



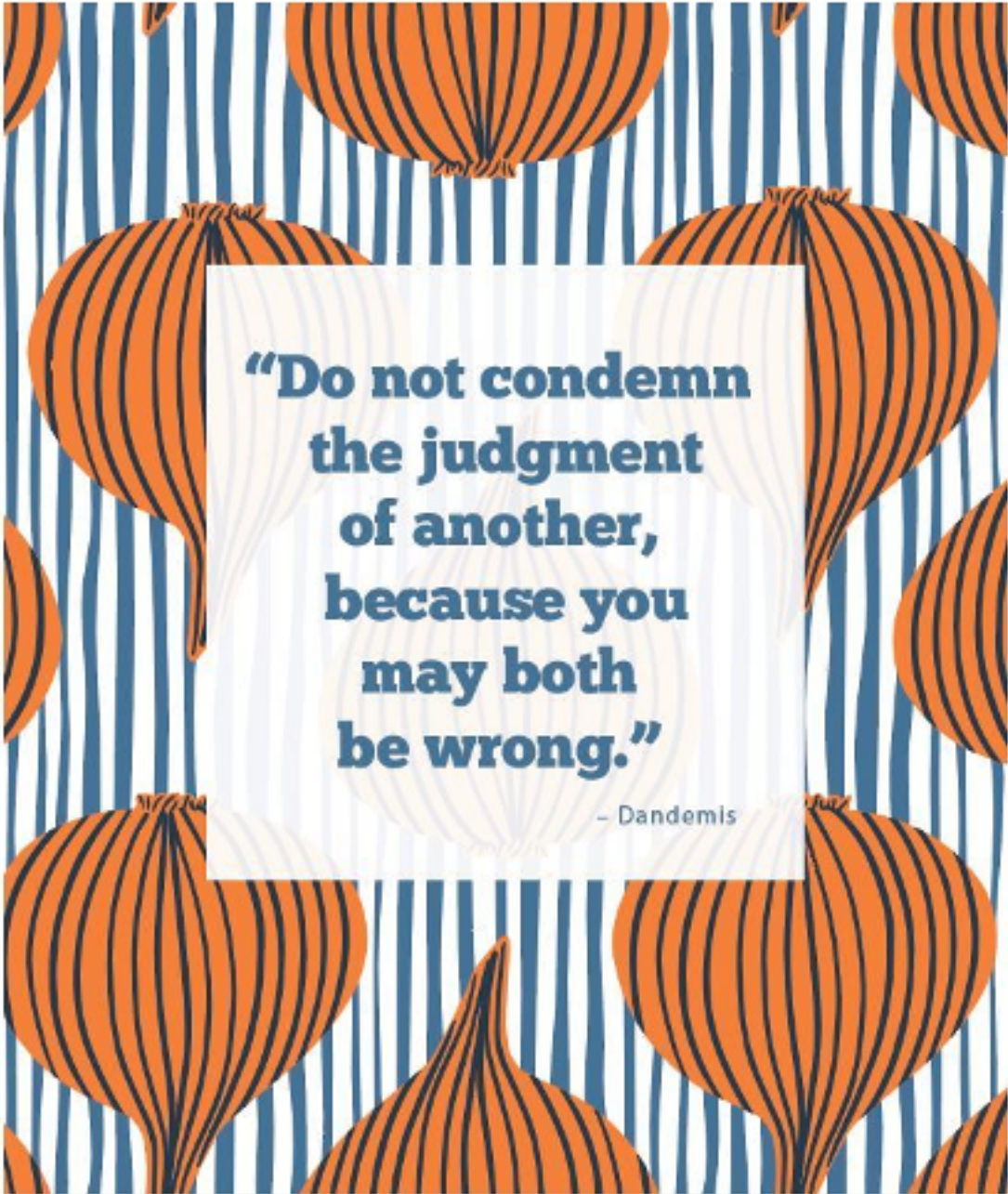
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Vol.4 No.3 September 2020

SANDHILLS INTERGROUP

The CONTEMPLATION Issue



**“Do not condemn
the judgment
of another,
because you
may both
be wrong.”**

– Dandemis

MY STORY | THE PROMISES
DEALING WITH UNCOMFORTABLE FEELINGS
TWO DAYS | ZOOM INTO AA
A TRAVELING HIGHLIGHT | ADDICTION

"MY STORY"

I remember telling my first lie when I was three years old-and it worked-good practice for later years. I also remember my first taste of beer when I was about six years old. It was magic. To this day I can still smell the aroma and feel the effervescence.

