

Ways & Means®

A Quarterly Newsletter For The Fellowship Of Debtors Anonymous

First Quarter 2012

How D.A. Service Has Transformed My Life

Editor: *The following four pieces on the benefits of doing service were submitted by the Resource Development Committee of the 2011 D.A. World Service Conference*

STORY 1: Let Me Count The Ways

I remember my first skirmish with service work. It was in 1986 at my first Twelve Step group.

Long-timers reminded us week after week to do service even if it was setting up chairs. Ugh. I frowned. I felt anger. I didn't budge. I wanted to bask in my misery without distraction. I sat there. Alone. Members folded chairs and chattered. They worked around me. I glared with my head down. No one joined me in my misery so eventually I grudgingly joined them.



Against my will, I began to enjoy their companionship, their chatter. Oddly, I felt better about myself. I felt a sense of accomplishment, a belonging.

Later, in 1990, in my first D.A. group, also service was stressed weekly. Double ugh! We made coffee before the meeting. Once more, my laziness spoke louder than my willingness. I resented having to arrive early, exerting myself. But I did. Perhaps out of peer pressure. Yet, once again, the sliver of willingness widened. Week after week, I felt better and better about myself. I felt part of the group, part of something greater than myself and my misery. I had stepped out of selfishness into helping.

I summoned up courage to Chair a meeting. I'd procrastinated too long. I was sooooo nervous. My insecurity loomed. My voice cracked. My mouth dried. My hands quivered. I could not focus on the right paper to read. Members gently helped me. Each time I chaired, it got easier. I felt fulfillment. I held my head higher. My confidence grew. I was helping the very group that was helping me! I began to value nearly forgotten talents and skills.

Fast forward, to 2004. A long slip plummeted me into crisis. I needed D.A. on a regular basis. Panicked, I trotted back to my F2F group and participated in my Internet group. I wanted and needed D.A. so deeply that I was willing to do whatever it took to make sure my group continued to exist: I served.

I served by sharing my ESH (Experience, Strength & Hope) and by attending business meetings with both my heart and my mind.

I helped start a new F2F meeting and helped revive another F2F meeting. I served as Treasurer of both contributing my time and my self-taught skills in spreadsheets and financial software.

I began to sponsor despite fearing that I wasn't qualified, despite fears and resentments about my time. Those concerns vaporized watching sponsees trade chains of bondage for freedom.

I served as Greeter in my online group.

I served as GSR for my F2F home group. That spring, I felt I wouldn't be doing my duty if I didn't apply for the John H. Scholarship. I

(Continued on page 5)

Ways & Means®

Carrying The
D.A. Message
Since 1988

Ways & Means, an electronic meeting in print for the fellowship of Debtors Anonymous, is published quarterly by the D.A. General Service Board. It is a forum for sharing the experience, strength, and hope of D.A. members, groups, and other service bodies. Articles are not intended to be statements of D.A. policy, nor does publication constitute or imply endorsement by D.A. as a whole, the D.A. General Service Board, or Ways & Means.

A PDF version of the Ways & Means can be downloaded free of charge from www.debtorsanonymous.org, the world service D.A. website. Multiple copies may also be downloaded for distribution at meetings. Back issues are also available.

Submissions from readers on any aspect of D.A. recovery or service are welcome. If chosen, submissions will become the property of the Debtors Anonymous General Service Board, and will not be returned. As with all D.A. publications, everyone submitting writing, artwork, or other creative work will be required to sign a standard publishing release form granting rights to the work to D.A. and releasing D.A. from legal liability. Those submitting work to Ways & Means automatically acknowledge that they will not receive compensation for their work, and that the work may be viewed by an unknown number of readers in unknown locations.

Please submit work by e-mail to: waysandmeansda@hotmail.com, or in hard copy form by mail to Ways & Means, c/o D.A. General Service Office, PO Box 920888, Needham, Mass 02492. Include your full name and mailing address, phone number, and e-mail address. (This information will be kept confidential). Story ideas and questions should be sent to the same addresses.

Editing and layout for Ways & Means are done by the Communications Committee of the D.A. General Service Board.

You CAN Start A Meeting! I Did!

It was the summer of 2008 when I found out that my yearly income was decreasing by \$12,000. I had run up debts, believing I could pay them all off in two years. Then reality hit! I was in a panic, frantic to meet obligations that exceeded my income. I felt angry, victimized, incompetent and betrayed. For eight years I had worked part-time. There were good reasons for this, I thought at the time. My list of reasons were:

- 9/11 Terrorist Attacks (2001)
- Family Medical Emergency (2002-2003)
- Graduate Program (2003-2007)
- Bad Economy (2008)

I had a lot of free time in those days and I used it searching for things on the Internet. I had been a moderator on an online group of women struggling to pay off debt for two years. Someone on that board told me about a book that described Debtors Anonymous. I had looked into the program ten years before, printed some information, borrowed some ideas, but believed that I could do this on my own. I did not need anyone to help me! Not me! I paid down tens of thousands of dollars of debt using this information but I ran it all back up. Yo-yo debting!

