

13th World Service Meeting Delegates Plug In to Unity

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At one of the many sharing sessions, Japanese delegate Akiyo M. invited everyone present to join in the celebration of her country's 20th A.A. anniversary in 1995. There also was sharing on how general service offices sell literature to intergroups, bookstores, treatment centers and other outside agencies. Brazil, for example, gives 35% discounts to intergroups. Mexico gives discounts to intergroups that are supported by area committees. El Salvador gives 15% discounts to intergroups; to neighboring countries, it allows a 12% discount on books and 10% on pamphlets.

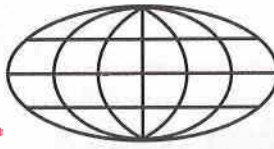
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development of world services; (2) to strengthen general service work already existing abroad; (3) to increase the number of service centers; (4) to provide for them an orderly plan of evolution; and (5) to assist in strengthening their self-support."

While not a decision-making body, the biennial meeting does provide a forum for sharing experience and ideas on ways to maintain A.A. unity and continuity around the world. In Colombia, the 38 delegates from 25 countries spoke a plethora of languages, but they communicated just fine. Most of them were conversant with English; and for those who could speak only Spanish, there were simultaneous translations at the main sessions. But Pedro Hernandez P. of Mexico spoke for many of his fellow delegates when he said, "We don't need to talk the different languages to communicate. Our hands embrace in love. We are at home."

John G., the General Service Office staff member on the International desk, reports that throughout the week, "there was plenty of good, powerful Colombian coffee, though we had to ask for larger cups since Colombians drink from tiny little ones. Interestingly, the hotel had the temerity—or thoughtfulness—to remove all the booze bottles from the rooms registered under Alcoholics Anonymous." John adds that the World Service Meeting "was an unforgettable experience in my



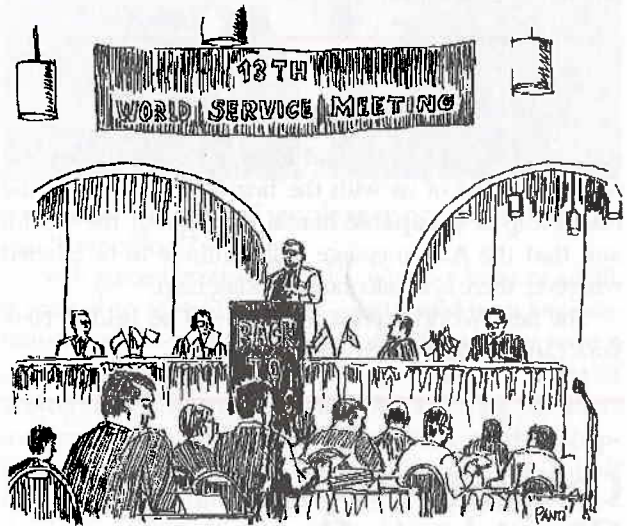
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A.A. journey. The unity and love expressed during the week left most of us with the firm impression that the Fellowship is in capable hands throughout the world, and that the A.A. message will continue to be carried wherever there is an alcoholic seeking help.”

The next World Service Meeting will be held in New York City, October 27-31, 1996.

Countries Help Countries to Carry The A.A. Message

“A.A. World Services has never let financial considerations stop us from providing start-up literature for those countries unable to cover the costs of their own translations and acquisitions, not even when there was concern about the financial picture at the General Service Office. Thus, the fledgling International Literature Monetary Fund is proving to be of great help to A.A.W.S. in carrying the A.A. message through our literature.”

Speaking at the Thirteenth World Service Meeting in Cartagena, Colombia, last October, G.S.O. general manager George D. explained that the Fund was born of a recommendation by the Eleventh World Service Meeting in 1990 that it be set up to help defray the costs of furnishing literature worldwide where needed. “Contributions began to come in immediately from the participating countries,” George reported. “To date \$44,730 has been received; we have allocated \$22,000 from these funds to cover one-half the cost of eight projects, mainly the printing and reprinting of books and pamphlets in six languages: Bulgarian, Czech, Hungarian, Romanian, Turkish and Ukrainian. The remaining expenses are defrayed by A.A.W.S., from the proceeds of literature sales in the United States/Canada.

“Our budgeting process must be extremely flexible,” George commented, “since we work with many entities

overseas in connection with the literature projects and need to be prepared for glitches that can and do arise. There may be style changes occurring from chapter to chapter, for example, or whole sections may be missing. Finally, though, the manuscript is typeset, proofread and the mechanicals are sent to G.S.O.” He explained that the books for Eastern Europe are printed in Vienna, with the main inventory stored there except for a small supply sent to G.S.O.-Germany in Munich. Large orders are then filled from Vienna, the smaller ones from Munich. (G.S.O.-Munich performs this service free of charge as part of its contribution to carrying the message worldwide.) Translations done for African, Asian and Mid-Eastern countries are manufactured and stored in the United States. As for South and Central America, they have been publishing literature themselves for some time, George notes.

“Clearly,” he says, “strong support of the International Literature Monetary Fund demonstrates the recognition of A.A.s everywhere that the responsibility to meet the need for A.A. literature is one that A.A.s everywhere share. It means that they have an opportunity to participate in this vital work as their means allow.”

Deadline for Directory Information—March 1, 1995

A reminder for area delegates: If you haven't already returned your group information printouts, please remember that the *final* deadline for inclusion in the directories is March 1, 1995.

Printouts corrected to show up-to-date group information and returned to G.S.O. by the areas, will be used to produce the 1995/96 A.A. Directories: Eastern U.S., Western U.S., and Canadian. These confidential directories list groups and contacts; delegates and trustees; central offices/intergroups/answering services; and special international contacts.

New from G.S.O.

