



Sobriety in Stumptown

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Portland Area Intergroup
825 NE 20th Ave,
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September Stories and Art

Step Nine and Tradition Nine

by Eric K., Sobriety in Stumptown Editor

This month's newsletter submissions are focused on the Ninth Step and Ninth Tradition, the conclusion to an alcoholic's travelogue from SE Asia, and a piece about the transformation from the streets to the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Step Nine

by George D. from Portland, OR

My name is George Dant and I am an alcoholic. Some who know me would ask how do I know that? Still others would praise me for finally accepting that statement. Myself – I need only to look at the wreckage of my past, to admit that to my inner most self, that I am an alcoholic.

It is the wreckage of my past, not others' pasts, just my past that I must address in Step Nine. I have written of that wreckage and as I like to say, "the would-of, should-of", as well as the remorse and regrets. For me these things are the essence of Step Nine.

By now all the skeletons, all the hurts and harms, and the hatred of the past are on the table. No longer do they have their power, they're over the moment as I forgive them and myself, and fling them away and they're powerless over my life forever. On the front side of this step, just like most of the others, was fear, anxiety, possible rejection, possible anger, possible love, and possibilities.

Sobriety for me is a new way of life. I strive to live by what the Big Book teaches us and what the Good Book says. In order to live that way I had to do Step Nine and to deal with my past openly and honestly. The up side of this step was freedom from the bondage of self. It was a final closure of the wreckage of my past. I got to look my family and friends in the eyes again. I sent the letters off. The visits and the flowers to the graves brought me closure and forgiveness.

Today I get to like myself. To sit quietly in areas of my mind that once burned with anger, guilt and rage. Today I experience peace, joy, and serenity. I could not close this article without thanking my friends, my family, my church, A.A. and the fellowship, my sponsor, Gary T, with his king size boot, as well as the hundreds of thousands of sober men and women who have gone before me. And most importantly, the God of my own understanding.

Step Nine

by Mike B. from Portland, OR

I found that once I resolved to do this and made the contact and said the heartfelt words, I felt much lighter, and like dialing in a station on the radio, I really started to get the AA message, better, clearer and everything started to make more sense. I feel now that this is a very valuable and necessary step, and that it helped me move along the path. From here on I could really feel myself learning and growing in the program.

Tradition Nine

By Barbara E. from Portland OR

“A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.”

Many sticklers for the traditions—liberal or conservative—recognize that the second half of Tradition 9 reinforces the thrust of Tradition 8 with regard to paying staffers at General Services in New York City, Intergroup offices, and at AA clubs. As is pointed out in this Tradition:

...the aim of our services is to bring sobriety within reach of all who want it. If nobody does the group’s chores, if the area’s telephone rings unanswered, if we do not reply to our mail, then AA. As we know it would stop.

It is the first portion of this Tradition that A.A. should “never be organized” that is not only essential and interesting, but sometimes even heartbreaking for our “bleeding deacons” and amusing for our “elder statesmen/women.”

As the Tradition is set out in the initial paragraphs of the Twelve by Twelve, organization to the outside world is a must. It’s always accepted and present in any community or military force, in governments of any kind, and as noted in the Tradition, religious groups, political parties, “benevolent associations” (read: “non-profits”). Nature could be added as well because the literature points out the price is high if its laws are disobeyed.

The groups I’ve been in—including all of the above plus Girl Scouts, a sorority, professional associations, two unions, P-TA, activism, and more—all had rules, regulations, and the powers of censure and exclusion.

Aside from AA, the only other group with no organization, yet considerable power I know of has been the Occupy movement. It had no elected leaders, provided the right to speak out, and tremendous spirit and fellowship before the government quashed it; yet today, members are sparkplugs of dozens of progressive and environmental groups.

However, A.A. has survived and thrived for 82 years without organization and is unlike any other group, without a hierarchy, without bylaws and rules/regulations, without a blackball on membership, without relying on outside donations, and without the power of censure, shaming,

or ejection used by other organizations around the globe.

And that's because the enforcer is a gruesome Death after trips to hospitals and rehabs and daily facing those "hideous Four Horsemen" that the Big Book cites: Terror, Bewilderment, Frustration, Despair (p. 151).

In those other organizations, how many would be allowed to join if they were in unspeakable desperation, disheveled in their only wardrobe, and incoherent?

It can be argued, of course, that A.A. does have rules because of the suggested 12 Steps and the 12 Traditions. But the only enforcer, on one hand is Death; on the other, it's Life and rewards undreamed of—especially in learning how to handle difficult situations that would have baffled us—and millions of non-alcoholics—as the Promises (BB: p. 84) state.