That summer of 2008 I was sitting alone late one night and found SpendersDA on yahoo. I posted. I was puzzled by the netiquette of the group. But I was scared and

desperate and I kept coming back to the group. I searched for a meeting in my area and there were none. The closest meeting was seventy miles away and gas was over \$4.00 a gallon. Years in another Twelve Step group made me aware I needed a sponsor. I found one on the We Care list. We emailed back and forth. She would send me questions and I would answer them.

After about four email exchanges my sponsor told me I had to go to a face to face meeting. HAD TO! I argued that I could not afford the gas. She told me I would find a way. I told her I did not have time. She told me I could make time. I told her I could do this without a face to face meeting. She told me I could not.

"Who is this woman? Why am I listening to someone I have never met? What does she know?" These are the thoughts that went through my mind as I drove seventy miles to the meeting. I listened to her because I was scared and had proved to myself over and over and over again that I could not handle money. I was sick and tired of being sick and tired and scared.

The church sat back from the street on a spacious, wooded lot. There were a few cars in the parking lot. I wondered if this was the right place. As I walked from my car to the church I was overcome with fear and wanted to hop back in the

(Continued on page 12)

Ways & Means® is a registered trademark of Debtors Anonymous General Service Board, Inc.

Service At The Conference Level

Intergroup voted to have a regional conference which would be for three days and would be dedicated to recovery issues. A steering committee was formed along with a number of other committees to address all the areas you need to have a conference of this scope. A spending plan was submitted and it was revised a number of times during the year. There was no seed money available to start with so this became an area of concern. Some members felt that because so many members had worked their Steps our area was ready to host a conference like this.

Ground rules were established and at each meeting the Traditions were read. This was important as there were challenges along the way. The steering committee changed its membership throughout the year as some felt the time commitment was too much, some had health issues and there were some personality conflicts within the group. However, there was a core group that remained involved in the process and others stepped up as some stepped down. One of the issues that had to be dealt with was that some members did not believe in the vision which became more of a problem as we got closer to the conference. Eventually these members opted to not continue and those who took their place were ready to do what was necessary to make sure the conference was a success.

The first Northwest Regional Recovery Conference was a

resounding success. We had it at a very abundant location and those who attended had a "profound spiritual experience" which was part of the vision for the conference. This was demonstrated by those who found their vision at the conference, others overcame their underearning, some had their first pressure relief meeting, others started their Step work, some found a sponsor and others begin to see the Promises fulfilled in their lives. Throughout the year those who attended shared the progress they made in their recovery as a result of the conference.

About a month after the conference we started the planning for the next conference. Most of those who got involved in the steering committee had participated in the prior conference and about half had served in various leadership roles. As before, we read ground rules and the Traditions at each meeting. Part of our goal for the second year was to have an even more organized conference and to emphasize fellowship. One of the most amazing things about the planning for the second year was that the entire steering committee stayed intact and there was no turnover. We met monthly and then more frequently as time got closer to the conference. As with any type of service at this level we did have our disagreements. However, we each worked our program and we used the principles of the program to deal with these issues as they arose. The steering committee became very a very close knit group and we

supported each other throughout the process.

The second year's conference was at a different location as one of our goals was to have housing on the premises to build a stronger spiritual community and to make the event more accessible. The evaluations revealed that those who attended were very pleased with the organization, the quality of the workshops, the speakers, the emphasis on fellowship and the program brochure, which was absolutely beautiful. We had a 20% increase in those who attended which is a reflection of the power of the first conference and the media / publicity that was disseminated throughout the Fellowship. For those who attended the first and second year of the conference, most of the comments indicated that members liked the changes that had been made over the first year and stated that they would return to next year's conference.

Those of us who were involved in the planning of the conference felt it was an honor and a privilege to be a part of this transformative event. Our higher power guided us each step of the way. For those who are not sure if they want to get involved with service at this level I would highly recommend it as it will raise your recovery to another level. And as I always say the more service you do, the more abundance and prosperity you will experience in your life.

—Willie W.

Rough Seas Ahead? Volunteer For D.A. World Service!

I've often heard my D.A. fellows share how great service is. "Give service, it's good for you!" "Give service and you'll grow in your commitment to the Program," I heard. "Do service and your program will move forward," they said. These same folks shared how service helped them grow. I got the impression that there was some Program-specific equation—something like this:

Steady Program + Give Service =
Great Rewards

I envisioned, then, if I gave service, I'd have my visions fulfilled. This translated to my thinking I'd have my vision career, great income, and visions about living, travelling, and relationships.

"OK," I said, "sign me up!"

Background

I entered D.A. on July 5, 2001—my Independence Day. My first service commitment was reading literature at the meeting. Gradually, I took on other meeting-related commitments: Literature Person, Treasurer, or speaker. I offered other service, too: sponsor, PRG person, and action buddy. At one point, I even helped start a new meeting.