In my sophomore year of high school we started drinking beer at parties and, when I was sixteen, I told one of the Jesuit priests at my high school that I might want to become a priest. He quickly told me that I liked the wine,

women and song too much and to forget about it--seems like I already had a problem--and a reputation. I was also experiencing blackouts. I started college when I was seventeen and was already a full blown alcoholic.

The first (and only) time I tried to control my drinking was when I was nineteen and had fallen totally in love with a wonderful girl named Bonnie. She never saw me drunk. But, after we dated for a year, she recognized how immature I was and ended our relationship. I was totally crushed and unable to cope with that reality. Shortly afterwards I quit going to classes and made a conscious decision to stay drunk. I spent the next thirty years unable to forget her and drank both over her and at her. I never got over her.

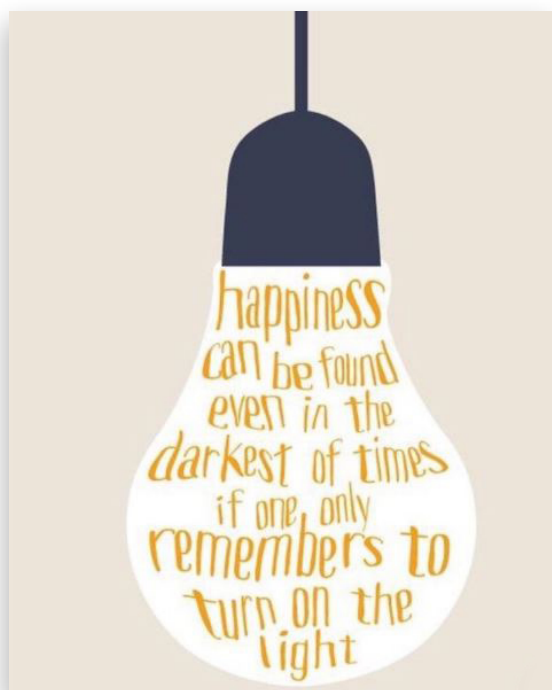
In 1970, after a violent argument with my first wife, the same Jesuit priest from high school called Alcoholics Anonymous for me and I went to my first AA meeting that night.

After about three or four months in AA, I went out and got terribly drunk-- and didn't go back to AA for nine years. I hadn't gone to more than one meeting a week, hadn't got a sponsor or read the Big Book.

My first wife divorced me for good reason. I was a terrible husband and father. Then my drinking got totally out of control--drunk every day. In the end, I lost my marriage and two beautiful daughters. My oldest daughter changed her name and, to this day, will not speak to me.

My insanity included being shot at twice-and hit once.

In the meantime, Bonnie had married in 1961 and moved to California but I still thought about her constantly. I happened to run into her sister around 1972 and she told me Bonnie would be visiting St. Louis in a week or so. I was drunk and gave her my business card--asking her to have Bonnie call me. To my amazement, Bonnie called and I offered to take her and her family to dinner. I didn't care if her husband was there--I just wanted to see my dear Bonnie again. She told me she was visiting alone and agreed to see me. We went to dinner and talked for hours. I ended up telling her that I still loved her and took her home to her mother's house.



In January of 1979, my two younger brothers, along with the woman I was seeing, confronted me about my drinking. I had crashed my car and been arrested and jailed for driving while intoxicated.

I entered a treatment center (a good one--modeled after Hazelden) and was definitely at my bottom as far as alcohol was concerned. I knew I could never drink again. The first part of AA's first step was easy for me--"We admitted we were powerless over alcohol".

The second part of the same step ("that our lives had become unmanageable") was to become almost impossible for me.

