people in the facility," Lisa said, "but it is live, and we're all looking forward to it. I hope you are, too!"

There's that audible exclamation point again, and here's another one — the Sobriety Sentinel will be in attendance at this year's Spring Fling as well!



Andrew H/Sobriety Sentinel

This entire hallway at the St. Louis Airport Hilton, with five meeting rooms and banquet space, belongs to Spring Fling Convention attendees and volunteers during the entire weekend of April 23-25. Many in attendance will also stay in a block of

hotel rooms reserved and priced specially for the event. The pre-registration period has ended, but attendees are still able to register at the door during the event for \$20. More information is available at springflingstl.com.



Mountainside.com

Grief in Sobriety: When Love & Fear Co-exist

by ANDREW H
Group 968

Ten years ago, Jim, my father-in-law, told me that he was a sober alcoholic, that he hadn't touched booze in three decades. He said his personal philosophy was, "The next drink will kill me." I rolled my eyes, not physically, but on the inside. The first drink wasn't my problem, I thought. The fifteenth drink... well, I could admit that sometimes *that* would cause some personal complications. But I didn't say that out loud, either.

Two years ago, after I had been sober for a fairly lengthy amount of time and had fully bought into Alcoholics Anonymous, I included Jim on an email list to which I'd send my new pieces of writing, all of which dealt with recovery and spirituality. Jim would always respond thoughtfully, with encouragement, every single time I sent something out. In response to one particular piece, he told me, "Progress is not always linear." Another time, he told me, "Perfect love casts out fear." On each occasion, Jim stated exactly what I needed to hear.

Rather frequently, I still hear him tell me those things, up in my head, and deep in my soul.

A few days ago, late in the night, Jim passed away. He was 77. His is the first family death I've had to contend with in sobriety. We knew it was coming, and he was able to say goodbye to us, and we him, on multiple occasions. But on Easter evening, 36 or so hours before his soul left his body, I sat silently at Jim's bedside, and I was utterly surprised at how thoroughly and how intensely I cried. I bawled. I wept. I hadn't planned on crying, and it was sad. It was remorseful. But it was also infused with a fundamental gratitude, and with humility. God was with me in that moment.

It was a surprise to me that I felt those emotions so deeply. My ten year old had just told me, that week, that he didn't know what I looked like or sounded like when I cry, because he never gets to see it. Indeed, the most tearful I typically get is when my eyes well up with emotion from a touching scene in a movie, or a beloved song that has been rooted deep, or the knowledge that 90+ percent of people who suffer from my disease die from

it without ever admitting they have it, much less achieving physical sobriety and spiritual recovery.

I talked to a friend in the program named Tim, the night after the death of my father-in-law. I returned Tim's call, not realizing he'd butt-dialed me earlier by mistake. We see each other around, and we've known each other for years; sometimes we text, but we'd never had a phone conversation. He might not have dialed my number consciously, but I believe he was meant to call me that night. Tim offered his experience, strength and hope with me, free of charge, while I sat within a stone's throw of my surviving family members. And Tim told me that death is spiritual. Certainly my experience at Jim's bedside was spiritual, but I hadn't considered that it was a spiritual process for Jim as well, not just for me.

While writing this piece just now, I took a break to attend a monthly writer's group on Zoom. The topic of death and grief loomed large, and I also don't believe that was by coincidence. A woman named Sandy, who recently lost her "big mutt" of a dog, told the group that all emotions in life either

fall under the category of love, or the category of fear. "Grief, though," Sandy added, "falls under both."

In grieving for Jim these past few days, I've missed work at a new job. I've gone back to work and felt anxiety. I've laughed with my kids extra hard over things that aren't really that funny. I've felt like my marriage, almost 14 years strong now, has entered a second-honeymoon stage. And I've cried over things that ordinarily wouldn't provoke that reaction. My ten year old knows what I look like now when I cry. I've experienced love and fear in the same moment, and I've had Jim's voice, Tim's voice and Sandy's voice - and many others that are sources of strength - telling me what I need to hear, upstairs in my cranium and all through my heart, when I need to hear it.

The next drink will kill me. Progress is not always linear. Death is spiritual. Grief is simultaneous fear and love. God's perfect love can and will cast out fear. Sometimes the simplest truths resonate and comfort me the most effectively.

Rest in peace, Jim. Your family loves you.

Missing something?

Our regular feature essays spotlighting the Step, Tradition and Concept of the Month will return in the May issue with combined pieces on Steps 4 and 5, Traditions 4 and 5 and Concepts 4 and 5.

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

Gus P	2 years	3/5	GROUP 77		
Jackie E	38 years	3/8	Kim L	9 years	3/10
Jeremy	22 years	3/15	Bob W	37 years	3/18
Dan R	10 years	3/20	GROUP 124		
Steve A	3 years	4/6	John K	36 years	3/8
GROUP 164			Dan S	4 years	3/15
Bill B	34 Years	4/10	GROUP 4094		
GROUP 1023			Cory H	27 years	4/1
Cara B	1 year	3/2	Jones J	16 years	4/6
Gina S	2 years	3/27			
Mary S	13 years	4/4			

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.

