

Rotating Trustee Reviews A.A.'s 'Coming of Age' in the '80s

When rotating Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee William E. Flynn, M.D. delivered his farewell address before the 39th General Service Conference last spring, he took the attentive delegates on a quick trip through A.A. in the 1980s—pointing candidly to the flowers, thorns and all.

Dr. Flynn described his near-decade of service as a time of "dynamic growth in A.A., in so many exciting areas." Perhaps the most dramatic progress has occurred in our expansion overseas, he said. "A.A. is blossoming in Poland and just beginning to take hold in the U.S.S.R. where at least four known groups have already been formed. The other Soviet-bloc countries are not far behind. Moreover, we are alive and well in Africa and parts of the Orient. That's the excitement, seeing the steady progress we're making around the world."

He recalled that the trustees' International Committee was his first assignment upon joining the General Service Board in 1980. "You would have loved it," he told his listeners. "Six or seven of us would gather each board weekend and hear the travelogues of various parts of the world. As a naive young trustee, I would ask, 'Why do we need this committee? What are we doing?' The response invariably was, 'Well, you never know when something will happen, so we'd better keep listening and encouraging the growth of these embassy groups.'

"Today," Dr. Flynn ponted out, "the International Committee has become perhaps the most exciting committee in A.A. There is so much going on globally, and so much to do.

"On the other hand," he suggested, "events have transpired at home that have created some problems—the proliferation in the eighties of other twelve-step programs, for example. Now we have a twelve-step group for every known malady, each one of them copying the basic principles of A.A. to the degree that they can. While A.A. willingly shares its recovery principles, there have been problems with this. In some parts of

the country there has been a great deal of talk about drugs in meetings or about problems as the adult child of an alcoholic. This, in turn, has led to a need for a renewed emphasis within our Fellowship, of our primary purpose to carry the A.A. message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

"In yet another eighties happening," he added, "some court systems began inundating some of our meetings with their referrals. In some areas, groups felt they were going to crumble under the impact. So, with the positive, exciting changes going on also comes frustration."

Here Dr. Flynn mused aloud. "When you think about our co-founder Bill W. and what an innovator he was in finding so many different ways to spread the message



- 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, 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 experience as the result of these steps we tried to carry this message to the alcoholic, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.



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of sobriety, you wonder: How would he feel about the fact that whole groups of needy alcoholics are inadequately exposed to A.A.? Would he find some faster way to carry the message to the Native American population? Would he target some method to reach the black community more effectively? These are just a couple of challenges I believe he would stress today more than ever."

The easiest way for A.A. to go, Dr. Flynn observed, "would be to pull back and wait and let things happen on their own. But the real challenge, the real growth, will occur when A.A., in a sophisticated, sensitive and caring manner, finds a way that is consistent with our Traditions to foster our growth both abroad and here at home."

He then cited one of the most heartwarming aspects of his duties as a trustee: attending Regional Forums. "that's when I got to meet the Fellowship," he declared. "I saw people in their own environments, from British Columbia to Florida and Montana, and that was the beauty of it. Everywhere I went, whether to the small Saturday Night Group in Homer, Alaska, struggling to practice the basics of A.A., or to a meeting of some cosmopolitan New Yorkers who were doing basically the same, there was a coming together. I could actually feel the heartbeat of the Fellowship."

A.A. "came of age" in the fifties, Dr. Flynn explained, "and again and again with each succeeding decade. The eighties have produced yet another significant coming of age that positions us for the work of the Fellowship tomorrow. By allowing me to participate, to be of some use in this exciting and valuable continuum, you all have given me a great honor. I thank you very much."

Gratitude Is An A.A. Named Kurt

Gratitude is not always easy to articulate, but Kurt R., of Blakely, Georgia, does it well. In response to the article, "Instant' Booth Carries A.A. Message at Arizona

Fair" (*Box 4-5-9*, Feb.-Mar. 1989), Kurt writes: "The story of the young alcoholic who found help at the A.A. booth made me cry. Thank you! I'm 20 years sober, 48 years old, married to a lady with four years' sobriety, the father of a one-year-old son, have two dogs, three kittens, my very own driver's license, and some people who call me their friend. Miraculous, isn't it? Especially since I'm also an ex-con, have only one eye that works, many obvious reminders of a rugged youth, an eighth-grade education, and carry the scars of the street deep within. My wife gets A's in college and I actually embrace the responsibilities of family life!

"All this because I saw an A.A. sign in a Miami garage in 1968, wandered in, was given a welcome similar to the one received by the girl in the 'booth' story, and sobered up. But why I'm really writing is to give you my new address. . . ."

1990 Regional Forums

Regional Forums strengthen the Fellowship's Three Legacies of Recovery, Unity, and Service, by providing an opportunity for A.A. group and area representatives, as well as any interested individual A.A.s in a particular region, to share experience, strength and hope with representatives of the General Service Board, and G.S.O. and Grapevine staff members. These weekend sharing sessions enhance and widen communication, and help spark new ideas in better carrying the message through service work.

Mailings regarding each Regional Forum will be sent to G.S.R.s, area committee members, delegates, and central office/intergroups, approximately three months ahead of time. In 1990 Regional Forums are planned as follows:

- *Western Canada*—May 18-20: Explorer Hotel, Yellowknife, North West Territory
- *Pacific Region*—August 17-19: Town and Country Hotel, San Diego, California
- *Western Canada*—September 28-30: The Winnipeg Delta, Winnipeg, Manitoba
- *Eastern Canada*—November 16-18: Ameri-Cana Resort, Niagara Falls, Ontario
- *Southeast Region*—December 7-9: The Ramada Inn-Shreveport, Shreveport, Louisiana

For additional information, please write: Regional Forum Coordinator, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163.

Please post *Twelve Tips on Keeping Your Holiday Season Sober and Joyous* (page 11) on your group bulletin board.

