



LifeRing Secular Recovery

A network of positive support groups for living free of alcohol and other drugs

Winter 2012

Newsletter

Volunteering – a reward in itself

by Tim Reith

I was honored to become the LifeRing Board Secretary at our Annual Meeting in June 2010, a position in which I continue to serve.

I live in Tucson, Arizona, where there is only limited awareness of LifeRing, so starting meetings and attracting persons to them are challenges. Chet G., a long-time LifeRing member and convenor, started a face-to-face meeting here in 2009. I assumed its convenorship in 2011. After struggling for three years we finally are making progress using newspapers, treatment facilities, local behavioral conferences, and the LifeRing website. We now have two meetings in Tucson: One is at "Turn Your Life Around, Inc." which is an outpatient recovery center, and a second one is at the University of Arizona Medical Center. Both of these centers have been extremely open to *choice*, which is the hallmark of LifeRing. Recently we established a local LifeRing Tucson website (liferingtucson.com) and one can find information regarding our Tucson meetings there as well as on the LifeRing International website (lifering.org) under "Connect with LifeRing > Find Meetings." LifeRing is alive and well in Tucson after a long gestation period!

I am also a volunteer in LifeRing's "e-mail pals" program that provides one-to-one support between a newcomer and a LifeRing member. This program, along with several others, was described by Craig Whalley in our Fall 2012 Newsletter. I have been writing to one person for several months and we have become very good friends. At this point, he helps me as much as I help him! Recently, he flew to Tucson to visit me for the weekend which was great fun. We did lots of sightseeing and lots of talking.

I have another e-mail pal who is really not an e-mail pal at all because he is confined to a prison in California and does not have access to a computer. We have been writing to each other for over one year, communicating only by "snail mail." We also have become good friends. I have been

sending him color photographs of desert flowers to brighten his walls and to provide a bit of cheer for him.

Volunteering in this manner has proved quite rewarding for me. We always encourage others to join in this effort.

Happy Holidays?

by Wendy Caputo

I look fondly back at the times when my kids were little, then, I remember how hard I worked on finding just the right gifts and making everyone's "pile" exactly the same....only to have mass chaos as they tore through the carefully wrapped gifts...weeks of time and effort "poof" gone! I always ended up with an attitude, resentments and a cocktail or 20... Happy Holidays?

I always strived to have the perfect "family" holiday gathering. Cooking, shopping, baking, wrapping... countless hours trying to make a Hallmark moment. I expected everyone to relax and enjoy my efforts. Every year the outcome was the same – disappointment. Add booze & stir - a great recipe for disaster. My family never got along, but somehow I expected that the holidays would be somehow make things right. Someone always left in a huff, in tears or in anger. Expectations are "resentments waiting to happen" and this rang true for me year after year. Happy Holidays?

Several years ago, just after Halloween, I went into a K-Mart and X-mas music was playing. My first thought was the pressure it puts on people to buy gifts that they can't afford when they are probably still paying for last year's "gifts". Happy Holidays?

That was the year I actually enjoyed the holiday season for the first time in my life. I thought long and hard about what the holidays really mean to me and decided to throw out all of the expectations of past holidays. I no longer spend time that I end up resenting. I don't spend money I don't have, buying things that no one wants or needs. Instead of going crazy and broke during the holiday season, I have adopted new traditions.

While the world is in chaos, I relax and enjoy making contact with friends that I haven't seen or talked to in a while, letting them know I care. To me that is the best "gift" I could give or receive. I make "gifts" from my heart - cookies, breads, candy, ornaments, etc. I spend my time writing letters to those special people in my life, letting them know how much I care about them and how much I treasure their presence in my life.

I no longer host nor attend holiday gatherings out of duty. I spend my time with friends that I consider "family" enjoying simply being together. Today... sober and simple is what works for me... no deadlines... no debt... just love and friendship for the holidays!

Wishing you peace, love and friendship.

Happy Holidays!!!!

“If we build it, they will come”

by Joe Mott

On Thursday, October 4th I traveled from San Francisco to San Diego to attend the 32nd Annual Conference of CAADAC (the California Association of Alcoholism & Drug Abuse Counselors) which was held at the San Diego Mission Valley Marriott. There I joined Cat Henley, a wonderful woman and LifeRing member who drove down from Santa Barbara to attend, and together we staffed a table in the Exhibit Hall. As part of our "exhibit," we were invited to (and did) convene a LifeRing meeting (for demonstration purposes, mostly) early on Friday morning at the same time a couple of 12-Step meetings were taking place in other rooms. The meeting was attended by only a few visitors who were interested in learning more about LifeRing, but those who did attend were quite interested and had many questions for us. One gentleman was associated with Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. He wanted to learn about alternatives to 12-Step programs that the university could offer its students.

