

In Tokyo, One Alcoholic Can Now Talk With Another In Español

It started as a love story. Martin G., of Guatemala, met and fell in love with a Japanese girl. They married and set up housekeeping in Tokyo, and Martin hoped for a happy ending that eventually did come, but not as he had envisioned. Never one to refuse a libation, Martin began drinking heavily; soon he drank himself out of the marriage and into a hospital. Then he found A.A.

Martin attended both Japanese- and English-speaking A.A. meetings and hung on to his sobriety. Someone gave him a copy of the Big Book in Spanish—*Alcohólicos Anónimos*—and he began to have a better grasp of the program. But in the meetings he longed to share in the language he understood best, so he decided to form a Spanish-speaking group.

Tentatively he approached a Spanish-language newspaper in Tokyo and entered a small item noting the place and time the first meeting would be held. Much to his surprise, several people showed up. Reported Martin in mid-December: “We are five members in the group—three women from Colombia, one man from Peru and me from Guatemala. The man from Peru and one woman from Colombia have not touched alcohol for three months, one woman hasn’t drunk for three months and 15 days, another woman is sober two weeks, and I have not picked up a drink for six months and 12 days, thanks to the program.”

The fledgling group was flourishing, except for a key problem: Other than Martin’s lone copy of *Alcohólicos Anónimos*, they had no Spanish-language A.A. literature. So one afternoon Martin visited the Japanese General Service Office to see what could be done. The office had one copy of the Big Book in Spanish but no other material. What they did have, though, was a visitor from G.S.O. New York, Bill A., staff member serving on the International desk. He was delighted to meet Martin and immediately arranged to have the full spectrum of Spanish-language literature sent out from G.S.O.: more Big Books along with copies of the Twelve and Twelve, *La Viña* (the Spanish edition of the Grapevine), pamphlets and much more.

Recalls Bill: “The fact that I was there when Martin came calling seems to me to be another example of a power greater than myself working anonymously. Being

able to help him made me feel like I was making a giant Twelfth Step call. And it shows that what can’t be done by one person alone can so often be done by many of us pitching in together.”

Martin and his fellow group members consider the Spanish-language literature integral to their staying sober and carrying the message of recovery. They feel as A.A. co-founder Bill W. did when he pointed out that the Fellowship’s success with a newcomer rests “squarely on our ability to identify . . . in experience, in language, and especially in feeling—that profound feeling for each other that goes deeper than words. This is what we really mean when we say ‘one alcoholic talking to another.’ ” (*The Language of the Heart*, p. 293)

A Lot of History Enlightens Work of Intergroup/Central Offices Today

A.A. co-founder Bill W. considered Intergroups essential to “the panorama of A.A. in action.” Fifty years ago, in the November 1951 issue of the Grapevine, he said bluntly that “intergroups do those area chores that no single individual or group could. They unify regions; they make A.A. tick.” (*The Language of the Heart*, p. 133)

Both Bill and his fellow A.A. co-founder, Dr. Bob, saw the early need for the development of intergroups, which have been around almost as long as A.A. itself. So when about 100 representatives of intergroups and central offices across the U.S./Canada gathered at the 16th Annual Central Office/Intergroup Seminar in Edmonton, Alberta, last September for shoptalk and fellowship, they were aware that the effectiveness of their own operations owed much to the trials, tribulations and collective sharing of their predecessors. As Jan D., manager of the Edmonton, Alberta, Intergroup that hosted the seminar, points out, “Nothing in A.A. today is original. Everything we know and do came from our predecessors, whether the Oxford Group, or

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intergroup/central office workers who came before and shared freely of their spiritual experiences and solutions gained the hard way.”

In the beginning there was the Central Committee in Cleveland, Ohio, where by October 1939—hardly more than four years after Bill and Dr. Bob first met—a committee of seven was meeting once a month “to coordinate efforts regarding hospitalizations and sponsorship.” Dr. Bob was not only a supporter but an active participant, according to fellow Akron member Dan K. “Doc used to play an important part in the Central Committee,” Dan observed, and the going could get rough: “During the meeting, sometimes, the words would fly like you were in a barroom.” One time, he related, “Dr. Bob stood up, hushed the crowd and said, “Gentlemen, please. We’re still members of Alcoholics Anonymous. Let’s carry the principles of A.A. into these business meetings. You are servants of your group, here to take the ideas formulated by the committee. Let one man talk at a time, and let us conduct this business meeting as a service to the Lord and a service to our fellow members. . . .’ After that, we had no more brawls when Dr. Bob was around.” (*Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers*, pp. 288-89)

Another early intergroup sprang up in Chicago, where an A.A. named Sylvia used her \$700 monthly alimony checks to rent an apartment in the suburb of Evanston, where the first A.A. meeting in the area was held in 1939. The phone was so busy that nonalcoholic Grace Cultice, Sylvia’s personal secretary, rapidly evolved into an A.A. girl Friday. By 1941, after publication of the Jack Alexander *Saturday Evening Post* article about A.A., Sylvia’s place “became something of a Chicago Grand Central,” Bill W. affirmed in *A.A. Comes of Age* (p. 23), and something had to be done. So [the A.A.s] rented a one-room office in the Loop, where, Bill wrote, “Grace was installed to direct the stream of applicants for Twelfth Step attention, hospitalization, or other help. This was A.A.’s first organized local ser-

vice center” . . . followed by New York City in 1942, which was then operating out of a clubhouse on Manhattan’s West 24th Street.

A Columbus, Ohio, intergroup started up in 1943, followed by the Los Angeles Central Office a year later. “In those days A.A. wasn’t easy to find—and we kept it that way,” one oldtimer, sober since 1940, remembers. “A carefully selected group of priests, judges and policemen knew about A.A.; our phone number wasn’t listed and could be gotten only from information. That way we knew that any newcomer who found us had generally made enough of an effort to guarantee the sincerity of his desire for sobriety.” In 1946 the Twelve Traditions were published, and the Third Tradition—“The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking”—raised the level of tolerance by rendering subjective judgment superfluous when it came to who was sincere and who wasn’t.