- A.A. Guidelines on Serving Alcoholics With Special Needs. A service piece to assist A.A. members in their efforts to make A.A. accessible to all alcoholics seeking help. (MG-16) 15¢ each.
 - *Alcoholics Anonymous* (Ukrainian). (SUK-1), \$4.60.
 - *Came to Believe* (Hungarian). (SJ-6), \$2.00.
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Tours at G.S.O.—‘It’s Your Office’

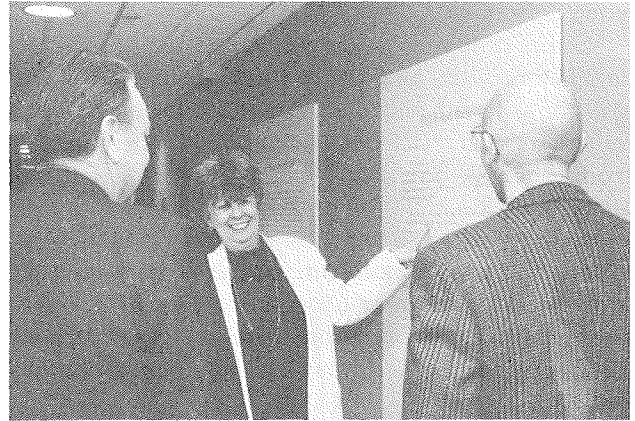
They come from as far as the Ukraine or as near as Brooklyn; in groups of twenty or as a single Loner; with enthusiastic willingness, and sometimes feeling the half-humorous pressure (“Don’t you dare go to New York without dropping by”) of a determined sponsor back home. In ever-increasing numbers they come, day in, day out, to G.S.O.’s offices on Manhattan’s upper West Side. What each and every one of them gets is a detailed, guided tour by Margie Janicek.

Margie, a nonalcoholic, has been at her job as “tour guide” (and receptionist) for twelve of the thirteen years since she came to G.S.O. When she began, the then general manager, Bob P., used to say to the visitors Margie led through A.A.’s service offices, “This is your office.” Margie says she’s “borrowed this phrase many times while giving tours, giving Bob credit, of course, for the words of welcome.”



While interest and curiosity in visiting A.A.’s General Service Office are always high, there’s periodically the visitor who seems to feel he’s on a pilgrimage, “as if he’s arriving at Mecca,” Margie says. Several years ago, for example, a gentleman “from somewhere in Canada, I believe, got off the elevator, stepped into the reception lobby, made a run for the A.A. symbol on the wall, and kissed it!” Margie relates. Others are not so demonstrative, but they make it clear they’d never dream of coming to New York without visiting the office they’ve heard so much about since getting sober.

The change in G.S.O.’s location a few years ago, from midtown Manhattan, to a seemingly more out-of-the-way spot five miles north, has hardly put a dent in the number of visitors. In 1993, there were 1,237 visitors, compared to 1,249 in 1990, and 1,166 in 1988. Not so surprisingly, perhaps, relatively few visitors are from the New York City area. “How many New Yorkers visit the Statue of Liberty?” Margie asks. “I guess they take us for



granted, or else a lot of people may not realize they can visit ‘their office.’”

Each guided group of visitors, whether large or small, is treated to Margie’s special—you could even say custom-tailored—tour, since each individual may have a particular question, which Margie makes a point of answering as thoroughly as possible or getting the information from the appropriate person. In fact, when shepherding visitors through the office’s one-and-a-half floors, which house ninety-five employees, Margie introduces them all to staff members (the Grapevine offices included), and the services director, as well as to the general manager “who is always available,” Margie explains. When Margie is not available Darlene Smith and Cathy Femia, (nonalcoholics) from support services, cheerfully double as tour guides.

G.S.O. also receives a large number of Spanish-speaking visitors each year. For the past ten years, Stella Gallon (nonalcoholic), the bilingual staff assistant on the Spanish Services assignment, has been giving the tours in Spanish.

Many visitors are surprised by the size of the space G.S.O. occupies (“Some of them expect one-and-a-half rooms,” Margie says), and are equally impressed by the scope of work and services undertaken daily at the Fellowship’s offices. Most of them, too, are particularly caught up by the lore and history of A.A., particularly when they look at just a small portion of the photographs, diligently preserved by the Archives staff. Co-founder Bill W.’s office couch is kept in Archives and there’s hardly a single visitor who passes up the chance to sit on it. Margie obliges every request to take a visitor’s picture while sitting on the couch, she says, adding that “It’s all in good humor. No one seems to be awestruck.”

Margie’s official title, she says, is that of receptionist, “but my primary purpose, if you’ll pardon the pun, is to be a tour guide. I drop everything to take people around.” Moreover, she likes the job as much now as she did twelve years ago, a fact which explains why her tour-talk never sounds rehearsed, dry or canned. “I have

the best job in the office," she gloats. "I really enjoy doing what I do. I'm more a people person than a typewriter person."

Visitors dropping by are sober anywhere from two days to forty years and they hail from as near as Mexico to as far as Japan, with every country in between represented, as well. "If I don't know the country they're from, I whisk out a map so they can show me," Margie says.

Many telephone in advance, especially large groups, to make a tour appointment, though a prior appointment is not required at all, Margie explains. Quite a few out-of-towners already know there's a regular, scheduled Friday morning A.A. meeting, so they try to come at that time.

Margie's many personal experiences in meeting visitors run the gamut from funny to moving. In the former category was the one-time visitor who "wanted to give me a tip," Margie notes. "He had the money in his hand. I guess he thought I didn't get paid for doing my job." Another of "my tourists," Margie recounts, "was a Loner, living in an area where there were no A.A. meetings at all. He heard from other Loners by mail and liked it that way, because there were no 'personality problems.'"

A moving incident occurred when a visitor began sharing with Margie that he had just taken the cook from a restaurant he frequented to a Manhattan detox. The cook did not speak English, the visitor explained; in fact, what he spoke was "an obscure language" Margie says she had never heard of. "As the story was being recounted, another gentleman got off the elevator and joined our conversation," she relates. To everyone's surprise, the new visitor happened to speak the cook's language. "Before he left my desk," Margie relates, "the second visitor had the name of the cook, the address of the detox he was in, and he was on his way to Twelve-Step the cook!"