After a few weeks in treatment my "focal therapist" asked me how I was doing. I answered "just great." He said, "just great, huh?" -- and then he got in my face like a Marine Drill Sergeant. He yelled--"your brothers, your father, your ex-wife, your kids and the woman you have been living with--none of them think you're doing "just great!"--WAKE THE FUCK UP!!

I have never been more terrified in my life--I knew the bullshit had to stop but didn't know how to stop it.

The following Sunday (the only visitation day), my brothers came to visit me and, with the help of the "focal therapist," proceeded to tell me what an asshole they thought I was. Then they both left.

I felt totally alone, went outside to the rear of the treatment center, and decided that I would go home, get my shotgun, and kill myself.

Then I suddenly dropped to my knees and blurted out "God, please help me". The miracle of my recovery had begun.

I finally had to admit and accept that my life was a total mess--but it took another nine years of not drinking in AA before I began to get really sober--emotionally and spiritually.

Shortly after I got out of treatment, I heard a song on the car radio that reminded me of Bonnie. I was on a busy highway and started crying so hard I had to pull over off the road. I went to my office, found her phone number in California and called her. I told her I was sober and still thought about her constantly. She was

rather cool, had no idea (nor seemed to care) that I was a "recovering alcoholic." The call ended and that was that. The George Jones song "He Stopped Loving Her Today" perfectly describes how I thought I would live the rest of my life.

So I became "Mr. AA"--went to meetings almost daily, chaired meetings, made coffee, set up tables and chairs, greeted newcomers, sponsored people, etc.

But after years of being "Mr. AA" I was still an emotional wreck. My second marriage was going rapidly downhill and I entered a "family program" at the same treatment center where I had stopped drinking.

At the time I had no idea what codependency was nor the concept of alcoholism as a family disease.

Most of my family, including both parents, were alcoholics. My mother, my father, a sister and a brother had all died from the results of alcohol abuse. My youngest daughter ended up drinking herself to death.

I began attending Alanon meetings but still didn't enjoy the inner peace that I saw in so many of the old timers in AA. I desperately wanted that serenity.

After several years attending both AA and Alanon meetings, I finally sought professional help and started seeing a therapist--one who was in recovery. I also started attending meetings of Adult Children of Alcoholics.

It took nine more years of terrifying "onion peeling" in therapy before I was able to really start healing emotionally. My guilt and shame issues were deep and my therapist told me I had the same symptoms as many of the Vietnam vets he had treated for PTSD. Thank God he was a truly wonderful and skilled therapist--a completely understanding, patient and loving person.

I finally started to get in touch with my real feelings and they were terrifying--so much shame, guilt, fear and anger that I did not know how to deal with.

After a long time in therapy I had a "spiritual awakening" of sorts.

I was driving home from an Alanon meeting, and began yelling at my Roman Catholic God-- cursing him. I was really tired of feeling guilty and ashamed. So I fired him and replaced him with a LOVING GOD. My new Higher Power was gentle, forgave me my transgressions and, with the help of my therapist, I started to rid myself of all the guilt and shame.

After a while I even started to feel loveable.

In the meantime, I had been earnestly trying to make my second marriage work, including marriage counseling, but saw no hope of it lasting.

In 1988 I happened to see in the obituaries that Bonnie's mother had died. I knew Bonnie would be back in St. Louis for the funeral and I went to the wake thinking that this would be the only chance I would ever have to see her again.

Bonnie and I talked for an hour and I told her I still thought about her and still loved her. To my amazement she told me she was unhappy in her marriage and thought of me often. She was also planning on getting a divorce.

My marriage ended shortly after that and Bonnie was divorced about a year later. She moved back to St. Louis and we were married in November of 1991.

Today, I am truly sober and the luckiest, most grateful alcoholic in the world.

My life with Bonnie has been wonderful. She is my love, my soul mate, my partner and my best friend. She loves me as much as I love her.

God has been so very good to me and I am eternally grateful.

I have found the inner peace that I had been desperately seeking all of my life and "The Promises" of Alcoholics Anonymous have come true for me.

~ James M.