Many service offices, such as those in Chicago and Los Angeles, have grown out of a phone number, listed as belonging to A.A., that was in a member’s home. Some—in New York City, Newark, New Jersey, and Edmonton, to name a few—were outgrowths of A.A. clubhouses that had been set up as hubs for A.A. activity and social events. Sometimes the clubs served as distribution points for A.A. literature, then began providing other services as well. Over time the service operations became entities separate from the clubhouses. In a surprising number of other localities—notably in the Upper Midwest and in Canada—intergroups or central service committees were in existence (some still are) long before there were actual offices.

In Charleston, West Virginia, the term “intergroup” was first used in 1953. The association evolved directly from the first treatment center in the state, which was founded in 1944. It was called the Alcan Center, Inc., but was fondly referred to by locals as “the jitter joint.”

Before the first General Service Conference was held, in April 1951, at least 16 central offices/intergroups were serving local groups. Since they predated the formation of the General Service structure and performed a different function, they were not a part of the structure (except in Chicago, where the Area Service Office and Area Committee are essentially one). Sometimes over the years there was some overlapping of services, especially when both entities were performing similar services, in Public Information for instance, but eventually, thanks to shared experience and better communication, intergroups and General Service have pretty much come to work hand-in-glove. No one appreciated more than Bill W. the value of intergroups. Back in 1946 he exclaimed in the June Grapevine, “Heaven has surely reserved a special place for every one of them.” Today there are approximately 1500 intergroup/central offices in the U.S. and Canada, including local answering services.

Intergroups and central offices are established and supported by local groups. Each intergroup is unique, reflecting the needs and wishes of its own community, and is responsible to the groups it serves. Typically each participating group has an intergroup representative. These reps meet periodically to elect a steering committee, or board of directors, responsible for administering the office. They report back to the group representatives who, in turn, keep their groups informed. A continuing flow of communication is vital, because the groups give financial support of the office that services them.

At last September's Seminar, the theme aptly enough was "Networking." Jan, who notes that the Edmonton Intergroup officially started up in 1950, reports that "we had many a fun time at the seminar, but we also rolled up our sleeves and candidly shared our problems, solutions and ideas with each other." In a variety of stimulating workshops the participants—including intergroup office managers and staff, along with a few trustees of the General Service Board and A.A.W.S. and Grapevine directors and staff—discussed subjects ranging from Twelfth Stepping, volunteer activity and office equipment needs to financial support and the dissemination of A.A. Conference-approved literature.

This last is a particularly vital aspect of intergroup work, and all the offices are constantly looking for more efficient ways to deal with the vast amounts of material they handle. Dennis Manders, who served as A.A.'s nonalcoholic business administrator/controller from 1950-85, says that "the enormous growth in volume of A.A. publishing in the 1970s alone would not have been possible were it not for the work of the intergroups and central offices." G.S.O., he explains, "had only to establish a network of warehouses from which to supply the local offices with literature in a timely fashion. It was this close partnership that led to the Intergroup Seminars as we know them today."

Jan reports that "the seminars encourage a strong sense of community and remind us that by networking freely all year long, by borrowing freely from each other's experience, we can do ever more to help the alcoholic." She notes that copies of the Final Report of the 2001 Seminar are available. To order, write: Jan D., Edmonton Central Office, 10010 - 107A Avenue N.W., Suite 206, Edmonton, AB T5H 4H8; (780) 424-5900; e-mail edmontonaa@hotmail.com. A \$10 contribution is requested to help cover production and mailing costs.

The 17th Intergroup/Central Office Seminar will be hosted by the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Central Office, September 27-29, 2002. For information, or to register, write: MaryLou M., Central Office, 239 Fourth Avenue, Suite 713, Pittsburgh, PA 15222-1712; (412) 471-7472; or e-mail pghareaoff@aol.com.

International Convention Information

Name That Theme for 2005! Deadline 7/1/02

Believe it or not, it's time to start thinking about a theme title for the 2005 International Convention celebration of A.A.'s 70th Anniversary in Toronto, Canada, June 30-July 2, 2005. We invite you to send in suggestions for a theme. The trustees' International Conventions Committee will select the theme at their July 2002 meeting, so please let us hear from you by July 1, 2002.

To spark your thinking, the themes of past A.A. International Conventions have been: 1965 "I Am Responsible" (in Toronto); 1970 "Unity"; 1975 "Let It Begin With Me"; 1980 "The Joy of Living"; 1985 "Fifty Years With Gratitude"; 1990 "Fifty-Five Years—One Day At a Time"; 1995 "A.A. Everywhere—Anywhere"; and 2000 "Pass It On – Into the 21st Century."

Send your ideas to: International Conventions Committee, P.O. Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163.

Registration and Housing for 2005

Many A.A. members are beginning to write G.S.O. requesting information on registration and housing accommodations for A.A.'s 70th Birthday celebration. Please do not write or call G.S.O., as this information will not be available for some time.

Registration/housing forms will be sent to all A.A. groups on our mailing list in September 2004. At the same time, local intergroups and central offices will also receive approximately 100 copies of these forms. Most of the hotels in and around Toronto, Canada are already committed to our Convention and the rates for each—from very reasonable to luxurious—will be described on the registration/housing forms.

The procedures for registration and housing, beyond specifying this 2004 mailing date, are still in the planning stages. Notification of these procedures will appear in *Box 4-5-9* several times prior to September 2004. We will use *Box 4-5-9* to keep in constant communication with groups so that anyone who is interested will have timely and accurate information. As we do not maintain a separate mailing list of A.A. members who have requested information, please be sure your home group receives *Box 4-5-9* so that you and all members of your group will have access to this information as we get nearer to Convention time.