Yes, there are unofficial "rules," wall signs ("Think,") and even "orders" meted out by fusty or drill-sergeant types chiefly because they do not want someone to drink, but they know they are powerless over alcoholics, drunk or sober. I've come to see them as helpful "adages," however. Among my favorites are:

- If you don't take the first drink, you won't get drunk.
- Meeting-makers make it.
- Rule 62: Don't take yourself so seriously.
- (To the long-winded) I didn't know this was a speaker meeting.
- Did God die and put you in charge?
- Take the cotton out of your ears and put it in your mouth.
- Never lend or borrow money in AA lest a default keep you from a meeting or get you drunk.
- (To new women) Men will pat your rear, but women will save it.
- Never let someone who's unemployed become treasurer.
- Take a phone list; it could save your life.
- When you're home alone, you're home with a killer. Get to a meeting!
- If you count all your assets, you always show a profit.

In Tradition 9, it's "suggested" that service work in groups be rotated, lest resentments or power trips result. How many times have we heard a group secretary or treasurer say "I've been doing this now for a year and please would someone take it on?" I got sober in Maryland where program chairs (who tap speakers/meeting chairs) and coffeemakers knew it was only a four-week commitment. As for resentful secretaries, Henry the Plumber advised: "Tell 'em you're leaving the key on the table and if nobody picks it up, there'll be no meeting next week." Risky as that might seem, I've never seen it to fail. Such is the spiritual power generated by a Higher Power to keep this disorganized international organization "never be organized."

September

by Riley S, Portland, OR

After leaving Indonesia, I spent a week in Vietnam to give a final presentation on how my project went, before joining the rest of our class in Hong Kong. Now I'm traveling, which has turned out to be a lot of fun. Some days we slide into a heavy schedule, but we've had a few days which are relaxed where we can explore the city at our own pace. I made it to a meeting in Hong

Kong and two meetings in Seoul. The meeting in Seoul is interesting; it's on the US Army base and is predominantly for Army members who got in trouble with drugs or alcohol. The Army places them in a five-week rehab program and attending that meeting is part of their requirement to finish. There are also a handful of expats and Koreans who attend the meeting. I could take this opportunity to go into Korean drinking culture, but I'm going to skip it. Let me just say that each night I've been out in the city I've seen people not feeling so hot—which is a huge understatement.

Anyways, the two main things I struggle with out here are mood swings, and feeling separate from my classmates. The director of our program managed Nike factories in Asia for a long time, and she mentioned that being in Asia manifests bi-polar type symptoms. For whatever reason, living and working out here, we experience these highs and lows, which as an alcoholic can be extreme. So sometimes I'm joyous, singing and chatting with everyone, and other times I want to body check every Korean that bumps into me—which happens a lot—and verbally lash out at any classmate that says something I find offensive. Then after giving each classmate a tongue lashing—either in my head or out-loud—I want nothing to do with them; but then I feel lonely. Last night I went out with a few friends to a cool night market, and then we went out for chicken and beer, which is huge in Korea. I felt pretty good. Only half the group was drinking and the chicken was great.

So, I'm sitting there drinking water and eating chicken and having a pretty good time. Some of the things I say are a little awkward because I'm still getting used to dinner conversation with non-alcoholics. It's not entirely clear to me what jokes resonate with them, and what topics are a faux pas. But everything went well and I felt like I fit in. I didn't do anything drastic to get to that point. I went to a meeting the day before, talked to some sober friends on the phone, and got to bed at a decent hour. I'd had a long day and drank a lot of caffeine, but it felt right to go hang out with these folks, even though we were out late and some were drinking. Compare that to our first night in Seoul, when a group of us went out for barbeque, and I felt out of place. The big difference was everyone was drinking, and as is customary in Korea, they were making a sport of it. I find one of the hardest parts of being out with a group in Asia is when they toast one another. Asia has this forced drinking culture, where you keep people drinking by constantly refilling their glass and cheers-ing other people. If I clink glasses with you, you have to drink. And sometimes they say, "one hundred percent" which means you finish your glass. So, there's a bunch of people clinking glasses, and I'm there with my soda, feeling left out. I've found it's a little easier to kind of disregard the cheers, and maybe clink glasses with one or two people next to me, instead of trying to clink my soda bottle with everyone at the table. Point being it's not too fun hanging out with a group where their secondary purpose after eating is getting drunk. But at the same time, I do like to have company over dinner, and it often beats hanging out by myself.

