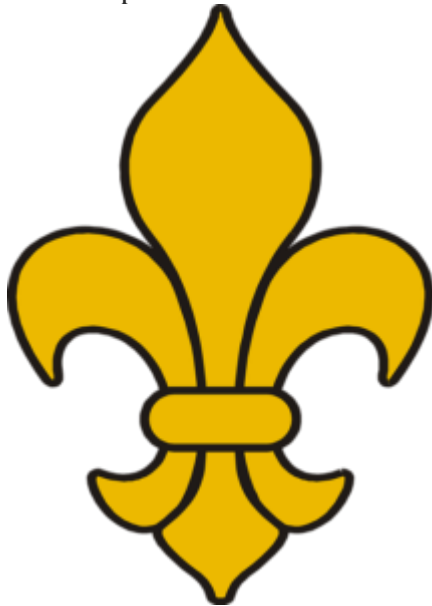


KNL SPRING 2023 | MY EXPERIENCE AT SERF

I flew to New Orleans on December 2, 2022 for the 2022 Southeast Regional Forum (SERF) of Alcoholics Anonymous. I am blessed to be the District Committee Member (DCM) of a district that offers reimbursement of travel and lodging expenses every two years for the DCM to attend the forum. I made the decision to fly to New Orleans rather than drive and spend some money of my own to save myself a 1700 mile roundtrip in the car. The event was held at the Hilton New Orleans Airport hotel in Kenner, LA. I arrived at the hotel via their shuttle from the airport around 11 AM.

The conference was scheduled to begin at 6PM that evening –hotel and conference registration did not open until 3PM. I found myself with a lot of time to kill with no transportation. As I sat in the lobby wondering how I was going



to busy the afternoon, shuttle bus after shuttle bus of other clueless and carless AA members continued to show up in the lobby. Soon I was sitting in a small group with another DCM from Kentucky and a bunch of her old friends from Florida learning about the 7th Southern States AA Service Assembly (SSAASA7) coming up in November of 2023. The other KY DCM is a Florida transplant to our Commonwealth and she had already been asked by her friends to help spread the word.

My first piece of education at SERF was discovering that every two years there is a service assembly sponsored and organized by the region (SSAASA). The crowd from Florida showed me where things were being set up for the night and I managed to get a snapshot of the weekend agenda with my phone. Around 2PM the desk clerk took pity on several of us who had been sitting in the lobby for three (or more) hours and gave us early check-in to our rooms. I carried my belongings up to the room and got a quick nap in anticipation of a long evening. The agenda showed the final event of the night starting at 9:30PM and New Orleans is in the central time zone – this is way past my normal bedtime.

After an hour or so of shut-eye, I registered for the conference then grabbed a late lunch of jambalaya, gumbo and red beans and rice in the hotel restaurant. The forum began with a

First Timers' Orientation at 6PM, moderated by Tom H, the Southeast Regional Trustee who spoke at our fall area assembly in October. He explained that the purpose of the forum was for General Service to bring the office and staff out of New York to the regions so that we could meet them and come to understand who they are and how they serve the fellowship. He introduced Vera, a staff member and she made a recommendation to us based on her first forum experience. She said that, as she was feverishly trying to take notes, a presenter suggested that everyone put down their pens and not try to record what was being said. She said that presenter recommended that we try to have an experience of the forum, not an education, then she asked us to try to do the same. This was excellent advice – the forum was indeed an experience, one that I am truly grateful to have enjoyed. I tried to put my pen down but I am a note taker by nature and I have an 8.5 by 11 legal pad with thirty pages of my scribbles that are being used to put this tale together.

The evening session was called to order by Tom H. at 7PM and he gave a quick synopsis of the upside-down triangle and requested everyone be cognizant of anonymity. After briefly explaining how Class A trustees are non-alcoholics who offer their voluntary services to support AA and Class B like him are alcoholics who do the same, he introduced Linda Chezum, the Class A trustee who serves as the Chairperson of the General Service Board. What followed I can best describe as effectively a stockholders' meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous but the most entertaining and personable stockholders' meeting I have ever attended.