Ann M., Beloved Link to G.S.O.'s Early Days

A.A. co-founder Bill W. hired Ann M. to work in the General Service Office (then called the World Service Office) in May 1948, when she was six weeks sober. She stayed nearly three decades, lending her intelligence, grace and love of Alcoholics Anonymous to the unfolding of early A.A. history. For the next 24 years, until her death on October 3, at age 84, she continued to give of herself to the Fellowship.

Observed Bob R., executive secretary of the New York City Intergroup Association, in a message read at an October 14 memorial service celebrating Ann's life: "Until a couple of years ago, she answered the phones at Intergroup every Wednesday. If you'd called central casting and asked for a woman who had lived A.A.'s Twelve Step program to the max, they'd have sent Ann."

Recalling what G.S.O. was like in the early days, Lib S., a retired staff member who worked closely with Ann, notes that the first office was opened only in 1940 on Vesey Street—when A.A. members numbered barely 2,000 in all (*The A.A. Service Manual*, p. S12)—to handle the increasing volume of mail and phone calls that would turn into a deluge a year later with publication of Jack Alexander's celebrated *Saturday Evening Post* article about A.A. "I arrived at G.S.O. barely three years after Ann," Lib says, "and she was my mentor. There were few of us staffers then, the volume of mail and phone calls was escalating rapidly, and the office was chaotic much of the time. In the mid-1950s we acquired an office manager, Hank G., who tried to establish business-like protocols and routines. He was often perplexed by staffers like Ann who thought nothing of taking off for several hours at a stretch to help a needy drunk. There were few Step meetings in New York at the time, and she sponsored a lot of people. With Annie, the alcoholic always came first."

When Ann herself sobered up, on April 12, 1948, she was 31 years old and considered a young person by the early A.A.s, who commonly hit bottom in their late 40s and 50s. Born in Seattle, Washington, and adopted as an infant to a couple who soon divorced, she spent her formative years in France. When she was a preteen her mother, to whom she was very close, died; Ann was sent to the States to live with her father's rather austere sisters, who put her first in boarding school at the National Cathedral School in Washington, D.C., then at the Brearley School in Manhattan. Later she studied drama in London and, upon her return, began making the drinking scene.

"She loved the Harlem night spots," reports Lib, "sipping in places the likes of the Cotton Club and Smalls Paradise and listening to jazz greats like Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong. But the time came when she did more drinking than listening. Then she hit bottom and found A.A."

Both Lib and another retired G.S.O. staff member, Beth K., stress Ann's dedication to the A.A. program of recovery. "She didn't want anything negative to happen to A.A.," Beth says. "She was very into the spirit of the Traditions and would brook no violations in silence. She was nonjudgmental, which made her an effective participant in every area of life. Thanks to her fluency in French, she was able to answer letters from many an alcoholic we might not have reached otherwise." Friends and associates alike comment on Ann's ability to rise above dissension and gossip. "She'd say kindly, 'We don't talk about that,'" Lib remembers. "She was very loyal, and an inspiration to me—in fact, I named my daughter after her."

Because she had a dignity that belied a whimsical bent, onetime G.S.O. manager Bob P. called Ann "the queen." Frank R., a Class B (alcoholic) trustee from Eastern Massachusetts, recognizing her steadfast allegiance to A.A. principles, dubbed her "the rock." And Dennis Manders, nonalcoholic business administrator/controller at G.S.O. from 1950-85 and today a senior adviser on the trustees' Finance and Budgetary Committee, enjoyed her sunniness. "I used to call her Ann M——, m' darlin'," he says fondly. "She was one of the kindest, sweetest people I knew, with great compassion." Adds present staff member Susan U.: "At meetings Ann always had something cogent to contribute. When we tackled a problem, she was invariably a significant part of the solution."

A favorite "Ann story" goes back to the 1960s, when G.S.O.'s office was in an old loft building on East 45th Street in Manhattan. Just before Christmas the staff had carefully decorated a small tree that brightened the otherwise drab surroundings. "One morning," relates Beth, "we came in and the tree was gone. The police tracked a trail of tinsel all the way down from the 18th floor and out the door. Then nothing. We all scratched our heads and envisioned a criminal lurking about the premises. The next morning, to our amazement, the tree reappeared magically, minus some tinsel strands but otherwise intact. It seemed that Ann had just borrowed it for a Jungian Society party a few blocks away. She was surprised at the fuss she'd caused."

At that time and for the rest of her life, Ann, was a devotee of psychoanalyst Dr. Carl Jung, who carried on a now-legendary correspondence with Bill W. Both men believed that for alcoholics a spiritual base is essential to the maintenance of sobriety. (As Jung

explained in a 1961 letter to Bill, “Alcohol in Latin is *spiritus*, and you use the same word for the highest religious experience as well as for the most depraving poison. The helpful formula therefore is: *spiritus contra spiritum*.” (“*Pass It On*,” p. 384).

In her later years Ann was an arresting figure, her white hair framing a delicate complexion enhanced by the pinks, blues and greens of the neck scarves she often wore. At meetings and conventions where there was a sobriety countdown, Ann would stand when 50, 51, then 52 and, finally, 53 years were called out. Invariably the A.A.s in the room would whoop and cheer and clap, and she would stand quietly, looking faintly astonished at her own accomplishment.

Until two years ago, when she could no longer venture forth alone, Ann arrived every Wednesday morning at Intergroup to answer the phones. “She would come at 8:30 sharp,” says Bob R., “leaning on her cane and carrying her coffee and pastry in a little brown bag. She made it in the worst weather, on days when considerably younger volunteers would call in ‘sick.’” One time, he recalls, “I stopped by her desk to chat as I usually did. Ann saw me looking a bit dour and said, ‘Poor Bob, what’s the matter?’ ‘Well,’ I replied, ‘I’m frustrated because people just don’t listen to me or do what I ask. Ann, how do you handle these things?’” Pausing to relish the memory, Bob says, “She looked at me, smiled and responded, ‘I just don’t ask them to do anything.’ That was Ann, and with her goes yet another irreplaceable chunk of A.A. history. I miss her.” And so do all who were privileged to know her.