Most of my Portland sober life is centered around hanging out with other alcoholics. In school, I'm forced to be around normal drinkers—or active alcoholics—and I find it tough. I've found that telling a few key people that I'm alcoholic makes attending meetings easier. That way when I go to some random place in the city, or have some strange evening obligation, at least some folks have an idea of how I spent my time. A lot of the other people don't care, they might ask where I went or where I'm going, but I can just say I'm meeting up with "friends of friends," or say the district or area where I'm heading and leave it at that. Sometimes they pry, and if they do I answer honestly, with or without mentioning the A.A. meeting. It's worked so far, and I can take a lot of what I learned here, back home. We head to Singapore this afternoon, after which

I'll spend some time in Chang Mai, Thailand, and then I'll end my Asia travels in Taipei, Taiwan. Looking forward to getting back. See you all in Portland.

From the Street to the Rooms: A look back at what I was like, and what I'm like now.

by Teresa B. for Jim D., from Portland, OR

I began experimenting with drugs and alcohol when I was 13 or 14. I had two older brothers, which made getting access to it much easier. At age 15, my parents divorced. I was forced to move from the magical woods into the city in Portland, ME. We lived in a mobile home park. I had no nature, no friends, no nothing. I soon found the wrong crowds and put my mom through hell. Honestly, I was pretty much drinking and doing drugs like candy throughout my high school years. I had found a way to anesthetize the unhappiness in my life. I was escaping into a world of drugs and alcohol, and I loved it!

Soon, I realized that I loved it a little too much. I made the decision to move to Florida. I was in my 20s and it was my first time away from Maine. Young, restless, and care-free! The beaches, the bars, and the alcohol were all intoxicating. What a life! But it didn't last. I was arrested for possession. I left the state before my court date and fled to Denver for the next 20 years. My culinary career began to expand...as did my drinking in a new city. Things were good for a while, until the drinking became more important than anything else. What followed were jails, hospitals, and, sadly, a few deaths.

I always enjoyed working the second shift in the bars for the late nights of drinking. The customers wanted to join me in drinking the night away. But things started to spiral out of control. I never paid rent on time, if at all. I got evicted frequently, or moved in with someone after only a few days of a romantic interlude.

Soon I set out on the road again. I was with some friends heading to the black hills of South Dakota for The '98 Sturgis motorcycle rally when things turned tragic. On our way there, I was pulled over by CSP for suspected drunk driving. I wasn't drunk but was detained until my tests came back clean. One friend was arrested for an outstanding felony warrant. Another swallowed her drugs to avoid being arrested. I, literally, watched her die in front of me.

That night, I hitchhiked back to Denver to tell her family members and then went straight to my regular watering hole and drank until the sun came up.

By now I knew that my drinking was out of control, so I checked in to a detox facility. I was held for held for 12 days while I went through withdrawals. Going cold turkey, I made Freddy Krueger look like Mickey Mouse at Disneyland. I was referred to a tough-love housing program near skid row in Denver - I was done with drugs but I couldn't stop drinking. Of course, I quickly got kicked out of the housing unit and moved to a pay-by-the-week boarding house. There was a liquor store across the street, and my two favorite sleazy bars were right up the road. I lost all control. I was unemployable, moved to the streets, and was panhandling for cash to drink with.

Then I met "Sherry". We set up camp together, pushed a shopping cart, went dumpster diving. She was 5 feet tall and wicked when she drank whiskey. One night, while drinking, we spontaneously decided to hitchhike around the country. We made our way around but were

eventually stranded outside of Oklahoma. I left her at a women's shelter with nothing but the clothes on her back and went back to Denver.

By now, drinking was a must. Always having a bottle of vodka, sipping every waking hour, pushing a shopping cart and collecting cans to buy a bottle. I rarely ate. It was 2004 and I ran into an old friend who recruited me from the streets to work on a 100,000-acre farm in eastern Colorado. "No drinking" was, supposedly, the rule. But every night, plastic beer bottles burned in our oil drums.

I asked another friend to come out and join us on the farm, which he did. On April 12th, 2006 we were driving at 7:30 pm, 2/10 of a mile east of mile marker 333, east bound on I-70, I was at the wheel when two antelope ran in front of me. I lost control of the vehicle. I flipped 1 1/2 times, across 39.7 ft., 1 life flight, 1 body bag.

I was placed in a drug-induced coma for 6 months. I had to learn everything over again and I still deal with vivid PTSD 10 1/2 years later. I have terrifying flashbacks. I remember the antelope, and that's it. The ironic part of the story is that my toxicology was 100% negative.

