

# The magic of Perry Street



**Celebrating 50 years!!!** 1958 to 2008





*“There is  
no wrong way to get sober.”*

~ Rudy

Perry Street has traditionally been a place where no subject is off-limits. Anything we need to discuss to remain sober is tolerated. As a result, over the years, we have heard people share about everything from the ridiculous to the sublime.

Perry Street’s **physical aesthetic has long been defined by its high funk factor.**

Some people even date their sobriety by the color the walls were when they came in. Over the years, these shades have included party pink, Bellevue green, puppy belly, champagne beige and mocus blue. Not to mention the fabulous array of curtains.

No matter the color of the walls or the curtains, Perry Street has always served as a fertile seedbed of sobriety.

# The Ass-Seat Count

Countless hours have been devoted to tabulating the Ass-Seat Count. Our crack Statistical Team has calculated that over the last 50 years approximately 2,786,160 asses have graced the seats of Perry Street.

## A note on methodology

- 50's** . . . . . 4 meetings a week . . . . 15 people per meeting
- 60's** . . . . . 7 meetings a week . . . . 30 people...
- 70's** . . . . . 11 meetings a week . . . 40 people...
- 80's** . . . . . 20 meetings a week . . . 40 people...
- 90's** . . . . . 51 meetings a week . . . 40 people...
- 2000's** . . . 58 meetings a week . . . 40 people...

Sources for the above figures ranged from Old Timers' memories to meeting books and Business Meeting Minutes. When making our calculations, we used the most conservative estimates in a mighty effort to avoid grandiassity.

AUGUST 2008		July 2008	August 2008	September 2008	October 2008	November 2008	
WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	FRIDAY	FRIDAY	FRIDAY	FRIDAY	
				1 7:30 n/a 7 10-15 n/a 10-15 2-30 4 6 BASHA 7 YRS 8:30 SIF n/a LUKE	214/152	2 7:30 n/a 7:30 12P 2:30 MARK 4 DIANE (20 yrs) 6 OXFORD GROUP 8:30 REBECCAH JASON 11 CHRIS S	215/151
6 7:30 n/a 9 PETER G 12-15 2-30 4 STANDS - 1 year 6 STOP MEETING BUSINESS MEETING	219/147	7 7:30 n/a 9 12-15 BILLY M. CHAIR ROBERT 2-30 4 JEFF 5:30 BIG BOOK 8:30 ROBERT S 10-15	220/146	8 7:30 n/a 9 Maddy 23 yrs 10-15 12-15 2-30 4 6 LIZZIE 2 years 8:30 SIF n/a AMEN F	221/148	9 7:30 n/a 9:30 12P RESERVEO 2:30 DIANE V. 21 yrs (Vendors) 4 ABAM 6 Shelley 8:30 ROBERT	222/144
13 7:30 n/a 9 KENNYL 18 YRS 12-15 reserved 2-30 4 STEVEN 6 STOP MEETING 8:30 PROBLEMS n/a 10-15 BIG BOOK P. 421	226/140	14 7:30 n/a 9 Joe 12-15 2-30 4 5:30 BIG BOOK 8:30 KELLY ONE YEAR 10-15	227/139	15 7:30 n/a 9 Phil 4 yrs 10-15 12-15 RICO 24 YRS 2-30 4 6 AL B. 8:30 STOP n/a JUSTIN H.	228/138	16 7:30 n/a 9:30 Thomas G 7 yrs 12P 2-30 4 CARTER 6 8:30 11 MELISSA J	229/137
20 7:30 n/a 9 WATERGATE 21 YRS 12-15 reserved 2-30 4 6 STOP MEETING 8:30 PROBLEMS n/a 10-15 BIG BOOK P. 421	233/133	21 7:30 n/a 9 12-15 BILLY M. CHAIR SCOTT L 2-30 ROSH 4 5:30 BIG BOOK 8:30 10-15	240/132	22 7:30 n/a 9 10-15 12-15 2-30 4 6 SANDACE 8:30 11	241/132	23 7:30 n/a 9:30 Ellen F 12P 2-30 4 JAME 6 JOSEPH B. 3 years 8:30 11	242/130
27 7:30 n/a 9 12-15 2-30 4 6 STOP MEETING 8:30 PROBLEMS n/a 10-15 BIG BOOK P. 421	240/126	28 7:30 n/a 9 12-15 2-30 4 5:30 BIG BOOK 8:30 10-15	241/125	29 7:30 n/a 9 10-15 12-15 2-30 4 6 8:30 STOP n/a 11 Heather	242/124	30 7:30 n/a 9:30 12P 2-30 4 Sean MC 6 Martin 8:30 11	243/123

AUGUST 2008

STAPLES



## 1958 to 2008

# An Abbreviated History of the Perry Street Workshop

*Alcoholics Anonymous was born on June 10th, 1935, the day that Doctor Bob took his last drink. AA Group Number 1 was founded in Akron, Ohio, in 1935. Group Number Two, as it was called, was started in New York City in the Fall of 1935.*