Let’s Reinvent Some Old-Fashioned Twelfth Stepping

Can you remember when you last made a Twelfth Step call on a sick, unkempt alcoholic, either on a drunk or coming off one and maybe verging on the DTs?

Once upon an A.A. time, Twelfth Stepping was a vital, hands-on affair. Members routinely made house calls, visited newcomers in the hospital or detox, escorted them to numerous meetings, shared their own experience, strength and hope nonstop, acted as sponsors, and, in the case of A.A. co-founder Dr. Bob, almost killed their taste buds with a surfeit of sauerkraut, tomatoes and corn syrup—for strength and energy, as he saw it.

What happened? As time went by, a Wisconsin A.A. has suggested, “the treatment facilities began assuming responsibility of carrying the message, and we

A.A.s became lazy. Sure, we became temporary sponsors and greeted the treatment patients with concern when they were vanned to our meetings. But by the time we saw them for the first time, they were clean, groomed and virtually free of the shakes; they even smelled pretty good.”

With so many newcomers coming to A.A. sober, or at least dry, a whole generation or more of us have forgotten how to make house calls or what it’s like to see alcoholics in convulsions at meetings, never mind knowing how to help them. Today the problem is that life and time have brought us full circle. Many of the treatment facilities have closed down and more sick alcoholics are coming directly to A.A. Are we prepared to be there for them?

Addressing this vital question at the 1998 General Service Conference, then-delegate Bill R. of Arkansas said, “I know I am responsible to go find the alcoholic to insure my own sobriety, but how? Do I just sit around in a meeting and wait for a newcomer to come in the door, or do I seek them out at hospitals and jails? Do I judge the alcoholics by the way they look, or do I treat them all as sick individuals? Do I just give them a Big Book and tell them to read the first 164 pages, or do I work with them and try to explain the principles of A.A.? . . . Do I contribute to the Twelfth Step work of my group, area and General Service Office, or do I drag out that lone dollar and toss it in the basket? Do I make myself available to Intergroup for Twelfth Step calls, or am I too tired?” These questions and more, Bill continued, “could be asked of myself. I must remember one simple fact: I am here through the grace of God, and it is with the grace of God I must carry the message of A.A. to the alcoholic who still suffers.” (1998 General Service Conference *Final Report*, p. 13)

Out of its own desire to increase Twelfth Step efforts and avoid glitches, the St. Paul, Minnesota, Intergroup carried “Tips on making Twelfth Step Calls” in last May’s issue of its newsletter *Lifeline*.

“When a Twelfth Step call is received,” the article states, “we begin with the assumption that another human being’s life is at stake, literally. This means that, without delay, this call is to be answered at once.” Among the suggestions offered: When making a Twelfth Step call, arrange for another A.A. member to accompany you. Maintain anonymity. Congratulate the prospect on wanting to do something about his drinking problem. Give him some A.A. literature. Tell him what you used to be like, what happened, and what you are like now. And note what the Big Book says on page 96: “We find it a waste of time to keep chasing a man who cannot or will not work with you. If you leave such a person alone, he may soon become convinced that he cannot recover by himself.”

Update on the Fourth Edition of the Big Book

The Fourth Edition of *Alcoholics Anonymous* has been selling like the proverbial hotcakes since the first printing rolled off the presses on November 12th. (See opposite page). A complimentary copy was sent to each U.S. and Canada group on G.S.O.'s mailing list as well as copies to Intergroup/Central Offices.

Here are a few of the questions that G.S.O. responded to:

Q. How many stories were carried over from the Third Edition?

A. Our October/November issue of *Box 4-5-9* indicated that there were 16 stories forwarded from the Third Edition of the Big Book. The blurb on the dust jacket also says 16, since the jackets were printed earlier. When the Fourth Edition arrived at groups, lo and behold, those who were sober and love to count found that there were the following 17 stories forwarded from the Third Edition of the Big Book: Alcoholics Anonymous Number Three, Women Suffer Too, The Vicious Cycle, Another Change, The Man Who Mastered Fear, He Sold Himself Short, The Keys of the Kingdom, Jim's Story, Fear of Fear, The Housewife Who Drank at Home, Physician, Heal Thyself, It Might Have Been Worse, Me An Alcoholic?, Acceptance Was the Answer, Our Southern Friend, Freedom From Bondage, and A.A. Taught Him to Handle Sobriety.

Q. Why was a 17th story added?

A. The goal of G.S.O.'s Publications Department was for the page count of the Fourth Edition to be similar to the Third Edition. In order to achieve that goal a 17th story was added. This had been discussed by both the trustees' and Conference Literature Committees and authorization was given to the Publications Department to add a 17th story if space permitted. As a result "The Vicious Cycle" was added to the original 16 stories recommended by the Fourth Edition Big Book Subcommittee.

Q. Why was there a title change?

A. We have also been asked why there was a title change from "Doctor, Alcoholic, Addict" in the Third Edition to "Acceptance Was the Solution" in the Fourth Edition. As reported to the 2000 Conference Literature Committee by the trustees' Literature Committee, the 1998/1999 Subcommittee on the Fourth Edition of the Big Book had asked the G.S.O. Publications Department to recommend a new title for this story to better reflect the spiritual content contained in the text.

Q. Why does the dust jacket cite that 21 million copies of the first three editions were sold, yet the Preface records 13,148,500?

A. Twenty-one million refers to the total distribution of the Big Book in all formats. The figures in the Preface refer to the hardback edition (B-1) only.

Q. Can I still order hardcover first printings of the Fourth Edition?

A. The complete inventory of hardcover first printings of the Fourth Edition has been sold. We are now distributing second printings and the third printing has been ordered. For those who keep track of numbers the first hardcover printing was 400,000, the second hardcover printing was 200,000, and the anticipated third hardcover printing is 200,000.

