

The Reprieve: District 8 AA



"We are not cured of alcoholism. What we really have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition."

July 2019

Mason and Thurston Counties, Washington State

4 pages.



Meeting Makers Make It!

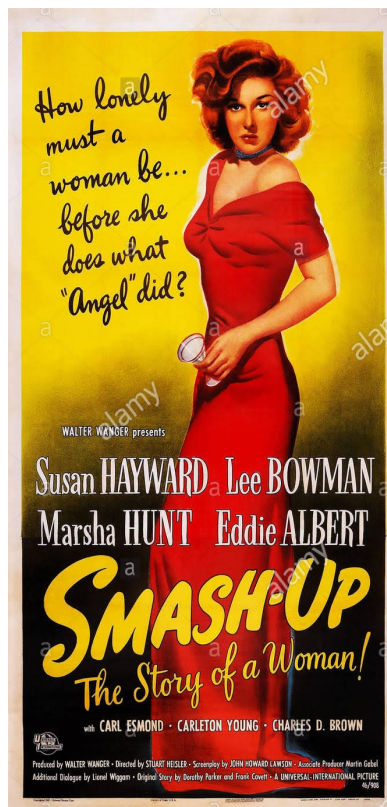
A few nights ago on a Thursday at 8 pm I finally found and attended the meeting in Lacey called New Beginnings, and it was a very good but small meeting, half a dozen or so. We went around the room and everyone shared, something I very much like. It was the third time I tried to find the meeting and I guess the 3rd time is a charm...and they had an AA sign up outside. The stickler is that our printed program says, Civil Engineering Building and, God Bless America, there are two CE buildings, an old one and a new one: this is the old one just off Pacific, named for a monk (this is on Saint Martin's campus) whose name just now escapes me. If you are coming from Olympia go past Pacific—which is one way—and to Lacey Boulevard...turn there and go to Rud-dell, then turn left and go back to Pacific. You can park in the lot and walk 50 feet and you're in the building.

The room was very neat and tidy and is all for the usual AA signs on the wall. Chairs and tables to sit at and at each place a carefully placed copy of the Daily Reflections. The protocol is the usual thing and then we go around the room and introduced ourselves.

What, for you, makes a good AA meeting? Location reasonably close...a comfortable room where you can readily hear, friendly people...what else?

Size? Ten people, fifty people? Please write to us and share your thoughts. In this District 8 there are probably 150 meetings listed (do you have a current schedule?), God only knows how many more unlisted...

Smash-Up, the Story of a Woman (1947)



Smash-Up, the Story of a Woman, 1947, is roughly based on the life of singer Dixie Lee, honestly kind of... well, how else can you say it? stinks. The first half hour is especially bad but then the plot thickens and it's watchable up to the end.

It's the story of a woman who becomes a drunk and then sobers up.

But the word "dated" comes to mind. When an old man like me finds it dated, then it really is dated. There is no mention of AA, for example. This may be the fault of dated Code rules about what could be in a movie rather than the scriptwriters—drinking was still pretty much a taboo subject for movies in those days.

Angie, played by the great actress Susan Hayward, who just a few years later made what I consider one of the best AA movies ever made, **I'll Cry Tomorrow** (reviewed in *The Reprieve*, June 2018 issue) sobers up when through a series of mishaps realizes she needs to if she's going to keep her child and her husband—and she goes to talk to a doctor who explains that she has a disease. So she says, Oh, okay, I'll do it.

We know it doesn't quite work that way, but hey, this is 2019, some seventy plus years later. We make fun, sometimes, of those who came before—ideas, movies, books, people—but in reality we owe them a debt to our own thinking...we stand on their shoulders.

Well, that was 1947, and dated as we might think they were, nothing's more dated than sneering at the past because it's not as hip as the present.

The movie was nominated for Academy Awards for Miss Hayward's acting, for Best Writing, and most Original Story.