Pray for Kristina M!



Live in the Now

After eight decades of spiritual study, three decades spent in two 12-step recovery programs, mission work in South Africa, meeting Nelson Mandela, walking labyrinth, silent retreats and reading hundreds of books, my spiritual director recently said to me:

"It all boils down to this – awakening to the presence of God right *here* and right *now*."

Her words were clear and simple. It doesn't have to be hard. We don't have to go to spiritual retreats, search high and low, try out new churches...

Quick aside: in my adult sober life, I have attended no less than four churches, and in the 10 years before sobriety, there were three or four more!

"It's a matter of waking up to the spiritual bread crumbs that are on our path," she continued.

We talked about various religious practices during Lent, which recently finished up. But for her and for me too, life is about having a spiritual practice more so than a religious practice.

While taking a "walk with God" out in nature, it's noticing the small signs. A bird singing proudly, a group of deer quietly lying down in the fresh snow, the rays of light through the black silhouette of a tree. Or the glaring white glow of a full moon on a clear night. There are many ways to "wake up" to the presence of a Higher Power in our lives.

Recently at a meeting, I heard two people share about hearing just the right words they needed to hear through the lyrics of a song. Another person sees the words with a message for her on Angel Cards. Many paths. One Source.

Prayer for consideration:

"God, as I walk, help me to be present to myself and to you."

Wake up to the Presence of the One. It's all around us.

Brenda F
Group 451



ExperienceRecovery.com

by **ANDY T**
Group 632

It was about 25 years ago that I moved to the St. Charles area. In those days, when we would pass around a newcomer's packet for names and signatures, we would simply hand it to the person next to us - man or woman - and let that person decide whether to sign it or not.

I'm not sure when the practice crept in of only allowing people of the same gender to sign. Or when some people started making ostentatious displays of bypassing anyone of the complementary sex, as if a woman merely touching a man's packet would somehow taint it. I don't know when any of this started, but it's bad for AA as a whole. And it's bad for newcomers in particular.

In my first few years of sobriety, I received tremendous amounts of help from women. They didn't just teach me how to stay sober. They taught me how to live. My first sponsor was a woman.

When I arrived in AA, I didn't know how to relate to women any way other than sexually. I needed to learn how

to connect with them simply as human beings. I was able to start doing that because women put their names on my newcomer packet, and because I put my name on plenty of women's packets, too.

I would often receive phone calls from both men and women, late at night and into the early morning. They called because they liked what I'd said in a meeting, or because they knew I'd answer my phone at three in the morning. Sometimes, these women who called were sober. Sometimes they were drunk. Sometimes they were suicidal. They were all desperate, and I didn't sleep with any of them.

We don't know what lessons people need to learn when they come into the program. Maybe they need to learn that all men or women in AA can't be trusted. More likely though, they need to learn that *most* men or women in AA *can* be trusted. Maybe they need to learn to tell the difference. The message we are sending, though, is that the men and women in AA *can't* be trusted in dealing with the opposite sex.

It's also incredibly hubristic to think that we have the

Gender Embargo

It's time to rethink our "men with men, women with women" axiom

right to decide for anyone who they can reach their hand out to. Any time I try controlling a situation or other people, I screw it up worse than if I'd just left it alone.

God works through people. By preventing someone from putting their name on a newcomer packet, we might be preventing the newcomer from meeting the very person God sent them to that meeting to meet.

I realize that the intent behind current "men with men, women with women" policy is good, and that it's meant to prevent Thirteenth Stepping. If a person *really wants* to Thirteenth Step a newcomer, though, we can't prevent that simply by not allowing the person to put his or her number on the packet.

We're not giving out the newcomer's number. We are providing the newcomer with numbers to call, if he or she chooses to call them. If the newcomer is uncomfortable calling a man or a woman, the newcomer does not have to call them. The choice is theirs.

The next time a newcomer packet is passed around, just hand it to the person next to you and let that person decide whether to put his or her name on it.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Recovery author to release new meditation book

Karen Casey, author of dozens of sobriety and spirituality-themed books, is a friend of the Sobriety Sentinel. She talked to us briefly about her new daily meditation book, *Each Day a Renewed Beginning: Meditations for a Peaceful Journey*.

"To find solace was my personal goal [in writing this book]," Karen told us. "When any one of us is gifted with a peaceful heart, we can't help but convey that gift to others, too. As a writer, I can't hope for more than that."

Karen's new book finds release on May 11. You can pre-order the book now at Amazon.

-Andrew H, Group 968

Men's and women's float trips coming in June

Don't tell Andy T up there, but there will be two separate AA float trips this summer, one for men and the other for women.

The Friends of Bill W. Men's Float Trip

will be held June 11-13 at Bass River Resort in Steelville, Mo. For \$65, your camping, canoe, food and drink are included. The trip offers Missouri Conservation Non-License Fishing on Saturday and Sunday, with a pig roast Friday night and dinner Saturday featuring one-pound T-bone steaks.