When a Coffeepot Is More than Just a Coffeepot

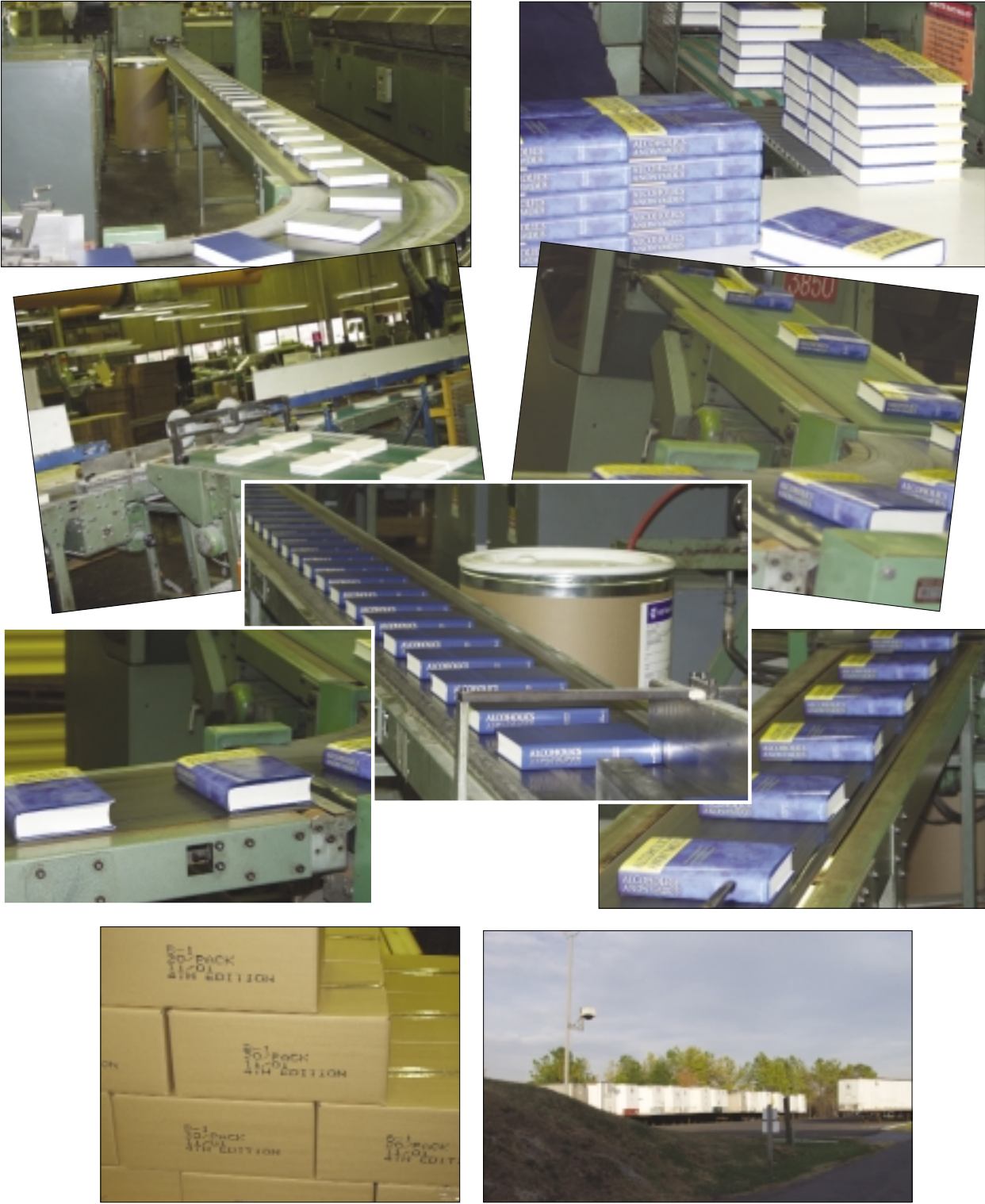
For Jerry D. of Warren, Pennsylvania, the coffeepot in A.A. is more than the sum of its parts. It symbolizes the essence of rotation—in all service positions, from group coffeemaker to the board of trustees—that is the Fellowship's main method of doing away with popularity contests and, in the spirit of Tradition Twelve, "reminding us to place principles before personalities."

Writes Jerry: "I had been in A.A. for five months when I joined a Big Book study group. One night my soon-to-be service sponsor told me to 'get active and clean the coffeepot.' I did, and got such a wonderful feeling cleaning that pot—it was the first good feeling I'd had in a long time.

"For the next year I cleaned the coffeepot every Thursday night. It was my job, and I wouldn't let anyone else do it. One night I was telling my sponsor about how good it made me feel. He said, 'Great. Now let somebody else clean the coffeepot. Let that person feel good like you.' So I found somebody else. First we cleaned the coffeepot together, then he cleaned it, then he passed the job on to another A.A., all in the spirit of rotation."

Seven years passed, Jerry relates. "Then one night I paid a by-now infrequent visit to the same Big Book study meeting. Afterward I walked into the kitchen to throw my paper cup away, and there was that old coffeepot. The current 'trusted servant' and I had our own meeting while I was cleaning it, and it felt really good. Thank God for A.A.—and coffeepots."

Fourth Edition of Alcoholics Anonymous



The Big Book Fourth Edition rolling off the press and being packed into cartons for the waiting trucks.

Sponsorship Is Just Another Way To Say A.A.

Sponsorship has many faces, many forms, each unique in its shadings of identification, hope and help. But if you look closely, every one is part and parcel of recovery in A.A.—and for the alcoholic who stays sober the essence of sponsorship often is an unseparable “my program/myself.”

Since the beginning A.A. sponsorship has been described variously as a spiritual reprieve, a Fifth Step partnership, Twelve Stepping, and a godsend. It is as old as co-founders Bill W. and Dr. Bob keeping each other sober over 65 years ago in Akron, Ohio; it is as new as the lifeline being forged this moment as some oldtimer, or group as a whole, welcomes a sick, bewildered newcomer.

