

The Party's Over. Let's Party!

by David M. Lowe

"I'm feeling good from my head to my shoes, know where I'm going and I know what to do. I've tightened up my point of view, I've got a new attitude..."

These lyrics blasting forth over the Civic Center Auditorium dance floor hit home as hundreds of faces broke into simultaneous smiles of agreement. This gathering of sweaty, gyrating, partying gay men and lesbians who crowded the dance floor could relate: They had in fact changed their whole attitude and outlook upon life.

On the surface, this party looked like many others held all over San Francisco that night. Had you stumbled upon the event, you might have inquired, "What are these folks on?" Closer inspection would have revealed the high was

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natural, not artificially enhanced with social lubricants. This event was more than a party, it was a celebration of living life — living sober. Everyone on this dance floor was clean and sober — and having a great time. Could this be?

For the eleventh year running, gays and lesbians gathered in SF for the world's largest conference on "Living Sober." This year's event drew just over 2,800 recovering drug addicts, alcoholics, and their families and friends. The fourth of July weekend included workshops, entertainment and three of the largest Gay Alcoholics

Anonymous (AA) meetings in history.

Joe H., Chairperson of the committee that put on this year's celebration, said: "It's a celebration of unity in sobriety; it's an opportunity to look around and really see that you're not alone." This is not the case for many gays and lesbians in recovery and provides one of the reasons SF's "Living Sober" conference draws people worldwide. "There are still places in this country where, if you are a gay man or lesbian, you are either not wanted, welcomed, or made to feel comfortable in AA," says Joe. He further

declared: "That has not been my experience, but there are people who tell me that has been their experience and it's why they come to our conference."

In SF many recovering gays and lesbians feel comfortable and welcome at straight AA meetings. Joe is one of those people, but says: "There was a different energy, different awareness and consciousness when I went to a gay meeting. I felt that I had come home, that I was finally with my peers who were going to help me become a human being. I believe that's essential." Joe attended straight AA meetings dur-

ing the first of his currently 7 years of sobriety. He further explained the importance of gay AA meetings in a community where one in four are believed to be alcoholic or drug-addicted: "I believe there are gay men and lesbians who are still out there practicing this disease who don't know that there's a place in AA that's safe and comfortable for them."

Joe believes the annual conference — and the awareness it generates — is one way people find gay AA. "To me, that's the purpose of AA; through attraction we bring these people into our fellowship by being visible and celebrating in unity."

Another purpose of the Living Sober conference is to assist those in AA in dealing with issues they face in recovery. According to Joe, "...the conference is really very important for people in their first or second year of sobriety: to realize that they're not alone, and that there are ways to stay sober. We have workshops addressed to new-

comers were people with experience describe how they stayed sober and what they did to reach out for sobriety. These are very essential."

Other workshops covered a wide range of topics, including: Looking for Love in All the Wrong Places, Dating in Sobriety, Smoking, the Last Refuge?, So Your Friend Has AIDS?, Letting Go of Old Ideas, The Long Road Home from Self-Loathing to Self-Loving, There Is No Problem Too Difficult to Handle, Dealing with that GOD Stuff in AA, Living Through Emotional Pain Without Chemicals, Socializing Without Alcohol, Now That I'm Sober, What Do I Do For An Encore?, and Leather, Sex, and Sobriety. Workshops drawing the largest number of participants dealt with relationships and intimacy.

The bottom line, according to Joe, was that "AA is a program for living, and we need to let people know you can have fun in sobriety." ■

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