

Our Primary Purpose

Stories, news and information from our fellowship in the National Capital Region

Alkathon 2020:
a “virtual” success

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of Our Primary Purpose

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Our Creative Corner

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2020: Not an easy year to get sober But TAS and 12-Step calls still made the difference

For Mike B the world changed on Tuesday, September 8, at a Beacon Hill zoom meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous.



In-person or online, AA will always be there for the newcomer.

But what made that happen, and what really brought him into the virtual rooms of AA, was the 12-Step support he got from Ottawa Area Intergroup’s Telephone Answering Service (TAS), and the 12-Step call list.

“I had reached out before, in 2018, and met a member for coffee. He took me to a meeting, but I just wasn’t ready, and I didn’t come back. This time was different, and I’m now four months sober. It’s by

far the longest I’ve gone without a drink in the past 15 years.”

Mike, who just turned 33, has two young children; a two-year-old and four-year-old.

“This past summer, my life was spiraling out of control, and I faced losing my kids. That’s what brought me around and helped me surrender.”

New roads to recovery

Countless AAs in Ottawa owe a debt to TAS and 12-Step volunteers who have been there to answer the phone, respond to emails, and ultimately meet with the still suffering alcoholic reaching out for help.

Pre-Covid, the process usually involved an initial phone call, followed by a face to face with a 12-Step volunteer...often it would be a ‘let-me-tell-you-my-story’ coffee at Tim’s followed by a visit to the nearest AA meeting.

As we know, the pandemic changed everything in March, when the curtain came down, and our AA groups went online. Instead of meeting the newcomer in person, it became an invitation to a zoom call.

For some, that first ‘virtual’ meeting just didn’t take; the message didn’t resonate, and there was no attraction. But for others, like Mike, something clicked, and they kept coming back.

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Editorial – change we must!

Ok, all together now...one, two, three...turn the page.

Welcome to 2021.

If there's one thing we learned in 2020, and of course we all know that hindsight is 2020, ha ha, it's that we all can change. Especially, if we have no choice.

Covid-19 left AA with no choice but to make a huge pivot and take our meetings from church basements and community centres to an online platform.

We all got a little bit more tech savvy because we had to if we were going to stay connected to the program.

When we were forced to stay at home, and work from home, we had to learn to adapt. After a while, through trial and error, we discovered that binging on Netflix and BBQ chips can be dangerous to our mental and physical health.

In the process, we found out a bit more about ourselves and each other. We discovered that self-care and resiliency are things that we have taken for granted, for far too long.

So, what did we do?

Maybe we started to meditate, or read, or find a new hobby, like woodworking or pottery. Maybe we dusted off the bicycle that's been leaning against the back wall of the garage for the past few years.

The bottom line is **WE TOOK ACTION!** And what did we discover?

Lo and behold, we discovered that we could become really passionate about something new and different. Or something old and the same. Maybe we just forgot about how much fun it was to cycle along the bike path, or a build a new bird cage.

Ultimately, we re-discovered that life is all about getting up off the couch and doing something, something concrete.

So, what will we do?

If 2020 taught us one thing, and one thing only, it's that we are NOT driving the bus, we are NOT conducting the orchestra. We are NOT in total control of our own lives.



We have learned, the hard way, that you cannot be happy or serene until you figure out how to “turn it over” every single day.

2021 is a clean slate. We all have the chance to change and grow in ways we haven't even thought about yet.

But let's harness the wind in our sails. Most of us share the confidence that we will be getting vaccinated sometime over the next few months, depending upon how old we are, or what kind of work we do.

So, add this to the fact that we've become more accepting of life on life's terms, and, *presto*, we're ready to continue to change and grow.

All we need to do now is take some action. Maybe it's time to become a sponsor or learn how to actually “host” a zoom meeting. Maybe it's time to volunteer to become your home group's Intergroup Representative, or General Service Representative.

Yes, maybe it's time to challenge yourself...what can I do in 2021 to better help the suffering alcoholic?

Whatever it is, just do it!

The “zoom” comfort zone from Page 1

Mike never considered himself a shy person, but when feeling vulnerable he found it hard to speak in front of others.

“On a zoom call I somehow felt a little less exposed. I could turn off my camera if I wanted to. I didn’t feel the need to speak. There was a comfort level there that helped me hear the message that I needed to hear.”

Mike felt the genuine warmth and friendship that seem to pour out through his computer screen, and something encouraged him to keep coming back.



He also continued to get support from a 12-Step volunteer who went above and beyond...traveling all the way to Kingston, where Mike had moved to be reunited with his children.

“When people make that kind of sacrifice and an extra effort to help you work your steps, that makes you want to hang in there.”