A.A.s from More Than 40 Countries Head for Seattle in 1990

The sheer logistics of transporting and housing the more than 35,000 A.A.s planning to gather in Seattle, Washington, for A.A.'s 55th Anniversary International Convention, July 5-8, 1990, are mind-boggling. How will they all get there? Where will they stay? How will they get around the city?

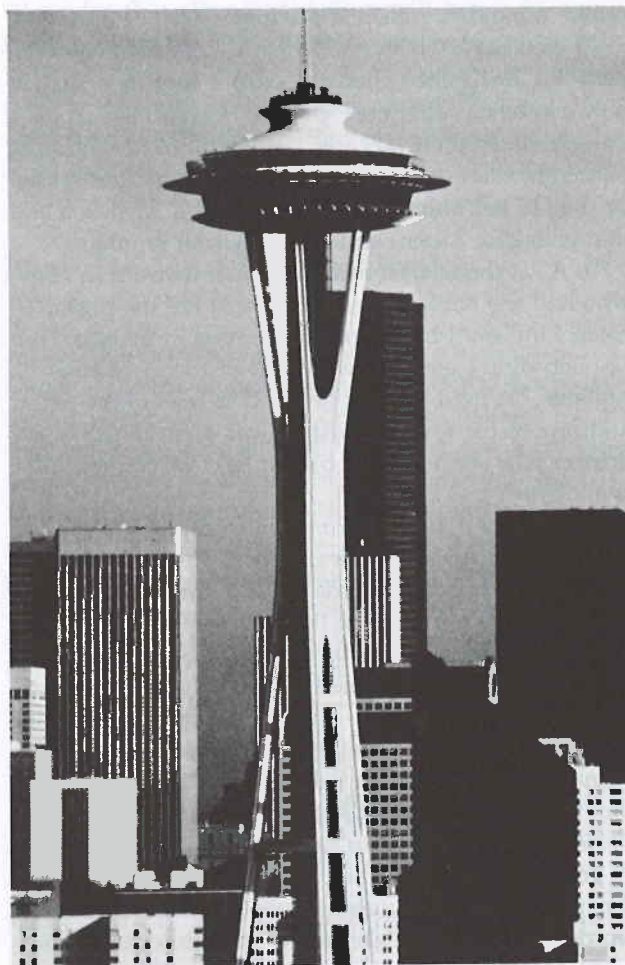
Many of the A.A.s expected from more than 40 countries will fly via commercial flights. Others, who live closer to Seattle, will travel by car, train, bus or bicycle. Many groups are planning to charter private planes. Some enterprising A.A.s have arranged charters on ships and look forward to sailing on to Alaska after the Convention. In October, 275,000 registration and housing forms in English, French and Spanish were mailed to groups, area officers, D.C.M.s, Loners, Internationalists, central/intergroup offices and G.S.O.s around the world. Many have already reserved some of the 13,000 hotel and motel rooms now under contract at reduced rates for Convention attendees.

Still others are planning to stay at one of the special RV (recreational vehicle) sites which will be set up on five Seattle school grounds. Low-cost dormitory housing at the University of Washington and the Seattle-Pacific University is also available.

Virtually all housing areas will be served by shuttle transportation during the Convention. In addition to the shuttle buses, A.A.s staying in the downtown area may choose to walk to the major meeting sites or ride the monorail.

Those who wish to reserve hospitality suites are asked to contact Coley Lyons at Talley Management Group, Inc., 22 Euclid Street, Woodbury, New Jersey 08096, telephone: 800-237-4716 or 609-845-7220. Hotel rooms, of course, must be reserved via the housing portion of the registration form. Registration and housing forms may be duplicated. However, if using a duplicate, please attach the housing form to the registration form prior to mailing. The registration/housing form should be mailed to: International Convention, Southside Station, P.O. Box 1990, Buffalo, New York 14220-1990.

However they travel, wherever they stay, A.A.s will revel in wider sharing than at any previous Convention. Workshops, panels and topic meetings will be held at Seattle Center and the Washington State Convention Center. Additional topic meetings and regional alkathons will be held at the Westin Hotel. Marathon meetings will take place at the Sheraton Hotel and the Holiday Inn Crowne Plaza. On Friday and Saturday nights and Sunday morning, we will gather at the Kingdome Stadium. Al-Anon/Alateen will hold its meet-



Seattle-King County Convention & Visitors Bureau, James Bell

ing at the Washington State Convention Center and the Sheraton Hotel.

Beyond all the provisions being made to assure ease of verbal communication—in four languages plus “signing” for the hearing-impaired—there is the language of the heart that will facilitate sharing among all the A.A.s present, no matter what their native tongue.

When Is A Pigeon a Person?

Most A.A.s, even those who have no axe to grind and naturally “go with the flow,” have definite, even violently opposing, opinions about calling a newcomer, or sponsee, a “pigeon.” This state of affairs becomes more understandable after a glance at the dictionary, which defines a pigeon variously as: “any bird of the family *Columbidae*, having a compact body and short legs” . . . “a dove” . . . “a young, usually attractive girl” . . . “a person who is easily fooled, a dupe” . . . and, in poker slang, “a card, acquired in the draw, that greatly im-

proves a hand or makes it a winner.”

Thanks to A.A. historian Father G., of Massachusetts, who has researched the subject to a fare-thee-well, it now can be reported that “pigeon,” as used in A.A., has an excellent archival and lexicographical standing backed by distinguished names—from A.A. co-founder Dr. Bob to Baltimore journalist-critic H.L. Mencken and that engaging American icon, Benjamin Franklin.

In A.A., the term comes to us directly from Dr. Bob, who had the habit of saying, “I must see the pigeon in room 218,” or “I have a pigeon coming in tonight.” But Dr. Bob didn’t pick the word out of the air, Father G. explains. “A light sleeper, he loved to read in the night, and one of his favorite writers was Mencken, a heavy drinker who shared Dr. Bob’s wit, and his contempt for shallowness and conceit.”