Cat and I then staffed a table in the Exhibit Hall all day on Friday and Saturday, greeting meeting attendees as they passed through the hall, and talking to interested folks about LifeRing. We were one of about thirty exhibitors, which included treatment centers, schools, drug testing services, and more. Most of the folks who stopped by were associated with treatment centers here in California, or were students earning certifications in addiction treatment. Nearly everyone who stopped by identified themselves as "12-Steppers," but the majority acknowledged an understanding around the need for alternatives to 12-Step, and we reinforced that view whenever possible, explaining what LifeRing was about, how it had helped us, and why it was important. We handed out fliers, business cards, newsletters, and recent articles that have appeared in the literature describing LifeRing and some of the other abstinence-based, self-help programs like Women for

Sobriety and Rational Recovery. We also sold a number of books (and raffled off a couple, too).

The most common question we fielded was "Is there a LifeRing meeting in my area to which I can refer clients?" As it turns out, there are no LifeRing meetings at this time in the San Diego area (and very few at all in Southern California). The next step in our growth will be really to get behind the creation and support of new meetings, because there is now a recognized appreciation and a need for meetings that have developed in the treatment community – we are now at the point, in some places at least, where "if we build it, they will come."

Absentee Voting – Bylaws changes in progress

by Jeff K.

The annual LifeRing Congress is the supreme deliberative and legislative body of the organization. This is where Board of Director elections are held, and where motions and changes to the Bylaws are proposed and voted upon.

Currently, the Bylaws provide definitions of who may serve as a voting delegate to Congress, and additionally specify that delegates must be physically present in order to vote. This helps build a sense of community among participants, and simplifies the process by which motions and proposals may be modified prior to being voted upon. However, as LifeRing has grown, the requirement that delegates be physically present at Congress has become a burden to those who would have to travel long distances, possibly internationally, in order to attend.

In May, the LifeRing Congress passed a motion directing the board to study and prepare to implement absentee voting in LifeRing. Numerous issues need to be addressed, particularly including changes to the Bylaws, in order to implement this directive. These include delegate registration, proposal ratification, absentee submission of motions and election nominations, and the specific details of how absentee elections are held and how votes are tallied.

The Board of Directors formed the LifeRing Bylaws Committee in order to address these issues and develop a specific proposal for Bylaws changes that may be voted upon at the next Congress. This fall, after several months of gathering member input, numerous meetings, and long discussions, the committee completed a draft proposal that will be brought to the next LifeRing Congress, our Annual Meeting 2013 in Denver. Highlights include the identification of meeting convenors as default delegates when meetings do not elect someone else, the creation of a delegate registration system, the identification of the kinds of issues that must be brought to an organization-wide Absentee Election, the mechanics of proposal ratification at Congress, the creation of a Registrar position to oversee the Absentee Election and tally votes, and the identification of

various time frames by which certain actions must be taken. The details can be found on our main website:

<http://lifering.org/2012/09/draft-of-proposed-bylaw-changes-is-offered-for-study/>.

If the proposal passes, it will take effect immediately and an Absentee Election may follow the 2013 Congress.

We hope this proposal will go a long way towards building a stronger sense of community within LifeRing, even between groups of people separated by wide oceans and many time zones.

LifeRing in the News

LifeRing radio broadcast on radio.md.com

The Lifering radio show was broadcast without editing almost live on October 12 went really well. Thanks to LifeRinger Gillian E. for making this happen, and to all who participated for your voices of reason!

To listen, click on the following links (segments are about 9 minutes long.)

<http://radiomd.com/show/life-love-and-health>

Part 1: <http://radiomd.com/show/life-love-and-health/item/2645-casting-the-lifering-alcoholism-recovery-your-way#.UILUC1ErdSU>

Part 2: <http://radiomd.com/show/life-love-and-health/item/2646-lifering-recovery-your-terms-your-way#.UILUMFErdSU>

Part 3: <http://radiomd.com/show/life-love-and-health/item/2647-two-paths-to-alcohol-recovery-a-generation-apart#.UILUc1ErdSU>

Convenor Workshop

Our last Convenor Workshop was on November 3rd led by Barry Emerick who organized the event at Centerpoint in San Ramon. It was very well received. Martin Nicolaus gave a short presentation about LifeRing, followed by an interesting question-and-answer session. The workshop was meant especially for new convenors and members of LifeRing who would like to start a meeting. Watch it on YouTube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=XYGoUWrtap8

The next workshop entitled "Convenor Preparedness" is scheduled for February 2, 2013 and we would welcome more attendees. Please RSVP to the Service Center.