The Promises

If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be amazed before we are half way through. We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness. We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it. We will comprehend the word serenity and will know peace. No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see our experience can benefit others. We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows. Self-seeking will slip away. Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change. Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us. We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us. We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.

Are these extravagant promises?

We think not. They are being fulfilled among us -- sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. ***They will always materialize if we work for them.***

THOUGHT TO PONDER

The solution is simple...

The solution is spiritual.

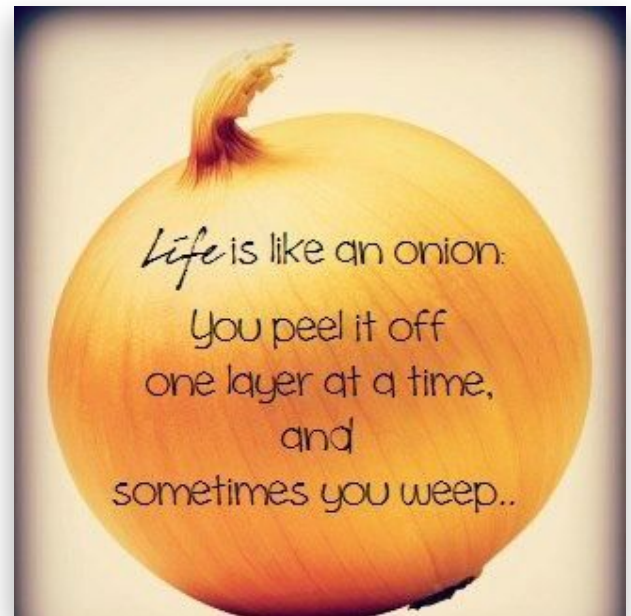
Dealing with Uncomfortable Feelings

So, I've been sober for 11 months now. Wow... To say my world has changed is an understatement, but to say all is good would be incorrect. Life just is what it is and every day I turn my will and my life over to God as I understand Him. I think about things like that every day, all day and most of the time I'm a little unsettled and uncomfortable. This business of being your best self each day takes focus and direction, and there is no alcohol to smooth out the edges. I feel it all, good and bad, and I question myself, "Is this all there is?" Gone are the highs and lows -- there is just open space for me to fill with my actions and attitudes. Some psychologists suggest that humans are driven by two connected motivations: #1 - *to feel pleasure* and #2 - *to avoid pain*. Most of us devote more energy to the latter than the former. Instead of being proactive and making choices for our happiness, we react to things that happen in our lives and use fight or flee behaviors to minimize our pain. My plan in my sober life is to focus more on being proactive and stop the negative coping tactics that have plagued much of my adult life. That is my goal but sometimes I miss the numbness and being able to just 'zone out' of life's trials and feelings. The fog is lifting in my 11 months sober brain and I am adjusting to this new normal, but at times my life is downright uncomfortable.

From many months of listening and talking to others, reading and researching I've learned 3 approaches that seem to help me on my sober journey:

- 1. Develop and enhance my emotional intelligence**
- 2. Teach myself to sit with negative feelings**
- 3. Create situations for positive feelings about myself and the world around me**

Researchers originated the term **Emotional Intelligence** as a missing link in terms of success and effectiveness in life. It is an answer to the



question of why smart people with good reasoning, verbal, and math skills could still struggle in social and professional situations. If you have a high EI, you likely regulate your emotions well; handle uncertainties and difficulties without excessive stress or fear; and avoid overreacting to situations before knowing the full details. If you have a low EI, you might be oversensitive to other people's feelings, obsess about problems until you find a concrete solution, and frequently feel a tsunami of emotions that you can't attribute to a specific life event. I definitely have had a lower EI factor than other people!

I learned that a psychologist named Daniel Goleman has identified five elements to EI: **self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills**. This means you understand what's going on in your head and heart; you don't make hasty decisions on impulse; you can motivate yourself to delay gratification; you listen to, understand, and relate to other people well; and you're able to focus on other people. I've learned about meditation as a way to improve my sanity -- it seems easier to deal with emotions as they arise if once you have done some personal work to create a calm inner space. Once you know what you feel, you can challenge both the cause and the effect of the day's challenges.