In his book, *The American Language*, first published in 1919 and revised several times, Mencken reserves some of his harshest words for the Prohibitionists; he further points out that Ben Franklin was the first American who wondered why tavern habitués never referred to a patron as being drunk. Instead, they were “soused” or “corned” or “stewed”—like so many birds, fowl or pigeons. Thus, says Father G., “that genius, Ben Franklin, who gave us the lightning rod, the bifocal lens, the fuel-saving stove, good postal service and *The Drinker’s Dictionary*, also gave A.A. its ‘pigeons.’ ”

To A.A.s who may take offense at being likened to the much-maligned pigeon, Father G. offers still more words of comfort. “Take heart,” he admonishes, “because Dr. Bob, Mencken and Franklin could have made you a bear, bee, cat, fox, toad, goose, rat, puppy or fox.

“Franklin wrote, among other things, that compulsive drinkers ‘eat a toad-and-a-half for breakfast,’ or are ‘dizzy as a goose,’ or ‘as good-conditioned as a puppy.’ He further observed that people who hung around taverns often referred to drunks as being ‘pigeon-eyed.’ And Dr. Bob, who knew English grammar (and alcoholics) very well, came to regard people who were pigeon-eyed as his pigeons.” Soused or sober, he loved them all.

Do We Make Ourselves Clear?

“In my desperation to carry the message, I sometimes forget to share with the newcomer many of the little but important things that helped me to be sober. If we who have been around A.A. awhile don’t do it, who will?”

Speaking at the Northeast Regional Forum in Portland, Maine last June, Leo G., the delegate (Panel 38)

from Western New York, mentioned some of the “little things”—the simple but essential safety pins of sobriety. “At meetings,” he asked, “do we orient the new person on kitchen duty, show where the utensils are kept, how to make the coffee and, these days, the decaf?”

When A.A.-oriented people come out of a prison or a treatment center, Leo pointed out, their status as alcoholics there is no secret, something they may think is par for the course. “Do we explain our Anonymity Tradition to them clearly?” he questioned. And do we take the time to detail exactly what we did to stay dry those first tough days?

“I, for one, have found myself so wrapped up in sharing my drunkalogue—talking about how I used to take the morning drink—that I forgot to share just how I’ve stayed away from that drink by using every tool available, from meetings to milkshakes to sponsorship and the Serenity Prayer.”

With newcomers, Leo reminded his fellow attendees, “establishing identification in terms of our drinking histories is important—but so is taking them by the hand and, step by step, showing them the way to a sobriety that encompasses the body, mind and spirit.”

Viewpoint: Do We Subsidize Low-Priced Literature at the Expense of Our Other Services?

“My girlfriend recently gave me a paperback science-fiction novel that I read in a few days and discarded,” writes Peter D. from Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. “It cost \$5.95, which is \$2.35 more than the hardcover Big Book costs in the United States and 55 cents less than it costs here.”

Peter’s concern is not that the cost of the Big Book and other A.A. Conference-approved literature is high, but that it is so low. “Why is the money realized from sales of our literature not considered a means of self-support?” he asks. “Are we subsidizing literature at the expense of other, vital services?”

At present, the hardcover edition of the Big Book sells in the U.S. for \$3.60, just 10 cents more than it cost when first issued in 1939—this, despite the escalating prices of paper, production, binding, distribution and other expenses. By 1984, the retail price of the Big Book had risen to \$5.65; other A.A. books ranged from about \$4.00 to \$6.50 retail. Then, last year, a 12½% reduction on all books and booklets and the elimination of two-tier

pricing (as well as a 22% discount on pamphlets and other materials) went into effect, sending prices back to their pre-World War II level. This action, taken by the A.A. World Services Board, was a result of greatly increased group contributions to the General Service Office in 1987. Since the General Service Conference had endorsed reliance on group contributions rather than excess literature income as the ideal means for supporting group services, the A.A.W.S. Board took that action.

The price reduction, Peter contends, was a well-intentioned mistake that does not, however, serve the intent of Tradition Seven. "Why shouldn't the money raised from the sale of our own, reasonably priced literature be used to pay for group expenses?" he asks. "What else would it be used for? I've heard it said that if every group contributed a set amount to the General Service Office, we'd be able to give all our literature away at no charge. But is that our aim? Do we want the Big Book to be another Gideon Bible—with a free copy tucked in every bar and motel-room drawer?"

If you visit the used book stores in your city, Peter observes, "you likely will see what happens to a lot of Big Books, A.A. *Comes of Age* and other A.A. books. The fact is that most active alcoholics place little value on something they don't have to pay for, unless of course they can pawn it for a drink."

The idea that A.A. services should be paid for by group and individual contributions only, he points out, "is a dream that ignores reality. In the early days of the Fellowship, it was book revenues, more than anything, that kept us afloat. Our co-founder Bill W. later wrote that 'earnings of the Big Book plugged up the often large deficits in group contributions to Headquarters.' (*The Language of the Heart*, p. 227)

"The A.A. Concepts, Bill noted in his Introduction to them, 'represent the best summation that I am able to make after more than 20 years' experience in the creation of our service structure and in the conduct of A.A.'s world affairs.' And Concept XI clearly states, 'We firmly believe that cheap looking, cheap selling, and poorly conceived literature is not in A.A.'s best interest from any standpoint, whether effectiveness, economy, or any other.'

"Who are we to ignore the experience of the past?" Peter queries. "Would it not be wiser for us to do as Bill often admonished—to make 'practical and spiritual sense' in all our affairs?"

Compare the prices of our books to those in any retail bookstore, Peter urges, and you will see that they are extraordinarily low. "These artificially reduced prices may not provide sufficient operating funds for the future," he warns. "If so, we are failing to live up to Concept XII, Warranty Two, which clearly states that 'Sufficient operating funds, plus an ample reserve, should be (A.A.'s) prudent financial principle.'"