Dixie Lee was the wife of the more famous singer, Bing Crosby, and the mother of several of his children. Presumably Crosby is the singer in the movie who rose to fame and eclipsed that, and perhaps at the expense of, Dixie.

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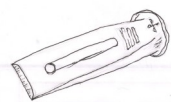
newletter@aadistrict8.org or phone him at 785-564-1118, leave a message and he will likely return your call the same day.

We appreciate your comments and suggestions for improvement. We welcome your contributions of articles.

There will be a print copy of each issue in your group's announcement folder. If you want the newsletter sent to your email, go to the District 8 website aadistrict8.org and sign up. The newsletter will come to your mailbox as a pdf.

June K. did the art and layout of this issue.

"The thin edge of the wedge."



Meditation on the Serenity Prayer.

When I first came in I hated this prayer. I called it a "canned prayer" (just like the Lord's Prayer) and could barely get through it without sneering. (I sneered a lot in those days.)

Main reason I didn't like it was that I confused "acceptance" as a narrow term meaning giving up and not fighting the good fight. I had fought the good fight (or so I considered it) for many years before I joined AA and eventually I realized that the good fight I had fought for so many years was a battle against myself and God that only got me into being an unhappy, suicidal drunk.

Once I realized that acceptance actually meant things I really couldn't change, and often things I had no business trying to change, such as the errant ways (I believed) of those closest to me in my life—knowing when to stop beating my head against a wall—I felt a lot better with it and today I say it and feel a great sense of relief and, whaddayuh know, serenity.

The Worst Meal Ever!

As you might imagine, the worst meals I ever had were of institutional origin. And you might think they were Naval in origin, but no, not at all, Navy chow was pretty good except for the dreaded SOS, chipped beef gravy on toast, called SOS for its popular name, *Shit On a Shingle*. It was what it was. And what's for lunch? we asked.

But in fact the worst was in the school cafeteria at Woodrow Wilson Elementary School (home of the Woodchucks) where they dished up something awful everyday.

Worst ever was Stewed Tomatoes. It was everything you can imagine: stinky, slimy, slithering and sloppy. The Rule, vigorously enforced by Miss Bebermeier and other sadists, was that everyone at each of the four long tables had to eat everything on their plate until anyone at that table could go outside and play. I would dilly, I would dally, until everyone at that table had gotten their portion down and now stared, seething, at me, the barrier to their going outside. You couldn't drop it to the floor or even pocket it or throw it over your shoulder: you had to eat it. I would gag, literally, and think of a Milky Way candy bar and get it down.

For fifty years I hated tomatoes of any kind, whether sliced or diced, stewed or whatever. Then when my beloved wife, who loves tomatoes and eats them like an apple, got me to like them...about that time my doctor diagnosed me with GERD and told me not to eat them, I was relieved. Thank God for GERD (gastro-intestinal reflux disease)!

Even today, stewed tomatoes reminds me of this old barroom joke:

A drunk walked into a bar (yes, of course) and asked for a free drink. "No free drinks," the bartender says, "especially not for a drunk like you."

"Okay," the drunk said. "Tell you what. I'll drink the contents of that spittoon over there if you'll give me a drink."

"God, the bartender said, "you must really want a drink. All right, go for it."

So the drunk lifted the heavy brass spittoon to his lips and began swilling it down: higher and higher, gulp after gulp. Everyone in the barroom stared, horrified and sickened. The bartender, sickened too, yelled to the guy, "Okay. Okay! Stop! Stop. I'll give you your free drink!"