Describing his early relationship with Dr. Bob, Bill once observed, “Dr. Bob did not need me for his spiritual instruction. . . . What he did need, when we first met, was the deflation at depth and the understanding that only one drunk can give to another. What I needed was the humility of self-forgetfulness and the kinship with another human being of my own kind.” (*As Bill Sees It*, p. 212)

In the old days in Akron, sponsorship frequently began with the sick alcoholic’s hospitalization and surrender—the latter induced sometimes by A.A.’s non-alcoholic friend Sister Ignatia, who tartly urged her patients to bend their knees instead of their elbows. Other times it took off in Dr. Bob’s kitchen with his unholy home-cooked Rx: tomatoes, sauerkraut and Karo syrup stirred together in one big pot and simmered on the stove. “The men got to where it almost gagged them, taking it straight,” pioneer A.A. member Ernie G. later recalled. “[Dr. Bob] did back down finally on the sauerkraut, but he kept up the tomatoes and corn syrup for years.” (*Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers*, p. 105)

Today that mouth-puckering concoction has been replaced by milkshakes and honey and broth, and the handful of “prospects” has mushroomed into more than two million members worldwide. But the simple truism—that the best way to keep our sobriety is to give it away to the alcoholic who still suffers—remains the same. Late trustee Webb J., of Western Canada, took this concept a step further. Speaking at the 1991 General Service Conference he declared, “You’ve got to give it away to keep it, but you can’t give away what you haven’t got.” This he had learned when, fresh out of a treatment facility, he attempted to sponsor someone else and wound up “back in the bottle.”

Certainly sponsorship—being there nonjudgmentally every Twelve Steps of the way for another alcoholic without seeking ego gratification in return—doesn’t always come easy. Also, “A.A. members differ in their enthusiasm for sponsorship work, in their ability to handle it effectively, and in the time they can give. Members who are willing and able to sponsor several newcomers simultaneously should certainly not be discouraged. . . sponsorship is, in a sense, a privilege to be shared by as many members as possible and an activity that helps all members to strengthen their sobriety.” (“Questions & Answers on Sponsorship,” p. 25)

Another take on sponsorship is provided by Guy F., a past delegate from Maine. Speaking at the 1991 General Service Conference on its theme, “Sponsorship—Gratitude in Action,” he said, “The way to repay those people who gave the help and hope I needed is to pass it on, to continue to stay active and express gratitude. This to me is sponsorship.” Then he related a story, told to him years before by a Native North American woman, that explained allegorically, he thought, the “concepts of sponsorship. . . . ‘In the old days,’ she affirmed, ‘they said an eagle—a very special bird representing freedom and courage—that soars skyward with the currents until out of sight is taking your prayers to the creator. When he comes back into view, he is returning with the answer to your prayers. But if you should wound that eagle, he will fall to the ground and flip over on his back for protection, since his only means of defense is with his talons. Even if you try to help him he will fight you; he doesn’t understand that you want to help and he is afraid.’ ”

Explained Guy: “That story reminded me of the drunk lying face down in the gutter. If you try to get him out, he will fight you, not out of meanness but because he is afraid and doesn’t understand you want to help him. In the case of the eagle, you can wrap your shirt around him and get him medicine for the wound, and the creator will heal him and free him to soar again with the wind. But to help the man in the gutter, you need to use your own experience. If you walk the Twelve Steps in your own life, you can guide this man into a new way of living. He will become free, like the eagle, to love and be as the creator intended.”

At the same Conference, 91 U.S./Canada delegates listened to the question, “How many of you came to service in A.A. with the help of a sponsor?” All the delegates raised their hands. As the A.A. pamphlet “Questions & Answers on Sponsorship,” (p. 28) explains, whether one is helping another alcoholic in his personal recovery or in becoming of service to a group, “Sponsorship in A.A. is basically the same Both types of service spring from the spiritual aspects

of the program.” A service sponsor, the pamphlet notes, provides familiarity with the Twelve Traditions, the Three Legacies—Unity, Recovery and Service—and the Concepts, clarifies the principle of rotation and helps newer members become aware that service is our most important product after sobriety. With this knowledge, they are able to share the vision with others and ensure the future of Alcoholics Anonymous.

P.I./C.P.C.

A.A. Makes Friends at Court In Palm Beach

“Our co-founder Bill W. used to say that it’s always better to have our [nonalcoholic] friends recommend us. And in the courtroom here we’ve made a lot of friends over the past two years—friends who have helped us to carry the message of recovery to a lot of alcoholics.”

So observes Franklyn C., chairman of the joint committee on Public Information and Cooperation With the Professional Community in the Palm Beach, Florida, vicinity (Area15, District 8). “The vision of a nonalcoholic judge, combined with the steady efforts of a bilingual team of P.I./C.P.C. volunteers,” he notes, “has created the Friday Morning Project—a brand-new way to reach individuals who have been summoned to court for D.U.I. [Driving Under the Influence] offenses.”

It all began two years ago when Palm Beach County Judge Bailey E. Bailey received an invitation from an individual he had sentenced months before to a residential rehab for alcohol-related offenses. The young man was completing his stay at the heavily A.A.-oriented facility and asked Judge Bailey to attend his “graduation.” The judge did attend and later told Franklyn, “When I heard that fellow and his friends speak, I was deeply moved by the simplicity and power of what they had to say. I think you A.A. folks would say that they had ‘gotten it.’ Alcohol had almost ruined their lives, your program had turned those lives around, and they were able to convey all that in just three or four minutes.”

Among other things, Franklyn relates, Judge Bailey presides over a long Friday morning court session in which all the county’s D.U.I. cases from the past week go through the arraignment process. At the graduation the judge recounted afterward, “I immediately thought of how effective it might be if all D.U.I. defendants

could hear that sort of brief talk before entering their plea of guilty or not guilty. Who knows how many would stop and take a look, perhaps for the first time, at what alcohol is doing to them—and to hear that help is available.” The judge immediately approached Pat McG., an A.A. who also serves as director of the rehab facility where he had heard the talks, and asked if he could bring a speaker to court for several Fridays on a trial basis. Says Franklyn: “By happy coincidence Pat is a veteran of P.I./C.P.C. work at the district and area level. He later told me with a grin, ‘I learned long ago never to turn down a judge. But, seriously, I told him that, if the thing got off the ground, it should be turned over to the district P.I./C.P.C. committee.’”