Here Peter poses a scenario that hits close to home:

"Consider that Canadian dollars will buy a 26-ounce bottle of whisky for about \$16.50 and a case of beer for \$12.50. If I wanted to get drunk, I'd find a way to afford these prices, and so might you. Now then, just what would you be willing to pay for a copy of the Big Book?"

New Prices Effective Jan. 1

At the October meeting, the A.A. World Service, Inc. Board approved literature price increases effective January 1, 1990. The board's decision to increase prices was based on a variety of factors. A.A.W.S. income generated by the very low literature prices of the past 18 months has not been sufficient to balance the entire budget; group contributions have not been as high as expected; paper, printing, and postage have increased. This combination of circumstances warrants literature price increases in order to keep A.A.'s 1990 budget balanced. New Catalog/Order Form is enclosed.

New G.S.O. Staffers Joanie M. and Mike K. Hail from Texas and Pa.

The General Service Office welcomes two new members to the staff—Joanie M., of Houston, Texas, and Mike K., of Allentown, Pennsylvania. Seasoned service veterans, they bring the rich experience of regional backgrounds to their respective assignments on the Literature and Treatment Facilities desks.

Says Joanie: "I'm an East Texas gal, born and bred in the Houston area. Texans are known as talkers, yet I've found that the qualifications at some meetings here in New York tend to run longer than they do back home. Also, our discussion meetings generally focus on a topic, while here, they seem to be less structured."

What doesn't vary from place to place, Joanie points out, "is the shared language of the heart." With or without a drawl, whether in English, French, or Japanese, "it transcends language barriers for A.A.s everywhere."

Since coming to G.S.O. in September, Joanie has been busy learning the many details of the Literature assignment and corresponding with A.A. members in the West Central and California regions. "The work is far more detailed than I had anticipated," she says, "and I am amazed at the lengths to which the staff members will go to help individual A.A. members and groups. They are fully engaged in serving our primary purpose."

An A.A. member since October 1975, Joanie looks back on her pre-sobriety years as "another lifetime." An alumna of the University of Texas, she completed graduate studies and went on to work in hospital administration. Several years earlier, she switched to professional practice management, acting as a financial consultant to physicians in private practice. "My interest in this area coincided with my second marriage," she recalls. "My first marriage had been short lived, and I was determined to make this one last. It did, for about ten years. A special blessing from my first marriage was my son, Mike, who died at age seventeen."

During these years when her drinking was accelerating, Joanie also managed a tire retreading company and a stable of racehorses, and found herself "cooking for eight people," including her husband's two children and a step-grandson she would raise for nine years. "So, although I don't have children of my own," she says thoughtfully, "I know a lot about what makes young people tick. I identify with them and love them."

By 1975, Joanie's drinking was out of control; and in late October, she hit bottom. "I heard voices, but nobody was there," she says. "Of course, I was hallucinating." Friends took her to a Houston hospital, where she found what was to become her home group. "Slowly, I became active in the La Branch Street A.A. Group, which rents space from the hospital," she relates, "and found a way not to drink. It turned my life around."

During her early years in the Fellowship, Joanie traveled with racehorses to tracks as far from home as Arkansas, Kentucky and New Jersey. "The rootlessness of the existence would have threatened my sobriety," she says, "but for the help I received everywhere I went. For those who don't know, there are great meetings at the country's racetracks!"

Meanwhile, Joanie was attracted to service in A.A., "after serving as a general service representative (G.S.R.) for the La Branch Street Group," she notes, "I became a district committee member (D.C.M.) and gained experience as area treasurer after chairing the area's first Public Information committee, and the 1990 and 1995 International Convention Bid committees." Joanie's professional life merged with her recovery in April 1988, when she became executive secretary of the Intergroup Association in Houston. "My, that's a busy place," she exclaims. "That staff was supportive in every way when the time came to depart for New York and G.S.O. Pulling up roots has been hard, but I feel that I have a wonderful opportunity to serve the Fellowship that has given my life meaning, direction and purpose."

Like Joanie, Mike K. is finding that work at G.S.O. offers a "new and exciting perspective" of the Fellowship worldwide. "My Treatment Facilities assignment is so varied," he says, "and every day brings something new. I'm learning the fine art of letter writing, on any number of topics. This is an important aspect of my work,

because I correspond not only with treatment facilities patients and personnel but also with A.A.s in the Northeastern United States and Western Canada."

Mike, who came to G.S.O. in July, was specially moved by a letter from an Ohio treatment center counselor seeking A.A. literature for a deaf client. "I immediately sent him pamphlets and service material specifically directed to deaf alcoholics," Mike says. The counselor was thrilled with the "care package," Mike reports, "and was very grateful to G.S.O. for responding so quickly. Then he ordered the video film of 'How It Works,' adapted from Chapter Five of the Big Book. Recently released, the film prominently features signage along with a voiceover. The exact text is captioned at the bottom of each frame."

Born in Philadelphia, the seventh in a family of nine children, Mike spent his growing-up years in Wilkes-Barre, where he graduated with a B.A. degree in English from King's College. "I found alcohol in my second week at college," he says. "I was 18 and loved it. I was drunk on and off for the next eight years, until I was well into graduate school at the University of Virginia. While home on summer vacation in July 1980, I woke up one morning feeling sick, miserable and hopeless, and phoned the local A.A. answering service. With help, I went off to my first meeting. I was shaking from head to foot but managed to get an important message through my thick, aching head: 'If you want to be sober, don't pick up the first drink.'"

Mike is philosophical about his early dreams: "I never did finish graduate school, or fulfill my fancy of being an English professor in an esteemed university setting; but, with a lot of help, I did save my life in A.A. and have tried to help other alcoholics do the same. Much that's happened is better than anything I could have imagined."