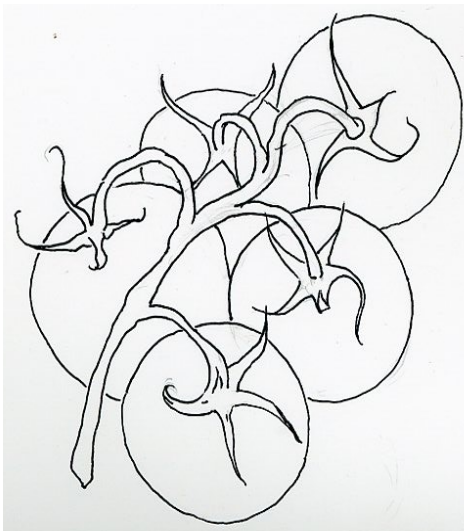
But the man continued to turn up the spittoon and drink it all down and then tossed the empty spittoon on the floor with a clang.

Everyone in the room was gagging.

"Man," the bartender said, "Why didn't you stop? You were making us all sick! And you went on! Why didn't you stop when I yelled at you?"

"I would have," the old drunk said, his lips curled, "but I had gotten onto a long strand and couldn't stop."

So it was when I was a boy in grade school cafeteria, back in the day, trying to down stewed tomatoes.



More from the mouths of drunks: "If I could drink normally, why, I'd drink all day!"

Honesty by Gary. R

"Those who do not recover are people who cannot or will not completely give themselves to this simple program, usually men and women who are constitutionally incapable of being honest with themselves."

This sentence is read before just about every AA meeting I've ever attended. It's in the beginning of Chapter 5 of the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous titled "How it works". Like many things in AA, it's something I take for granted, think I understand.

For some reason it caught my attention at a meeting the other day and I've been thinking about it ever since.

One of the first things I decided was that I didn't really know the definition of the word

"constitutionally." One thing I do know is that Bill Wilson was very careful about the words he used and seemed to go to great lengths to find just the right word. So I looked it up. My dictionary says it means, by nature or temperament. That same dictionary defines nature as something existing naturally rather than acquired, and temperament as one's customary frame of mind.

This led me to believe we're talking about two different kinds of people that are incapable of being honest with themselves. The first type, the ones whose nature it is to be dishonest, or more simply put, who were born that way, are beyond my limited experiences and would seem to be more in the area of psychology or genetics.

I do however, feel I have some firsthand knowledge about the second type, the one whose customary

frame of mind is to lie to one's self. My frame of mind, before I hit my bottom, was full of lies such as, I'm not hurting anyone but myself. Or, I'm only self medicating to get through the insanity of of modern world. Or, I open up avenues of thought and insight that would be unavailable without alcohol. Or, one of my favorites, if it ever gets to really be a problem, I'll stop drinking.

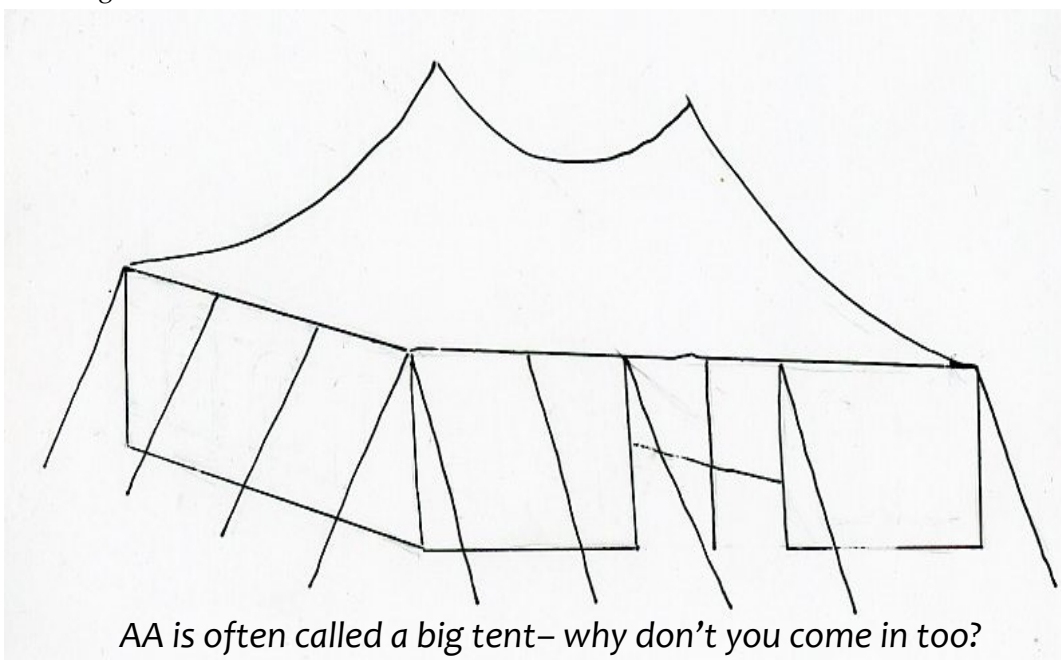
The first time I got drunk it was a wonderful experience. I believe the key was that my best friend and I only had one six pack of warm Olympia beer and that was just the right amount to get us buzzed good, but not out of control drunk. It was