ACM Opportunity

In 2008, I applied to be an Appointed Committee Member (ACM) for World Services' Literature Services Committee. At the time, I was employed in my vision career and about to present a small workshop at an international

conference—my career was expanding. I was married to a gentleman—another vision that had come through D.A. work. And I was living in a home that I owned. My visions had taken off *because* of D.A. and I wanted to say "thank you" to the Program. I chose to give back to D.A. through the career gift D.A. had given me—writing.

I worked with my PRG and sponsor to determine that the ACM position was appropriate action. To my pleasant shock and surprise, Literature Services (Lit Services) accepted me. I was humbly grateful that I could now use my talents to hopefully assist D.A. This was April 2008.

My picture of how my world service would augment my program was vastly different than my Higher Power's picture. (I choose to call my Higher Power "G-d"). I worked on the literature assigned to me, took a specific service role within the committee, and attended the monthly meetings (held by telephone.) On my sponsor's suggestion, I focused on the ACM commitment, rarely taking on any other service commitments.

I was riding high—and expected my visions to grow exponentially.

Waters Grow Choppy

Eight months into my ACM commitment, my world started to crash. In December 2008, my employer debted and was forced to conduct a mass layoff—I was included. A month later, we

discovered I had a health issue that required major surgery. (Thank G-d, that surgery was the solution to the health issue.) My income was drastically reduced as I was on unemployment—which I could not collect while recovering from surgery. Again, thank G-d, I had insurance coverage through COBRA and my husband's health insurance plan. My ACM work slacked a bit due to the surgery. Yet I was able to attend the monthly calls. It's truly a blessing that these were virtual meetings so I could rest in bed yet be totally present!

I landed a new job in March 2009. In April, my husband developed a major health issue and was on disability for six months. At this point, I was still not completely recuperated from my surgery, so taking on extra activities was a challenge. I lost the new job in June, which was actually a blessing. All along, I stayed committed to my program, to my Lit Services ACM work, and did not debt one day at a time. I'm very grateful to my understanding and supportive colleagues on Lit Services.

With the lowered income—again—I applied for mortgage modification. It was granted—a major miracle.

High Seas Ahead

Things started to look up in November 2009—my husband's health issue resolved itself and we took a short vacation. I was gaining more strength and seriously looking

(Continued on page 9)

Life Transformed*(Continued from page 1)*

resented wasting time researching travel etc. with no hope of a scholarship. A few weeks later, my jaw dropped when I received an e-mail that my group was granted a partial scholarship towards attending the WSC (World Service Conference). I read it over and over before realizing, omigod, we now have what we need to go to the WSC. It was the first time a group in my city would be sending a GSR to the WSC! Then, the next year, omigod again, a D.A. member donated frequent flyer miles so we could send me to represent them at the WSC again. Ya just never know where service and HP will take you!

As GSR, I served on WSC's Literature Committee for three years, then as its Chair in my last year. (WSC requires us to rotate off after three years on the same committee.)

Currently, I serve as GSR for my Internet group serving on our WSC's Resource Development Committee (RDC). I had grieved leaving LitCom because D.A. literature is my passion. It composes the "book" of D.A. It is the result of the collective D.A. world consciousness done in our annual business meeting. I had no idea which committee I wanted join until WSC's opening day when I heard our President, Jan S. speak on the state of our Fellowship. I was riveted. His voice, usually strong and jovial, was cracking as he spoke. This was serious.

He said our two greatest issues were:

1. Sticking to our Primary Purpose
2. Supporting D.A.: "We are not FULLY self-supporting as a Fellowship. Not debting. We're good at visions, but not good at paying for them." (DA has had to dip into savings.) Lots of work done at previous WSC, but we need money to support the projects. We have excuses that we're debtors, but we're recovering debtors... we have prosperity. "We want these things, but we're not willing to pay for them." That we are each responsible.

His words gripped my mind and my heart. That's when I knew I just had to join RDC (Resource Development Committee).

Jan S. also spoke during Fellowship Day on "The History of D.A." I bought the CD. On it, he gently added that the Twelfth Step states "Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to compulsive debtors, and to practice these principles in all our affairs." That the key words are "as a result of working the Steps we have a spiritual awakening and tried to carry this message...."

He drew a correlation between working the Steps and doing service. He spoke to the fact that many D.A. service positions go unfilled both on the world and group level, few members seem to work the Steps and donations to D.A. are low... That as debtors, we

seem to have a deep sense of impoverishment. That the Steps are the answer out of impoverishment. That when the Steps are worked, he noticed that folks seem compelled to serve, to carry the message.

"Impoverishment mentality" hit home. That had been me! I had been so impoverished in my thinking about my time, my talents, and my treasure. I "didn't have enough." I had been selfish, wanting something for nothing even from the very groups that had helped me. I had been lazy, wanting others to do the work rather than helping. I'd been stingy, fearing not having enough time, talent, or money to contribute. Yet it's only a "mentality." Step work and HP continue to transform my mentality. I serve. I contribute my time and talent. I contribute my treasure to my group and to the General Service Office.