Sobering Up in The Arctic Is Not Always Easy

Far north of Ontario, Canada, on a group of rugged, icy islands north of the Hudson Bay, live groups of Native North Americans "who may have the highest incidence of alcoholism of all the minorities," reports Tommy H., past Eastern Canada Class B (alcoholic) trustee. "These are the Inuit, or Eskimos, who struggle to exist under conditions of hardship beyond the understanding of most of us."

The total population of the settlements is about

27,000, says Tommy, "but the percentage of those hooked on alcohol is out of all proportion. One theory points to possible diet deficiencies. Little more than a generation ago, the people lived, as they had for centuries, off the land; their food was almost exclusively protein, from whale, fish, caribou and such. Occasionally they would eat berries but little else, because the growing season is so short. Consequently, the theory holds, their systems do not metabolize alcohol as efficiently as people of the south who are sustained on diets rich in vegetables, fruits and other important nutrients."

Obviously, Tommy points out, "this region is fertile ground for carrying the message of A.A., which is already surprisingly well-known. However, because the land is inaccessible to most people for long periods of time, the problems of communicating the A.A. message are enormous. In winter, depending upon how far north the sparse settlements are, there are long periods of time in which it is always night and the temperature can go down to 50 degrees below. Since there are no roads, transportation is almost exclusively by plane; weather permitting, the snowmobile has gradually replaced dog teams as a means of getting around locally. So the climate demands, and always will demand, innovative means of reaching out to alcoholics among the Inuits and other peoples in the vast Northern Remote Communities, who need all the help we can give them."

One idea gaining support is for a flourishing Southern Canadian A.A. group to sister, or sponsor, a group up north (see following article). On another optimistic note, Tommy says, "a Toronto-based treatment facility has worked successfully for about six years with the government of the Northwest Territories to bring alcoholics from the northern reaches, as far off as 6,000 miles, down for treatment.

"Most of the alcoholics are from north of the Arctic Circle, or close to it. Almost without exception they are addicted to multiple substances—and alcohol invariably is one of them. The substance-abuse problems in the Far North are of epic proportions and have severely affected the very young; and even when treatment has been provided, the newly sober alcoholics return home to situations hardly different than before. The families are the same, the friends are the same. There are relatively few people trying to stop drinking, never mind long-term A.A. members to act as sponsors. In the larger communities, of course, there are more people, more A.A. groups and more opportunities to develop healthy new habit patterns and stay away from the past. Here not only A.A. but Al-Anon have significant roles to play."

Tommy tells about one A.A. member who first sobered up at a treatment facility: "He lives far north on Baffin Island, the largest and most easterly of the Arctic

Archipelago. After a couple of relapses, he is back on track and belongs to a small A.A. group of men and women that meets every Tuesday. He says that at least 50 percent of the people have little understanding of English, and a number of them would like to have the Big Book translated into Inuktituk. Basically, however, the Inuit are not readers; however, they are gregarious and friendly, and respond well to fellowship."

In order to create a network of A.A. groups and sponsors in the arctic reaches, Tommy stresses, "native and cultural values must be treated with respect. Furthermore, the problems of alcoholism and drug abuse go hand in hand and have to be considered together. Essentially, if we wish to help suffering alcoholics who live in a harsh environment so incredibly unlike ours, it is imperative that we keep an open mind to their circumstances. Let's encourage them as best we can to join in A.A.'s program of recovery that has been so freely given to us."

Canadians Reach Out To 'Sister' Groups in Northern Remote Areas

"I drank for 35 years, I'm sober now 12. It was hell when I drank; because of A.A., I am happy today. But our numbers have gone down. We had 18 members once, we had three roundups, now there is only me. A.A., it stopped, but I'll try to get it going again. I am so glad you phoned. I need help, I'm alone. It's going to be good to have someone to talk to."

A.A. Member, Fly-In community

"We started this A.A. group in 1988, my wife and I, when we came back from the treatment center. It was a big group but lots fell off the wagon. The sober ones aren't showing up. Maybe written materials would help: pamphlets, the Twelve and Twelve, those window shades with the Steps on them. I started this group, I'm proud of that. Maybe I can try to get it going again. I know A.A. works, we just need a little help to start over."

A.A. Member, community 650 miles north of Winnipeg

When Max G., district committee member for the Northern Remote Communities, finished presenting his A.A. speakers at the Manitoba, Canada, General Assembly last September, "the room fairly vibrated with emotion," reports an A.A. who was there. "This was what the Fellowship's about, and there followed in depth sharing on ways to reach out to isolated individuals and groups in the Northwest Territories."

One plan that is steadily gaining momentum was

seeded at last year's General Service Conference, when all the Canadian delegates, along with the U.S. delegate from Alaska, met for a brainstorming session of the committee on Northern Remote Communities. Says Manitoba delegate David W.: "The idea is for one flourishing southern Canadian A.A. group to sister up with a faltering northern group for both their benefits. This way, the southern group has an outlet for its Twelfth-Step work, and the northern one has an ally—A.A.s to talk to, a source of speakers, emotional support. The aim is not so much to throw money at the small northern groups, but to reach out our hands to them and make them feel that they are part of the greater body of A.A. That would include phone calls, letters, literature and probably visits back and forth."

The isolated A.A. groups struggling to stay alive in the sprawling Northwest Territories (N.W.T.) enthusiastically welcome the idea of sister groups. "You have to understand how cut off many of these A.A.s are," David explains. "We're talking about an area half the size of the United States that spreads over four time zones, yet is sparsely populated by only 55,000 people. Many areas are impassable in winter, and even in summer you can reach some of them only with difficulty by air or water."