When coping with situations, I've learned to ask

myself whether or not I'm overreacting to the event or worrying about a situation just to find a sense of control. I can choose to interpret a situation a different way, soothe yourself, and then feel something different. No one else causes our feelings. Only we can choose and change them. I've also learned that pain is part of life, and we can't avoid it by resisting it. We can only minimize it by accepting it and dealing with it. Emotions do pass and change with time. Time -- that's a big one for an alcoholic like me to realize that things do not happen on my timetable! By my choice, my Higher Power is in control of my Life now, and I'm accepting of that fact. It has actually brought a sense of peace and comfort to me.

The last thing I've learned in my new sober life is about creating situations for positive feelings about myself and the world around me. I've learned to be a player in my life and not a victim. We don't need to sit around waiting for other people. Instead, I've taken responsibility to create my own with a strong inner core and peaceful brain. Negative feelings are only negative if they're excessive and enduring. So I am learning to sit with those uncomfortable feelings while choosing to foster a sense of inner peace, to challenge my initial perceptions and interpretations, and to take responsibility for my joy and my life.

~ Betsy Y.

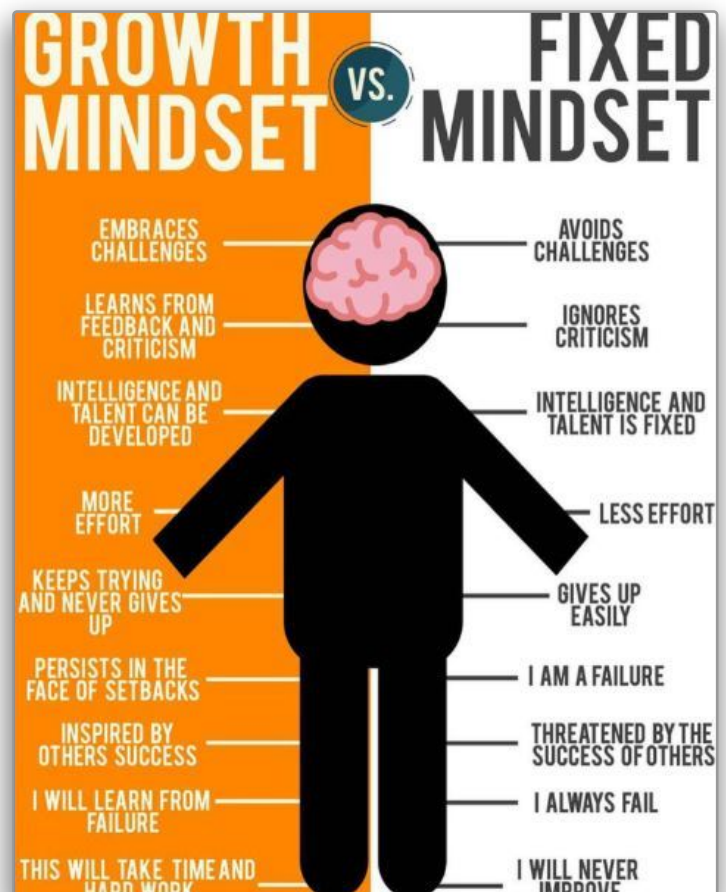
Two Days

There are 2 days of the week that you should not worry about: Yesterday and Tomorrow.

Yesterday has its faults and burdens, mistakes and cares, and aches and pains. Yesterday has passed forever beyond our control. We cannot erase or change or have a re-do - yesterday is forever gone.

Tomorrow is an open canvas ready to be filled with its own adversities, burdens and opportunities for both good & bad. Tomorrow the sun will rise in splendor or behind clouds - either way it will be a whole new day that will happen.

So let's focus on the only day we can have some degree of control over -- Today.



Zoom into AA!

How the Pandemic Affected AA in the Sandhills

As we all know by now, in the spring of 2020 everything changed: The arrival of the coronavirus pandemic and its increasingly broad impact made us rethink and revise the most basic activities of our day-to-day lives – and A.A. was no exception. All of a sudden, we were facing a threat to one of the central elements of our program of recovery: Alcoholics gathered together to share their stories of experience, strength and hope.