eliminate those problems entirely.

When I finally reached the legal drinking age of 21, I was married and had a son. I had a good job and drank at home mostly. My wife was the adult child of parents who drank very heavily (I won't say they were alcoholics because only they can say that). At any rate, she was used to dealing with people like me and thought it was normal. The lies I told myself in those years were really bad, like I can drive better drunk than most people sober. How many times I put both their lives at risk are uncountable and something that still makes me shudder. The biggest lie I told myself was that I was being a

good husband and a good father. I did earn a living and wasn't abusive and didn't carouse very much, but I was withdrawing emotionally, slowly but surely. When our marriage ended, neither on of us put any blame on alcohol, only that we weren't doing well together.

Freed from the constraints of marriage I



so much fun we made plans for the following weekend and scored a fifth of Southern Comfort. My last memory of that outing was of throwing up on the putt-putt golf course on the corner of Martin Way and Sleater-Kinney, with the world spinning around me. I had never experienced anything that awful and vowed to never do that again. That was the first lie I told myself related to alcohol. I modified that vow to, "I will never drink hard liquor that fast again". From the time I was 16 until I was 21 I drank for effect almost every weekend. Since I was living at home and working I had to control and hide my drinking and managed to do pretty well 80% of the time; it was that other 20% that caused problems. The lie I told myself about those other 20% of the times was that I would change my behavior when drinking so those bad situations didn't happen. Never once did it occur to me that stopping drinking could

could have gone wild with my drinking, but, I had custody of my 12 year old son so had to keep a semblance of order to keep him fed, clothed and attending school. The lie I told myself was that doing those things made me a good father. The truth I couldn't admit was that I was emotionally unavailable to him much of the time. I would come home from work, open a bottle of wine drank as I fixed dinner for us. The lie I told myself was that I was a wine connoisseur and drank to compliment the meal. I never thought about the cheap gallon of Hearty Burgundy I kept in the pantry for after the corked wine was finished, and drank until bed time. If I ever ran out, there was a little grocery a couple blocks away that I could walk to. Again, 80% of the time I drank at home without incidents. The 20% where I had difficulties were when I got out of town and was just blowing off steam. It was a classic example of the saying, "I didn't get in
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Journaling for Members of AA

Most of us admit that we have at least two selves. I have at least two or four or five voices in my head urging us in different directions. Some years ago after joining AA I decided that I have one voice in my head that speaks up again and again and seems to make a lot of sense and that's the voice I call God. If I can listen to God over the din of the other voices, then I'm in pretty good shape and, honestly, the longer I'm in AA, the more I'm able to listen to God.

I write in my journal every day and have for years. It's very much a part of my continuing recovery. I feel very, very lucky—God doing for me what I could not do for myself—to be granted the strength and courage to do that. I have been able to overcome Resistance, which is still lodged in me and greatly resembles what religious people call the Devil.