Alberta/N.W.T. delegate Ray M., who attended the meeting at the Conference, also heads a fledgling subcommittee on a project dubbed Cross Canada. "One of our goals," says Ray "is to redefine the areas—part of British Columbia, the B.C./Yukon, Manitoba, Alberta/N.W.T. and one area in Ontario—from the border of the Yukon all the way to the Atlantic Ocean, in order to break them down into more manageable parts. But of course, there's a tremendous amount of work to do before we can take a proposal to the General Service Conference."

Just trying to talk to alcoholics in the Northern Remote Communities is a challenge, Ray points out, and "the problems of furnishing appropriate A.A. literature are monumental. There are many different languages spoken by the Native Americans, from Cree to Inuit to Dene and Nuktatuk, and within each are several dialects. Translations of some A.A. books and pamphlets have been done, but only on a piecemeal basis. Mostly the A.A. message is carried word-of-mouth by alcoholics who have been exposed to A.A. in the treatment facilities. Many younger people speak English or French, but most of the older alcoholics are isolated, not only geographically but by language barriers. Getting through to them is a struggle reminiscent of the way it was in A.A.'s early days, and we are determined to follow through in the same spirit. We're convinced we can not just make a difference, but save lives."

How Do On-Line Meetings Log On the A.A. Service Structure?

For some years now, A.A.s using their real names or monickers such as Serenity and Ezeduzit have been accessing their computers at all hours of the day and night to “attend” meetings on local bulletin boards and over national and international electronic networks. The sharing is often as old and healing as A.A. itself, but the way it’s transmitted from one alcoholic to another is high-tech, still young, and expanding faster than you can say “Alcoholics Anonymous, It Works.”

Like all things new in A.A., the explosion of on-line meetings raises questions—about everything from anonymity to self-support to registering as a regular group with the General Service Office and supporting A.A. services worldwide. These gray areas perhaps can be resolved only with time, through sharing and discussion within the Fellowship in the spirit of its constant yardsticks: the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions.

Most A.A.s agree that on-line meetings are a godsend for people who are housebound, hearing-impaired or otherwise physically disabled. But past Western Michigan delegate Anna C., of Kalamazoo, speaks to a common concern when she writes: “One thing worrying me about registering an on-line meeting is that, although I really enjoy the discussions on the computer, it is still no substitute for ‘skin’ meetings—one drunk talking to another, sharing his or her experience,

strength and hope. How do on-line A.A.s do service work with no doors to open or coffee to make? How does one pass the hat at an on-line meeting?”

Most A.A. bulletin-board meetings are open to on-liners who are interested in being there; if they so wish, they can make a print-out of what has been said. Bruce B. of Denver, Colorado, feels that material appearing, as it frequently does, under topic headings that contain the A.A. name—not to mention the full names used by some of the A.A.s themselves—constitutes publishing at the public level, thus flying in the face of the Anonymity Tradition, among others. In a letter to G.S.O., Bruce emphasizes what he terms the delusory nature of computer bulletin boards: “There exists much new literature about human interaction in the nonphysical realm of communication, which is called ‘Cyberspace.’ It probably sounds corny, but when people sit alone and stare into a computer monitor, the illusion exists that we are ‘talking’ to someone, that this someone is our ‘dear and intimate friend,’ a trusted ally who is genial, warm and understanding. But it is an illusion; I know because I have been through it myself.”

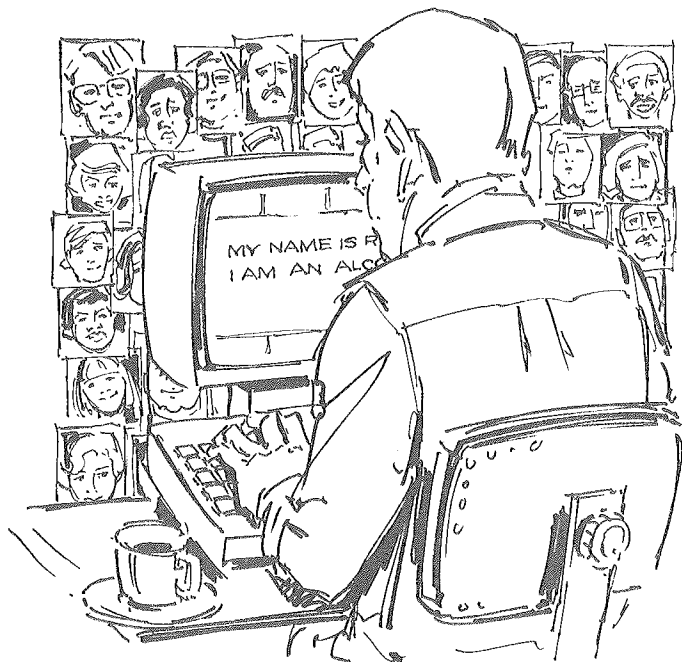
In another corner of the discussion are the enthusiasts; they feel that most criticisms are simply misconceptions—that the time has come to list on-line A.A. groups with G.S.O. and in local meeting directories as well. Jack M., of Indianapolis, originally communicated on Prodigy with an A.A. meeting called the Lamplighters. “It was a closed meeting on electronic mail for A.A.s only, and all our communications were private,” he explains. “After a while the Lamplighters split into a new meeting that uses Genie and calls itself the Interknots. Our meeting is closed, but not cliquish. We welcome any and all alcoholics with a desire to stop drinking.”

“A.A. meetings on-line have proved a wonderful addition to my regular meetings,” says Laura K. of Los Angeles. “Thanks to them, I have connected in sobriety with A.A.s all over the world I would otherwise never have known.”

