

Recovery in Changing Times

My name is Johnny and i am a GRATEFUL ALCHOLIC! I would like to thank you for giving me this opportunity to be of service. When I was told they were looking for names to be put in a hat to be drawn to speak at this event, I thought what are the chances? Plus, my sponsor said if you really believe in spiritual principles what are you worried about! "Thanks Scott"

Really, I mean that, from the beginning he has always pushed service work at all levels. And i will tell you from my personal experience it's a big part why I'm still sober today.

Before I get into my talk on the subject "RECOVERY IN CHANGINGTIMES" I want to tell you a little about myself. My sobriety date is July 15, 2016, before then my life was hell. Since then, it's been a heck of a lot better! Thanks to all of you!!

RECOVERY IN CHANGING TIMES ... When I first read my topic, my first thought was, time is always changing and there's one thing this alcoholic hates worst is change. And everything in it is changing. With that being said, let's look back a little in our history. Myself, being a former member of the armed services - let's take a look at 1941. Alcoholics Anonymous was in its infancy when WWII erupted. There were thousands of men who volunteered or was drafted for the war. The home AA office in New York, which later, became the General Service Office (GSO) and today serves AA groups in the U.S. and Canada as a clearinghouse, had concerns whether the war would be too much for the newly sober members.

Thankfully, for AA members serving on the home front, the war didn't prove to be too much. Likewise, AA members serving in the war overseas thrived because the principles of AA kept them grounded and focused when the world around them was falling apart and full of destruction.

In June 1944, World War II was nearing an end. Of the approximately 300 AA members in the U.S. armed forces at that time, many lived in the New York metropolitan area. The first issue of the AA "Grapevine" was published that same month, and for every month since. The Grapevine was created by six members from the New York area, with the Blessing of Bill W. A copy was sent to every AA group and all the AA members in the U.S. armed forces overseas. An entire page entitled "Mail Call for All AA in the Armed Forces" was devoted to letters from these members. They called the Grapevine their "Meeting in Print" A title that stuck and remains today. When WWII ended in 1945, the AA members started meetings where they were stationed. AA in Europe took root due in part to the military. The new AA was started by military members who invited locals to attend.

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They called the Grapevine their "Meeting in Print". I remember those days. Thats right, it was when I was locked up. Prior to me being locked up, I was attending at least four meetings a week, my first year and a half. I was active in service work, stayed close to the fellowship, and tried to apply the principles to all my affairs. Then I find myself sitting in a cell (serving time for a crime committed before coming to the program). I was scared, alone, and in an unfamiliar place. At that time, there was a meeting being brought in once a week. I will always be truly grateful to those men who brought those meetings in!

At that time in my sobriety, I needed more ...lots more, and were I got that was from the "Grapevine". I read them over and over so when they say it's like a meeting in print, I agree. It helped me stay grounded. It gave me hope and strength to get through that day and reminded me to practice those principles in all my affairs - and things will get better, and they did.

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So now let's jump to November 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic. I live in a small town in the northwest, with a population of about 2000. The epidemic wasn't really a factor in my life, especially in my recovery. Then things slowly started to change. Wearing of masks, social distancing and finally closures of places where meetings are held. When this first happened, the weather was nice, so we were able to have meetings outside. Nobody knew how long this would continue, so we had concerns of not being able to meet outside due to the future weather of northwest Montana. By this time, other places around the country were starting zoom meetings. At our business meeting, we knew we were going to have to address these changing times, and how can we still carry the message to the still suffering Alcoholic.

There was a lot of discussion, and all were aboard on carrying the message. And to be honest there was fear on how we were going to do this. I know I was - like I said I hate change. There is one thing I have to always remember, what my sponsor always says, ~~and did during this~~. Is that It's a "great opportunity for spiritual growth". With some sceptism we were able to form a group conscience. We were going "Virtual". Everything seemed to fall into place. Some members had experience with this new technology and were able to get us up and going without many glitches.

It did not take me long to realize how valuable this new technology is at a time like this, and the future. One great example of this is, we had an active member of our home group who was loved and a friend to all, move away (due to personal reasons) and was thought of a lot. He was able to attend his old home group meetings again. Just think, distance is not a variable anymore.

When I was the treatment and accessibilities chair for our district. Rural communities was, and has been, an issue. What a great tool like virtual meetings would help. There are many more great examples of this new technology being an asset to A.A. as a whole.

Now do I think virtual meetings will ever take the place of in-person meetings? "No time soon". I will say, during this COVID-19 pandemic, virtual meetings was a valuable tool to help carry the message to the still suffering Alcoholic. I also believe in certain circumstances virtual meetings are here to stay.

I have come to look at change different and have realized it will always be a great opportunity for spiritual growth.

I would again thank you for giving me this opportunity to grow and be of service and close with what our co-founder Bill W, said at the 10th annual General Service Conference in 1960. "We live in an era of change. Our Twelve Steps probably won't change: The Traditions, not at all likely. But our manner of communication, our manner of organizing ourselves for function, for service-let us hope that this goes on changing for the better, forever We reference the past and its lessons for as long as those teachings work. When they don't, we adapt, and we shift. That has been our history."