After sobering up, Mike became a computer programmer and analyst. He also became involved in A.A. service, first as G.S.R. for the Fresh Air Group in Wilkes-Barre, and after moving to Allentown, as a G.S.R. for the Young People's Group before becoming D.C.M. "District work opened my eyes to all areas of service," he remembers. "I was exercising people skills I didn't know I had, or that I could develop while sitting hunched over a computer. At some point, the thought struck me that A.A. service was so rewarding—wouldn't it be great to do the same thing full-time!"

Spotting an "ad" for a new G.S.O. staff member in *Box 4-5-9*, Mike responded, only to learn that the position had been filled. "I forgot all about it," he says, "and went about my business as usual. Then, last April, G.S.O. asked me to come in for an interview—and here I am."

One of Mike's key tasks has been "putting the finishing touches" on a new film for patients and personnel in treatment facilities. The 15-minute film, which will

also be available as a Twelfth Step tool to A.A.s who carry the message of sobriety into these centers, is slated for completion in 1990.

Good Will and Gratitude Ring In the Holidays

Each year as the holidays roll in, brightly colored cards from A.A.s worldwide flood G.S.O. with the light of good will, gratitude and A.A. love.

Small, large, gilt-edged and plain, and decorated in the colors of Christmas with everything from madonnas to Christmas trees, candles and shining stars, the greetings come in many tongues. "God Jul, Goth Nyth Ar," reads the Christmas 1988 card from A.A.'s "Servicekontor" in Stockholm, Sweden. "Gelukkelig Nieuwjaar," writes a delegate from Belgium, while an A.A. in Japan, where Christmas is not celebrated, sends New Year greetings: "Shinen Akei-Mashi-Te Omede-Toh." And from the Illinois Tribes: "May Christmas bring Friends to your Fireside, Peace to your Pathway, And Good Health throughout the New Year."

What makes the holidays so special is that people everywhere communicate briefly in the language of the heart—something that A.A.s do all year long. You don't have to know Hawaiian to translate *Mele Kalikimaka*, or speak Spanish to understand what *¡Felice Navidad!*, inscribed on a red-and-green card, is about. And when

one A.A. tells another, "Thank you for my sobriety," the meaning is as clear as a crystal bell.

For many, the holidays can be a lonely, depressing, impoverished time. But A.A.s everywhere know it is better to reach out in pain than not at all—and crucial to the maintenance of our sobriety. Last year one A.A. sent G.S.O. his own special holiday greeting, typed on orange paper adorned with two Christmas seals depicting a tree and a star. [He signed himself "Waynonomous," apparently in a play on words. A Greek word, *anonymous* means "without (*an*) a name (*onymous*)," so the writer in effect signed himself *with* a name.]

"Please accept this as a humble substitution for the Christmas card I can't afford," he wrote. "Before starting this letter, I had to go and get a cup of coffee. It seems as though I'm not me without a drink in front of me. But I didn't pick one up today. If I had, talk about life and joy would be meaningless.

"Whether we light a Christmas tree, a menorah, or simply a candle, the act is one of turning from darkness. This season is not only for children. It's for the young at heart. I feel younger as I put purpose back into my life and push death further and further from my mind.

"Acceptance, humility and love provide a capacity for peace and joy. For me, that's what Christmas is about, what Chanukah is about, what the joy of living is about. Life in the Fellowship is a celebration of being alive. Thank you for being there to share with me in the spirit of the holidays."



Treatment Facilities

'Every Day I Don't Drink Is a Holiday!'

As A.A.s who have been there know, a treatment facility at Christmas is hardly a hothouse of health and good cheer. And yet, it's the time of year when A.A.s inside and outside come together in a specially sensitive way—one that wraps the gift of sobriety in ties of friendship and gratitude.

Many A.A.s involved in treatment facilities service work make a point of visiting these centers during the holidays. Says Bob P., of Spring Valley, New York: "The people in treatment are even more vulnerable than—and so responsive to the A.A. message and its bearer. They are touched that a comparative stranger would take the time on Christmas or New Year's Day to bring

them a meeting; and it makes them feel better and more hopeful about themselves." He is quick to emphasize that T.F. service "does wonders for my sobriety. Working with these alcoholics at the difficult crossroads between active alcoholism and sobriety keeps my memory green. It reminds me that every day I don't drink is a holiday!"

Bob, who has taken meetings into treatment centers for most of his 33 years in A.A., recalls that he used to visit New York City's old Towns Hospital—the "drunk tank" where co-founder Bill W. finally sobered up during the 1934 Christmas season, with considerable help from his friends Ebby T. and Dr. William Silkworth, and experienced his spiritual awakening. "When I used to visit, during the '50s," Bob relates, "there was an A.A. day room that had been dubbed 'Duffy's Tavern.' One evening, when I was trying to talk a hard-drinking prospect into entering Towns, I mentioned Duffy's Tavern as a lure. The reluctant fellow brightened for the first time. 'That's great,' he exclaimed. 'Do they got a piano?'"

No matter how slender their hold on sobriety, treatment patients manage to hang on to their humor. One A.A. relates that she walked into a hospital meeting room on New Year's Eve, dressed to the nines in sequined silk. "I hope you don't mind my coming like this," she apologized. "It's just that I'm going to a party directly from here." The patients smiled. "Oh, that's no problem," said one of them reassuringly. "What bothers us is when the World Series is on, and some dumb A.A. sashays in and turns off the TV."

Around the holidays, the identification between patients and outside A.A.s seems to intensify. This year, according to transplanted Texan Jane F., her Grapevine Unity Group is hosting both a Thanksgiving dinner and a Christmas buffet for patients at a local facility. "I know from my own experience how bleak this time can be," she says. "Nine years ago, I was out on the streets of Dallas, 1,900 miles from my home in Rochester, New York. I had no money, no friends, no place to go. That Christmas before I found A.A. was a lonely, terrifying time."