Celebration of Recovery Lunch

About 40 people were at a lunch get-together for LifeRing members and loved ones at the Old Spaghetti Factory in Sacramento last Sunday. Executive Director Robert Stump, Board Chairman Craig Whalley and Martin Nicolaus attended from the Bay Area. Marty gave a presentation

about LifeRing. Everybody had a great time. Both Marty's books *Empowering Your Sober Self* and *Recovery by Choice* sold out at this event! We'll bring more books next time.

The Sacramento LifeRing community is very active and has 13 meetings in the area. For more information visit www.liferingsacramento.org.

AlcRec blog takes note of LifeRing

Alc and Rec is a "media concept for an alternative recovery application" and here is what they say about us:

"LifeRing may be the most popular recovery program after AA. I find them to be a bit better at keeping up with science and technology; their website is a customized Wordpress blog just like this one, and their newsletters and articles are always fresh and up to date. They place a huge emphasis on the respect and intelligence of their members, which is one of many contrasting elements with AA, which demands a moral inventory and confession of irresponsibility from its members."

Read and watch the video featuring Marty Nicolaus at <http://students.expression.edu/alcoholismandrecoverysfba/2012/10/29/lifering/>

International News

LifeRing in Copenhagen

LifeRing has added its first meeting in Denmark, with the start of weekly Sunday gatherings in Copenhagen. The meetings, convened by Pernille F., who has been a long-time member of LifeRing's online community, began on Nov. 18th. They will be held every Sunday at noon. For further information, contact Pernille at liferingdanmark@gmail.com. The meetings will be primarily in Danish, although English-speakers will be welcome.

LifeRing in Paris

Kathleen Gargan, current board member, is on an extended visit to Paris, France, and will be hosting a weekly information table/informal LifeRing meeting in a Starbucks in that city starting Sunday, Nov. 25, at 10:30 a.m. and continuing through the end of December. Way to go!

LifeRing Canada

When Michael Walsh did a Google search for alternative recovery support, he "came upon a California group and knew it was the perfect fit". See *Danielle Pope's* article in **MondayMag.com**: Clean & Sober - LifeRing takes a non-12-step approach to addiction support... First steps of recovery begin with: "How was your Week?"

Read the article here: <http://www.mondaymag.com/news/173573881.html>

Give something back

by Carola Ziermann, editor

This is the time of year where I'd like you to take a moment to reflect on what you could do to become more involved to help sustain our wonderful organization. LifeRing Secular Recovery invites you to take on an active role in our growing organization.

Please think about any skills you have (web design, office administration or accounting, creative arts, people or presentation skills) that you could put to good use to help our organization thrive. Maybe you could help out at the Service Center. Or you could start a new meeting or take on convening an existing one.

Any commitment you make to LifeRing is a commitment you make to your sobriety and to yourself. If you cannot volunteer at this time, please think about supporting us with a tax-deductible donation. LifeRing Secular Recovery, founded in Berkeley in 1999, is a free-standing organization supported only by donations and the proceeds from our literature sales.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all our dedicated volunteers and convenors for their tireless work. Many thanks to my fellow board members, including my good friend Craig Whalley who is so devoted to our cause and our newest board member Troy Spears for his incredible work. Also to our diligent Executive Director Robert Stump who is doing an outstanding job. Special thanks to Marty Nicolaus who continues to inspire us all. Finally, many thanks to Barry Emerick and Byron Kerr for their enormous efforts in promoting LifeRing.

I wish all of you a happy New Year, all the best for your sobriety and because of it even ... happier holidays!

Letters to the Editor

Every revolution needs money

My ancestor, Samuel Adams, sold beer to the people of Boston and used the proceeds – money and happy citizens – to start the American Revolution. Every revolution needs money. He hoped to create a democracy where people could help each other to live and love together.