Social distancing and in-person meetings do not mix, so in March every A.A. group and meeting in our area temporarily shut down. But before long, folks were discovering and implementing work-arounds so that we could continue to carry the message. Many groups included members who had used Zoom or some other Internet-based platform for holding meetings by video teleconference, and groups unfamiliar with such technology were soon getting assistance from other meetings.

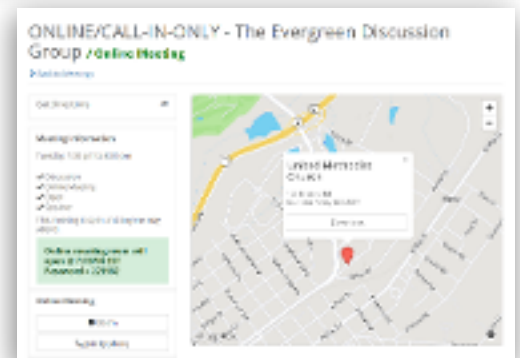
The first Zoom meeting in Moore County was set up by a member of the Early Risers Group, Jay F. He immediately took the initiative to establish an online presence. Within a day or two of the lockdown, recovering alcoholics in our area could connect virtually with the Early Risers (Monday through Saturday at 7:30) and the Sunrise Group (Sunday at 7:30). Tara C. quickly set up the first Women's meeting using Skype.

Getting the word out to a wider audience was the next challenge. Sandhills Intergroup maintains the Moore County A.A. website (<https://moorecountyyaa.org/>), which houses the master schedule for all groups and meetings here and in adjacent counties. Throughout March

and April, recovering alcoholics worked together to establish online meetings, and within a month more than 40 meetings were in operation. Suddenly, Sherri S. and Bob H website responsibilities were awash with requests from groups to update their listings in the schedule with links to Zoom sessions, Meeting IDs, phone numbers, and passwords.

But thanks to the diligence of individuals from each meeting who stepped up to be online coordinators, we were able to stay informed about changes in meeting times and connection details. Stacy N. recalls her early days of the A.A. during the pandemic: "A female friend in the program reached out to see if I'd be interested in doing some sort of online meeting. We explored the different platforms, and eventually she decided on a free trial with Zoom because they didn't have a time or participant limit. We both invited other women in the program from various home groups and areas, and thus began her first meeting."

Due to popular demand, a second weeknight was added to the schedule. Before long other local groups had fine-tuned their online presence, so was no longer be a need for this groundbreaking meeting – which was suspended before it had even been named by its creators! As yet another example of how the challenges of the pandemic have led



to creative solutions, Stacy has also been attending a 24-hour International Women's Marathon Meeting which has been ongoing for a few months (Zoom Meeting ID = 928 9414 8568; password = Billw).

Two groups in our area were able to make arrangements with their meeting facilities to observe the safety protocols necessary to gather for in-person meetings as well as online: the Primary Purpose Group in Southern Pines (Monday and Thursday evenings at 7:00) and the Vass Group (Wednesday evening at 8:00). This hybrid approach has provided valuable options for those unable to connect electronically or who especially need the presence of other recovering alcoholics.

