

Sobriety Sentinel

FEBRUARY 2022 - REPRESENTING DISTRICTS 14, 19 and 20 of AREA 38 - TRICOUNTYAA.ORG



The Chair By the Window

Finding God, again and again, to fight fear with faith and hope

by **ANDREW H**
Group 968

Entering 2022, I have a lot of blessings, obligations and expectations, outward and inward, that I didn't have a year ago, or that I barely had a year ago. Big ones, amazing ones. I've had months to settle into all of them - in many ways, I'm looking at this being my sophomore year spent in a brand new life. God is showing me rather clearly what I'm to do now. I have a somewhat foggier idea of what's coming next, and the long-term future seems wide open.

My greatest irrational fear for this year is that I'll lose what I have, that I'll stagnate and move backward. I view spiritual sobriety as being on a down escalator, facing upward. I have to move at a certain pace just to break even. I have to move faster than the escalator's pace to advance, and if my pace becomes too slow at any time, the escalator will continue to bring me down.

I have a lot to handle now, more than ever, and I know there's more coming. I

fear I'll reach my threshold before I get there. The AA Big Book tells me any fear I have is due to the failure of my own self-reliance. I can't do any of the productive things I do strictly on my own. Selfish me is powerless. Over-indulgent me can't manage my life.

Faith fights fear, and I have to come to believe every morning. My most favored spiritual access point is in my bedroom chair, which sits by my bedroom window. What I have to come to believe is, God's power can and will restore me to the ability to see the objective truth about my life and my duties, and to think complete thoughts on how to accomplish them. I have to decide, in my chair by my window, every morning, to give my coming day to God. God the Father. God the Power. God the Solution.

In this chair, first I read, then I pray, then I write, then I pray. With time, with practice, I've been able to consistently reach a place described by the following words I heard and wrote down at the beginning of

2021: "It never felt like me writing, it felt like God speaking." I'm reading, I'm writing, I'm praying - I'm *hearing*- words and thoughts that are greater than what I believe I can produce entirely on my own.

I believe in God as a being, and I believe in God as a total summation of the following: Good Orderly Direction from a Group Of Drunks because I have to cultivate Gratitude Obedience and Discipline to Grow Or Die. God is the Great Out Doors. God is the Gift Of Desperation.

If I seek God, God will - and I can trust this because it happens every single day - take away my difficulties so I can show others God's Power, God's Love, God's Way of life.

I didn't notice until the end of 2021 that the Third Step Prayer capitalizes those three - the Power, the Love, the Way. These are the proper nouns to our program of action.

Hope includes both positivity and the ex-

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

Judith R's journey from crisis of faith to spiritual teacher

by **BRENDA F**
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Born in a log cabin in the St. Louis region, Judith R was only here in the area for a few months after her birth on a bitterly cold February day. Her father had brought his family all the way over from Sidney, Australia, while he was studying and pursuing a doctorate in theology. His path was a more traditional, conservative one.

After his studies were complete, the family returned to Australia, and that's where Judith grew up, until coming to the states when she was 18 years old.

Initially, there was culture shock, and she missed the food, the countryside and her relatives. Some relatives had descended from Aborigines, the indigenous peoples of Australia, and would later influence her spiritual path.

Judith would grow up to question and, as she told the *Sobriety Sentinel*, "reject everything." She had a spiritual crisis of faith. But coming into recovery, Judith crafted her own understanding of a Higher Power.

Professionally trained and working as an attorney in North Dakota, Judith in 2014 took a leave of absence from practicing law to become more hands-on within the field of recovery.

Now she is director of a nonprofit foundation called The Hub in North Dakota (no relation to The Hub in Maryland Heights), helping people affected by addiction. The Hub offers counseling services, a sober coffee shop, a gift shop run by a woman in recovery, and meeting rooms for groups.

Judith's passion for AA and Twelve Step recovery is evident. She has been on the AA speaker circuit for about 7 years, having started out at an AA event in California which was recorded.