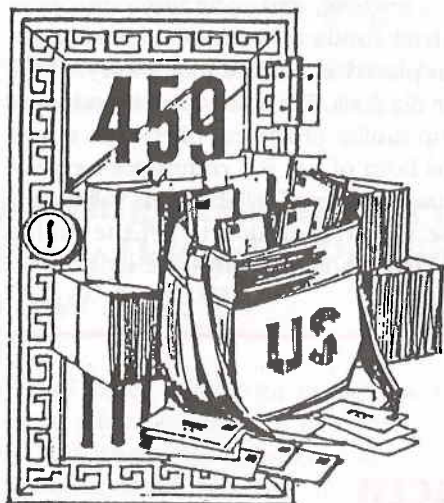
A project absorbing much of Laura’s energies these days is the Living Cyber hospitality suite for A.A.s on-line that will bring together many interactive members at the 1995 International Convention in San Diego next summer. “The hospitality committee, which presently numbers about 30 of us, is getting the word out to the Internet, to A.A.s in countries all over the world including Australia, Bulgaria, Japan, Russia and the British Isles,” Laura relates. For information she says, send E-mail to: committee-request@world.std.com.

Users should be aware that not all bulletin boards are A.A. meetings. Some computer meetings invite participation by members of various twelve-step programs.

Many questions remain: How can on-line meetings and/or groups fit into the A.A. service structure? Should



they be listed in the national and international directories and, if so, how? And where would the general service representative fit into the area structure?



From the Mailbag

“The article ‘Viewpoint: Let’s Stand Up and Speak Out’ (Box 4-5-9, Oct.-Nov. 1994, p. 2), really hit home when the writer said that too often a ‘Live and Let Live’ attitude is merely apathy in disguise.” Writing to the General Service Office from Maryland, Michael H. says that when he came into A.A., “the ‘I am responsible’ declaration on most of our literature meant that each and every one of us has the responsibility to uphold and defend the principles and Traditions of A.A. so that the newcomer may have the same chance I did to receive the gift of sobriety. I thank God every day for those oldtimers who were there to teach me the Steps, Traditions and history of the Fellowship as set forth in our literature. They also set shining examples of living the A.A. program by being truly involved in group activities and going to any lengths to help the newcomer.

“But where are the oldtimers today? I don’t see them around much; and I am truly frightened about the future of A.A. when newer leading lights tell me that ‘it’s OK to let nonalcoholics participate in our meetings; don’t rock the boat, they aren’t hurting anything, so live and let live.’

“Like others, I too speak out about our Singleness of Purpose, the importance of the Anonymity Tradition and more—but there are some days when I seem to stand alone.”

On a note of gratitude, Carolyn N., from West Virginia, writes: “Me and my husband, Tommy, are alcoholics. We thank each and every one of you at G.S.O. for sending us booklets and pamphlets and

telling us about A.A. in our area. We go to A.A. meetings Tuesdays and Saturdays. Thanks to the will of God and A.A., we have been sober now for two months. We are happy.”

Carolyn’s sentiments are echoed by Donna W. of Virginia. “Yesterday I celebrated eight months of continuous sobriety,” she writes. “I had been in treatment several times and gone to A.A. a couple of times after that, but A.A. was the last thing I really wanted. I did finally surrender, though, thanks to my sponsor and my Higher Power.”

Donna says she “can hardly wait for the chance to help someone else as desperate as I was. I know I couldn’t have stayed sober alone, much as I wanted to; it’s been tough, but I am going to make it, and I’m very grateful. In fact, my entire group, the Cedar 12&12, is grateful for your guidelines and literature in helping us to get started, and we thank you all.”

When Valerie S. of Canada went to Panacea, Florida, for a six-month stay, she thought she was the only A.A. around. Until “one wonderful day,” she writes, “when I chanced to overhear a woman saying that she couldn’t take even one drink, and that she was trying to live a Twelve-Step program. Of course I approached her; I learned her name was Helen, she was from Texas and indeed in A.A. We held our first meeting yesterday—the first ever in this fairly remote location, as far as we know. We used ideas from some of the A.A. literature for discussion, and we intend to hold a Step meeting every week. Helen has been sober two years; I have 21 years. The Texan and the Canadian—we need each other.”

“As a new general service representative,” writes Katy E., of Calabasas, California, “I was so glad to see and read the article ‘What Does Crosstalk Have to Do with Our Primary Purpose?’ (Holiday issue). This subject has been a very hot topic of discussion at two of my regular meetings. Your article gave me important information that will help us make decisions about the crosstalk issue.”

From Chicago, Dolores C. sends “thanks for the article ‘Let’s Stand Up and Speak Out’ (Oct.-Nov. 1994). There are hundreds of thousands of us A.A. members who are practicing A.A.’s principles and Traditions in all our affairs, especially within our A.A. group meetings. Also, let’s not put down our older members in order to make a point. Let us always be reminded that it’s those earlier A.A. members who were here when we got here, and many still are. Nope, I’m not advocating prestige nor power for oldtimers; but remember that through it all, they are the ‘Keep Coming Backers.’”

The same article, writes Caleb H., of Birmingham, Alabama, “brought a lump to my throat and tears to my eyes. It was an eloquent plea for a return to our basics; for adherence to our Traditions, especially our singleness of purpose.”

P.I.

The A.A. Message Goes To School in Minnesota

For the past three years, A.A.s in Northern Minnesota have steadily carried the message into high schools, thanks to a comprehensive program developed by the area Public Information committee. Reports Cheryl P. of Sauk Centre, the P.I. committee's school program coordinator: "We have given close to 200 presentations in our district and reached more than 5,000 students in grades 9-12. As we tell them at the beginning, we aren't there to lecture, but to inform, dispel misconceptions and shed light on recovery from alcoholism. Our primary purpose is to give the students some factual information about the Fellowship in language they can understand and relate to; and to make sure they realize that A.A. is here for them if they want help with a drinking problem, no price tag attached."

All participating schools have incorporated the presentations into their health classes. "Trial and error taught us," Cheryl says, "that a group of no more than 25-30 students works out best, since it permits time for questions and personal sharing. When we read the Preamble we emphasize that 'the only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.' Also, when giving our presentations, we try to have a variety of A.A.s on hand—as many as five or six—so the kids can see that A.A. knows no boundaries of age, sex, race or class. Importantly, we explain our Anonymity Tradition in depth, assuring them that their privacy and confidentiality will be respected."