The forum was introduced to the GSO general manager Bob W who with Linda lightheartedly took us through a regular day at the GSO. Anyone who has spent any time trying to coordinate the efforts of AA volunteers would, like we did, find their presentation truthful, enlightening and absolutely hilarious. Here are some highlights: We were introduced to Andie Moss, another Class A trustee who has been on the board since the beginning of 2022. She helped us understand just how much of a learning curve these volunteers for two three-year terms supporting the fellowship experience. This was followed by Tom H giving a similar presentation on the different but equally challenging roles of the Class B trustees. Bob W then spoke at further depth about his job as general manager before introducing us to all of the staff members who were present at the forum. We were told that these people would be socializing with us for the next two days and they all expected us to spend time with them ask questions and raise concerns. Unlike a shareholders' meeting, these trustees and staff members and the general manager did walk the halls with us, talk to us and listen to our concerns. Anyone who wanted to spend time getting to know them got opportunities to do so.

Day two began with an Early Bird AA meeting at 7AM. About twenty to thirty of us gathered in a circle and had a regular discussion meeting. After a quick breakfast, we were treated to presentations by four regional delegates. Shannon C from Area 64 (Tennessee) spoke about getting more people involved in service. Her basic theme was "What needs to change in me to make service more attractive?" She challenged us to look at how we present ourselves to our groups. Do they hear us talking about how much we are enjoying ourselves or do they constantly hear us complain. Do we only share the inconvenient stuff? She suggested that continual complaining is an ego problem. Her conclusion was that continuous laughter is essential to successful service work. Ruth C from Area 1 (Alabama/Northeast Florida) talked to us about using literature to carry the message. She recommended getting familiar

with all the literature AAWS and Grapevine have to offer but suggested that ultimately we just get our own little tea cup of the ocean, we don't have to get the whole sea. Tracy M from Area 16 (Georgia) spoke about rights vs. responsibilities saying we have the right to be grateful and to ask for help every day and the responsibility to constantly think of others and how we can meet their needs. She emphasized we have the freedom to serve and are not fragile flowers. Tom W from Area 15 (South Florida/Bahamas) spoke about reciprocal responsibility. He challenged us to recognize the responsibilities of participation and communication are equal in both directions – from the service structure and from the members. He said that in this era of change we need to be the voice of our members to the service structure at large and the ears of the members as well. Each day was interspersed with “What’s On Your Mind?” sharing sessions where three microphones were opened and anyone could walk up, introduce themselves and ask a question or pose a concern. These sessions were either hosted by our Class B Trustee Tom H or the AA General Manager, Bob W. If the host did not know the answer or felt there was someone else in the room more qualified to respond, he would route the question to that other person. Topics discussed varied greatly and were mostly quite interesting. They varied from discussions of the translation of background materials to the expense of the ERP upgrade to unanswered email queries to “why did AA stop growing in 1992” and “why are young people not coming to AA as they once did.” The morning sessions also included a report from Kevin P., the non-alcoholic treasurer of the General Service Board. I have never enjoyed a financial report the way I enjoyed Kevin’s. He presented the state of AA’s finances with humor and wit not customarily found in such a presentation. This session was followed by breakout sessions that covered five different topics. I sat in on the “Inclusivity: How Much is too much?” session hosted by the Area 14 (North Florida) delegate. There was a healthy discussion of gender identity and whether AA should even participate in the discussion as well as the idea that young people are the most discriminated against group in AA. No conclusions were made but there was a general feeling of comradery despite differences of opinion and outlook.

The afternoon sessions began with a presentation by Marita R, the trustee-at-large for the US concerning “AA around the world.” She started by pointing out despite the success of AA having meetings in 180 countries and literature translated into 73 languages, we need to acknowledge that there are 96 different languages spoken in Canada and 219 different languages spoken in the United States. She presented world maps showing how there are still countries with no AA and countries with only loner members. It was interesting to see how complex and widespread the mission of communicating the AA message has become. The next session was a Full Forum Workshop on “Who’s not in the Room?” Cushing P, a former delegate from Alabama, had us break in to groups of two with a person we did not know and ask each other the question. Once we had discussed the question for 10 minutes, we were asked to join with the group of two closest to us and share what we had discussed. After that 10 minutes discussion, each group was asked to have a representative briefly present their discussions to the whole forum. The variety of answers and topics elicited was fascinating. My first group focused primarily on who was not participating in service work but the group we turned to discuss with had spent their time discussing why there were so few people of the predominate ethnic group in their region in their AA meetings. Other groups spoke of the exclusion of on-line groups from the service structure and most

others spoke of how few of the registered groups actually participate in district or area meetings. There were discussions of cliques and group inventories and the idea of bringing back the greeter as a service position.

The afternoon was rounded out with presentations by Grapevine, La Vina and AAWS covering all the nuances of publications and the challenges of managing worldwide distribution of literature. It was a good time for a nap.