"I guess the recording of me got around, and I started getting invited to speak," Judith remarked.

Judith claims to be an introvert who

only speaks when invited.

"It's easy to speak about the Power of the Program," she said.

She loves the history of AA, the work of Carl Jung, and how his work influenced our founders.

She is planning a "Spiritus" Retreat in North Dakota, to be held this fall, after being postponed for multiple years due to Covid. The retreat will introduce Twelve Step principles to people who are not in recovery, and deepen understanding of the Steps for those already in recovery.

"I think there are people who have a sort of 'AA envy,' as they don't understand, nor have they ever been exposed to, the AA way of living," Judith explained. "The retreat will introduce concepts like daily inventory, meditation, contemplation, prayer and spiritual seeking to attendees."

Judith said her favorite steps are 10 through 12. She believes they are essential to daily sobriety and intensely practical.

"Step 10 guides me to safely interact with those around me, and what to do so I will not harm others," Judith added. "It tells us what to do in a very simple step-by-step method. Rather than being emotionally driven, I can be spiritually led."

Some of Judith's favorite authors outside of the program include Richard Rohr, Eckhart Tolle, Michael Singer and Mirabai Starr.

"My Higher Power is very inclusive," Judith said. "A sponsor suggested to me once to get the focus off the pointers and look at what all the various philosophies are pointing to."

Judith expressed that one of her favorite passages from the Big Book is found on Page 12: "At long last, I saw, I felt, I believed. Scales of pride and prejudice fell from my eyes. A new world came into view."

Judith R will be the "spiritual speaker" at the Spring Fling Convention this April. For further information, please visit SpringFlingSTL.com.

This New Year, make decisions, not resolutions

by **MISSY R**
Group 632

New year, time to break some new resolutions, right? Personally, I never make resolutions. The word bothers me for some reason. It's too rigid for this alcoholic. Besides, I can't think of a single resolution I've ever been able to keep for more than two weeks.

In "The Doctor's Opinion," Dr. Silkworth says, "They are over-remorseful and make many resolutions but never a decision." He's describing one of the types of alcoholic: the psychopath.

These words are highlighted in cute, bright-pink ink in my Big Book. I totally relate to this statement. Does that mean I'm a psychopath? Draw your own conclusions.

The definition of *resolution* is, "a firm decision to

do or not do something." When I first started drinking alcohol, I suppose it was a decision I made - a purposeful, willing choice. Gradually, though, my choice in the matter disappeared.

The Big Book describes this exact situation on Page 24: "The fact is that most alcoholics, for reasons yet obscure, have lost the power of choice in drink. Our so-called will power becomes practically nonexistent. We are unable, at certain times, to bring into our consciousness with sufficient force the memory of the suffering and humiliation of even a week or a month ago."

Whoa! That is so heavy to me. I remember the hundreds, maybe thousands of times, I sat pouring another drink and asking myself out loud, "Why are you doing this again?" But I didn't stop pouring. I couldn't. I didn't know drinking was no longer op-

tional.

It's interesting that this quote says the reasons most alcoholics have lost the power of choice are "yet obscure." That was in 1939! We *still* don't know why this happens.

For many years, I knew I was in trouble but believed if I could just figure out why I drank the way I did, I could stop and wouldn't need anyone else to help me or know about it.

I never did figure out why I drank so much, and I stopped looking for the reasons when I came into AA. "Why" doesn't really matter.

Resolutions are pointless for me. These days, I make decisions. I like to look at new years as new beginnings. I make a deal with myself to be a better person than I was a year.

Before I came into Alcoholics Anonymous, I didn't

concern myself about the quality of my relationships, helpfulness to others, generosity, spirituality (*especially* not my spirituality!), or my life.

Being sober has allowed me to improve my life in every way possible. Not only am I happy and fulfilled, but I'm able and willing to do what I can for other people to improve their lives or even just their day. The more I give, the more I get. Anyone who works this program as best as they can knows what I mean.