Aaron F of Group 589 has served on the float trip committee for the past five years.

"One of the best parts of the weekend is the speaker meeting on Saturday night," Aaron told us. "Over 125 people gather around a 15-foot-tall bonfire, doing the sobriety countdown."

Two weeks later, on the weekend of June 25-27, the Women in Recovery Float and Camp Trip comes to Bourbon, Mo. Based on your accommodation preference, prices range from \$47 to \$71 but include most food, "round-the-clock" coffee, float, showers and pool.

It should be noted, too, that the women's float/camping trip includes four scheduled AA meetings, including three with speakers; souvenir T-shirts available in seven sizes;

and three types of seafaring vessels to choose for your float. You're not just stuck with a canoe and no souvenir shirt like on the silly men's float trip.

-Also Andrew H, Group 968

Missouri State Convention will be held in person

A friend who's fairly high up in the Area 38 service structure told us the news tonight, and a quick email to the Convention Committee garnered reply from a guy named Greg S who confirmed: "It is a fact. The MOSC is back, and it is live!"

The convention will be held at Capital Plaza Hotel in Jefferson City from July 30 to August 1. Current room rate is listed as "\$0.00 plus tax." They're bound to go quickly at a price like that.

"Online registration will open up at the end of April, once we get the food prices from the hotel," said Greg. "We will have full food services for hotel guests, banquets and ice cream socials. The hotel restaurant will also be open for walk-in guests for the

entire convention."

-Yet Again, Andrew H, Group 968

Tuesday night meeting at Harris House resumes in person

When interviewing Marian S for the Spring Fling article on the front page, we also learned from her that Group 1149, Tuesdays at 6 pm, is resuming in-person meetings at Harris House on 2706 S. River Road in St. Charles.

Treatment center residents attend, but Marian stated there are "plenty of AA people" also in attendance, and she said pre-Covid, sometimes vanloads of men and women from other residential facilities would typically be brought to the meeting as well.

"This meeting is a good way to carry the message to the newcomer," Marian said. "There are plenty of retreats there, too, and you can pick up sponees there."

-Someone Else Can Start Writing These If They Want To. It Doesn't Always Just Have To Be Me, You Know

Featured Birthday: Relapse is a part of his story

60 DAYS

My sponsor requested that I write this. I've known what a "sponsor" is and does since childhood. AA and alcoholism have been a part of my family for generations.

When I was growing up, my dad hosted Big Book meetings at our house every Tuesday. My grandfather, who had passed when I was very young, was always described in memories as a "dry drunk." And my brother lost his life to the disease of alcoholism four years ago.

I had my first real experience drinking around the age of 15. I could tell you exactly where I was, who I was with, and what we had. The memory is that ingrained in my mind. But none of that is important. What is important, is the fact that despite the consequences—DUIs, minor-in-

possession charges, lost friendships, a broken marriage, and so on—I could always find a way to justify and rationalize my behavior. I believed that I was in control and that it wasn't possible that the disease of alcoholism was affecting me in the same way it did the other members of my family.

Fast forward 20 years. I'll skip the period lasting almost a year where I tried to quit drinking on my own with absolutely no success.

May 3, 2019, I finally ran out of excuses. That was my first sobriety date. I was living in Philadelphia at the time with my now-ex.

I found a sponsor and, with his help, started on a journey of sobriety and a new life that I had not thought possible, a life without my two best friends, Budweiser and Bushmill's.

My life became coffee meetups for

Big Book readings and discussions instead of the nightly trip to the bar. Daily phone calls instead of morning hangovers and that look of disappointment in my wife's eyes. Step work instead of living paycheck to paycheck, trying to balance the cost of rent and drinking. More meetings.

The Promises started to reveal themselves. My marriage improved. Financial stress went away. Coworkers enjoyed me more.

I felt like I had been staring at a picture of the Golden Gate Bridge this whole time—morning light, dew and fog—and never cared about what I had been looking at. Then someone turned my head to the left to show me a completely identical picture that was clear as day. It was there the entire time, I had just never bothered to look.

For 15 months, I experienced what

the program of Alcoholics Anonymous could bring to my life. For the first time in my life, I could breathe, I could relax, and I could genuinely smile.

Then adverse circumstances arose—a move across the country, to a city I never wanted to live in. Covid. Divorce. A whole lot of self-pity. It was a recipe for relapse.

I stopped working the program of AA, and my excuses for everything came back, as did my doubt. Guilt. Myriad other forms of depression that I can concoct in my own head. I believe we all know the feeling.

I am 60 days sober as of writing this. I don't know where this second go-round with sobriety will take me, but I do know what is possible, and I am looking forward to the ride.

Anonymous
Tri-County, MO

Celebrating sobriety? Write your birthday story and email it to bday@tricityaa.org

All opinions expressed are those of individuals and do not necessarily reflect the views of AA as a whole. To report Tri-County AA news or events, submit articles, recommend your homegroup for a feature piece, or just to share your experience, strength and hope with us, please email sentinel@tricityaa.org