The evening session began with six breakout groups. I attended "Unity: How do we stay Unified in a Divided World?" This was a lively discussion whether outside issues of division were encroaching on our meetings, districts and groups. The often asked question was whether we are carrying the message or changing the message. Some spoke of meetings being disrupted by those who insist upon bringing their political or religious messages into the meetings – asking how we address such things. The idea that fear is the first place we go when confronted with change was mentioned. Sponsorship was suggested as the only effective tool for addressing the disruptions. This was countered with the idea that groups, as a whole, had the right to police speech and actions within their meetings. Pat from Morehead City said, "There are 12 traditions and not just the one I want to use to prove my point," while stating the home group was the place to handle controversies. Several people asked if we are willing to embrace the people we don't agree with in our groups and show them love. Cliques were mentioned again and the suggestion made that we push ourselves outside of our areas of comfortability. Love and tolerance were suggested and the only way to look past the outsiders. The moderator finished the session by challenging all to go back to our groups and do something uncomfortable.

The evening concluded with Linda C., the GSB chair, Andie Moss, the newest Class A trustee and Kevin P., the GSB treasurer telling us the stories of their journey to become trusted servants of our fellowship. Linda spoke of how she first encountered alcoholism as a local judge in Indiana sentencing a lot of DUI cases. Her first encounter with AA was when a group of local members approached her about sending people to meetings as a part of their probation. This ultimately led to her appointment by the governor of Indiana to a commission on treatment of alcoholism for the entire state. Her positive experience with AA and her observation of lives changed through it led her to accept the trustee position. Andie was exposed to AA while working in the correctional system in Georgia for 40 years. She found as a warden and later a consultant to prison systems on moving from fear-based to hope-based environments that AA was an effective tool for changing lives within the prison systems. Kevin spoke of growing up in an alcoholic home and the devastation that brought in his life and how through his work managing the finances of a religious organization he came into contact with AA. His exposure to AA and its positive effect on people like his father who never recovered led him to accept the GSB position when it was suggested by his supervisor within the church where he still works.

After another lively "What's On Your Mind?" session, the local groups hosted an ice cream social that went on way too late into the evening. This event provided me an opportunity to have one on one conversations with both Linda and Andie whom I found to be effective listeners genuinely concerned about the topics that had been discussed during the day's sessions.

Sunday morning began with a 7:30 AA meeting. Another twenty to thirty of us had a regular AA discussion meeting before heading off to breakfast. The opening session was dedicated to sharing from first time attendees to the forum. Most of us expressed our

gratitude to Vera for her early suggestion that we “Put down our pens, quit taking notes and have an experience” of the forum. Many were pleased that we had hard discussions that were done with love and felt that was not how it is everywhere. Many were amazed at the openness of the GSO staff and management and the amount of information that was shared. The idea that their perception of GSO had become more positive though this experience was oft repeated. Several were pleased to find out that GSO really wants to hear from members and groups and that the staff was not intimidating when approached. Many expressed thanks at being shown what GSO actually does for the fellowship. Others said they came expecting a boring business meeting and were thrilled by how much fun they had. Some thanked the participants for coming to the microphone and sharing and asking questions, saying many things they wanted to hear discussed were brought up by other when they would not have had the courage to say anything. One woman said the experience had made the Service Manual come alive for her – a live action show of a dull old book – an infomercial saying, “Wait, There’s more!” Allie from District 19 of Area27 summed it up by saying, “There’s more to AA than meetings.” Throughout the entire forum there was an Ask-It Basket available for anyone to anonymously ask anything they did not want to bring to the microphone. Bob the general manager was given the task of answering these questions. They covered trivia and technical issues as well as serious questions like:

- Does the group have the right to read the preamble they want? Yes, we do. All groups are autonomous.
- When are AAWS and GSO going to move out of NY to cut costs? An ad hoc committee, location plus, is investigating possible solutions and possible locations.
- Are AA contributions tax deductible? Contributions to GSB are but they cannot speak for other groups/entities.
- Status of the Plain Language Big Book? It is going much slower than expected. The literature committee knows that AA does not trust the process. They want to move slowly and gain trust. It may be ready to go to the full conference next year.



After a silly skit about the International Convention, we were treated to a panel of sharing from five past trustees, three class B and two class A ,who also shared a quick story of how they came to serve the general service board. Tom H, the current Southeast Regional Trustee closed out the meeting by reporting that we had 276 first time attendees out of a total 406 participants in the weekend The forum closed at noon and we all departed for our various locations.