*As Bill W. tells us in Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age: "Small A.A. gatherings were being held at that time in newcomer Bert's tailor shop. Later this meeting moved to a small room in Steinway Hall and thence into permanent quarters when A.A.'s first clubhouse, 'The Old Twenty-Fourth,' was opened." This clubhouse was at 334 1/2 West 24th Street. "The old meeting place on Sullivan Street" is mentioned on page 289 of the 4th edition of the Big Book; we are not sure whether that refers to Perry Street's original location.*

## 1950's/60's

There are differing versions of how the Workshop started. Some say as early as 1949, some men started a woodworking/carpentry shop where they worked during the day and held meetings at night. Others say it didn't start until the summer of 1957, when a group of artists and writers established a group at the carpenters shop on Sullivan Street. It was above a funeral parlor and next to a liquor store. Their goal was to have a place to work, stay sober, and have meetings. What we know for certain is that it was in a carpenters' shop, hence the name The Workshop.

By 1958, they had outgrown the space and found a new location in the West Village.

***In September of 1958, the first meetings were held in a storefront at 50 Perry Street.*** It had either been a candy store or a German bakery. Meetings have run continuously there ever since.

Initially, there were four 8:30 PM meetings a week, with a core group of about 15 members. They sat in a semi-circle on furniture that had been dragged in off the street—a coffee table, a couch, overstuffed and straightbacked chairs, and a loveseat. There was no podium or counter, but there was a bathroom. The room had only one light, a lone electric bulb hanging by a cord from the center of the ceiling. They froze in the winter and sweltered in the summer.

There was an old-fashioned alarm clock set for 10:00. "No souls saved after 10 pm" was announced at the end of the meeting. When the alarm went off it scared the hell out of most of the speakers, even though they knew about it in advance. It took a year to get rid of the clock, but we remained strict about stopping every meeting at 10:00 sharp.

Perry Street grew and grew. Many business meetings included lively discussion about whether the group should move to larger quarters. Those who wanted to go were told, "You can go and start another meeting, if you like. We're staying here." They usually stayed.

Perry Street meetings were never cancelled. Even when the famous New York Blackout of 1965 occurred, the scheduled speaker walked down from the Upper East Side.

Holidays being a difficult time for many alcoholics, we began having our soon to be famous Thanksgiving Open House. A potluck buffet started around noon and continued until the evening meeting at 8:30. Each year more and more people came. After about twenty years, the group could no longer support the large crowds. The tradition ended in 1982.

- **Meetings:** increased from four per week to seven.
- **Rent:** under \$100 a month

## The 1970's

There were very few late meetings at this time, so Perry Streeters traveled around the city to find them.

**1971** "It was also pointed out that the high cost of the Annual Bill W. Dinner was making AA into a rich man's club."

**1975** Here's a good one: "Mention was made of a rodent problem. Rudy found a rat in the garbage can at his meeting. It is not known whether the rat was sober 90 days or not. Rudy killed the rat. The Co-chairpeople were to notify all the coffee chairpersons to close the bathroom window when they leave, as it is believed the rats come in there."

**1978** "There was concern over the 'steady stream of cockroaches' parading across the west wall."

**1978** "There was a motion to announce before the start of each meeting, 'Anyone who has taken alcohol or any other mood changers today may not share.' Motion passed."

~ The midnight meetings for Christmas and New Year's go back to the 1970's, and probably earlier. These meetings have always been very special to us.

~ The "Our Father" was the prevalent prayer used to close meetings.

~ Coffee was served until the mid-eighties. The chairperson arrived 2 hours early to make it. The door opened an hour before the meeting began.

~ "No infants, children, pets or bikes" originated in the 70's.

~ The chairperson's counter was by the bench in the back.

~ 70s Business Meeting Madness: Quotes from the minutes.

• **Meeting List:** 8:30 PM NIGHTLY (*Problems In Sobriety wasn't in the meeting book. It was considered a private meeting for members to discuss problems in sobriety. Crosstalk and feedback were encouraged.*)

12:15 PM TUESDAY AND THURSDAY

3 PM SATURDAY

11 AM SUNDAY

• **Meetings:** *meetings increased to eleven per week.*

• **Rent in 1975:** \$145 a month

*Coffee and cups in 1975: \$242.08 a month*



## The 1980's

**The first group in NYC to officially go "clean and dry" was "Clean And Dry."** We were the next group.

Until this time, there was some dispute about whether one could be high and sober at the same time. The debate continued into the '80s.

**1983** "Motion accepted that a sign be posted behind the coffee counter stating that the California style greeting of the person sharing is optional at Perry Street." California style greeting: "Hi, So & So" in response to "Hi, my name is So & So, and I'm an alcoholic."

**1985** "A motion to add in the announcement 'Any visual display of weapons can be grounds for dismissal from this room until discussed at the next business meeting' was floored."