I'm not suggesting that no one else should make New Year's resolutions. Do whatever works for you. For me, the word is just empty. If I call it a resolution, I won't do it.

I'm going into 2022 feeling grateful for my family, my friends, my Higher Power, my sponsor, and my AA family, friends and community.

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

Kathy S	1/1	6 years	GROUP 5	Mike K	12/13	9 years
GROUP 1023				GROUP 484		
Cindy C	1/1	4 years		Jim S	1/1	36 years
Laura J	1/8	4 years		Tony P	1/18	1 year
Shannon B	1/24	3 years		GROUP 77		
GROUP 164				Jerry C	1/5	22 years
Marilyn P	1/1	10 years		Nick P	1/5	4 years
GROUP 1176				Dan F	1/14	13 years
Nan H	1/23	31 years		Lary B	1/24	16 years
GROUP 4094						
Don L	1/9	28 years				

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.

Check out Hawk Point potluck, Group 1176 meeting at St. John's UCC on Wolfrum

Group 392, a faithful friend of the *Sobriety Sentinel*, holds its regular fifth-Sunday speaker potluck on January 30 at 6p, in the St. Mary's Church Basement, 458 Main Street in Hawk Point. Doors will open at 5p. Sobriety Year Countdown, AA and AI Anon Speakers and a Big Book drawing will run from 7p-8p. Please bring your favorite "secret dish."

Months ago, we told you about a new meeting at St. John's UCC, Tuesdays at 7p. Closed, mixed Big Book Study. Theresa N reports, this meeting continues to grow and now has a group number - 1176. It also has made contributions to the district, area and the GSO in New York. If you haven't visited, please check it out!

Chair: Forgiveness means canceling debt

From Page 1

pectation of likelihood. Hope and faith are interconnected. Faith includes both belief and trust: "It worked before; it will work again." My greatest, fondest hope for 2022 is that I will continue to advance on my three goals:

First, to spend more time - in the chair and out - in prayer, in godly collaboration, with me writing and God speaking, or with God writing and me speaking. One practice I was introduced to in 2021 was that of Two-Way Prayer. This was popular in very early AA, brought over from the Oxford Group. You spend your time, doing what you've learned to do, to get into

a meditative spiritual state, you get the paper, you get the pen, and you write a message to yourself that you believe is coming to you from God. You don't approach this exercise with any specific expectation. You just try it out, and you experience the results.

Second, to engage in more healthy pursuits and disciplines that will facilitate the first goal to the maximum. I gained a lot of weight in 2020, into 2021. These past couple months, I've lost weight. The only difference is I've cut out wheat and sugar almost completely. I have the disease of more, which I use to treat my disease of self. My food consumption is similar to what my alcohol consumption once was, meaning that I have about the same likeli-

hood of successfully eating a single cookie as I do drinking a single beer. The only truly safe amount is zero. I'm not eating perfectly - I still overeat, I still buy chips - but I am eating in such a way that I have a little more time and energy to engage in the first goal.

Third, which is essentially opposite of the second, is to engage in fewer unhealthy pursuits and disciplines that block access to the first goal. Again, we're looking at progress, not perfection.

In my chair by the window, daily, I shoot for full forgiveness. I have to forgive others in order for God to forgive me. I also have to forgive myself for imperfections. Forgiveness equals canceling the debt. I can't start this day fresh if I'm shackling

myself or others in chains of debt based on distorted perceptions of perfection. Emmett Fox - again, we're dipping into the spiritual toolbox of very early AA - teaches that every resentment requires a prisoner and a jailer. One is imprisoned, one is standing guard. Both are in the jail. One holds the key to free both.

Show me how to be helpful. Save me from being angry. Help me to view them and me with compassion, with acceptance, with patient self-control. Help me cancel the debt.

At this point in the daily narrative, I am prepared to collaborate with my Higher Power to remove those fears that I'll lose what I have, that I won't get what I want, that I'm simply not good enough. I com-

mit to control only what I can control.