I am aware that our democracy is a work in progress, just a start of what it could be. Yet, it has made it possible for me to free myself through LifeRing, an independent secular non-governmental self-sustaining democratic movement. Some would like to have our process made more democratic via voting, a referendum. But “a straw vote only shows which way the hot air blows” (O’Henry). When I consider all that the LifeRing process has done for me I will do my voting with my money. “Money is the sinew of love as well as war” (Thomas Fuller). We are loving each other without depending on the criminal justice system or some Grover Norquist 1% type.

Please join me. As O.W.Holmes said, “Put not your trust in money, but put your money in trust.” Now is the hour.

Yours in truth,

Sam Adams

What is alcoholism?

Quite understandably, many people in recovery are reluctant to think of themselves as alcoholics, due in large part to the popular perception of alcoholism as a progressively debilitating life-long affliction. However, a thoughtful appreciation of the concept of “alcoholism” can be beneficial to those seeking to maintain a life of sobriety. Perhaps a good place to start would be by defining the term in a way that is both accurate *and* helpful.

Alcoholism is commonly defined as an escalating pattern of excessive drinking that impairs social and vocational functioning. Many people—professionals and others—refer to this condition as a “disease,” and some claim that it is incurable, albeit manageable, as such. However, it would appear to be more helpful and just as accurate, to describe alcoholism as a persistent desire or urge to drink, rather than the destructive *product* of an urge to drink.

Acceptance of a definition of “alcoholism” based on a persistent desire to drink, rather than an irrevocable surrender to a terminal disease, makes it much easier to avoid the unhelpful usage of “alcoholic” as a noun; people who suffer from alcoholism are no more “alcoholics” than people who suffer from autism are “autistics.”

The following definition attempts to define alcoholism in a way that is both accurate and helpful, without necessarily inviting controversy or debate over whether alcoholism is a disease (incurable or otherwise), and by focusing on the *alterable* state of mind that precedes problem drinking.

Alcoholism, noun. A persistent desire to alter one’s state of consciousness by drinking alcohol.

Note that the only “abnormality” included in this definition is a “persistent desire.” There is no minimum volume or frequency of alcohol consumption; nor is there a minimum degree of intoxication. In fact, one can suffer from alcoholism simply by yearning for just enough alcohol to become “buzzed,” as long as the desire is *persistent*. This definition reminds us that our lives can be impaired without even drinking, as long as we are saddled with a persistent desire to drink alcohol.

Once the problem of alcoholism is framed this way, the solution can then be seen in terms of eliminating the persistent desire to drink, instead of simply avoiding drinking - a largely pointless endeavor if we are still left with a lasting urge to drink.

For most people, focusing on changing ways of thinking and living so as to eliminate the persistent desire to drink, rather than stopping at successful alcohol avoidance, will ultimately have a longer-lasting and deeper effect on their sobriety and their quality of life.

We come to LifeRing because we have a desire to live our lives free of alcohol. But many (if not most) of us also have a competing desire to live our lives *with* alcohol. When our *desire* to live alcohol-free completely displaces our *desire* to drink, we can finally enjoy the physical and spiritual peace and freedom brought by true sobriety.
Marty B.

Gratitude

As a rule, I don't care for holidays. I know it's a bit arrogant or elitist of me, but I find them tedious and repetitive. I just can't get in the spirit of them. But for reasons of timing if nothing else, this year I find myself feeling very thankful at just the right time.

It's been a bit more than a month since my back blew out, leading to an ambulance ride and surgery. That was followed by a period of recovery during which I was haunted by the knowledge that the nervous system, including the nerve affected by my surgery, is unpredictable in its response to injury and repair. I started out unable to walk and there was no guarantee how much I would regain (although the likelihood was for at least a substantial recovery). On Thanksgiving eve, I can't quite pronounce myself fully restored, but I've been able to resume my usual activities and walk comfortably, if a bit awkwardly, with the help of canes (which are certainly temporary). Since the surgery, there has been very little pain to deal with.

All through this adventure, I've been helped by a myriad of people, both health care professionals and supportive friends and family. Even someone as curmudgeonly as I am can't help but feel thankful, regardless of the time of year. But that feeling is amplified by the holiday.

Thank you.
Craig Whalley

Book Review

In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts by Gabor Mate

In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts is a compassionate look at drug addiction. This book explores the scientific and psychological causes of addiction, as well as the impact on the addicts treated at the clinic where Mate is a physician. He widens the lens to address the larger societal problem – speaking also to the risks of the more “high-status” addictions, such as wealth, power, and sex. He boldly challenges the War on Drugs, proposing a more holistic, constructive set of alternatives. A riveting, debate-provoking book about an illness that reaches all levels of society, it provides a much-needed glimpse of hope from an innovator who is taking on addiction with startling clarity, vision, and wisdom.