Summing up: how did service transform my life from begrudging service? Let me count the ways.

1. The mere willingness to serve helped me step outside myself into something greater than me: my fellowship.
2. It helped me obtain and maintain seven years & nine months of solvency through abstaining from debt.
3. It helped me help others get and maintain solvency, who were then able to help others get and maintain solvency, who then helped....

(Continued on page 6)

Life Transformed*(Continued from page 5)*

4. It led me to members with longtime solvency/abstinence.
5. It reminded me that I have talents and skills that can help others.
6. It strengthened my commitment.
7. It str-r-e-etches my spiritual muscles. Oh yes. As a result...
8. It deepened my Step work, Tradition work, my understanding and application of the Twelve Concepts of World Service.
9. It challenges my character assets.
10. It challenges my character liabilities.
11. It helps me empower others, who then empower others.
12. It helps me Step Up out of "Impoverishment Mentality" to contributing; helping D.A. stay alive.
13. My confidence has grown.
14. It helps me realize I have been receiving the Twelve Gifts of D.A. Every one of them!

—Grateful recovering debtor,
Sharon S.

**STORY 2:
I've Witnessed Miracles**

When I first came to D.A., it was my fourth recovery program and eighth year in Twelve Step rooms. I knew the moment I walked in the door that I was there to work the program. I picked a sponsor within a week and began calling her immediately.

It took me six weeks of attending D.A. meetings to begin keeping my numbers though. I thought I could figure this program out intellectually and avoid all that hassle. I guess it required eight years of recovery in other fellowships to have it take me *only* six weeks to make that discovery. I soon began to understand why this was a spiritual program.

I kept my numbers in a small spiral notebook and had my first PRG once I'd accumulated a few months worth of information. That first PRG was transformational—mostly that two other caring adults, who had professional lives outside the rooms, would sit there with me for over an hour—gratis—and gently speak to me about *my* numbers. When the hour had passed, they didn't look at their watches and say, "Time's up!" I took note of that and felt my heart grow warm and soft as they said, "Let's continue until we finish these sheets." Not even a charge for overtime!

It wasn't long after that that I started giving PRGs regularly. I estimate that I've given between one to eight PRGs a month ever since. Since this is a program about

numbers and clarity, by my calculations, that's over 700 PRGs. In addition, I've led meetings, run vision fairs and PRG fairs and have now served as a GSR for nearly three years.

My life is completely different than it was fifteen years ago when everything that had to do with money, mine or anyone else's was a deep, dark secret. Having sat in on hundreds of PRGs, my whole outlook on life, my concept of abundance and my attitude towards giving service has shifted.

By sitting at the table with a debtor and his/her spreadsheets, I've had a front row seat on the miracles of abundance that come from faith and action. I remember sitting with one woman who didn't have the money to pay someone to mow her lawn. She was in dire straits.

Through the PRG process, listening to her and allowing the guidance of a Higher Power in, she created an action plan and scheduled a follow-up PRG a week or two later. When we met again, she was smiling and reported that each of the issues we'd addressed previously had been resolved. Miracle after miracle had occurred for her, including a neighbor ringing her bell and offering to mow her lawn.

Every time I've given service by being a part of a PRG team, I have witnessed a miracle. How this has changed my life, in addition to being awe-struck regularly by the infinite abundance of a Higher Power, is that when my own situation gets close to the edge, I

(Continued on page 7)

Life Transformed*(Continued from page 6)*

have faith. I take action and I keep my serenity. That's the greatest change of all—increased serenity.

This past year was challenging financially. It began to turn around in the spring when a sizable client returned. Through D.A., I was able to put an agreement into writing that was the largest single contract I'd ever proposed. It was accepted. Halfway through our contract, I realized that this company was more dysfunctional than my talents could accommodate. Although I left nearly a third of the contracted money on the table, I walked away (after a suggestion I'd given them was rejected) to preserve my spirit.

I pursued a different project that was near and dear to my heart. I left that first company in September and put out an offer to my target market in late October. The amount of money I'd 'left on the table' was exactly the amount that the tuitions from them provided.

Without my up-close observations of others' financial fears and bearing witness to their work through via PRGs, I would never have had the courage to speak my truth, to walk away, and to do it without fear and with serenity. I'm truly grateful.

—Jane P.

**STORY 3:
Service Saved My Life**

I came into Debtors Anonymous angry, confused, skeptical, and "intellectually self-sufficient." I

was concerned that D.A. would require me to dumb things down to a level that was unacceptably beneath me. But I was without savings, income, or prospects, and my sizable debt load was at its maximum. In short, I qualified.

From day one, I regularly attended my local home group and began daily record keeping. I can point to this when looking at Tool Eleven, which says, "We perform service at every level: personal, meeting, Intergroup, and World Service." I recommend to all D.A. members that they begin with these first two tools, meetings & record keeping.