Help wanted; humility required

Geraldine H has been reaching out to the newcomer for a long time – she’s 14 years sober – but if there’s one thing she’s learned, and learned all over again during the pandemic, it’s NOT about her.

“When you make 12-Step calls, you quickly learn, ‘it’s not about me.’ I really have to put my ego aside and be satisfied with the notion that I’m simply a conduit. I’m there to explain how the program works. The person on the other end of the line has a choice to make. Are they ready to surrender? Are they ready to admit they cannot do this on their own?”

Like many of us, Geraldine has found out the hard way that we cannot, or should not, chase people

down, trying to convince them to join us in the program of AA.

We all spell ‘desperation’ differently

Geraldine has come to realize that by the time we actually get connected to the suffering alcoholic who has tried to contact AA out of desperation, they are often feeling much better.

“We rarely get the chance to talk to people at that critical moment when they are right there in the depths of ultimate despair.”

She recalled a recent case where she spoke to a woman and invited her to a zoom meeting later that day. The woman showed up online, but only stayed for 10 or 15 minutes and dropped off the call.

“I reached out to her once more after that, but she never got back to me.”

Geraldine admits she used to feel hurt and sometimes a bit resentful when the suffering alcoholic did not jump to action, but experience is teaching her that everyone gets sober on their own terms.

“I have a lot of admiration for those who have been trying to get sober during Covid-19. While online meetings have been a wonderful substitute, there’s nothing that takes the place of the feeling you get when you walk into a room full of people who want to help you.”

Do you want to help?

Ottawa Area Intergroup is always looking for AAs who would like to become either TAS or 12-Step call volunteers. Maybe you’ll be one of the lucky ones who gets to speak to someone, and pass along the message, just at the right moment.

But remember, we carry the message, not the person suffering.

If you would like to volunteer, send an email to: TAS@ottawaaa.org or 12step@ottawaaa.org

Announcements

Shift volunteers
needed for

OTTAWA AREA INTERGROUP OF
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

*Telephone
Answering
Service*

YOUR HELP IS NEEDED AND
APPRECIATED THIS MONTH

CALENDAR: WWW.INTERACTIVE.OTTAWAAA.ORG/TAS
CONTACT: TAS@OTTAWAAA.ORG
CAROLYN S, TAS COORDINATOR

Alkathon 2020

A unique and fitting close to a very difficult year

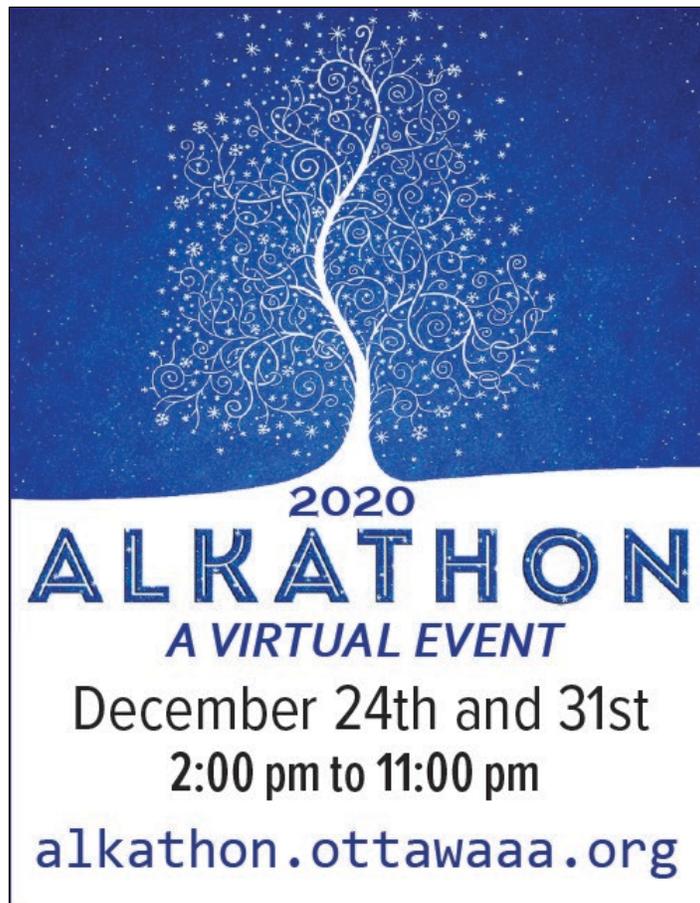
Survey a group of Ottawa AAs and ask them for the most important dates on the local AA calendar ... chances are it will be a toss-up between Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve, at the Alkathon.