The majority of 2006 was spent with doctors, nurses, hospitals and therapists. Apparently, my Higher Power wasn't done with me yet! Having my neck was fractured in three places, blood drained from my brain, teeth broken from kissing the steering wheel, acute respiratory failure, a breathing tube, and a feeding tube - you'd think I'd be done. But I wasn't. I couldn't let my accident slow my drinking down. I was drinking vodka from sun up to sun down. I was tired of the guilt and shame from people blaming me for my friend's death. It was so painful and ugly. I had to leave Denver to try to clean up my life.

For several years, I moved aimlessly searching for a geographical cure in different cities around the country before finally landing in Portland, Oregon. When I arrived at the bus station, the security officer pointed out the new homeless day center to me. I rounded the corner to a huge line of people and some hovering bicycle cops. I wasn't going to start a new day in a new city with the cop shop. So I went in search of a store and a few beers. Unfortunately, I didn't get sober right away when I arrived - it took a bit for everything to sink in.

One night, I ventured around in search of a doorway to sleep in, but instead found a group of people sleeping across from the bus station where I had first arrived. It also happened to be across from a local non-profit organization that prints a publication about the streets and signs up vendors from the street to sell it, at cost. I was working!

Soon after, I entered into transitional housing. Things quickly began to line up for me. I was placed in the kitchen as my chore. I felt at home, and the clients were happy. These small actions made a big difference for me. I gained stability and a measure of self-respect. My Higher Power entered my life at that time where a window of opportunity was offered to me and I walked through it. I started school, started an apartment search, and found the local Alano Club. I signed my first lease in 20 years in June of 2012. It was harder than hell to get used to for the first few weeks - listening to the rain, but not feeling the rain or having to move to a drier doorway. Everything was so new.

I started going to the 5:30 AA meeting in the basement of the Alano Club. People were so happy there - it was annoying! I found my seat with my back to the wall, several seats away from anyone else. I gave out the vibe of "don't talk to me or I'll bite your head off!" The full understanding of AA hadn't hit yet. My first sponsor didn't quite work out and I went sponsor-

less for a few weeks. But then, one of my customers asked me if I had a sponsor and I had to tell him no. He said “Get a sponsor! I’m going to check up on you tomorrow.” He did...and I had one. We started working on step one right away. I realized that I was powerless over alcohol and that my life was completely unmanageable. Things were starting to make sense and I stopped sitting in the back of the room, away from my fellow AAs. I am a part of the group now.

Since that time, I did have a slip, but I immediately knew where to come back to. Ten days after that slip, my sponsor started me on Step One, once again, and took me to a men’s retreat. You know what they say – Step One is the only one you have to work perfectly. We left for the men’s AA Dignitaries group retreat at Menucha retreat center and it was the best suggestion my sponsor could have made at that time. It was an excellent weekend spending time with other men in recovery. I’m looking forward to going again this year! At this time, I have two service positions that I am active in 3-4 times each week. I have the same home group and the same sponsor. By the grace of God, I am sober today as I write this to you, Teresa B.

Thank you!

Monthly Business Meetings

For details about monthly business meetings, contact the PAI Office at 503-223-8569. Or send your questions or concerns to: 1212@pdxaa.org

Portland Area Intergroup (PAI): Business Meeting, 2nd Monday of every month, 7:00 PM, 4524 SE Stark St. (Unity of Portland), Portland.

Portland Deaf Access Committee: Monthly, 2nd Sunday of every month, 6:30, The Alano Club, NW 24th & Kearney.

Dist 9: 1st Wed, 6:30 PM, 24th and Kearney, Portland

Dist 10: Last Mon, 7:00 PM, 12945 Beavercreek Rd., West Side Service Cntr, Beaverton

Dist 11: Last Thu, 7:00 PM, “URS” Club, Portland

Dist 12: 1st Tue, 6:30 PM, 12x12 Club, 7035 NE Glisan, Portland

Dist 15: 1st Wed, 6:45 PM, 710 6th St., Oregon City

Dist 18: 1st Sat, 9:30 AM, 215 N 6th St., St. Helens

Dist 23: 1st Tue, 6:00 PM, Emmanuel Presbyterian, 19200 SW Willamette Dr., West Linn

Dist 24: 1st Thu, 6:00 PM, 5441 SE Belmont St., Portland

Dist 25: 4th Tue, 5:30 PM, Immanuel Lutheran Church, 39901 Pleasant Street, Sandy, OR