Jane's fellow Texan Les W., of Kaufman, has similar memories. "I was in rehab at Easter almost five years ago," he recalls. "I felt like a captive, degraded and isolated, so I know what our visits mean to the patients." Last New Year's Eve, Les took a meeting to a facility just outside San Antonio. "It was wonderful," he says. "We talked about getting back to basics—finding a sponsor, staying out of bars and going to meetings. The patients were appreciative, and I felt good about bringing some light into their lives. Besides, we have an expression around here about treatment center work: 'If you don't go (to meetings) there, you're liable to end up there.'"

For Steven C., of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, the best

treatment center meeting he ever led "took place on Thanksgiving Day. The night before I had attended a meeting of general service representatives, where we'd been screaming our lungs out about something or other. I'll never forget walking into that center the next day. The folks were sitting quietly in their bathrobes, and I felt such a sense of peace. This is what A.A. is all about, I thought to myself. This is where I want to be." Steven came into A.A. through the treatment center route. "My marriage was falling apart," he explains, "and a counselor advised me to go to rehab. The people there stressed the importance not just of working the A.A. program but of getting involved in service. 'The stronger the connection, the stronger your chances are of staying sober,' they told me, and it has proved true. What I didn't know then was the ripple effect my sobriety would have. Today, six years later, my wife, Anne, is in A.A. and so is half my family."

Steven, together with his good friend Robert M., started a meeting program at a detox facility about four years ago. "When Robert walked in for the first time," Steven remembers, "he appeared so at home and relaxed. I just hung on to him until I got my bearings."

Says Robert: "The patients were surprised when we showed up on holidays. We felt it was important for us to be there. As a treatment center alumnus, I know it's tough for those alcoholics—you don't get a lot of attention in detox!"

When talking to patients, Robert says, "I get a missionary zeal. I so much want them to join us in A.A. because I know what it has done for me. That's why service is integral to my life every day, holidays included."

Correctional Facilities

Out-of-State A.A.s Share Ideas and Information At Tennessee Workshops

Correctional facilities chairpersons from as far away as Florida, Missouri and Virginia are sharing their areas' experience and concerns at a series of stimulating workshops hosted by the Tennessee State Correctional Facilities Committee.

"We initiated the workshops in August 1988," says secretary Cheryl L., "and they have been a gold mine

of information. They are open to those who work in corrections and to all interested A.A.s. So far, about 75 people have come to each of the workshops, which are held twice a year in various locations throughout Tennessee."

Several out-of-state C.F. committee chairpersons "have gone out of their way to participate," Cheryl says. "Pat K. of Missouri drove 2,200 miles to be with us, and he paid the traveling expenses out of his own pocket."

"The out-of-state A.A.s have shared generously," Cheryl adds, "and were grateful to G.S.O. for giving us the list of contacts, such as Bob T., North Florida state chairperson. He is a one-man team, since there is no committee as such in his area; he emphasized the need for A.A. volunteers, saying that "if you can help just one alcoholic in your lifetime, you've made a difference."

At the same workshop, Virginia chairperson Will T. described his state's active contact sponsorship program. The C.F. committees there work closely with parole officers, who have been most cooperative in arranging contact between volunteer A.A.s and inmates about to be released. "In Tennessee," Cheryl observes, "we have just printed a confidential directory of A.A. contact persons that is being distributed to parole officers."

Tennessee C.F. committee member Kyle C. told a story that illustrates the importance of clear communication between corrections people and A.A.s on the outside. At one state facility, he related, "Some of us A.A. farmers wanted to take the inmates a batch of watermelons. One warden said no, then another said yes, and the right hand didn't know what the left hand was doing. We finally straightened everything out and had ourselves a great watermelon party; but we were once again reminded the warden is the prison. His word is law."

One problem everyone seems to have in common, Cheryl reports, "is a tangle of bureaucratic red tape, lots of it. For example, many state correctional facilities, including ours, require certification of volunteers—a procedure that involves a thorough background check and about six hours of orientation. Additionally, the volunteers must either have been sober, or had a trouble-free court record, for the previous five years. In Tennessee, this really puts people off."

Still, Cheryl declares, "there's almost nothing we can't deal with when we put our minds to it, and right now we have some exciting irons in the fire. Our C.F. committee is working with the governor's staff to establish special A.A. programs in all our state facilities. Once the program is in place, there will be three mandatory A.A. meetings a week at each location. We also have eight-week A.A. orientation sessions set up at two facilities, which are run by the inmates themselves. They tell us that the men are involved and talking about real nitty-gritty issues."

C.P.C.

Connecticut A.A.s Use Personal Approach To Reach Professionals

When members of Connecticut's District 6 Committee on Cooperation With the Professional Community make an A.A. presentation to area professionals, they don't hand them just a contact number hooked up to an answering machine. They present a C.P.C. committee card with their names and personal phone numbers written in, along with the printed number and mailing address of the local A.A. answering service. And it works.

"Recently," says Chris H., of Norwalk, outgoing District 6 chairperson and Connecticut State co-chairperson, "16 of our people gave eight A.A. orientation sessions for the Greenwich Police Department. Soon afterward, a couple of the attending police officers were called to the home of a woman who had been involved in a neighborhood dispute. The woman, who was very drunk, said she wanted to stop drinking and asked for help. The officers offered to take her to a hospital detox unit, but she refused. The men were stymied; then one of them remembered his C.P.C. contact card, fished it out of his wallet and made the call. Within a half hour, two A.A.s were on the scene. The upshot was that the woman received help—and the officers felt a new trust in A.A., stemming from the assurance that they could make one-on-one contact."

This personalized approach is time consuming, Chris acknowledges, "but if it turns even one alcoholic's life around, it's worth it." He further reports that dialogue between the C.P.C.s and professionals is "increasingly candid—with lots of meat and potatoes—and we find that we're able to clear up many misconceptions."