In the early days, when I was most fearful and doubting, I would listen and rarely speak. I reserved the right to keep to myself, leave the meeting quickly upon its completion, and privately consider whether I thought there was anything to be gained by continued involvement. I heard the words, "In order to keep it, you must give it away," but they meant little to me. In time, that shifted. Eventually I moved from feeling like I couldn't give away what I didn't have to give, to recognizing that I had contributions to make, and that I honored myself as well as D.A. when I did so.

Somewhere along the line, I decided that if I was going to continue to be standoffish and remote, I would have to compensate for this. While it does not flatter me to admit this, I consciously determined that giving service would "make up for" whatever behaviors issued forth from being so judgmental of myself

and others. However strange the logic, this strategy worked.

I began with little things like folding chairs and picking up trash. Before I knew it, I met requirements to qualify for greater responsibility and I was nominated to be meeting treasurer. Nobody else wanted to do it. This six month position carried a weekly responsibility for the Seventh Tradition collection and a monthly responsibility reporting the accounting to the Business Meeting. I thought it would be "good for me," and it was.

In years hence, I have served in many more capacities. At an interpersonal level, I have sponsored (though far too infrequently and with the recent counsel that I grow this area of my recovery); served on dozens of Pressure Relief Groups (to the point where I now automatically respond that I must consult with my sponsor before answering whether I can say "Yes"); and my telephone has almost 200 names of people across many time zones who call and whom I call.

I have chaired meetings and business meetings, been secretary and treasurer, served countless committees, and been a member of Pressure Relief Groups specifically for service matters. I have qualified at numerous face-to-face and telephone meetings, and facilitated sessions at Share-a-Days and conferences. For two different meetings, I have been General Service Representative. This has included attendance at World

(Continued on page 8)

Life Transformed*(Continued from page 7)*

Service Conferences, local GSR meetings, and WSC committee conference calls. In between my two times as GSR, I was an intergroup representative, and I have been an ongoing consultant to another Intergroup that is in formation.

Whenever my home group reads the Service pamphlet, I pay particular attention to the discussion about the challenges we face when we give service. A full service schedule demands healthy sense of balance and a close working relationship with D.A.'s Twelve Traditions and Twelve Concepts. I am grateful for the loving guidance of mentors throughout the Fellowship with whom I can share experience, strength and hope, so that I only give what I have to give and only do so when I can.

When I began in D.A., I was afraid of people and couldn't work well with others. This hurt my ability to earn income and "forced" me to debt and steal in order to meet my material needs. By performing service, I have grown in skills and confidence so that I now serve others outside D.A., both as a volunteer and professionally. It is no exaggeration to say that my D.A. service has been the laboratory from which my successes have grown. Simply put, service has saved my life.

—Anonymous

**STORY 4:
The Rewards Of Service**

Working the D.A. program has created a miraculous change in my life. Giving service has been a key part of that change.

Perhaps the biggest effect service has had on me is to build my self-esteem. Having come from a background of great opportunity turned into my version of financial ruin, my self-esteem had bottomed out when I entered the program. When I had little or no experience, strength or hope to give to others, I could go to a meeting and provide service in many ways; by setting up coffee, doing literature, etc. This service made me feel worthwhile, like I could provide something of value, even when my work life reflected the opposite to me.

Taking on leadership roles dramatically increased my self-confidence and made me more willing to be visible. A big part of my under-earning had been related to my fear of being a leader, of being in the spotlight, of taking those risks. I was much more comfortable being in the background, and earning less. Being a treasurer or meeting secretary gave me the opportunity to be in front of people, speaking up, helping to guide (not necessarily to direct) the meetings. Being treasurer enabled me to speak very clearly and confidently about finances and numbers to fellow members who listened. It was a safe environment in which people could question what I did,

but did so in a loving and respectful manner. People may have had issues with things that I did and said, and I got to take it in, sometimes do a Tenth Step, and either stand my ground from a peaceful place or admit if I had been wrong.

Being in a leadership role, the expert in my field, is now comfortable for me. And not surprisingly, my earnings have increased dramatically as a result. The person who is putting himself out there is the one earning the most in my field.

I had always shied away from commitments, largely because I wanted to be true to my word and worried that I would not follow through. Taking on service positions has taught me that I can be consistent; I can show up regularly and fulfill my obligations. And, if I can't show up, I don't have to be perfect. I can ask someone else to fill in and pick it up from there. So now I am much more willing to take on commitments in a variety of situations.

One-on-one service has also caused a deep change in me. Part of what was inhibiting my earning was a feeling of guilt for the dishonest things I had done in the past. By sponsoring someone and listening to their Fifth Step or their deep issues, I became someone who was worthy of trust, and I have honored that trust. I also get to rework the Steps myself!

Another amazing benefit of

(Continued on page 9)

Rough Seas Ahead

(Continued from page 4)

for new work. Then a hurricane struck and huge waves crashed over the shore—unexpectedly my husband passed away in late November. Suddenly, I was a widow.