Clear communication with administrators of the nine schools involved has been vital to the success of the P.I. program. Toward that end, Cheryl says, "nothing is left to chance. Every aspect of the presentation is explained beforehand, thus generating an atmosphere of staff trust, sensitivity and discretion."

At each school, the presentation is given in two parts: The first time around, the students learn what A.A. does and does not do. After being shown the film *Young People and A.A.*, they are given the pamphlet "A Message to Teenagers" and asked to answer, anonymously and as honestly as they can, the questions in the pamphlet. About a week later, after the P.I. committee volunteers have had a chance to assess the students' answers, a second orientation session is held. The students are shown the film *Hope*; and time is spent addressing specific drinking problems and patterns that may have surfaced in responses to such questions as, "Do you drink because you have problems—to relax?" and "Do you lie

about your drinking?" Finally the students are asked to rate the presentations. "The ratings we've been getting are very encouraging," says Cheryl. "Comparative analysis of the responses indicates that the students are being pretty honest too. For many, it comes as a relief to know that help is available, even if they aren't yet ready to avail themselves of it."

The program is ongoing; and pamphlet racks, purchased with district funds from the General Service Office, have been placed in each school library, along with a copy of the Big Book. For other districts and areas wishing to start up similar programs, Cheryl has a couple of suggestions born of her P.I. committee's experience: "(1) organize a group of reliable A.A. volunteers; and (2) rehearse the presentation to get the timing down pat. When that school bell rings, the kids are up and out of the room."

Treatment Facilities

Bridging the Gap— Before It's Too Late

One drunk talking to another, each of them realizing they don't have to be alone anymore; they don't have to drink to face life without gut-wrenching fear. This is what Bridge the Gap programs are all about: providing temporary contacts for alcoholics just released from treatment or correctional facilities—to accompany them to their first outside meetings, introduce them to potential sponsors and share their experience, strength and hope in recovery.

This form of Twelfth Stepping is energized in Eastern Missouri, where the Area T.F. committee's Bridging the Gap subcommittee has arranged some 3,000 temporary contacts in the past four years. For many newly sober alcoholics, these provide a lifeline to continuing sobriety, says Craig B., of St. Louis, who chairs the subcommittee.

Recently, he relates, "I called Carry T., who had just been released from a treatment facility in another town and was feeling terrified and alone. He, like so many, seemed relieved that anyone who knows how he's feeling would call and show that we care. Hope flickered for him when he learned that he would soon be contacted by a sober neighbor and taken to some A.A. meetings. He let me know that I had made his day; but he had trouble grasping the fact that *he* was making *my* day as well."

At the time, Craig says, "I did not know that Carry was in his 20s; nor did I know that Van B., the 12-years-sober contact I found for him, was 66 years old—or young, as it turned out, since he's so vigorous. They were also of different races and backgrounds, and none of it mattered a bit." The power of the shared experience worked its magic, Craig reports, and "Carry is sober today in A.A." His story shows, as co-founder Bill W. has said, "how very much alike all of us alcoholics are when we admit that the chips are finally down." (*As Bill Sees It*, p. 24)

Sharing Session Discusses: 'How Does the Public View A.A.?'

"When I joined A.A. in the mid-1970s, I heard from a woman sober since the '40s that, for her, being a member had been like belonging to a secret society. Wondering which is better, the secret society of those early days or the scrutiny of today, replete with inaccuracies and anonymity breaks, my stronger view is that we have grown and benefited from our higher profile. It helps us to carry the message and live proudly and openly in the world."

Speaking at a sharing session of the General Service Board meeting last July, Richard R., an A.A.W.S. Board director, noted that over the years most of A.A. has accepted responsibility for the spiritual principle of personal anonymity at the public level, which co-founder Bill W. called as vital to the life of A.A. as "100 percent sobriety is to the life of each and every member" (*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*).

Richard B., General Service Office staff member presently on the Correctional Facilities assignment, said that "circumstances or situations beyond our control often lead to public disclosures that make us uncomfortable. It causes a tremendous pull within us to see A.A. being discussed in a controversial manner in public, much like opening the door to a family argument."

For example, Richard said, "in connection with a trial in New York State in which the question of A.A. anonymity has been on the lips of every reporter trying to seek information, it seemed as if very few of them had much understanding of anonymity or A.A. In fact, my attempts to explain certain basic principles—our singleness of purpose, the Tradition of not getting involved in public controversy and having no opinion on outside issues—failed dismally most of the time. I felt I could look right through the telephone wires and see the reporters' eyes glazing over.

"What they really wanted to know was whether the

catalysts for the trial, both reported to be A.A. members, had betrayed A.A. principles in talking to the prosecutor, whether there really was confidentiality at A.A. meetings, and how this particular revelation could affect the Fellowship as a whole. Answers to the effect that we don't know how A.A. will be influenced, that we don't have opinions on legal issues, that these were personal decisions made by individuals but not by A.A., while maybe right for us, may not have fostered a better understanding of A.A. for those inquiring reporters."

In the final analysis, Richard B. suggested, "perhaps we can't really judge how the public perceives us, nor should we focus on it too much. Experience shows that we should concentrate our efforts on providing correct information about A.A., perhaps even correcting misinformation when we are aware of it. If overly concerned about ongoing goodwill and cooperation with the public, we could easily slip into popularity seeking, dilute our Traditions, undermine our unity and lose the energy of our reason for being—the still-suffering alcoholic.

"Of interest," Richard added, "are strong indications that A.A. is held in high regard by our friends in medicine and other professions. However, pressed in conversation, doctors rarely can explain what A.A. is about. Similarly, while A.A.'s success is widely known, and our Twelve Steps have been adopted by more than 200 organizations, very few of them are interested in our Traditions. It is as if the recovery program can be used, but that principles such as anonymity, singleness of purpose and nonaffiliation with outside groups are not so readily accepted. When others tell stories about A.A. and how it has helped people in their families, they often have only a dim understanding of the Fellowship, though they do have respect. But what they truly care about and remember is that A.A. helped somebody they love.