For example: During the question-answer period at the end of one orientation session, attended mainly by alcoholism counselors, one of them expressed a "real resentment." It seems that he had sent a client on physician-prescribed medication to an A.A. meeting, where she was told by a member in no uncertain terms to "get off the stuff immediately."

"Our speaker responded in several ways," Chris relates. "First, he explained that the client was hearing the personal opinion of just one A.A. Then, noting that 'we are not doctors—we do not prescribe treatment,' he stressed the Fellowship's singularity of purpose. He also gave the counselor some helpful pamphlets, including 'The A.A. Member—Medications and Other Drugs,' and 'A.A. as a Resource for the Medical Profession.'"

At another orientation session, Chris says, a policeman asked: "If we arrest a drunk, will A.A. assume responsibility for taking him out of jail for the night?" The speaker's response: "No, we don't assume any legal responsibility. On the other hand, we would be happy to go into the jail and talk to the prisoner, provided that he is willing to talk to us."

Says Chris: "There are many things that we may know and take for granted in A.A. But we shouldn't jump to the conclusion that professionals and other people outside the program are equally aware. At an orientation session hosted by the Stamford Family and Children's Services, a doctor wanted to know if a Catholic client should be referred only to meetings held in Catholic churches; Jews, to meetings held only in synagogues or temples, and so on. We A.A.s know that we're welcome at meetings everywhere—our position is set forth clearly in our Preamble. But we can't assume that knowledge for others.

"We need to make it clear," he stresses, "that there are no foolish questions either inside or outside A.A. Many a sick alcoholic is referred to us by a policeman, counselor, physician, member of the clergy or other professional in the community. In order to reach these alcoholics with our message, we need to encourage open communication with the front-line people who frequently see them first."

P.I.

A P.I. Overview

Hi everyone! Happy holidays! My name is Richard and I'm an alcoholic.

You may find it unusual to have an article in *Box 4-5-9* start in the first person, but I have just rotated into the Public Information assignment here at G.S.O. and I wanted to introduce myself. It is my hope to not only work with members of P.I. committees throughout the Fellowship, but to try to have a dialogue so that we may all have the best information possible to do our job in carrying the message to the still-suffering alcoholic.

There are some important things going on within the realm of Public Information these days. We hope that all of you who are doing P.I. work on committees throughout the U.S. and Canada will take time to share with us the minutes of your committee meetings at the group, district, area, or intergroup level, as well as

stories of things that have worked or have not worked in carrying the message of A.A. to the public, through the media, through exhibits at health fairs, through your work in schools and any other methods that you have tried.

We would also like to hear how your P.I. committees work with the area Cooperation With the Professional Community committees in dividing the work between carrying the message to the public, and carrying the message to alcoholics through professionals.

There is a great deal of concern and many questions about anonymity these days. We seem to have cycles where there are many anonymity breaks and then it gets quiet for a while. We receive reports of many discussions throughout the Fellowship on the subject of anonymity, and about whether it and our Traditions are outdated or still extremely important for us to observe and to pass on our knowledge about these Traditions to newcomers.

There seems to be an increasing number of people who have reported problems in the media about affiliation with other organizations, or the misuse of confidential A.A. lists or directories. We have been busy for the past year producing a new set of radio public service announcements. These have gone out to many P.I. chairpersons throughout the U.S. and Canada, and we are anxious to hear from you about how those are being received in your area. We also sent these p.s.a.'s to 300 randomly selected radio stations, and you may have heard them on the air by now. Please share your observations about how people in the Fellowship comment about these new p.s.a.'s.

We would also like to know who the new chairpersons are in your area, district and local P.I. committees, so that we can add their names to our mailing list to receive *Box 4-5-9* and a Public Information Workbook.

We feel that the core work of Alcoholics Anonymous will be done locally, and we want to be a good resource for you in accomplishing your goals. So please let us know what your needs are, and how we may better serve you as you do your work.

If you have questions or problems in doing Public Information work, please discuss these matters at your local committee meetings, have group consciences, depend upon the resources of your area committees and feel free to call our Public Information desk.

In short, Public Information work may be among the most exciting challenges of the Fellowship, and is one of the most interesting ways to provide service in our communities and to carry the message of Alcoholics Anonymous to alcoholics who still suffer.

It's nice to meet you and we're looking forward to hearing from you soon, so that we might all share in this exciting work.

Twelve Tips on Keeping Your Holiday Season Sober and Joyous

Holiday parties without liquid spirits may still seem a dreary prospect to new A.A.s. But many of us have enjoyed the happiest holidays of our lives sober — an idea we would never have dreamed of, wanted, or believed possible when drinking. Here are some tips for having an all-round ball without a drop of alcohol.



1 Line up extra A.A. activities for the holiday season. Arrange to take newcomers to meetings, answer the phones at a clubhouse or central office, speak, help with dishes, or visit the alcoholic ward at a hospital.



2 Be host to A.A. friends, especially newcomers. If you don't have a place where you can throw a formal party, take one person to a diner and spring for the coffee.



3 Keep your A.A. telephone list with you all the time. If a drinking urge or panic comes — postpone everything else until you've called an A.A.



4 Find out about the special holiday

parties, meetings, or other celebrations given by groups in your area, and go. If you're timid, take someone newer than you are.



5 Skip any drinking occasion you are nervous about. Remember how clever you were at excuses when drinking? Now put the talent to good use. No office party is as important as saving your life.



6 If you have to go to a drinking party and can't take an A.A. with you, keep some candy handy.



7 Don't think you have to stay late. Plan in advance an "important date" you have to keep.



8 Go to church. Any church.



9 Don't sit around brooding. Catch up on those books, museums, walks, and letters.



10 Don't start now getting worked up about all those holiday temptations. Remember — "one day at a time."



11 Enjoy the true beauty of holiday love and joy. Maybe you cannot give material gifts — but this year, you can give love.



12 "Having had a . . ." No need to spell out the Twelfth Step here, since you already know it.