Because of G-d's kindness—and His agreement that I not debt—the funeral was paid for, I had health insurance (COBRA through my husband's employer), a roof over my head, food in the fridge, and supportive friends, family, and my D.A. community. Although I was an ACM, I never thought of myself as on the D.A. Board. Yet D.A. did—and one day I received a condolence card from the GSB. What a wonderful warm gesture!

My ACM service turned out to be one of the major anchors in this wild sea. The commitment kept me connected to my vision work (writing), to other people, and gave me a reason to get up and do something productive. I had to read the literature, edit, or do whatever my responsibilities were for the month. We counted on each other to help the team. I know I wasn't always there 100% during this time—I did try. And folks were patient. Giving service on the World Service level helped me maintain a balance in my life.

Land Ho!

In June 2010, I relocated to Los Angeles—and kept on as ACM. One of the nice aspects of World Service is I can be anywhere in the *world* and still keep my commitment! Now I was in a different time zone and did adjust my personal schedule to match the meeting times. Yet, match them I

did... I was holding onto this anchor—it was saving my spiritual and financial life. (With G-d's help, my surgery, funeral, and move were accomplished without incurring unsecured debt. Major miracles!)

I kept my ACM commitment until the term ended in April 2011. Serving as an ACM didn't quite turn out the way I had envisioned. When I began the service in April 2008, I never expected an unusual turn of events. I expected to stay solvent, stay connected to program, improve my writing skills, help develop our literature in some small way, and move my visions forward in the direction they were going.

Well, I did stay solvent. I did stay connected to the Program. My writing and editing skills improved. I learned how to work on a virtual team. And I hope I helped our literature develop during my service.

My visions of what my life would look like are on a different course today than I had planned when I started as ACM. I am not living the visions I planned. I'm living the life G-d planned. It was His plan to send my ship onto high rough seas. He knew I could handle it—I'm a good swimmer and sailor! He knew I wouldn't capsize because He was with me all the time. And because He knows I doubt Him sometimes, He even gave me a good crew and a beacon of hope: Lit Services and my ACM commitment.

New Equation

Steady Program + Give Service =
Humbly live a full life

—Anonymous

Life Transformed

(Continued from page 8)

service is the random phone call! I was once distraught and nearly paralyzed by an ethical decision I had to make in my work. I received a program call and found myself saying, "Why don't you make a call and ask the questions you need to get the clarity to make your decision?" As the words were coming out of my mouth, I realized that that was exactly what I had to do to resolve my dilemma! And that's what I did with an amazing result. I realized that a public statement I had made was in fact true, although I had doubted my own veracity. It was a very important issue and a huge relief not to live in fear and anxiety.

The whole concept of service in D.A. has changed the focus of my work. I now start my day with a request of my higher power—*please show me how I can be of service to you and your children*. This request is always answered as I always get some idea of how I can help others. Focusing on serving others instead of how I can receive money brings it all to a spiritual level—the dialogue of the spirit vs. the ego.

Service is its own reward, and I am so grateful for its place in my D.A. recovery.

—Anonymous

my **2**cents

Food Budget Explodes: Eats Step And Tradition!

Working a D.A. program in Southern California (SoCal) is a unique experience, to say the least. California has more meetings, more GSRs, more literature, more money than any other state and SoCal is where the bulk of that action happens, specifically Los Angeles. Exciting yet baffling.

One of the most hotly contested topics in Los Angeles D.A. is food. I know, out of left field, but it's true. When attending meetings in Los Angeles it is impossible not to notice the proliferation of food: toasters, coffee makers, artisanal muffins, lox and cream cheese with capers and onions for your bagels or bread or brioche, nut butters, jellies, jams, teas, half and half, 1%, 2%, no % and soy milks, cereal, oatmeal, cheese, salami, tomatoes, fresh fruit, olives, lemon wedges and toothpicks. People swarm in like locusts for the best stuff and there is talk of abundance—that "food is abundance." But is it? We say in D.A. that "God is in the numbers," so I looked at the

numbers. The meeting that is the most luxurious food shopper is a wonderfully large meeting with fantastic speakers, CDs to rent or buy, a well-stocked literature table and a food budget of \$60 a week plus \$25 a month for paper products. That's a whopping \$3,420 a year. That's a lot of food for a group whose primary purpose is recovery from incurring unsecured debt. Another big food budget meeting here lays out \$65 a week for a weighty close second of \$3,380 a year. Every week when their meeting ends, they throw out food.

But what of it? Who cares if meeting after meeting in Los Angeles spends thousands of dollars on food? Well, God is in all the numbers, not just some of them. That same meeting that spent \$3,420 on food and paper products last year sent \$880 dollars to the GSO, almost four times less than what it spent on feeding folks. The \$3,380 meeting sent the GSO \$622 in 2010, a roughly 550% difference. When motions to decrease food budgets are proposed, anger and hostility ensues. People defend the

spending with statements like, "When I was new, I came here because of the food," "We are showing prosperity," "Food is abundance." It is an ongoing battle in L.A. meetings: the bigger the meeting, the bigger the food budget.