Dist 26: 2nd Sun, 5:00 PM, St Charles Church, 5310 NE 42nd Ave., Portland

Dist 27: 1st Mon, 7:00 PM, 11631 SE Linwood Ave., St. Paul’s Methodist, Milwaukie

Dist 31: 2nd Tue, 7:00 PM, 937 NE Jackson School Rd., Hillsboro

Dist 34: 3rd Sat, 5:00 PM, 485 Portland Ave., Gladstone

Dist 35: 2nd & 4th Sat, 7:00 PM, 18926 SW Shaw St., Suite A, Beaverton

Dist 36: 2nd Thu, 6:00 PM, St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, 2201 SW Vermont St, Portland

Dist 37: 2nd Tue, 7:00 PM, Sherwood Community Center, 21907 SW Sherwood Blvd., Sherwood

Committee News

Portland Area Intergroup is a committee of volunteers that encourages mutual support and cooperation between Portland AA groups and provides services that would be too much for the

individual groups to handle by themselves. PAI provides services for the AA community and the general public.

We have several committee positions available. Portland Area Intergroup needs your help. Working on a committee is excellent 12th Step service work. If you are interested in being on any Portland Area Intergroup committee, send an email to pdxaa.org with "COMMITTEE INTEREST" in the subject field. Or, just click on [Service](#) on the Intergroup website. **Intergroup committees carry the message of recovery to the still-suffering alcoholic.** Please help yourself and others. Sign up. Thank you.

Bridging the Gap (BTG): Provides a one-time temporary contact for people transitioning from a treatment center to AA meetings. BTG meets the second Monday of each month at 6:30 PM at the Portland Intergroup Office basement, located at 825 NE 20th Ave, Suite 200, Portland. "We Bridge the Gap so alcoholics leaving treatment don't have to walk alone across that scary gap between the beginning of recovery in treatment and the continued recovery in AA." Please contact the PAI office via phone, 503-223-8569, or email btg@pdxaa.org, if you are interested.

AA Hotline: The AA Hotline keeps the Portland phone number for AA active 24 hours a day, every day of the year. The way this is accomplished is by volunteer support. Calls to the AA number placed after Central Office hours and redirected to volunteers' phones, keeping the volunteer's number anonymous. A volunteer can elect to go on a 12th Step call or just provide the information the caller needs about meetings. Commitments are generally two times a month. In particular, if you're a night-owl, we'd really appreciate your help. Call the Central Office for more information at 503-223-8569.

Corrections Committee Information: Take meetings into correctional facilities & carries the AA message to the alcoholic who suffers. The Corrections team is looking for AA volunteers, both men and women, to bring AA meetings into the jails in Multnomah County, specifically Inverness Jail, the Courthouse and the Justice Center. If you have questions on becoming a volunteer, or if you would like to be on the PAI Corrections Committee, please email: corrections@pdxaa.org, or call the Central Office for more information at 503-223-8569.

Cooperation with Treatment Centers: The Treatment Centers needs your help to share your experience, strength, and hope with the alcoholic who still suffers by taking meeting into treatment facilities. The Treatment Center committee needs volunteers to help coordinate and facilitate meetings at treatment centers. We need your help to contact treatment centers that have reached out to Portland Area Intergroup for AA support. We also speak with treatment centers to find out if AA is currently bringing in meetings, or if they would like to arrange an appointment to speak with a representative from AA that could explain what we can offer them and their patients. We also coordinate with AA groups to find out about the service opportunity, and how their group members can participate in this important 12th Step work. The committee meets monthly at 6pm, before the Portland Area Intergroup meeting. If you have questions, please email treatment@pdxaa.org, or call the Central Office at 503-223-8569.

Public Information Committee: Panels meet with the media, schools, clubs, and the general public and show videos (produced by the General Service Office), provide literature, contact information and answer questions about AA. For more information, email pi@pdxaa.org, or call the Central Office at 503-223-8569.

Newsletter (*Sobriety in Stumptown*): The committee for the very publication you are now reading is looking for members. Send an email of interest to: newsletter@pdxaa.org

Events: The Events Committee needs committee members. Send an email to Events@pdxaa.org for more information.

Get Published!

If you have AA news, a meeting change, a big event, a story, a painting, a poem, or just a rant, Sobriety in Stumptown wants to hear it! Send articles of 1000 words or fewer to:

newsletter@pdxaa.org

Deadline for the August issue: August 1st.

Step Nine

“Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or other.”

Tradition Nine

“A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.”

Serenity Prayer

“God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.”

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