"Covid-19 restrictions made it impossible to plan a normal Alkathon this year, but we also knew it was a tradition we just had to try and hold on to," said Gene M who took over as chair in late October, when it looked like the hallowed event – which has been going on for more than 50 years – might not take place.

Putting all his positive energy to the test, Gene managed to pull together the first, and conceivably last, virtual Alkathon. He and his organizing committee rallied ten home groups from across the region to each chair a meeting – five on December 24, and another five, one week later.

"We had at least 65 people joining us online to hear Molly K speak on Christmas Eve. And more than 80 participants were in front of their computers for the keynote speaker on New Year's Eve, Aneka S, from Montreal. The committee was very encouraged by the turnout."

Those who participated were also very happy that



Alkathon 2020 went ahead at all, even if it could not feature in-person meetings or a hot meal.

"Just knowing that the Alkathon was not going to be cancelled, and that we would have the ability to get to a meeting at a time of the year many of us find very difficult...this alone made it incredibly worthwhile," said Kevin M, who chaired Freedom group's 5 p.m. meeting on New Year's Eve.

The speaker at that meeting was Kevin A who shared a poignant story about his recovery journey – getting sober

16 years ago on Christmas Eve. It was a fitting message for all those who logged in during the final hours of 2020, a year that challenged our program and our own sobriety.

"On behalf of the committee, we want to thank everyone who joined us online and helped to make our virtual Alkathon a great success. We once again proved that we really care about each other, and that long-standing traditions are worth working hard to preserve."

Bravo Gene and the Alkathon organizing committee for keeping the heart of a vital event beating strong!

Nice to meet you! Our newsletter has a new Editor



My name is Dawn-Marie M and I am an alcoholic. By the grace of God, and one day @ a time, I have been sober for 18 years. My home group is the Wednesday Women In Step meeting. I work closely with my sponsors. I have two – one for each of the fellowships I belong to.

I was recently acclaimed as newsletter editor, during elections held at the December Intergroup meeting. On the subject of elections, it is my prayer and hope for 2021 that more AAs might step up to fill the remaining positions on Ottawa Area Intergroup's executive board. And especially, that more local members would come to realize the benefits of doing this kind of service. I always try to remember, my Higher Power doesn't call the equipped, He equips the called.

My own experience with service goes back to 2009 when I started as newsletter editor in another fellowship. I served again from 2017 – 2020, as publications chairperson (newsletter editor and webmaster). I enjoy being creative on the computer and harness this passion to make anniversary cards and flyers for both programs.

My educational and work background is in electronics. I also have computer software training; both of which will be beneficial as editor of OPP.

I am a married mother of two adult children. My pride and joy! I'm now a full-time homemaker. My interests include photography, writing and calligraphy. I like to work out and practice daily meditation. We spend summers at our cottage where I get to go kayaking on the lake. So serene.

I'm grateful to Jeff F, our outgoing editor, for his encouragement and support. I'm also thankful to other board members who have offered to help. This will definitely be a collaborative effort.

On that note, I am also counting on you, as members, to contribute submissions to the newsletter. If you can't commit to an Intergroup position at this time, consider writing something for the newsletter now and again.

If you are sharing, please make it 600 words or less. You can also share your photography, poetry, drawings/paintings, or any other creative works. We'll showcase them in our Creative Corner. If you have flyers with AA announcements, please send those along as well. Please email submissions to: newsletter@ottawaaa.org.

I am looking forward to serving in this capacity. It is a joy to give back what was given to me. Please help me carry the message to the next person who still suffers.

Many thanks and blessings,

Dawn-Marie M

A member shares

A classic AA “coincidence” also known as a Godincidence!

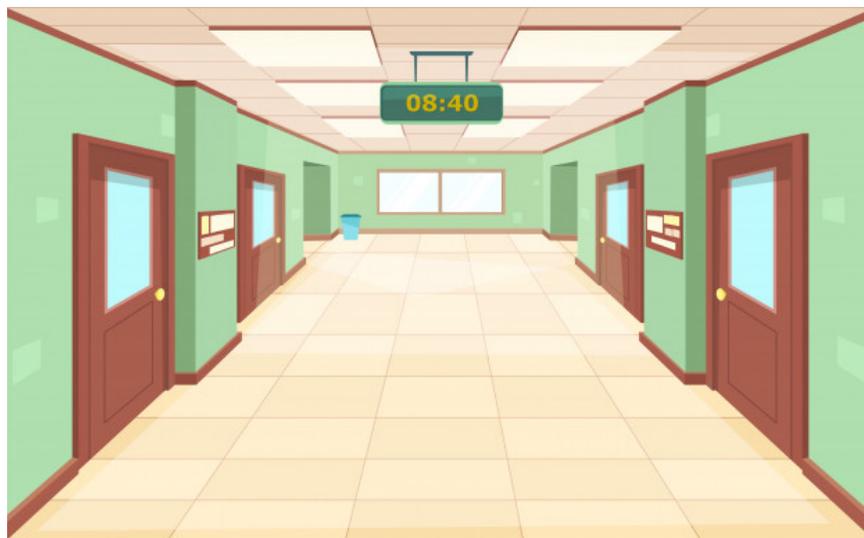
I got sober in Toronto at the old Stock Exchange Meeting, called the 5:15 Group in downtown Toronto. At seven years sober I moved back to Ottawa where I had grown up, because I had just had my daughter and wanted her to be around my family. So, I started a new job in the national office of a large well-known organization with 300 people in the office. I hardly knew anyone.

