

# Here's *How*

VOLUME LX ISSUE NO. 1  
JAN-FEB 2009

*Published in Fellowship by the Chicago Area Service Assembly*

## *We Are Not a Glum Lot*

### *Scrooged-A Christmas Story*

Elizabeth G.

The year I got sober, I was living in a house that had been gutted for renovation somewhere north of Hollywood, with my cat, Loretta. The people who owned the house left me to care for it for six months during the rainiest of winters. The roof leaked, and in the mornings I would pad across the damp cement floor in wool socks on my way to the microwave in the bathroom to heat my tea.

I had lost my job, my car, my apartment, and most of all, most of the people I called "friends". Loretta and I braced for another holiday season. We depended on each other to keep warm and dry. I'd experienced many lonely holidays before I got sober. By the time I was a few years out of college, I was spending most of my time drinking alone; the holidays seemed an especially good time to hole up with reruns of "A Christmas Carol" and experiment with new things to mix into eggnog.

Usually it was December 24th before I'd realize I'd earned no invitations at all; that's when my ego deflated and pride would beat back my feelings of sadness that I thought would kill me. The year in the rainy house was no different except I wasn't drinking. Like the house itself, I was trying to rebuild my life one solid brick at a time. At just a year sober, I was still isolating, even from my new friends in A.A.

December 24th came again, and Loretta and I curled up in a bundle of blankets and I flipped the channels on

a small TV I'd retrieved from storage where I was keeping my material life as I sorted out the spiritual. There he was again, that miserly grouch, Ebenezer Scrooge. He was threatening to keep his clerk in on Christmas Day, like he threatened every year, even though he had a large family waiting for him at home, including a good natured, lame little boy.

The BASTARD, I thought, as I sipped my virgin eggnog. Then it occurred to me, since I was a child, I loved the story of the old man who had cut himself off from the sunlight of the spirit, and is graciously visited by three ghosts on Christmas Eve, before waking up a new man. I'd seen every version, from Donald Duck to Bill Murray, several stage productions, and read the book twice. I loved the whole concept of past, present and future "ghosts" that told a story of a life and communicated a complex meaning simply and profoundly. Isn't that what I was beginning to experience by working the Twelve Steps?

At my very first meeting, they told me that by working the steps, I would experience a spiritual awakening, and that my life would change forever. I knew I needed to change, but had no idea what that spiritual awakening would feel like, or how I would recognize it if it came. Eventually I found a sponsor a lot like Marley's ghost, who visits Scrooge the night of his ghostly encounters to warn him to pay attention.

They told me the 4th Step was an inventory of our emotional deformities—a catalog of "misdirected instinct". The Ghost of Christmas Past shows Scrooge the roots of his injured

self-esteem, security, ambition, sex and personal relationships. The Ghost of Christmas Present allows him to review his own part in the story of his life, especially how fear had caused him to retreat into a corner of his life and lash out to all who trespass. The *Twelve and Twelve* tells us, "These fears are the termites that ceaselessly devour the foundations of whatever sort of life we try to build".

The Ghost of Christmas yet to come is always the most compelling part of the story for me. It's the place where Scrooge sees the emptiness of a life run by fear. His greed—one of the seven deadly sins—causes him to make unreasonable demands on everyone around him. As we know, fear is a soul sickness in its own right...which in turn, generates more character defects.

That particular Christmas Eve, alone with my precious cat, I made a pact with God: that if he kept me sober, I would do my best to outgrow fear.

I woke up Christmas Day, happy to be alive and grateful for my own ghosts. And like Scrooge, I felt like dancing.

### *We Are Not a Glum Lot*

Adam C.

I never really expected sober life to be dull. I knew I would have to go through a certain amount of depression and a lot of unpredictable change in recovery, but glum-ness was not something I associated with it. Being in AA is healing, and the body doesn't heal well in a glum environ-

ment. When I see people laughing in the program, it usually seems natural and organic, not the ego-laughter I associate with drinking and drugging.

Something I'm really grateful for is the continuity my life is getting. It's not all start and stop anymore – get wasted till I hit a brick wall, then have to recover, start over. Events and days connect and make sense now, and with that clarity comes peace and the ability to enjoy being alive. I've started doing some exciting things in sobriety that I don't believe I ever would have had the chance to do before, or at least not effectively. For example, I've been writing stand-up comedy that I hope to perform soon, and only because I really want to, not because I feel like I have to or because I think of it as a stepping stone to something else (which were both issues before I got sober). It is an end in itself and I'm having a blast, and it is only because of AA that I believe I might be able to do it somewhat successfully.

