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# The Voice Within

NHAA District 12 Newsletter

JANUARY 2014



## *A Few Words on Gratitude*

by Larry K

Gratitude is the most powerful tool that the program of AA has given me. It is not just a key to lasting sobriety; it is an essential key to happiness. A soul in a state of gratitude will not drink. That same soul will not say nasty things to others, nor wish to steal, to abuse, or walk around in a state of obliviousness to the good and beautiful things and persons that God (or whomever you designate as your higher power) surrounds us with. A grateful soul will feel calm and predisposed to feel joyful about all good things—even the little things.

Gratitude is an enormously powerful form of grace; and we have the power to trigger it ourselves. Below I have included a quote from an essay titled "Sacraments" by the recently deceased American short story writer, Andre Dubus—a New Englander. It seems that he lived most of his life in a state of gratitude, despite some terrible difficulties—including being hit by a passing motorist as he tried to help someone else change a tire at the side of the road. This accident left the middle-aged Dubus paralyzed from the waist down; he spent the rest of his life in a wheelchair. He managed to hang onto his gratitude, his faith, and his even his joy. I suspect that without these three things, the rest

of his life would have been almost pure pain. By deliberately cultivating gratitude and the grace that goes with it, Dubus made of his final years something enormously worthwhile. The man was not only making superb art (his short stories) in those later years and raising his still-young daughters, but the man was doing what we would call twelfth-step work all the time. He was doing twelfth step work when that car struck him down. Imagine the challenge of remaining grateful after that!

It is also important here to note that Dubus was a very devout Catholic and tried to attend mass and take communion every day. While I find myself very uncomfortable with all forms of organized religion, I am deeply impressed by what Dubus has to say about the effect had on him by the various sacraments administered by the Catholic Church, particularly communion:

A sacrament is an outward sign of God's love; they taught me at school when I was a boy that in the Catholic Church there are seven. But, no, I say, for the church is catholic, and there are seven times seventy sacraments, to infinity. Today I sit at my desk in June in Massachusetts; a breeze from the southeast comes through the window behind me, touches me, and goes through the open glass door in front of me. The sky is blue and cumulus clouds are motionless above green trees lit brightly by the sun shining in dry air. In humid air, the leaves would be darker, but now they are bright, and you can see lighted space between them, so that each leaf is distinct; and each leaf is receiving sacraments of light and air and water and earth. So am I, in the breeze on my skin, the air

that I breathe, the sky and earth and trees that I look at.

All of this is a lesson in how to find and maintain *gratitude*. Dubus feels literally blessed by God's countless gifts. He implies that the world itself is a great gift—and God is in everything. A bit later in the essay, he talks about the grace he receives specifically from taking communion; he tried to go to mass and take communion on a daily basis. Personally, I do not believe that the Eucharist is the body and blood of Christ. What matters here, however, is that Dubus very much did believe; thus, God gave him what he needed to get from it. Dubus talks later in the essay about this transforming thing happening when the soul is in a “receptive” state.

In terms of the AA program, I would say that it is our daily task to keep ourselves in a *receptive state*. If we open ourselves up to our Higher Power, good things will follow. I believe that the best way to keep ourselves in that condition is to work at maintaining our gratitude with the regularity that we eat healthy meals or take necessary medications.

November was gratitude month, and so gratitude was being brought up as a frequent topic at meetings. I found myself talking about it recently with a friend from the program shortly after one such meeting. At one point, he said:

“For me acceptance is the key.”

“Don't you think that gratitude and acceptance go together?” I then asked.

He replied by saying, “Yes. Of course. They're practically the same thing.”

A couple of weeks ago, my wonderful younger sister, Loretta, and her equally wonderful but also hilarious husband, Jeff, came to Manchester to spend a Saturday with me. We went out and had a great lunch along with much good conversation. During our time together, I felt my heart—actually it felt like my whole body—filling up with gratitude and grace. After lunch my sister came to my apartment to see what I had done with it recently (“redecorating” is far too grand a word for what I had done; anyway . . . Jeff could not come in because he is

deathly allergic to cats and I have two.) Loretta is always supportive and declared that she liked the place, especially the way I had arranged my kitchen. We both like to cook. She also handed off to me a huge package of groceries and household items that I can certainly use since I am living on a tiny income. My profuse “thank-you”s to her led to a conversation about gratitude in the abstract. My sister's views on gratitude just happen to be very close to the idea presented to us in the Big Book and other AA literature. I told my sister that AA strongly encourages recovering alcoholics to work at feeling grateful, sort of the way opera singers have to work constantly at maintaining their voices. When explained to Loretta what a written gratitude list was, she understood immediately.

Later that day, I did a written gratitude list and I put it into an e-mail to my sister who was already back home in Connecticut. I listed twenty-six things that I was grateful for, including my sister, my brother-in-law, my three beautiful nieces, my grand nephew, the fact that I have wonderful friends, the fact that I do not live in some country where people are firing bullets or hurling bombs at me, the fact that I have warm and dry shelter plus clean water to drink, the fact that I have a healthy liver despite my assiduous efforts to damage it, the fact that I now have the opportunity to work as a full-time writer . . . . This already long gratitude list could have gone on and on.

Life is not exactly a bowl of cherries. We all know that. It is true that God sometimes has very harsh things in mind for us. What matters is that we accept his (or her) will, find the good in whatever is happening, and get on with the business of sober living.