Back in Toronto, my sponsor had celebrated 10 years of sobriety at her home group, then had stopped going to meetings. I kept asking her “why don’t you go to a meeting Jan?”

and she kept saying “I have my AA books, I talk to my AA friends on the phone, I’m fine.” I kept bothering her about it but she kept insisting she was fine.

So, I’m in my office in Ottawa where I barely know anyone yet. My office is located in a little enclave that one wouldn’t normally walk by unless one had an office in there. I get a call from my sponsor’s daughter in Toronto. She tells me that she just found her mother drunk at the bottom of

the stairs. I hang up and am sitting there crying, with the office door closed. After a few minutes of crying, there’s a knock at my door and this woman I had seen around but didn’t know, sticks her head in the door. I say to her between tears: “Are you a friend of Bill Wilson’s?” She says “yes” and comes in and hugs and holds me until I stop sobbing.



To this day, many, many years later, Shirley B, formerly Shirley A (she says she’s working her way through the alphabet) says she doesn’t know what she was doing in that part of the office

where she had no business going. She just wandered in there and happened to knock on my door. That was 33 years ago. Shirley is now 52 years sober, and I celebrated 40 years sober last summer. She says there’s no way that was a coincidence.

And THAT is what we call an AA Godincidence!

P.S. Jan did get sober again and was six years sober when she died of cancer.

Nadia S

The OPP Creative Corner

Covid-19 is giving us gifts. We have more time to reflect and to create. Our new "Creative Corner" is a place where we can share what AA members are doing with extra time on their hands during the pandemic. ***Send us your poetry, or your paintings, or your photographs.*** You can reach us at: newsletter@ottawaaa.org

An Anniversary Poem - December 2020 (by Deb)

Two thousand twenty reasons to see life as strange
to feel as helpless as the stars watching the earth and humans change.
For a moment we were bowed, and yet were never broken
even though the COVID scourge had risen and had spoken.

Our hope within the Program is a candle burning bright
a quiet sense of dignity no mask will ever hide.
Walking in our upright and yet imperfed ways
We live within the Power that illuminates our days.

We have real-life examples of strength within the year
Three women from this Fellowship that we have come to cheer
Their gentle love and service keeps them warm, secure, and dry
as they take each Step and Sobriety reminds them they can fly.

For N:

One year of sober living can feel as new as any child
while stepping into feelings so uncharted and so wild.

But remember, in another land, where newcomers ask why,
You're an actualizing woman leaving footprints on their sky.

For H:

At five, a child asks questions and while laughing, takes our hand
they take their place upon the earth and begin to understand.
And never mind those times they take apart a brand new toy.
Discovery and wonder fill the days that they enjoy.

For D:

Sunrise seems to learn from the sparkle of your smile.
Your corners lift, and truth releases, in your own fair style.
Maybe you don't see all your intuitively knowing.
You are a field of Promises; in you, we see them growing.

We miss the taste of snowflakes as we're walking to the meeting
We miss anticipation as we're hugged into a greeting
but listen, and I promise, it's not just imagination
you'll hear the roar of nothing less than our standing ovation.



From the AA archives...

Saturday Morning Big Book Group



The Saturday Morning Big Book Group meeting takes place every Saturday from 9:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m., at St Stephens Church, 579 Parkdale Ave. It is a closed discussion meeting which begins with a reading from the Big Book followed by an open floor discussion. The group reads the entire Big Book (Fourth Edition), starting each reading from where the previous meeting ended. Members can request to celebrate their anniversary on any Saturday, during or around the month of their sober date. The celebrant can choose to have a speaker or a regular meeting.