But it's not just the things I can do, it's also the simplicity of being present. I enjoy being with people now, and I have a naturally good time with my friends. Before, if I wasn't drunk, I was thinking about it, and that took me out of the immediate now. Instead of only looking forward to a future time when I could numb myself, I can live consciously in the moment and really understand other people and that much of life is meant to be enjoyable. God wants us to feel good.

### *A Newcomer Shares*

Ross M.

**H**ello, my name is Ross, and I'm an alcoholic. I never thought I'd say that. I still can't believe I just did. I attended my first AA meeting last night and was introduced to the program.

I was pretty sure I'd have nothing in common with the people I found myself sitting next to. Within literally sixty seconds of being in the room, I overheard some people talking about their profession. I asked them if what I heard was correct and it was. I had the same career as two of these guys sitting across from me. I was blown away. We had a 1st step meeting.

Several kind people told me about AA and what it has to offer. They told me the positive effects it had had on their lives. It has got me interested. I want that for myself. I want to be free from the chains of alcoholism. So I listened. We went around the room and each person gave me a brief glimpse into their lives. They told me how alcohol has affected them as well as the lives of people they care about most. It felt like I was listening to my own stories.

At the end of the meeting, people I had just met gave me their phone numbers. They told me I could call them if I needed to talk or if I felt that I was going to drink. The bond we shared, although simple, was amazingly gratifying.

## A Word From the GSC Delegate

*By Ruben G., GSC Delegate*

Let me begin by wishing all of you a very Happy New Year. May the year to come be one of joy, prosperity, and sobriety. This past September I had the privilege and honor of being elected as your representative to the General Service Conference held in New York every year in April. At the General Service Conference it is my hope

to have a strong pulse of our Area's needs and effectively communicate them during the Conference. It will be at this time when I will measure our needs with that of AA as a whole and help make the decisions that best serve the entire fellowship.

In order for me to do this I will have to continue to carry the message – not only to the Alcoholic who still suffers but to those of you who have taken on the responsibility to ensure our movement carries on. Those of you who unlock the doors at your home group before the meeting as well as those of you who have become GSR's or group treasurers who ensure that the information is passed along and the 7th Tradition is practiced. As we all know it takes a tremendous amount of work to ensure we keep our doors open, just the way someone did for us.

Over the next two years I will do my best to keep you all informed as to what is transpiring in our fellowship. Not just what transpires at the GSC but what may be unfolding during Board Meetings in New York as well as within our Area and Region. I will in turn ask for your feedback as me communicating cannot be a one-way street. Please feel free to reach out to me at: [GSCDEL1959@me.com](mailto:GSCDEL1959@me.com) with any questions or concerns.

My first piece of news to pass along is that we now have a new General Manager for our General Service Office in New York. Her name is Phyllis H. from the Pacific Region. She replaces Greg M. who did a tremendous job for many years and I wish him well on his future endeavors. Closer to home: Bob M. our East Central Regional

Trustee will be rotating off in April as well as Dorothy W. our Trustee At Large. US Area 19 has submitted the names of two members from our Area as candidates for those positions and I wish both of them good luck (Don B. & Earl H.). For additional information please have your GSR share with you the minutes from our previous Assembly or send me a line.

In closing I would like to thank Maurice H., our outgoing Delegate for a job well done during this past rotation, and another thank you to Celeste O'C., our outgoing Area Chairperson who also did a beautiful job. To both of these trusted servants, my hat goes off to you.

Thank you all for allowing me to be of Service!!

Ruben G.  
General Service Conference Delegate  
Area 19 / Panel 59

## CASA Report

By Mark M., CASA Chairperson

Hello all, my name is Mark M. and I have the Honor and Privilege of serving as your CASA Chairperson for the next two years. The Here's How Committee has asked me to write a little something for this edition of *Here's How* on what is going on in our Area. For one, our new Area Officers began their positions as of January 1, 2009. Our new Area Chair is me - Mark M., Alt Area Chair is Michael H., Delegate to the General Service Conference

is Ruben G, Alt. Delegate is Eric B., Recording Secretary is Nicole M., and Alt. Secretary is Nora W. We are all excited and look forward to serving the Area in our respective capacities.