The project was an immediate success. Kevin S., one of the first speakers (and still a regular in the rotation) remembers, “It was the first time I had been in a courtroom voluntarily, much less at a judge’s specific invitation, and I was plenty nervous. I think probably the toughest part was keeping it real simple and no longer than three or four minutes. But I just prayed to be of help to those folks sitting out there, and it worked out great.” Soon not just one but two speakers were included in each Friday session.

“Palm Beach County has a sizable Spanish-speaking population,” Franklyn points out, “and a portion of the D.U.I. cases always involved men and women whose primary language was Spanish. So the judge asked Pat if there was a Spanish-speaking A.A. who might be willing to participate. The following Friday morning José F. was on the team. Like Kevin, he still speaks in court at least one Friday each month. ‘This is the most satisfying A.A. service work I’m into,’ he told me. ‘All I have to do is remember how completely baffled and defeated I was when faced with my own D.U.I., and God just lets the words flow. Often a *compañero* will stop me as I leave the courtroom to ask for more information and my phone number. That’s real special.’”

Within a few months of its inception the Friday Morning Project became the responsibility of the area P.I./C.P.C. committee, just as Pat had suggested. Today the weekly team consists of three A.A.s: the English and Spanish speakers and a P.I./C.P.C. committee member who acts as liaison with the court. A strict dress code and schedule is followed. “We’re introduced officially as ‘friends of the court,” says Kevin, “and it’s up to us to look and act the part.” To qualify, a volunteer for the project should have at least two years of continuous sobriety in A.A. and is required to attend two sessions as an observer beforehand. “Speaking three to four minutes may sound easy,” José says, “but there’s a real trick to covering all your key points in such a short time—and we can’t overstay our welcome.”

In those few minutes, Franklyn points out, “a speaker shares with the defendants in the courtroom that he

[or she] has been exactly where they are; that his illness continued to progress, leading to incarceration or other consequences; that he finally learned the nature of his problem and accepted help; and that his life has become immeasurably better in recovery. He concludes by urging the listeners to at least get the facts before making a decision about whether to seek help. Instead of directly mentioning A.A., the speaker suggests that the prosecuting or defense attorneys—or even the judge—can steer a person in the right direction.”

Recently Judge Bailey hosted a breakfast at the courtroom complex for Area P.I./C.P.C. committee people, who were also given the opportunity to observe the Friday Morning Project first-hand—with the hope that they might be able to plant the idea back in their home districts and help it to grow.

P.I.

Creative Teamwork Puts P.S.A.s on the Air in Louisiana

After a long drought, public service announcements are now being aired frequently on Louisiana radio and show what exciting things can happen when creativity and teamwork get in lockstep. Says Glenn M., chairman of the state’s Public Information committee: “Some dedicated people have been involved in this effort—member Bart M. (now of Silver Springs, Maryland), Bill A. at the General Service Office and others—once we got going, there was a ripple effect when it came to getting help.”

For some years, Glenn relates, “our committee had been getting nowhere in placing P.S.A.s. So last year we dug up some ideas and ran with them. With the permission of G.S.O. we copied about 100 of the audio CD announcements for distribution to our districts and their P.I. people. The total cost was approximately \$120. Meanwhile, at an A.A. meeting, I’d met Bart, who was involved in production at a radio station, and he was most helpful in providing names, titles, addresses—the whole nine yards—of people we wanted to reach. Once we were able to give our local P.I. people the CDs along with a list targeted just for them, they got all fired up and went to work.”

The 30-second P.S.A.s are in English, French and Spanish. They emphasize the membership of young people and minorities along with generic information, as recommended by the 1997 General Service

Conference. A sample video sent out by the Louisiana P.I. committee features a young man in his 20s or 30s saying, “What I remember most is the loneliness I felt. Separation from other people. And at the end drinking was no fun for me. Since I started attending A.A. meetings, perhaps the greatest gift of all is that I’ve become reconnected. I’m part of the universe again. I really like myself, and that’s beautiful. A.A. has been like a miracle in my life. . . . Alcoholics Anonymous: It works. Look us up in the phone book or check your local newspaper.” The results, Glen reports, “have been inspiring. A few folks around the state, taking a bit of time here and there, using the Louisiana Association of Broadcasters’ membership list that we acquired and delivering CDs, often in person, has put A.A. back on the radio here at a level never before achieved—and it’s getting better and better as they continue their efforts.”

While getting out P.S.A.s to radio, the Louisiana P.I. committee hasn’t forgotten about television. The same approach used for radio has been adapted to TV and is already reaping results. Importantly, after a radio or TV station plays its first A.A. P.S.A., the district P.I.s send out a letter of thanks developed by Glenn and his committee. It reads: “We (names of senders) are writing on behalf of Alcoholics Anonymous and your generous decision to air our P.S.A.s. We are representatives of the state and local Public Information committees. In the greater New Orleans area . . . approximately 10 percent of the population have the potential to develop problems with alcohol. This means that there are about 200,000 people in the area who potentially could need our services at some time in their lives. We understand the number of P.S.A. airing requests you must get and thank you on behalf of the approximately 14,000 active members across Louisiana for helping carry the message that there is an escape from alcoholism.

“It may seem strange to you, but when new people join us, our ability to help helps each of us to stay sober and become stronger. In the time since the P.S.A. has been airing, we have already received several calls that are confirmed to have come to us because of [your station] directly. You are making a difference in the lives of your viewers by providing this valuable and potentially lifesaving information to the public. It is a fact that alcoholism touches almost everyone at a direct or indirect level. Again we say ‘thank you’ for helping us to carry the message of recovery.’ ”

The Louisiana P.I. committee will gladly share its experience in getting P.S.A.s on the air with other interested committees, and welcomes their input in return. Write to the P.I. desk at the General Service Office, which will quickly pass your letter on to Glenn M.; or e-mail him directly at: grayseal123@yahoo.com.