My question is, "Why?" Why are SoCal D.A.ers so locked into the belief that food is anything other than just food and that we absolutely must have as much of it as possible at meetings? Food is number three in my spending categories, spirituality is number one. I am asked to work the Twelve Steps in order that I may not only have a spiritual awakening but that I may carry the message to the debtor who still suffers. So I could see how some might consider the presence of a lot of gorgeous food to be evidence that D.A. works. But is SoCal D.A. asking food to do its Twelfth Step work? The Twelfth Step says I will carry the message to the debtor who still suffers, not my bagel or cup of half-caff-decaf with

(Continued on page 11)

My Two Cents*(Continued from page 10)*

almond milk creamer. Are Los Angeles D.A.ers missing the opportunity to work a Twelfth Step face-to-face, one-on-one, with God in their midst as we try to achieve solvency one day at a time, which is our primary purpose?

We see again and again in meetings that no one is available to sponsor, people can't get PRGs, commitments don't get covered, there is no GSR, members don't answer their phones or return messages left. Why is that? Is there a connection between underfunding the spiritual side of our program and overfunding our food? Is this the great new pair of shoes we buy instead of contributing to our prudent reserve? Funding the D.A. General Service Office is my meeting's Twelfth Step work. I may feed a member, I may give them money, a couch commitment or a job—and I have done and had done for me every single one of those things in my D.A. recovery. But my meeting's purpose is to support the GSO so that D.A. exists in the future, so that D.A. grows.

That D.A. has no twenty-four hour hotline to call and talk to an actual person who has stopped debting one day at a time is not a priority for us? That we have no D.A. "Big Book" to press into the hand of a newcomer and say, "Come on, we can start your First Step today" doesn't scare us? That we have no "Twelve and Twelve," no daily meditation book, no history of D.A. books, and only one employee isn't of grave concern to those of us who

need D.A.? Because I need D.A. I don't want it, believe you me. I want a second home and a hundred thousand dollar stock portfolio and a career that makes me leap out of bed before the alarm goes off I'm so fulfilled by it. But I have a disease, a disease that left untreated will kill me. I will die from lack of medical care because I can't afford insurance. I will die a violent death while homeless on the streets. I will die alone in prison for money crimes. I will kill myself because the enormous pressure of my never ending financial crisis makes me believe that is the best answer. On a daily basis we bear witness to this in our and others' towns. If I do not have D.A., then where will I go? No other program will treat my debting; that is not their purpose. I know, I have tried. If we do not have our GSO we do not have D.A. If we do not have D.A., we die. It is that simple.

Having looked at the numbers regarding L.A. D.A. money, I wanted to look at one final set of numbers: meeting availability. How easy is it for the debtor who wants to stop incurring unsecured debt to get to where the solution is? Thirty-five years into our journey, nine states have no meetings at all. That's one meeting shy of 20% of the country with zero meetings. Seven states have one meeting a week, five states have two. (Author's note: Wyoming is tabulated as having one meeting but technically has two: back-to-back on Thursday in a women's prison, attendance is restricted.) Combine the bottom three stats and you have twenty-one states with two meetings or less a week. That's

46% of the entire country. California has one hundred twenty-two meetings a week. Fifty-two of them, or almost half, are in L.A., so why should we care?

We should care because our First Tradition states that success for the greatest number depends upon D.A. unity. Well, where is the unity? Where is the success for the greatest number? Where is the asking God what we can do for the man who is still sick? Is D.A. doing all it can for the debtor who suffers when the wealthiest among us turn our backs on the needs of our own program, the very program that saved our lives? Is it a violation of the First Tradition for a meeting to spend more on food than it sends to the GSO? I say yes. I say big food budget meetings are spiritually debting. Big food budget meetings are violating our First Tradition. Big food budget meetings are letting money, property and prestige divert them from their primary purpose.

D.A.'s GSB Chair, long timer Jan S., joked at this year's fabulous World Service Conference in Detroit that, in trying to increase contributions to the GSO, the hardest thing we GSRs would face was prying open the wallet in the cold, cheap hand of the debtor. Well, Angelinos are opening their wallets, but they're putting their money in their mouths. So how do we motivate the wealthiest area in D.A.'s world to find its own program more important than food?

I speak in favor of no meeting spending more on any line item

(Continued on page 12)

Start A Meeting*(Continued from page 2)*

car and head home. I kept walking through the door and found a tall thin man walking along whistling. He stopped and asked me if I was looking for the meeting. I told him yes and he waved me down the hall to a huge meeting room.