Soon our Delegate will be receiving the background information for this years General Service Conference (GSC). The way we can all help him prepare is by attending and participating in the Delegates Forum. This is our Area's version of a mock GSC. Those in attendance will be assigned to a committee, such as Public Information or Corrections, and discuss the same issues that will be discussed at the GSC in New York. Each person on the Committee will have all of the same background information as our Delegate so they can have an informed opinion during committee discussions. At the end of the day the committee chair will give a final report to the forum and discussion with everyone in attendance will begin. What this does is give our Delegate an informed opinion on what our Area's conscience is. Oh, by the way, did I mention this is a FREE EVENT and there will also be a FREE LUNCH! I always look forward to the Forum. It is one of those things that has always made me feel closer to AA as a whole. It will be held on Saturday, April 18, 2009 with a location to be determined. Hope to see you all there.

And don't forget to register for the Second City Round Up which is on May 15, 16 and 17, 2009. This year it will be held at the Holiday Inn Chicago North Shore.

## Here's How Newsletter

Here's How is published six times a year by the Chicago Area Service Assembly (CASA) of AA in the interest of greater unity of the 75,000+ members and 3,200+ groups in the Chicago/Suburban Area.

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### WE NEED YOUR STORIES!

Tell us about "what it was like, what happened and what it is like now." In upcoming issues, Here's How will publish your stories about:

#### Friendships in Sobriety

Feb – March Issue

Last day for submission – March 31

#### Step One

April – May Issue

Last day for submission – May 31

#### Carrying the Message

June – July Issue

Last day for submission – July 31

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with submissions

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*Experience, Strength and Hope*

Mark Z.

When I entered Alcoholics Anonymous, I walked in twenty-five years old and completely broken. I spent my final using months wandering around Wicker Park bumming cigarettes and stealing food. Every morning I awoke to feelings of unbearable hopelessness and overwhelming depression. My life was clearly unmanageable but yet I somehow failed to make the correlation between alcoholism and my problems. I just figured that if I miraculously came upon a large sum of money, everything would be okay. It was obvious I had a million problems but I was oblivious to the possibility of alcoholism being one of them. And so I entered Alcoholics Anonymous not so much because of booze but mainly because my life was terrible. I had completely run out of options and had no other alternatives.

I entered Jack Clark's recovery house and they required me to get a sponsor and do ninety meetings in ninety days. At the time I didn't have any specific thoughts about long term sobriety. To me, it was just something I had to do at that moment to stay fed with a roof over my head. After obtaining a sponsor and making meetings everyday, I quickly began to realize that alcohol did, indeed, negatively affect my life. Due to my excessive drinking I had been unable to hold down a job, pay bills, or do anything that even remotely resembled responsibility. Furthermore, I had resorted to stealing to support my drinking habit. The more I heard people

comment at meetings, the more I began to identify with them. Gradually I began to believe that I was alcoholic and could not drink like normal people.

Accepting my alcoholism was a turning point for me. When I bought into the problem, I then proceeded to buy into the solution. The solution, I was told, was in the 12-Steps. As I dived into the 4th and 5th Step, my life began to get better quickly. Socially I began to interact with people from meetings, family members, and people in the work place. The loneliness and isolation began to disappear and usefulness began to emerge. At nine-months of sobriety I moved out of my halfway house to live on my own. It was a beautiful moment in my life. No longer did I have house requirements limiting what meetings I could attend and how long I could hang out. On January 29th, 2007, I reached one year of sobriety. In a year I had gone from being a degenerate loser to a happy and productive member of society.

My second year of sobriety saw more growth but required even greater resolve to work the steps consistently. Years of selfish and dishonest behavior did not go away in one year of sobriety. Old behaviors still crept in and occasionally caused me to struggle both emotionally and financially. Learning how to cope without drinking was a mandatory learning experience. The more I persevered, the more I realized how much happier I was living sober. Even when times got tough, I always found things to be grateful for.