"For me," Richard concluded, "anonymity presents an opportunity to try to achieve something that does not come naturally to me: a measure of personal humility. For us collectively, it is sometimes difficult to be satisfied just doing what we do and not trying to 'fit into' society as a whole. Yet time has shown that for us in A.A. it's sufficient to cherish the principles which have brought us to where we are today, to have the grace to accept our place in the world, whatever it may be, and not to concern ourselves with what others might think."

Willing to Go to Any Lengths

Something clicks into place in all of us who achieve sobriety in the Fellowship and, with the passage of time, the cost of what going back out there would entail makes us see all the more clearly the tangible—and mostly intangible—gifts our precious sobriety has given us.

Roger M., of Stanton, California, has spelled out what “Willing to go to any lengths” means to him. In part, he writes, as follows:

“If it were necessary, I would find all new friends, I’d also find a new place to live, if my sobriety were in danger.

“I must be willing to become teachable, even if it means I must shut up and listen to someone I don’t like or look up to.

“I must find a sponsor with whom I can relate on a higher level than with most other alcoholics.

“I’ll give up old, comfortable ideas, if I have to — watching for things, places and people that could negatively affect my sobriety.

“My willingness has been given strength because I saw what sober people around me had. I wanted whatever that was, and though I still don’t understand a lot or see ‘how it works,’ I’ve made a decision that I am ready. Ready to be honest with myself and the people around me.

“I became more willing as I learned (sometimes balking), that *this* was the only way.

“The Big Book tells me not to be afraid. Alcoholics tell me I’m not different, that I’m not terminally unique. I’ve learned that every alcoholic has been where I am today, done the same things, thought the same things. There’s nothing new in Alcoholics Anonymous. Everything’s already been tried.

“It’s all about willingness, doing what’s been tried and true for about sixty years. Something must be working.”

Some Sharing from the Pacific Regional Forum

“It is important to carry the message to the suffering alcoholic, regardless of gender, race or creed,” said W.J. (Jim) Estelle, Jr., Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee and chairman of the General Service Board. Speaking at the Pacific Regional Forum in Boise, Idaho, last June, he added, “Sometimes we may think we don’t know how to carry the message, but someone once felt he or she didn’t know how to carry the message to you. To know how, we need to communicate with each other.”

And communicate is what the more than 450 attendees did—at meetings, presentations and the popular Ask-It-Basket general sharing session. Following is a sampling of questions asked, along with the responses given variously by trustees, delegates and members of the General Service Office staff:

Q: What importance does G.S.O. place on being part of a home group? And where does the Fellowship stand on A.A. meetings turned into drug-addiction meetings?

A.: G.S.O. doesn’t have opinions, it shares experience.

But you might be interested in the book published by the A.A. Grapevine, Inc. called *The Home Group: Heartbeat of A.A.* The whole first section carries personal articles about the importance those individuals place on the home group. As for drug addicts at A.A. meetings: The sharing in the Fellowship is that we reaffirm our primary purpose Groups struggle with this subject a lot, trying to find a balance between not wanting to chase people away and, at the same time, wanting to make sure that what’s happening at the group level is useful to the alcoholic in staying sober one day at a time.

Q: Why is the Second Tradition longer in the short form of the Traditions than it is in the long form?

A.: Co-founder Bill W. set it down that way, so who’s going to argue?

Q: How do we encourage individuals with special needs to integrate rather than separate from A.A. by going to special interest meetings?

A.: Perhaps we should separate the terms “special needs” and “special interests”—they are two entirely different entities. Regarding special needs: Some of our members might not feel safe at regular or mainstream meetings. For instance, some people have illnesses that require their taking medicines or drugs; and at some meetings, members are asked to refrain from sharing if they have taken drugs that day. So there are certain characteristics or circumstances that might deter some alcoholics from ever attending mainstream A.A. meetings. As for special interests: Specific groups of people, be they women or gays or physicians, may feel more comfortable in their own groups initially; but many eventually join mainstream groups.

Q: Is there a link between Russia and G.S.O.? How can I help carry the message to groups in Russia?

A.: There have been regular contacts and visits between Russia and G.S.O. for some years; and we have been able to supply 30,000 Big Books to Russian members, thanks to contributions and the World Service Meeting International Literature Monetary Fund. To help carry the message, you can increase your personal contributions, or your group’s, in the Seventh Tradition’s spirit of taking responsibility for supporting A.A. services worldwide. Russia now has its own general service office.

Q: When and why was the Lord’s Prayer introduced into A.A.?

A.: In the early days, A.A. was more religiously oriented. We had no literature, not even a name of our own, so the early groups leaned heavily on Bible reading for inspiration and guidance. Besides, using the Lord’s Prayer at meetings freed speakers from the task, embarrassing to many, of composing prayers of their own. As time went on, Bill W. explains in *A.A. Comes of Age* (p. 197), “we began to emphasize the fact that A.A. was a way of life that conflicted with no one’s religious belief.”

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

FEBRUARY-MARCH 1995

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.