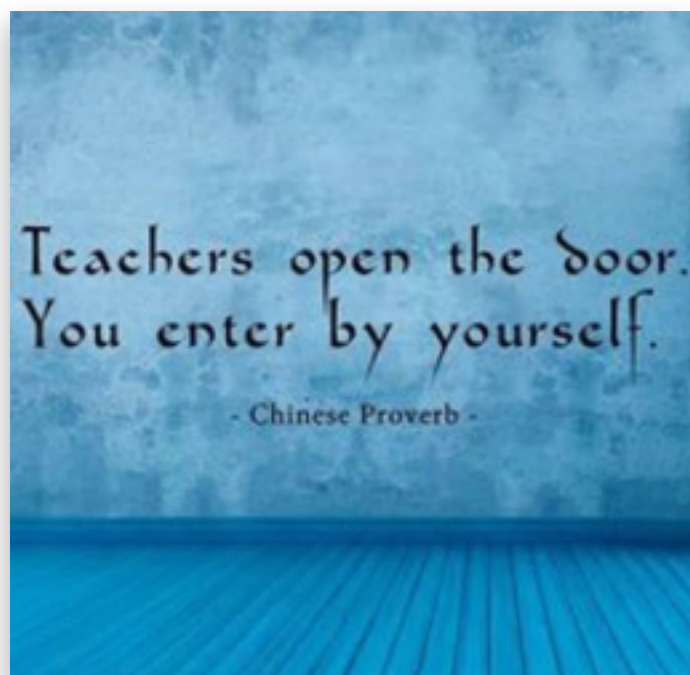
As the days and weeks passed,

Sandhills AAers became more familiar with navigating the online world and mastering the features of the Zoom platform. We got used to hearing the Serenity Prayer recited in less-than-perfect unison, and we remembered to mute our microphones when we were not speaking. The expression “when I come into these rooms” takes on expanded significance when the rooms include the kitchens, living rooms, patios and porches of our brothers and sisters in the Fellowship. And we’ve come to value our ability to stay connected to former members of our home groups who have moved away from the Sandhills.

In early July, arrangements were made for the many groups who had depended on the Wilder Building to begin using that facility again. Some 25 separate meetings began observing the agreed-upon protocols: “Face masks required, maximum number of attendees in the meeting room, kitchen and al anon room and to always observe social distancing!” This is a significant development for many recovering alcoholics – especially newcomers who have enough hurdles and distractions without having to deal with technological challenges. At the same time, many members have voiced a desire to retain the online option even as more facilities are able to open – particularly vital for those in vulnerable groups because of age or a medical condition that increases the risk of COVID-19 infection.

The future still holds many questions, but we’re confident in the creativity and resilience of our members to take it one day at a time, to seek progress rather than perfection, and to ensure that “When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, the hand of A.A. will always be there.”

~ Bob H., Evergreen Group



A Traveling Highlight

We lost Gordon this past month but cherish the words that he left us in this memoir. He wrote them for a Newsletter article many years ago and we repeat it here.

During the long Neanderthal epoch of my existence when John Barleycorn ruled my life, I guzzled from coast to coast and border to border because of the traveling nature of my work.

As befits an alcoholic full blown into the idiocy of the disease, I got drunk in Boston & San Francisco, Montreal and Houston, Miami & Chicago along with getting violently ill from booze in Watkins Glen, NY and Ogden, Utah. And it isn't easy to get stinko in Utah! You have to work at it just as I had to devote time and effort to finding more than my share of drink in the dry counties of the Bible Belt back in the Nineteen Forties, Fifties and Sixties. But what dedicated, active alcoholic couldn't solve these problems?

One Sunday in Greenville, NC, (so long ago that East Carolina University was just a half dozen one-floor corrugated buildings on an open and dusty old farm-land), I managed to come up with a bottle of something that could just as well have killed me. I bat was supposedly dry territory in those days. But not for an alcoholic bent on booze.

When this drunk found AA more than three decades back and began to emerge from the prehistoric life that was barely an existence into the wonderful life of one beautiful day at a time, I was fortunate enough to still be holding down the traveling job, a job I loved. I felt that since I had gotten drunk all over the planet it was only fitting that I work at getting sober all over the planet by attending AA meetings everywhere I landed on assignments. What a delightful way to work at this life-long experience of staying off alcohol.

Just about everywhere there is a town full of saloons, there is a town full of kindly and loving folks in AA. Also, in many of those places there are AA houses, such as we have here in Aberdeen. Of course there are AA meetings in churches, schools, homes, clubs etc. from border to border and coast to coast.

For many years I wandered the good old USA in a big

custom fitted Chevy Van. Starting from New Jersey just before Xmas. I drove to California in about six days, usually. There I worked the Rose Bowl and then picked up the PGA Tour. Traveling by van was the best way to follow the golf tour as I went from California and Arizona in the winter to Florida and Georgia in spring and then up north through the summer.