On January 29th, 2008, I reached two years of sobriety. As part of Step 12, my old sponsor wanted

me to start talking to newcomers. As a result, I started working with a sponsee. Without a doubt, watching his growth has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my entire life. When we did his 5th Step, I was overcome with amazement and awe. At that moment, I began to realize just how powerful Alcoholics Anonymous truly is. This program saves not just individual lives but also entire families. It's such a beautiful thing. On December 5th, 2008, my sponsee reached eleven months of sobriety. His transformation has been unbelievable. He has helped me in more ways than I could ever have imagined. I owe everything I currently have in my life to this program. Sobriety is a gift and I am so grateful I don't have to pick up a drink today.

*Hmmm...A Good Day Sober*

Rick H.

Hmmm....Been thinking about some of the "cool" sayings in AA that usually get a smile or nod when they are said. I like them, too. However, as the years of sobriety keep adding up I get a little more thoughtful about what these sayings really mean... and find myself reflecting on them to determine if I really buy into their message.

Here's one that caught my attention recently. "My worst day sober is much better than my best day drunk." Hmmm. Flashback-I'm drinking at the bar with lots of my friends after a softball game (lots of fun), then off to the racetrack where I made one bet (and won a lot of

money)—then off to buy a nice set of clothes and right to an all night party. No cops, no DUI, no fights, not even a terrible hangover. So that is probably the best day drunk I can remember.

Not as good as my worst day sober??? Hmmmm. Highlights of some of my worst day's sober; my mom and dad die, my little sister commits suicide and I'm asked to speak at her funeral, really brutal days at my job, sick kids, nightmares about drinking and bad withdrawal symptoms, crying after eight months sober because my life just didn't seem to be getting better. (Just a necessary phase of my recovery)

So were these "bad days sober" truly better than my best day drunk? It depends on what my overall life objective is; what path I've chosen and why I'm on it; the road I want to follow and the people I want to take the journey with.

So for me, after consideration the answer is yes, I agree with the AA saying. The reasoning goes like this. Every day I took a drink the alcohol was doing its job of rotting my soul and me from the inside

out. Slowly but surely my character, my moral fiber, was dissolving into a cesspool. I was on a terrible path of destruction that absolutely, without a doubt was going to end in misery for me and those around me—and I didn't even know the path I was on. In the end once the bottom fell, out I didn't even care.

And what about those "good days drinking"? Just a temporary pause on my way down to the bottom that had me believing that I was really having fun—even though in the deepest, alcohol soaked part of my soul—I knew something was wrong....

And what about the pain of recovery, the struggles, the disappointments and tragedy that happen in sobriety that are just part of life? Are these good days sober? For me, yes they are because I am dealing with all of it on life's terms, not running to a bottle or drugs to escape my responsibilities. I'm hanging in there and building back some character. I'm feeling good about going to bed sober. Sure I'm beat up and anxious sometimes, but feeling good about what I'm doing. Finally feeling good about the new path I have chosen and the

direction I'm headed. My soul is healing every single day I stay clean and sober.

My approach is to not drink now, forever.

*Service is the Secret*

Jerry

**M**y name is Jerry, and I'm an alcoholic. I drank for twenty years and had ENOUGH! I'm now sober for over two years and have learned so much in AA. I go to many meetings and always hear something new. I've learned that service is the secret to staying sober. I sponsor three guys now and that's definitely one thing that keeps me sober. I'm also on the Literature and Special Needs Committees which I love. Don't get me wrong, I still think about drinking sometimes, but when I get that crazy thought, I pray and call other people in recovery. It works for me. I'm not an expert at staying sober by any means, but I know I don't want to drink again. Thanks, and God bless you all.

LIFE UNMANAGEABLE

BY BEN



## Experiencing Jet Lag On Your Journey?

Jenni N.

**H**as life's journey been a little rough lately? Are you experiencing unexpected delays, detours or road blocks? Has there been a cancellation or two in your carefully laid out travel plans? Is the word TRUDGE capitalized and in boldfaced letters on your Road to Happy Destiny?

Answering yes to any of the previous questions may suggest you are suffering from a condition known as jet lag. Symptoms of jet lag affect travelers physically, mentally and emotionally, especially over great distances. And we in the program of Alcoholics Anonymous know all about great distances. We travel them daily. Does this put us at risk?

Use the following checklist to determine if you are experiencing jet lag symptoms on your journey:

### Disorientation or Confusion

Lack of commitment, motivation or willingness to complete activities that require some effort; i.e. calling your sponsor, attending meetings, working the steps or service work.  
Inability to move forward; feelings of going backward or being "stuck" on a particular step.