And at that point, I am prepared to seek God's guidance on an ideal for behavior in specific situations, to ask for sanity and for strength, and to mean it. I need these things to accomplish any sort of compliance on my three goals.

My greatest fear for 2022 is Less. It's When? It's Worse. Proper nouns. Powerful.

My fondest hope for 2022 is More. Now. Better. Also proper nouns, but *more* powerful.

GOD makes that possible. The Disease of Self, recklessly driving the Bus of More, tears that down. I have faith, I have hope, I have an expectation of livelihood that I will grow in 2022, and beyond.

Meet Comedy Night performer Vincent Opper

The Spring Fling Committee will host its annual comedy event on February 12, 2022, at Crestwood Community Center.

The Sobriety Sentinel, fresh off yet another Sober Pulitzer Prize win, celebrated by spending a few minutes in conversation with comedian Vincent Opper, a featured performer at this year's Comedy Night:

Last year's Comedy Night was held over Zoom. Do you have any Zoom performance experience?

Yes, I did a lot of Zoom shows in 2020. Sometimes I would do three mics a day.

What are the main differences in Zoom comedy vs. in-person? I guess you'd be able to do triple headers a whole lot easier.

The main difference is with the audience. Some mics are muted so you can't hear laughter. But I like Zoom mics because I can see my facial expressions in real time. It's helped me fine tune the physical aspects of comedy.

How long have you been doing comedy, and how did you get started?

I've been doing comedy since summer of 2016. It started as a bucket list thing for my 50th birthday.

The other comic I interviewed for the Spring Fling show, Kathy Brennan, said she started later in life too. What do you think the advantages and disadvantages might have been to doing your first mic at 50?

The disadvantage is something I turned into an advantage - starting at 50, knew I'd never get that Netflix special every comic craves. It takes years to get to that level. So I turned that knowledge into the advantage of being able to accept that I will always be a local-to-regional level comic. It takes away a lot of anxiety.

I would guess that's freeing in a way; you can just kinda have fun with it and say what you want.

Exactly.

Are you local to St. Louis? Where are the usual places

you perform?

I do most of my comedy in the metro area. I do some work in southern Illinois and southern Missouri, along with central Illinois. A few partners and I promote local shows. Our usual venue is Taytro's Bar and Bistro in Festus.

What's your process like as far as writing and breaking in new material?

I write by recording stuff as it comes to my head. I can't read my own handwriting, so recording audio on my phone works for me. If I can make it into something I think is stage-worthy, I will try it a few times at open mics and get feedback. If it gets good response, I will start introducing it in the middle of extended sets on shows.

Have you done any specialty-type shows where the audience is a certain kind of people? Do you ever write stuff that is meant to play just to that crowd, just that one time?

I've performed at fundraisers, holiday parties, private parties and a few members only organizations. I might do an off-the-cuff joke that fits, but I don't usually write for a specific occasion. Once I did a Christmas party for a company that cleaned houses and businesses. I did a few jokes specific to that that really hit.

How was your Christmas and New Year's?

My holidays are very low key. Just family stuff. I am not a "party person," so the real amusement is ripping on my kids.

Comedy Night is on Valentine's weekend. What do you usually do for Valentine's?

My Valentine ritual is checking to see if my wife is sick of me yet. So far, she still likes me.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Tickets for Comedy Night are \$20 and are nearly sold out. Contact Dave B at 314-346-4279 or Lisa H at 618-567-2347 to get yours.

-Andrew H



John A/Sobriety Sentinel

An assembled crowd listens to a speaker at the Al-cathon at Sts. Joachim and Ann Church on New Year's

Eve. Despite lowered attendance due to Covid surges, more than 130 people showed up to celebrate.

Jubilation!

Alcathon draws lively sober crowd

by JOHN A Group 164

After a year off due to Covid, the tradition of gathering on New Year's Eve to celebrate the past year and to hope for health, sobriety and happiness in coming new year continued.