February

- 3-5—*Burbank, California*. 20th Annual SFV Conv. Write: Ch., Box 7727, Northridge, CA 91327-7727
- 3-5—*Redding, California*. Shasta WinterFest. Write: Ch., NCCC, Box 491707, Redding, CA 96049
- 3-5—*Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada*. Eighth Annual Midwinter Roundup. Write: Ch., #36-11018 Woodstock Rd., Fredericton, NB E3B 4X4
- 3-5—*Ligonier, Pennsylvania*. Midwinter Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 55, Laughlintown, PA 15655
- 4-5—*Naperville, Illinois*. We Are Not Saints Conv. Write: Ch., Box 3018, Country Club Hills, IL 60478
- 10-12—*North Little Rock, Arkansas*. Winter Holiday Conv. Write: Ch., 7509 Cantrell Rd., Ste. 106, Little Rock, AR 72207
- 17-19—*Paducah, Kentucky*. 44th State Conf. Write: Ch., Box 9492, Paducah, KY 42002-9492
- 17-19—*El Paso, Texas*. 33rd Annual Jamboree. Write: Secy, Box 3115, El Paso, TX 79923
- 17-20—*Mansfield, Massachusetts*. Southeastern Massachusetts Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 492, Somerset, MA 02726-0492
- 18-19—*Hot Springs, South Dakota*. Ninth District Roundup. Write: Ch., R.R. 2, Box 202M, Custer, SD 57730
- 24-25—*Sikeston, Missouri*. 14th Five Corners Conv. Write: Ch., 205 N. Jackson St., Kennett, MO 63857
- 24-26—*Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada*. 28th Annual Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 8878, Saskatoon, SK S7K 6S7
- 24-26—*Kansas City, Kansas*. Sunflower Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 26322, Overland Park, KS 66225
- 24-26—*Sidney, Ohio*. 12th Area Mini Conf. Write: Ch., 111 S. Main St., Minster, OH 45865
- 24-26—*Corpus Christi, Texas*. 41st Annual Coastal Bend Jamboree. Write: Ch., CBIA, 3154 Reid Dr., Ste. 300, Corpus Christi, TX 78404

March

- 3-5—*Gulf Shores, Alabama*. Gulf Shores Jubilee. Write: Ch., Box 1183, Foley, AL 36536

- 10-12—*Fresno, California*. 48th Annual Spring Conf. Write: Tr., Box 1484, Rohnert Park, CA 94927-1484
- 10-12—*New York, New York*. Big Apple Big Book Seminar. Write: Ch., 1636 3rd Ave., Suite 164, New York, NY 10128
- 10-12—*Sioux Falls, South Dakota*. Sixth Sioux Empire Round Up. Write: Ch., Intergroup, Box 182, Sioux Falls, SD 57101
- 10-12—*Richmond, Virginia*. Virginia Area Assembly. Write: Ch., 7711 Fisher Dr., Falls Church, VA 22043
- 17-19—*Indianapolis, Indiana*. 42nd Annual State Conv. Write: Ch., 600 Main St., Apt. 111, Anderson, IN 46016
- 17-19—*Ruston, Louisiana*. Fourth Annual Upstate Conv. Write: Ch., Box 651, Ruston, LA 71273-0651
- 23-26—*Charleston, South Carolina*. 48th State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 13285, Charleston, SC 29422
- 24-26—*Peoria, Illinois*. Illinois State Conf. of Young People. Write: Ch., Box 435, Peoria, IL 61615-0435
- 24-26—*Ames, Iowa*. Aim for Ames Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 2491, Ames, IA 50010
- 24-26—*Toledo, Ohio*. Area Mini Conf. Write: Ch., 5937 Sylvan Green, Sylvania, OH 43560
- 24-26—*Newport, Rhode Island*. 19th Annual Conv. Write: Ch., Box 9342, Providence, RI 02940
- 24-26—*Rapid City, South Dakota*. 11th Annual Roundup Conf. Write: Ch., Box 594, Rapid City, SD 57709-0594
- 24-26—*Omiya City, Japan*. 20th Anniversary. Write: Japan G.S.O., c/o Tachibana Bldg., 9th Fl., 2-23-3 Ikebukuro, Toshima-ku, Tokyo 171, Japan
- 31-April 2—*Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada*. Big Book Study. Write: Ch., 413B Lawrence Ave., Kelowna, BC V1Y 6L6
- 31-April 2—*Mt. Vernon, Illinois*. Southern

Closed Meeting Topics

February (Page 39): Singleness of purpose and taking inventory.

March (Page 35): The value of meetings.

Illinois Spring Conf. Write: Ch., Box 502, Carlyle, IL 62231-0502

31-April 2—*Oak Brook, Illinois*. 1995 Northern Illinois Area Spring Conf. Write: Ch., Box 2024, Joliet, IL 60434

31-April 2—*Columbus, Ohio*. Columbus Spring Round-Up. Write: Ch., Box 163732, Columbus, OH 43216

April

7-9—*Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada*. Southern Alberta Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 212, Lethbridge, AB T1J 3Y5

7-9—*Grand Forks, North Dakota*. Northern Spring Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 14121, Grand Forks, ND 58208-4121

14-16—*New Orleans, Louisiana*. 27th Big Deep South Conv. Write: Ch., 4041 Tulane Ave., Ste. 301, New Orleans, LA 70119

14-16—*Port Elizabeth, South Africa*. National Conv. Write: Ch, Area Services, Box 7604, Newton Park, 6055, Port Elizabeth, South Africa

21-23—*Superior, Wisconsin*. 50th Annual Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 996, Superior, WI 54880

28-30—*Lincoln, Nebraska*. Spring Fling. Write: Ch., Box 30785, Lincoln, NE 68513

Planning a Future Event?

Please send your information on April, May or June events, two days or more, in time to reach G.S.O. by February 10, the calendar deadline for the April-May 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): _____

Flip up this end of page - for events on reverse side

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



May

5-7—*Ventura, California*. Roundup. Write:
Ch., 111 So. Catalina St., Ventura, CA
93001

5-7—*Greenville, Mississippi*. Fourth Annual
Delta Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 1653,
Cleveland, MS 38732

5-7—*Greensburg, Pennsylvania*. 44th

Laurel Highlands Conf. Write: Ch., Box 6,
Bovard, PA 15619

5-7—*Sioux Falls, South Dakota*. Area 63
Spring Conf. Write: Ch., District 5, Box
1872, Sioux Falls, SD 57101

26-28—*Laval, Quebec, Canada*. 17th
District Congress. Write: Ch., 1502
Station Chomedey, Laval, QC H7V 1A0