One cold, December day while cruising 50 miles west of Fort Worth along I-20, it began to drizzle. But, as is Mother Nature's wont in mid-Texas in winter, she mixed in a goodly bit of sleet that quickly turned I-20 into an ice rink that the Red Wings would appreciate. But drivers, trying to make it home for Christmas on I-20, felt differently. We needed safety off the road and quickly.

I knew all motels would fill up in a hurry so I pulled into a Holiday Inn on the east edge of Abilene and got one of the last four rooms. There I stayed for four days waiting for the ice to melt on I-20. And, for each of the ice-bound nights in Abilene I attended a crowded AA mtg. in a nearby church adjacent to the Abilene Christian University campus. In fact, the first night I walked into an open speakers meeting and a kind lady at the door introduced herself, knowing I was new to the mtg. When I answered with my very strong non-Texas accent from Jersey she asked me to be her speaker for the night. You don't say "No" in AA, even in Texas. So they were subjected to Jersey-gobble in Abilene AA one frosty Dec. 20th in the mid Nineteen Eighties.

Years before that I spent the 1975 Christmas Day at the AA house in El Paso, Texas, while working the Sun Bowl game that was played the day after Christmas. There was a mtg. every 3rd hour that day and it helped me get through a lonely time being away from home on that Christmas.

Even across the Atlantic one can find AA in most locations from Dublin to Moscow. My wife and I travel to Ireland regularly and have close friends in that beautiful island nation. But the most striking aspect of sobriety in Ireland for me comes in our regular visits to Tralee, the little West Ireland city in County Kerry. That is where Matt Talbot came from. There is a major road in Tralee named Matt Talbot Street.

When I first joined AA, my home group was in a Catholic Church on the Atlantic Ocean shore in Long Branch, NJ. Across the street from the church was a retreat house where, twice a year,

AA members came from all over the Northeast to attend a semi-annual, three day Matt Talbot Retreat. So, when we visit Ireland, I make a point of driving along Matt Talbot St. in Tralee.

I have attended AA meetings in Boston, Syracuse, Portland, ME; Pasadena, CA; Houston, San Francisco, Miami, South Bend, IN; Pittsburgh, Detroit, Lexington, KY; Kansas City, Nashville, Palm Springs, CA; Palm Beach, FL. & on and on. It must be noted that I also got drunk in each of the above locations in the bad old days.

What is so important to me is that no matter where I go for an AA meeting, the welcome is uniformly warm with no questions asked. I have always felt right at home just as I was walking into my original old home group in Long Branch, NJ.

AA is a rare and magnificent fellowship that takes to its bosom the drunk, the long sober and the ones who slip. AA holds them and comforts them in the same fashion no matter where in the world you seek out a gathering of AA members. No church, social organization, club or other group gives as genuinely warm a welcome to a stranger as you will find in AA. Maybe that is because there really are not any strangers in AA ... just friends you have not met before.

~ Gordon W, Vass Group

I would rather go
through life
sober,
believing I am an
alcoholic, than go
through life drunk,
trying to convince
myself that
I am not.

-Anonymous



Addiction

A friend or foe
for good it was sowed
a plan to heed
a rest for mead
the space was filled
with external need.

The sight and sound grew,
it grew till I was lost,
or was I lost before it grew...
who abandoned who?

Was it really ever there?
We'll never know.
It's gone,
what came back
I do not own -
a body,
a mind,
I think not -
but a breath that lets me see.

~ Sherri S, Early Risers

Sandhills Intergroup

The Sandhills Intergroup is a central office established to aid groups and meetings in Moore County carry the AA message to alcoholics who still suffer.

We provide:

Answering service (910) 420-0575 - General AA questions and meeting information are provided. In case of an emergency please dial 911.

Website - www.MooreCountyAA.org

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Visit our website and hear inspiring stories from AA members!

We are funded solely by the AA groups in our county and we **NEED**, **ASK** and **THANK YOU** for your contributions and input.

Visit our website for the current **MEETING SCHEDULE**
www.MooreCountyAA.org

Have a question? Answers are a phone call away (910) 420-0575



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We meet at 9am the first Saturday of each month via Zoom.us

All AAers Welcome!

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www.MooreCountyAA.org

AA District 52

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