The group was registered with the General Service Office on January 4, 1988. It is currently unknown who the founding members of the group were. It has always been called the Saturday Morning Big Book Group and has never changed locations. The original time was 11:00 am to 12 p.m. It was known to have a healthy attendance – somewhere between 20 and 30 participants. The meeting would break up into smaller discussion groups when numbers were greater.

For a period leading up to the year 2000, regular attendance averaged about eight to 10. One of the longer-serving regulars was a dedicated AA member known as “Big Dave.” An ex-military bookkeeper, Big Dave was chosen to be treasurer. He passed away in 2001, and at his funeral a

second room had to be opened up to accommodate all those who wanted to pay their respects.

After Big Dave’s passing, a man named Ray was handed the keys to the meeting and he took on many service roles for the good of the group. Linda R took over as treasurer and remains in the role to this day.

On January 5, 2002, the Westboro Big Book Study meeting was formed. It took place at 9 a.m. every Saturday and still does. Many from the Saturday Morning Big Book Group started attending the Westboro meeting, preferring the earlier start time. It was also less than three kilometers away. Between 2002 and 2008 attendance at the Saturday Morning Big Book Group dropped to a handful; sometimes Ray would be the only person at the meeting. The group came very close to folding.

Members like Ray, Linda R, and Dave C (an active member today), were able to keep the meeting alive. Ray eventually moved to other meetings but new members like Paul B joined. Paul eventually took over as the holder of the key. Numbers slowly increased and today it averages 6 to 12 participants.

Some highlights and notable moments include: hosting a 5 a.m. meeting slot for the Alkathon (sometime around 2008); reading the First Edition of the Big Book (cover to cover) in 2018; changing its meeting time to 9:30 a.m. in January 2019; and shifting to a virtual meeting during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 (thanks to Dick G who provided the zoom account).

The Saturday Morning Big Book Group is known as a small closed meeting in Ottawa. On most occasions all attendees have the opportunity to read and share during the meeting. Newcomers are always welcomed with “Hellos” and a handshake or hug. You will be lucky to attend on a day where Linda R brings in her fresh baked chocolate chip cookies to share with the group.

SERVICE CALENDAR

Online meeting logistics are shown for committees that have provided it.

No matter how much sobriety you have, you can help and be part of the greater whole. All AA members are welcome to attend any of the following committees:

OTTAWA INTERGROUP MONTHLY MEETING..... Second Wednesday (7:00 pm)
([ZOOM Meeting ID 824 3878 6359 Passcode OAIG2020](#))

DISTRICT 54 MEETING..... First Thursday (6:30 pm)
([ZOOM Meeting ID 834 9953 9650 Passcode 141892](#))

DISTRICT 58 MEETING..... First Monday (7:00 pm)
(Bronson Centre, 211 Bronson Avenue-Room 213-in-person meetings suspended)

DISTRICT 62 MEETING..... Second Monday (7:30 pm)
([ZOOM Meeting ID 638 5623 068 Passcode 016224](#))

CORRECTIONS FACILITIES AND TREATMENT..... Fourth Tuesday (6:30 pm)
(Bronson Centre, 211 Bronson Avenue-Room 108-in-person meetings suspended)

PUBLIC INFORMATION/ COOPERATION WITH PROFESSIONALS..... Third Monday (6:30 pm)
([ZOOM Meeting ID 815 4385 6025 Passcode PICPC](#))

OTTAWA ARCHIVES..... Third Wednesday (7:00 pm)
(Bronson Centre, 211 Bronson Avenue-Room 108-in-person meetings suspended)

Is your AA Group’s meeting information correct on ottawaaa.org? Please send all updates as well as temporary closures to Ottawa Intergroup at info@ottawaaa.org.

Do you have a question for the Intergroup board? Please email us with your question and you can also request an invitation to meet with us at our monthly board meeting. Send your email to chair@ottawaaa.org.

If your group needs insurance, please contact Ottawa Intergroup at info@ottawaaa.org to discuss.

“Our Primary Purpose” publishes articles reflecting the full diversity of experience and opinion found within the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous. In determining content, the editor relies on the principles of the Twelve Traditions. “Our Primary Purpose” values the shared experience of individual AA members working the AA program and applying the principles of the Twelve Steps. Seeking neither to gloss over difficult issues, nor to present such issues in a harmful or contentious manner, “Our Primary Purpose” tries to embody the widest possible view of the AA Fellowship.

The editor of “Our Primary Purpose” reserves the right to accept or reject material for publication, based on the AA traditions. Note: this policy is consistent with that of the AA Grapevine.

Articles are not intended to be statements of AA policy, nor does publication of any article constitute endorsement by either Alcoholics Anonymous or Ottawa Area Intergroup. Submissions are always welcome.