Missing the point by being so caught up in daily struggles or mundane routines that opportunities for growth are overlooked.

### Interrupted Sleep (restless)

Difficulties falling to sleep or staying asleep due to "committee meetings" or that stupid hamster spinning his wheel in your head.  
Sleeping too much as a means of avoiding some problem or issue.

### Getting Uptight (irritable)

"Losing it" or "lashing out" at people, places and things.

Pesky character defects that keep resurfacing.

### Dehydration (discontent)

Inability to connect with your Higher Power.  
An overwhelming feeling of missing something important.  
Seeking, but not finding, the spiritual nourishment needed to fill some emptiness or void.

### Overall Health Problems

Suffering effects of withdrawal.  
Experiencing some minor physical ailments such as weight gain, headaches, joint and back pain.  
Coping with life altering medical conditions such as surgery, stroke and heart attack.

Relax fellow travelers, this is not a test. It's not necessary to tally and total a score. All alcoholics at sometime during their journey experience a few, if not all of these symptoms. Checking a box or several doesn't label you a "Bad Traveler." In fact recognizing these jet lag symptoms can help you remove some obstacles along the course of those travels.

There is no quick fix to alleviate all the symptoms of jet lag. But for the serious and steadfast traveler, may I suggest some "Travel Tips" that you just might find useful on your journey.

### Travel Tip #1

Develop and maintain a relationship with your higher power. Ask Him for directions. Include Him in every aspect of your journey, using prayer and meditation to seek and do His will. Ultimately it is His destination you are trying to obtain. He will lead the way if you let Him.

### Travel Tip #2

Call your sponsor, everyday if requested. Sponsors are your lifeline while traveling. They act as your tour guide through the steps. Most importantly, they speak your language. They are alcoholics, too!

### Travel Tip #3

Go to meetings! The number of meetings you need to attend is directly proportional to the situations accruing during the current course of your journey. In English this means attend meetings, lots of meetings, during good times and bad.

### Travel Tip #4

Be there for your fellow travelers. Call them on the phone, request to meet them at a meeting or take them to meetings. Offer to them your experience strength and hope. There is nothing like working with another alcoholic to get "you out of your own head."

### Travel Tip #5

Ask for help. As you were there for your fellow travelers, they too will be there for you. This is the part of the journey where you and others reap the benefits of service work.

### Travel Tip #6

Always carry The Big Book of "Alcoholics Anonymous" (pocket size will do) along on your travels. No matter what the distance, your journey will be made easier by using this "Field Guide."

### Travel Tip #7

Seek the assistance of medical professionals familiar with issues associated with recovery. Remember to be completely honest with your doctors, sharing with them all of your travel plans.

So take heart fellow travelers. You are now ready to go great distances on life's spectacular journey. And if you experience some jet lag symptoms during your travels, view it as an opportunity to try out these helpful Travel Tips along the way. I know they work for me.

Till we meet again on that Road to Happy Destiny,

Jenni N.



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Big Book Trivia  
Tim R. Hinsdale, IL  
Billy N. Spring Lake Hts, NJ

**Saturday, May 16<sup>TH</sup>**

"Alcoholism the Disease"  
workshop with Dr. Burns B."  
Annalise R. Chicago, IL  
Pat Y. Pasadena, CA

**Sunday, May 17<sup>TH</sup>**

Joyce L. Chicago, IL  
Burns B. Louisville, KY

*\* Program subject to change*

**HOTEL INFORMATION**

To get the discounted rate of \$109 per night (plus tax), call the Holiday Inn at 1-866-750-3369 and mention you are with the Second City Round-Up (SCRU) OR visit their Web site at [www.hiskokie.com](http://www.hiskokie.com) and use the online registration code WRS by May 1st, 2009. *There is no charge to park.* Visit <http://tripsweb.rtachicago.com/> for public transit info.

**CONFERENCE CONTACT INFORMATION**

Bill W. 708-372-4186 • Jonas H. 773-988-7423 • Derek T. 773-206-6306 • Kimmy H. 773-559-9539

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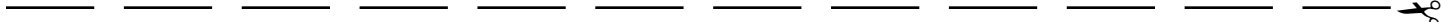
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