Flip up this end of page—many events listed on reverse side

BOX 4|5|9 BULLETIN BOARD

Items and Ideas on Area Gatherings for A.A.s — Via G.S.O.

HOLIDAY ISSUE 1989

Calendar of Events

Events listed here are presented solely as a service to readers, not as an endorsement by the General Service Office. For any additional information, please use the addresses provided.

December

- 1-3 — *Jacksonville, Florida*. 14th N. Fl/S. Ga Gratitude Weekend. Write: Ch., Box 51134, Jacksonville Beach, FL 32250
- 1-3 — *Wichita, Kansas*. Southwest Regional Forum. Write: Sec., Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163
- 1-3 — *Del Rio, Texas*. Border Conf. Write: Ch., Box 395, Del Rio, TX 78840
- 1-3 — *Nagpur, Maharashtra State, India*. Sixth General Service Conf. Write: Ch., 5/4 S.E. Railway Colony, Wanjari Nagar, Ajni, Nagpur-440 003, India.
- 8-9 — *Stikeston, Missouri*. Ninth Five Corners Conv. Write: Ch., 205 N. Jackson, Kennett, MO 63857
- 8-10 — *Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada*. 1989 B.C./Yukon Area Conv. Write: Ch., Box 76887, Station "S", Vancouver, BC V5R 5T3
- 8-10 — *Houston, Texas*. Big Book Study Conf. Write: Tr., 16915 Methil Dr., Spring, TX 77379-4359
- 15-17 — *Taegu, Korea*. Christmas Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 154, 121st Hospital, APO, San Francisco, CA 96301
- 29-Jan 1 — *Karlsruhe, West Germany*. Roundup. Write: Ch., Bldg. #9051, Karlsruhe Army Airfield, Smiley Barracks, FRG, APO NY 09164
- 31-Jan 1 — *Colorado Springs, Colorado*. Intergroup Alkathon. Write: Ch., 2609 East St. Vrain, Colorado Springs, CO 80909

January

- 5-7 — *Dodge City, Kansas*. Southwest Kansas Conf. Write: Ch., 1601 Wooden Road, Dodge City, KS 67801
- 12-14 — *Jamestown, North Dakota*. District 6 — Ninth Annual Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 1030, Jamestown, ND 58402
- 12-14 — *Yakima, Washington*. First Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 10741, Yakima, WA 98909
- 13-15 — *Gainesville, Florida*. No. Florida Area Conf. Write: Sec., 1906 Skyland Drive, Tallahassee, FL 32303
- 19-21 — *Montgomery, Alabama*. Al/NW Fl Area Assembly. Write: Ch., Box 362, Camden, AL 36726-0362
- 19-23 — *Townsville, Queensland, Australia*. Island Camp-Over. Write: Ch., 3/6 Eclipse Street, Rowes Bay, Townsville, Queens-

- land, Australia 4810
- 25-28 — *Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada*. Winter Conf. Write: Ch., Box 236, St. James P.O., Winnipeg, MB R3J 3R4
- 26-28 — *Casa Grande, Arizona*. Sahuaro Agape Weekend. Write: Ch., Box 42470, Tucson, AZ 85733
- 26-28 — *Biloxi, Mississippi*. Gulf Coast Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 1502, Gulfport, MS 39502
- 26-28 — *Whitefish, Montana*. Sober-Ski. Write: Ch., Box 326, St. Ignatius, MT 59865
- 26-28 — *Nanaimo, British Columbia, Canada*. 22nd Rally. Write: Ch., 102-3464 Hillside Avenue, Nanaimo, BC V9T 2Y8
- 26-28 — *Kindersley, Saskatchewan, Canada*. Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 1644, Kindersley, SK S0L 1S0

February

- 1-4 — *Ft. Walton Beach, Florida*. Emerald Coast Jamboree. Write: Ch., Box 875, Ft. Walton Beach, FL 32549
- 2-4 — *Christchurch, New Zealand*. 27th National Conv. Write: Sec., Box 2062, Christchurch, New Zealand
- 2-4 — *Berchtesgaden, West Germany*. Spirituality Weekend. Write: Ch., 5th Gen. Hos., Box 297, APO New York 09154-3345
- 2-4 — *Cebu City, The Philippines*. Eighth National Conv. Write: Ch., Box 280, Cebu City 6000, Philippines
- 9-11 — *Camrose, Alberta, Canada*. 10th Annual Valentine's Roundup. Write: Ch., 4610-61 Street, Camrose, AB T4V 2H7
- 16-18 — *Sacramento, California*. 13th Annual Spring Fling. Write: Ch., Box 19548, Sacramento, Ca 95819-0548
- 16-18 — *Kings Island, Ohio*. S.W. Ohio Seventh Mini-Conf. Write: Ch., 710 Miami St., Waynesville, OH 45068

Closed Meeting Topics From the Grapevine

For more detailed suggestions, see the pages noted.

December (page 13): "Getting help"; the holidays; Step Twelve; anonymity

January (page 13): Our common welfare; taking risks in sobriety; the group conscience

- 16-18 — *Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada*. 18th Annual North Shore Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 91086, West Vancouver, BC V7V 3N3
- 16-18 — *Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada*. 23rd Annual Roundup. Write: Ch., 1122 Byna Avenue, Saskatoon, SK S7L 5J5
- 16-18 — *Syracuse, New York*. Third Annual Salt City Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 871, Syracuse, NY 13205

Planning a Future Event?

Please send your information on February, March or April events, two days or more, in time to reach G.S.O. by *December 10*, the calendar deadline for the February/March issue of *Box 4-5-9*.

For your convenience and ours — please type or print the information to be listed on the Bulletin Board page, and mail to us:

Date of event: from _____ to _____, 19____

Name of event: _____

Place (city, state or prov.): _____

For information, write: (exact mailing address) _____

Contact phone # (for office use only): _____

Cut along dotted line, and post this page on your group's bulletin board