**1988** "Dance: Claude was very pissed that volunteers didn't show up to help clean PS3 after the dance... The need for future planning floated in the air like swamp gas..."

~ The holiday marathon meetings began in 1983. Perry Street has always called them "marathons," eschewing the term "alkathon."

~ Holding hands at the end of a meeting began around 1982 or 1983.

~ AIDS defined much of Perry Street life during the '80's. A whole sobriety generation was lost. We lost dear friends, sponsors, sponsees, precious institutional memories. No one knew what it was at first. There were many funerals and memorial services.

• **Meetings:** *meetings increased to twenty per week.*

• **Rent in 1985:** \$875 a month

*Coffee expenses in 1985: \$480 - \$600.00 a month*



**The 1990's** The early '90's were dominated by The Great Smoking Debate. Beginning in the late '80's, the group struggled with whether smoking should be prohibited in the Workshop. At one point, half the room was made non-smoking, and the other half smoking. Members went to court to answer the complaints filed under the "Clean Indoor Air Act." We used SmokeEaters and paid the fines rather than quit smoking. Steering Committee meetings were filled with debate about whether we should continue to break the law/pay the fines/subsidize smoking with group money. Was paying the fines enabling addictive behavior? Eventually, it came to a vote again and finally smoking was banned. The days of the heavy blue haze filling room became but a memory.

- **Meetings:** *This was a period of great expansion. By the end of the decade, we were holding 51 meetings per week.*

**The 2000's** We rang in the 21st Century with our traditional New Year's Eve midnight meeting.

Perry Street served as a refuge in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. It gave us a place to share the experience of living through that day, and remaining sober a day at a time.

- **Meetings:** *schedule increased to 58 meetings a week.*

## The More Things *Change*...

Steering committee meetings have been

**debating the same issues** since The Workshop began:

- Control of the air conditioner
- Noise on the street
- Congregating out front
- Being a good neighbor
- Fear of losing our lease
- Need for more meeting books and chairs
- Bulletin boards are for AA announcements only
- Outstanding collections
- "The roaches are getting out of hand..."
- "We had a discussion about our more lice-infested members..."
- Seat saving
- Constant plumbing problem

### POST MEETING HAUNTS:

*In Memoriam:*

- Spiro's (*now closed*)
- Jean's Patio (*now closed*)
- Tiffany's (*now closed*)
- Daisy's (*now closed*)
- Pennyfeather's (*moved*)
- The Bagel (*now closed*)
- Homer's (*now closed*)
- Patisserie Lanciani (*now closed*)

*Still there for us:*

- The Village Den
- Manatus
- Esperanto
- Silver Dollar
- Rivoli Pizza
- Good Stuff Diner
- Doma

## Overheard at Perry Street:

***“If you go 20 miles into the woods,  
you don’t get out in one mile.”***

“LIFE IS NOT A PROBLEM TO BE SOLVED,  
BUT A MYSTERY TO BE LIVED.”

“Co-Dependence is when the  
rocks in your head fit the holes in  
someone else’s.” **“You can’t save your face and  
your ass at the same time.”**

“Don’t have conversations with  
people who aren’t there.”

“Two heads are better than one,  
but not on the same body.”

*“Outlast the feelings.”*

**“You can take the rum out of the fruitcake,  
but you still have the fruitcake.”**

*“Whether your ass falls off or turns to gold,  
pick it up and take it to a meeting.”*

“Alcoholics lead lives of noisy desperation.”

*“Anyone who comes to this room  
and doesn’t pour their heart out is  
cheating themselves.”*

**“Anything worth doing  
is worth doing obsessively.”**

“If you didn’t drink today,  
you’re a winner.”

**“Just show up.”**

***“Learn to cooperate with the inevitable.”***

“THE THREE M’S:

MEETINGS, MOVIES AND MASTURBATION.”

“AA is like an adjustable wrench,  
it fits every nut.”

***“We’re not here to see through each other;  
we’re here to see each other through.”***

“You’d better have self-pity at Perry Street  
because you’re not going to get any other kind.”

**“When a civilian gets a flat, they call AAA;  
when an alcoholic gets a flat, they call a suicide hotline.”**

*“Drinking is like fucking a gorilla –  
you don’t stop when you want to, you stop when the gorilla wants to.”*

**“Each group has but one primary purpose—  
to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.”**

**Tradition Five** The door to 50 Perry Street has been open continuously since 1958.

*“That little place on Perry Street  
turned out more miracles than  
you can imagine. I have memories  
of people who walked in dead  
and they stayed alive.”*

~ Cy E.

*We would like to have an ongoing Perry Street history project.*

*Please contact [paulv@panix.com](mailto:paulv@panix.com) if you have any stories or information to share.*



## 12 SUGGESTED STEPS

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

## The 12 Traditions

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on AA-unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or AA as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.
6. An AA group ought never endorse, finance or lend the AA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property & prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every AA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. AA, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the AA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio & films.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principals before personalities.