Writers have various ways of overcoming resistance. The late great American poet William Stafford when confronting writer's block said that he just lowered his standards and kept on writing. I find that not being judgmental is a big part of it. Sometimes I get up in the morning

and don't feel like writing, so I open my computer and write, I don't feel like writing today, or even something harsher...but I write that down.

A more productive trip is to write narrative rather than essay. If I sit down and start out writing, The reasons that I am a drunk are...then probably I'm not going to stay with that: resistance has set in. But if I write some little story (and not be too picky) about going to the grocery or having a flat tire or meeting an old friend...well, that keeps me going pretty easily. Yeah, well, you might say, how productive is that compared to your pushing yourself to answer the question about why you're a drunk. I say, Wait a minute: there may be more answers in a randomly selected story than in an essay. Resistance can be overcome sometimes when you come at it indirectly.

Out of the mouths of babes, and sometimes out of the mouths of drunks, truths can emerge.

Anyhow, good luck with your journaling!

Lots of people in AA keep a journal. Some did it before they came into the rooms, and some take it up at the suggestion of their sponsor or just inspired by the Big Book or something else. Everyone agrees it's a good idea. Not everyone is able to form the habit; not everyone is able to start it, and most, honestly, don't keep it for long.

If you just do it "when the spirit moves you," then chances are that one day, maybe several in a row, the spirit will not move you and you'll quit. Toss it in the nice try pile and sleep in or hit the hay a little earlier.

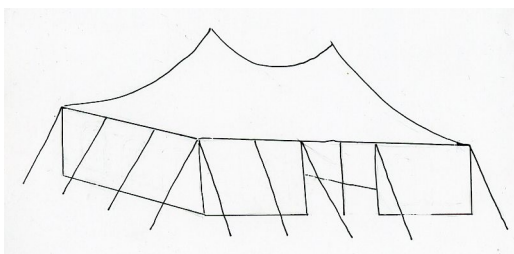
AA usually refers to this as "rebellion," as in "Rebellion dogs our every step." Psychologists are more likely to call this "resistance," and that raises the question, resistance to what? Or rebelling against what? How do you resist yourself? How do you rebel against yourself?

Honesty...continued from p.3

trouble every time I drank, but every time I got in trouble I had been drinking."

These were just some concrete examples of how I lied to myself. The real damage was done by the false subconscious reality I constructed that allowed me to go on drinking and believing everything was alright while I was drinking more and more. After a while, the bottle or two of wine in the evening wasn't enough and I began to take a glass of Yukon Jack to bed with me and drink while I read and passed out.

I began a relationship and once again found someone who didn't think my drinking was obsessive. She admitted later that she was amazed at how much I could drink without appearing to get drunk. The lie I told myself was that I wasn't getting drunk, I was just enjoying a few drinks. She did wonder once when she found me drinking cooking sher-



ry in the pantry after we had foolishly run out of alcohol.

At this same time, I was getting ready to retire, we had built our dream house on the bay and our kids were pretty much grown. Luckily for me, a power greater than myself decided to give me a chance and had me stopped and arrested for drunken driving. I remember sitting in the back of the sheriff's car, with my hands in cuffs behind my back, and realizing, "this is insane, this is not who I am, my drinking has become a problem." I finally admitted to myself that everything that was happening was a direct result of choices I had made concerning alcohol. It wasn't the Sheriff's Deputy that was filling his quota. It wasn't my partners fault or the bartenders or anyone else, just me. With that realization fresh in my mind, I started a court

ordered attendance at AA meetings. Stripped of my excuses and rationalizations, the things I heard at meetings rang so true and so applicable to me that I became willing to accept new truths and make them a part of my life. In fact, I liked doing it.

I discovered the real "me" and I began to like him. I think about what would have become of me if I had retired and had been able to drink all day while my partner was at work. I suspect it would have been fatal. Instead, I became interested in my fellow man, discovered interests I never knew I had and became comfortable in my own skin. AA has given me so much I couldn't list them all, but I know what would come first, and that's the ability to be honest with myself, and for that, I will be forever grateful.