Harville Hendrix, PhD, says: “In this brilliant and well-documented book, Gabor Mate locates the source of

addictions in the trauma of an emotionally empty childhood, making it a relational rather than a medical problem. Such a radical thesis of cause leads to human connection rather than traditional treatment as the cure. This passionate and compassionate book, filled with scientific evidence and personal narratives, should be on the shelf of every person interested in the pervasive challenge of addiction.”

Gabor Mate will be our Guest Speaker at our next LifeRing Annual Meeting on June 1st, 2013 in Denver.

Meet a LifeRinger

Who are these people in LifeRing? Here's another story - excerpt from *Empowering Your Sober Self - The LifeRing Approach to Addiction Recovery* by Martin Nicolaus.

My Turnaround

I'm a bookseller, with a small-town store that sells both new and used books. As my drinking presented more and more problems in my life, I tried to convince myself to call AA. But I'd seen used copies of the *Big Book* come through the store and was totally turned off by its tone. The whole approach seemed phony and lacking in any sort of intellectual underpinning. There was no way I was going to buy into it and I couldn't imagine benefiting from being in a room filled with people who did.

I began to search the Internet, looking for some hope. It took many tries but eventually I found the LifeRing website. As soon as I began to read, I felt a surge of hope. There was a choice! There was a group offering help for people like me! I wasn't alone!

Never in my life had I experienced such a climate of openness, honesty, and support. People whose lives had been turned into a complete mess by their addiction, people who were financially ruined, had health problems, had torturous relationship issues to deal with, had the energy to offer kind words to me and others. More than kind words, there was real friendship.

It was LifeRing that gave me what I needed to become a former drinker. I've never been to an AA meeting. I've never even been to a face-to-face LifeRing recovery meeting! But my life was saved by the Internet and by the men and women who learned how to use it to help people like me .

Craig W., Port Townsend, Washington

LifeRing members Lee H. and Kat “Kishi” W. passed away. Lee had been one of our online convenors for a long time. Both Lee and Kishi get a LifeRing Pioneer Award posthumously. They will be greatly missed.

Convenors' Corner

A frequent request, voiced especially by newcomers to LifeRing who'd like to start a group is, "I would like a section on promoting Life Ring in your area, who to talk to, etc. Also tips on how to look for a place to have a meeting would be good."

Here's what you can do:

- Contact libraries, community centers, Unitarian churches for a meeting room. They usually require only a small donation instead of rent and once you explain about LifeRing and your plan to start a group, they tend to be very helpful and supportive and might even give you a room for free.
- Get some brochures from Lifering, write your meeting's information on the back in the provided space and leave a stack at treatment facilities, Dr's offices, libraries, community centers, etc. (*Welcome to LifeRing or If this is day one* are good ones to introduce LifeRing).

- Prepare a flyer about your meeting with date, time and directions to your location. You can download templates from the LifeRing website. Post them at libraries, community centers, etc, and any place where people get together, your local supermarket or post office may have an announcement board. (Editor's note: I even put flyers up in the restrooms at our community center.) Always get the permission of the person in charge when leaving brochures or posting flyers. This helps to build a more supportive relationship with them, introduces LifeRing and they may even refer someone to your meeting.

Convenors, we'd like to hear from you!
Please email us at service@lifering.org.

**Mark your calendar:
LifeRing Annual Meeting 2013
May 31 – June 2, 2013
in Denver, Colorado**

with Guest Speaker Gabor Mate, author of *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts*

We are preparing our Annual Meeting 2013 in Denver. Our guest speaker will be Gabor Mate, whose book *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts* provides a valuable insight into addictions. Watch our website for more information about this event.

We need your financial support

For more than 10 years, LifeRing has been helping people who struggle with alcohol dependency or drug addiction. This time of year is a crucial time for many people. We see some people coming into a meeting for the first time and others attending more frequently to get additional support in their recovery during the holiday season.

Please mail your tax-deductible donation to: LifeRing Secular Recovery, 1440 Broadway #312, Oakland, CA 94612-2023 or make a donation directly via our website at www.lifering.org/donate/. Thank you for your continuous help and support.

Happy Holidays and best wishes for 2013!



LifeRing Secular Recovery
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Questions? Call us toll-free at 800.811.4142
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