This year's Tri-County Intergroup Alcathon turnout was less than in prior years as a result of a new strain of Covid that had intensified in our region. The 41st Annual Alcathon did, however, provide a first-class event to an estimated 130 sober men and women, friends, family members and children.

The Sobriety Countdown recognized a man who had 46 years of sobriety and a newcomer with 30 days. The food was amazing, as was the before-dinner prayer by Don C. Don set the tone as he spoke about the gift of sobriety and the gift of each other on this night.

The Alcathon provided people with a safe

place to be on New Year's Eve. The Al-Anon and AA speakers were powerful as they talked about personal pain, recovery, newfound joy and happiness. As the speakers spoke, volunteers gathered the children outside the Celebration Room, then the kids colored and made balloon animals.

For the children, this was their night too. Alcoholism is a family disease with well-documented negative effects on our children. Sober, family-friendly events like the Tri-County Intergroup Alcathon give children the opportunity to see their parents having sober fun and experiencing fellowship with healthy and happy people.

After dinner, this year's Alcathon brought back the tradition of dancing. The dancers brought new levels of performance excellence as they rocked to the "Electric Slide." The Photo Booth was also a big hit as families and groups of friends took photos that recorded the excitement and appreciation of the night and of each other.

We fully appreciated the volunteers who did the shopping, supply inventory and

transporting, food and coffee set-up and serving, the amazing decorations, music and audio, babysitting, raffle ticket sales, and all the other things that made the event a success.

The night before the Alcathon, not knowing who would come to help decorate and set-up, more than 20 people showed up. Many of them we didn't even know; they simply said, "Heard you might need some help." That is AA unity and service in action!

Also, a special thanks to all the groups that donated raffle baskets. Donated baskets included pet supply baskets, lotto scratch-offs, numerous gift cards, exquisite homemade crafts, tickets to a Fox Theater show, recovery books and a cleaning supply basket, to name a few. The creative and generous raffle baskets provided income that helped cover expenses.

Finally, I know we all hope for a new year with not only sober days but a world free of widespread illness.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Impact of Meeting Guide app is felt on Tri-County website

EDITOR'S NOTE: The AA Meeting Guide app, with its iconic, recognizable logo - white folding chair in circle on blue background - has been a useful tool for many of us when finding nearby meetings to attend. As Tri-County Intergroup technology chair Bob M explains, Meeting Guide creator Josh R developed "game-changing" technology that expands Tri-County's local listings to region-wide and worldwide platforms:

Four years ago, we were putting the meetings in an Excel spreadsheet that we shared online. After we revamped our own Intergroup's online meeting list, using Josh's website plugin, we were able to feed our

meetings directly into the meeting guide.

Now our meetings are searchable and the meeting information is fresh, no matter which format you're using - the paper Where and When, the website or AA's Meeting Guide app. Our website plugin also connects directly to the greater St. Louis area AA website, aastl.org, so our updated information is available there. Josh's plugin was a game changer in making all that happen.

I love the Meeting Guide app when I'm out of my area. To be honest, though, when I'm close to home, I prefer the website. The information is centric to the Tricounty area. Also the Where and When paper guides are tangible reminders with greater persistence that loops folks back to the website and/or the app. Just a win-win-win for the alcoholic

who's desperate to find a meeting.

-Bob M, Group 340

Campus Office has multiple meeting slots available

Dr. Paul O, author of "Acceptance Was the Answer" in the Big Book, once told *Grapevine*: "one of the things I do when I get bored, if I can't think of anything else to do, is to start a new meeting."

If you're bored and you feel like starting a new meeting, the Office - at 2021 Campus Drive, just off I-70 and Zumbuhl - has several time-frames to accommodate your new meeting: daily between 7a-9a, Fridays between 1:30p-6p and Saturdays between 3p-5p.

-Andrew H, Group 968

All opinions expressed are those of individuals and do not necessarily reflect the views of AA as a whole. To give feedback or report Tri-County AA news or events, please email sentinel@tricityaa.org

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