Five people sat around the table. I introduced myself and they greeted me with warmth and welcome. They seemed genuinely glad I was there and I began to relax. The meeting started with a reading and then sharing. Lucky me, my first meeting was a business meeting and the GSR had just come back from the World Service Conference. He virtually glowed talking about the World Service Conference and shared that he had put in a bid to have the conference in our state three years from then. I decided right then and there that I would drive back the seventy miles home, start a meeting in my area, and be back to work on the World Service Conference if our state won the right to host it.

Being a woman of my word I did exactly that. Someone at my first meeting gave me the name of another person in my area who wanted to start a meeting. We got in touch and began the work of finding a meeting room, getting our meeting registered, getting some public information out in the newspaper and choosing a meeting format. Three months after my first post on SpendersDa I sat in a face to face meeting just a mile and a half from my house. For one entire year there were only two people in our meeting, me and the person who started the meeting with me. We both had prior Twelve Step experience. Our focus on the Steps and Tools was strong and we both experienced spiritual and financial growth.

After the first year others began to

show up, one by one or in couples they came. Some of them drove three hours to get there, others one hour, some visited from distant states, and some came from just down the street. Slowly, but surely our group grew from two debtors in the church basement, to a steady attendance of eight to ten debtors in the church basement. As we grew we struggled, people began to argue and have different opinions about the meeting format, the readings, and the business meetings. We began to get court-ordered attendees and people in fear of losing their homes. Whoever came was welcomed and made to feel at home. We shared our experience, strength and hope along with our phone numbers and a free Debtors Anonymous pamphlet.

As of this writing our meeting has been going strong for three years and five months. We elected a GSR and in our third year sent our GSR to the World Service Conference. Five members of our group attended the Fellowship Day and worked in service positions there. Now we are working on our goal of raising funds for our GSR to go to the next WSC.

We have lost some of our members who got frustrated with group process. We have gained others. Our group has seen four other meetings launched by attendees, a D.A. meeting in a neighboring city, a B.D.A. meeting in our city and two other meetings. A core number of members offer service. We emphasize the Steps, the Traditions, and the Concepts. Like all Twelve Step groups, there is disagreement and there are challenges every so often. We feel blessed that we have brought some D.A. unity to our area of the state and are hopeful that we will be here to welcome the debtor who still suffers for many years to come.

— Anonymous

My Two Cents*(Continued from page 11)*

than they send to the GSO: matching amounts or less but never more.* I urge all meetings to adopt this language into their spending plans that this issue be put to rest once and for all. I urge all meetings to find ways to financially support D.A. as a whole through increased contributions to the GSO and to respect our First Tradition, without which we would not be here. Meetings have joined together to have yard sales and send the proceeds to the GSO. Meetings have changed their spending plans to include a regular 10% tithe to the GSO. Meetings have chosen to send anniversary contributions on the date of their inception. But no meeting I know of has agreed to lower its food budget and increase its GSO contribution. It is time to do that. It is time to put D.A.'s house in order so that the answers will come and great events will come to pass for us and countless others. In the world of the Twelve Steps, that house is built with money, not muffins.

— Anonymous

*The exception to this would be rent. Large meetings need large meeting spaces and inexpensive rent is often not obtainable.

Around The Fellowship



Panic

My PRG wanted me to write. So here's one piece I did.

Ran like a nut to catch my train. All the way up the stairs. Across the bridge. Down the stairs. Lord help anyone who steps in my way. "Hold the train!" I yelled.

Huh? Like someone can hold a freakin' train?

Panic makes people dangerous. Well, it makes me dangerous. So what if I didn't make the train?

I'd sit. I'd think. I'd pray. I'd go get an iced coffee. I'd grumble. I'd stop grumbling. I'd pay. I'd think about the Steps. I'd call my sponsor. I'd pull out this notebook and write. I'd look at the greenery on the other side of the tracks. I'd watch the birds hopping around looking for food. I'd listen to passengers chatting on their cell phones. I'd let it go. I'd breathe. I'd close my eyes. I'd meditate. I'd live. ■

Literature Grants Available To Groups

New D.A. groups or small meetings that are struggling to afford Conference-approved literature can still receive free literature packets under a Literature Grant Program approved by the World Service Conference.

To obtain literature, or to learn more about the program, group secretaries or literature chairs can contact Mary P. by e-mail at mailformary@yahoo.com or by telephone at 310-838-6677.

Two California GSRs Are Mourned

Two veteran trusted servants from California are being mourned by those who knew them in local and world-level D.A. service.

Barbara A. of San Diego died July 1, 2011, and Mary S. of San Jose passed away on October 3, 2011. Both had served in various positions in their home groups and as GSRs at past World Service Conferences.

Barbara was a member of the WSC Literature Committee and Intergroup Caucus during her tenure as a General Service Representative, and Mary had represented her group in Mountain View, California as a GSR on the Public Information Committee. ■

Ways & Means is always interested in hearing about interesting and inspiring events and accomplishments going on around the fellowship. Please send submissions by e-mail to waysandmeansda@hotmail.com or by physical mail to Ways & Means, c/o DA General Service Office, PO Box 920888, Needham, Mass. 02492