## **UPCOMING AA EVENTS**

**Sunday, January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2014: District 12 Assembly Meeting**

6–8 pm, St. Raphael's Church, corner of 3<sup>rd</sup> and Ferry Streets, Manchester.

**Tuesday, January 21, 2014: Manchester Original Group Spaghetti Supper**

Supper Served at 6:30, Speaker Meeting 7:30 – 8:30 pm.

Brookside Congregational Church Fellowship Hall, 2013 Elm Street, Manchester.

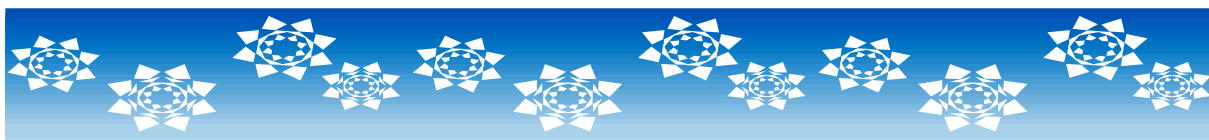
**February 28<sup>th</sup> – March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2014: NHSCYPAA State Conference for Young People in AA**

Best Western Hotel, 41 Winchester St, Keene, NH 0431. (603)357.3038

Pre-register and more online at [NHSCYPAA.com](http://NHSCYPAA.com).

**April 11<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup>, 2014: 48<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL NH AA AREA 43 CONVENTION: SOBRIETY ROCKS!!**

Courtyard Marriott, Nashua, NH.



## **Thrift Shops, Mother Theresa and The Holidays**



I love thrift shops. In fact I've often said that if it wasn't for Goodwill and other thrift shops I would be naked and living in an apartment with no furniture. Thank God for thrift. I have often said that if you can't get it at a thrift shop it's not worth having. One of the joys of travel is the

opportunity to visit Goodwill stores around the country and they all have their local flavor. One of my favorite ones is in Bath, Maine, the nearest large town to the little Georgetown Island where I spend my time in the summer. That thrift shop has an arrangement with L.L. Bean to take its damaged goods and seconds and it is not unusual to buy a perfectly good coat for twenty dollars that would cost two hundred in the store.

Aside from clothes and other necessities I always like to browse the book section. I am constantly on the lookout for the first edition Big Book or other AA material and also I can often find great spiritual books

to add to my collection. Last summer I found the biography of Charles Fillmore the founder of Unity Church. This was a great find because my friend Jere H. had recently told me about his writings. Another book I found at the Goodwill in Bath was called *Mother Teresa, A Simple Plan*.

Its funny how little I really knew about Mother Teresa. I would joke about her by saying things like “It was enough to piss off Mother Teresa” and other stupid things like that but I had never taken the time to learn about her good work. The night I opened the book I literally could not put it down. This is a cliché but in this case it was true. This rarely happens and I am an avid reader. I was totally fascinated by the beauty, love and compassion of this Mother Teresa. If there ever was a living saint it was this woman. The sheer magnitude of the accomplishments of this small humble lady should be an example for us all. I was truly moved and if ever there was a book that was life changing for me it was this one.

Her basic philosophy was to meet people at their level of need. She applied this to her own life and the lives of her followers and helpers. She lived with the poor as they lived. She realized so well the need to deal with the problem right away rather than to organize, philosophize, spiritualize or talk about it. She simply believed that if someone needed food, feed him, if someone needed love, touch him, if someone needed clothes, cloth him, and if someone needed shelter, house him. Take the action immediately talk about it later. She was not parochial in her views. She helped anyone and everyone regardless of their malady and regardless of their belief. She and her sisters helped lepers, aids patients, the elderly, sick children and hungry people all over the world.

Mother Teresa was a person who received an inspiration from God while riding on a bus in India.

From this inspiration in a bus for one woman a whole movement of kindness has flowed. Millions have been helped. Just as she was inspired by a momentary experience with her God we can be so inspired by her work. What can we do about the chaos and confusion, hunger and greed, death and suffering on our planet? Well we can either do nothing or like Mother Teresa we can do everything.

We are so blessed with our recovering lifestyle. All of us have been touched in some way by the hand of God through the hand of a recovering alcoholic. This simple act of kindness one to another over and over and over again throughout the last seventy years has created a powerful movement of personal transformation. We keep our gift by giving it away and we keep the gift by not spending hours talking about gratitude and the spiritual nature of our program but by extending our hands; by meeting people at their level of need and being constantly attuned to the needs of others.

If Mother Teresa had restricted her work to Catholics millions would not have been helped. Her love would have not reached so many. If we restrict our twelfth step work to only alcoholics we are doing what the Master calls “hiding our light under a basket”. Let us observe the true meaning of Thanksgiving and the holiday season by giving our light to anyone anywhere who is in need. Start on it by finding a volunteer opportunity and making a phone call. This simple call can save lives and as was once said the “life you save may be your own”.

-- Dave F., first published in *The Solution News*.  
<http://www.thesolutionnews.com/?p=768>

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*One More Thing... It has been my privilege to serve as the editor of The Voice Within for the last two years. Not only has this district service broadened my awareness of AA history, activity, and traditions, but it has also brought me in touch with some incredible writers and event organizers. It is now time to pass the torch, and the new editor is Richard S. You can send material to him at [voicewithinnews@gmail.com](mailto:voicewithinnews@gmail.com), and I look forward to seeing what's next for the newsletter. Thank You!*

*Sincerely, Cathy H, Manchester.*