I left my first visit to New Orleans and Louisiana having had a unique experience that I truly enjoyed. After an exhausting trip home through Houston and delays, I realized that I never left the airport hotel. I guess I will have to find another reason to go back to the Big Easy.

John A.

KNL SPRING 2023 | IMPORTANCE OF HOME GROUPS

I have recently been reminded about the importance of having a home group as part of my AA program. Do you have one? Is yours the best home group you know?



My home group has group conscious meetings every quarter now since we have gotten pretty small. They correlate with the area meetings. Our GSR attends district meetings and area meetings so that we can stay informed on what is going on with AA as a whole. We also get an opportunity to vote on issues that our GSR then takes back to the district and the area. We hear about activities and opportunities for service from these contacts. I like being informed and knowing I am a part of a larger community and having a voice in that community.

I remember when I first came into the program being told to pick a home group. Mostly the concept was to make friends and to be accountable. It was easy for me to come in at the last minute, sit in the back and leave quickly. Being part of a Homegroup I felt I belonged and gave me more of a 'job' that is to say hello, to greet newcomers, to help chair or setup the room. To become a part of and get to know the other members.

At first I had two home groups. One was a large meeting with lots of great support and I learned a lot by listening. The second was smaller and more personal. As my sobriety grew I learned it is recommended to just have one. We vote on district and area issues and reasonably only one vote per person is needed so I finally decided to go with the smaller group where I felt more involved.

Our group has matured over the years. When I first started we were just learning about service and what a big part service plays in our recovery. I was taught the three legacies of recovery, unity and service. I started out as inner group representative, then secretary, then group service representative (GSR) and then District Service Representative (DCM). I have since served as secretary. Of course service involves a lot more than just having a role in your Homegroup. It can be just being at the meeting and sharing, being a sponsor, being part of a committee at the inner group, district or area level. I also see it being a good family member too.

Our group as I said is small so we all rotated thru GSR and have a good understanding of AA structure and service. Using the traditions we have all watched each other grow. At first our group conscious meetings were full of conflict and everyone's ego. We learned gradually using the traditions how to overcome our self-centeredness and think about the good of the group as a whole. We saw many times how important it was for everyone to be able to express their opinions for sometimes one would sway the thinking of the whole group when we kept an open mind. For me I am so grateful for having the close friendships and support I have gained from having a Homegroup.

I hope you have one too and if not perhaps think about finding one. It really helped me complete and deepen my recovery experience.

In service,

Carla C

KNL SPRING 2023 | WHAT I DIDN'T WANT

Homeless, physically addicted to alcohol, financially bankrupt, morally misguided, spiritually sick—this is where I ended up after I took my first drink at 14. It was as good as it was going to get.



When I started my journey into rehab (court-ordered rehab), these were the things I knew I didn't want. I had no clue what would happen or what I wanted, BUT I knew what I didn't want. I was sick and tired of being sick and tired. The never-ending vicious cycle of drinking was prominent in my life, and I was exhausted. Fortunately, the judge intervened and asked if I wanted to return to jail or rehab. At that point, the answer was easy. I did not want to go back to jail, so on to rehab, I went. The first morning of rehab, I had this overwhelming feeling that everything would be all right. Enter the Big Book and a Power Greater than Myself. I struggled with a power greater than myself, my father passed away when I was 7, and my thought was if GOD needed him more than me, then the heck with him. But as I have stated, I knew what I didn't want, so let's give it a whirl.

Everything I did was because I didn't want to return to where I was. I start reading the Big Book and listening to other people's experience, strength, and hope. Not entirely convinced of this deal; I did it anyway. I lay crying in bed at rehab, and one of the techs walked in and asked me what was wrong. I explained to her my problem with GOD. She said, "Son look at it as Good Orderly Direction". I said, "What does that mean?". She responded, "To act like you got some damn sense!" So that is what I did, and the personal relationship between GOD, you all, and myself began to grow. All because I knew what I didn't want.

GOD entered my life and has become the director of this story. All I had to do was get out of the way, and my selfish wants and needs had to be pushed to the side. I had to focus on something or somebody else one day at a time. I have zero chance at this thing if I focus solely on myself.

Here I am, 14 years later, and I believe in a power greater than myself, in healthy personal relationships, and in being a productive member of this society. All because I didn't know what I wanted but knew what I didn't want. If I had known what I wanted 14 years ago, I would have cut myself way short of all the fantastic things that have happened. It really has been that simple! One hundred percent Grateful!



One Day at a Time!
Kevin D.