Area Gatherings for A.A.s—Via G.S.O.

FEBRUARY - MARCH 2002

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

- 1-3 - Burbank, California. 27th Annual San Fernando Valley Conv. Write: Ch., Box 7610, Northridge, CA 91327-7610
- 1-3 - Melbourne, Florida. Spacecoast Round Up. Write: Ch., 720 E. New Haven Ave., Suite #3, Melbourne, FL 32901
- 1-3 - Fredricton, New Brunswick, Canada. 15th Annual Mid Winter Roundup. Write: Ch., 181 MacKenzie Avenue, Oromocto, NB E2V 1K5
- 1-3—Wichita Falls, Texas, XVIII Reunión de la Zona Norte de Texas. Write: Com. Org., Box 1284, Arlington, TX 76004
- 8-10—Bowling Green, Kentucky. 51st Kentucky State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 3570, Bowling Green, KY 42102
- 8-10 - Columbus, Ohio. East Central Region Conf. of Delegates Past & Present. Write: Ch., Box 2131, Columbus, OH 43216, Attn: ECR Conf.
- 8-10 - Austin, Texas. SW Texas 10th Annual Correctional Facilities Conf. Write: Ch. Box 26615, Austin, TX 78755-0615
- 14-17—Denver, Colorado. 38th Annual International Women's Conf. Write: Ch., 12081 West Alameda Pkwy., #260, Denver, CO 80228
- 15-16 - Whitefish, Montana. Into-Action Weekend. Write: Ch., 536 Park Ave., Whitefish, MT 59937
- 15-17 - Little Rock, Arkansas. 20th Annual Area 04 District 9 Conv. Write: Ch., Box 26135, Little Rock, AR 72221
- 15-17—Virginia Beach, Virginia. 26th Annual Oceanfront Conf. Write: Rgstr, Box 66173, Virginia Beach, VA 23466
- 15-17 -Arecibo, Puerto Rico. 46^a Conv. Write: Com. Org., Box 78, Arecibo, PR 00613
- 22-23 - Sikeston, Missouri. 21st Annual Five Corners Conv. Write: Ch., Box 158, Sikeston, MO 63801
- 22-24—Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. 11th Annual NERASSA. Write: Ch., Box 10052, Pittsburgh, PA 15236-0052
- 22-24—Pattaya, Thailand. Seventh Annual Thailand Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 1032, New Petchaburi Road Post Office, Bangkok 10311, Thailand

March

- 1-3—Bloomington, Illinois. ISCYPAA. Write: Ch., Box 3291, Bloomington, IL 61701
- 1-3—Fresno, California. PRAASA. Write: Ch., Box 836, Fair Oaks, CA 95628-0836

- 1-3—North Platte, Nebraska. West Central Regional Service Conf. Write: Ch., Box 804, North Platte, NE 69101
- 8-10—Jekyll Island, Georgia. 15th Unity Weekend. Write: Ch., Box 214911, S. Daytona, FL 32121
- 8-10—Columbus, Ohio. Area 53 Third Annual General Service Weekend Mini-Conf.. Write: Ch., Box 2131, Columbus, OH 43216
- 8-10—Yahualica de Gongalez Gallo, Jalisco, Mexico. XXI Congreso de Area de Jalisco Centro, Write: Com. Org., Mexicaltengo N° 1238 S.J. A.P. Postal 1-76, Guadalajara, Jalisco, México
- 15-17—Victorville, California. 18th Annual Conv. Write: Ch., 18888 Hwy 18, Suite 205, Apple Valley, CA 92307
- 15-17—Columbus, Indiana. 49th State Conv. Write: Ch., 967 North Ewing, Indianapolis, Indiana 46201
- 15-17—Cherry Hill, New Jersey. 38th Annual Area 45 Conv. Write: Ch., Box 8955, Turnersville, NJ 08012.
- 15-17 - Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Ontario Regional Conf. Write: Ch., Box #43189, Sheppard Centre RPO, 4841 Yonge St., North York, ON M2N 6N1
- 15-17—Martinsburg, West Virginia. Area 73 Spring Assembly. Write: Ch., 327 Euclid Ave., Morgantown, WV 26501
- 22-24—Wichita, Kansas. 27th Annual Wichita Spring Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 1814, Wichita, KS 67201
- 22-24 - Newport, Rhode Island. Rhode Island Conv. Write: Ch., Box 1058, Charlestown, RI 02813
- 23-24—Chicago, Illinois. Special Regional Forum. Write: Forum Coordinator, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163
- 28-30—San Salvador, El Salvador. XXX Conv. de Centroamérica y Panamá, Write: Com. Org., Apartado Postal (06) No. 132, C. Postal 001123, San Salvador, El Salvador
- 29-31 - Ames, Iowa. Aim for Ames. Write: Ch., Box 2522, Ames, Iowa 50010

April

- 5-7—Montgomery, Alabama. Alabama/Northwest Florida Area 1 Assembly. Write: Ch., 8121 Lillian Hwy #45, Pensacola, FL 32506
- 5-7—Anchorage, Alaska. Alaska Area Pre-Conference Assembly. Write: Ch., 523 W. 8th, Anchorage, AK 99501.
- 12-13—Goodyear, Arizona. 12th West Valley Roundup. Writ: Ch., Box 5495, Sun City West, AZ 85376
- 19-21 - Lincoln, Nebraska. Spring Fling 2002. Write: Ch., Box 30691, Lincoln, NE 68503
- 19-21—Superior, Wisconsin. 57th Annual Round-up. Write: Ch., Box 996, Superior, WI 54880
- 26-28 - Irvine, California. 21st Annual H&I Conf. Write: Ch., 2245 W. Vancouver Dr., #E Anaheim, CA 92804
- 26-28—Galway, Ireland. 45th All-Ireland Conv. Write G.S.O, 109 South Circular Road, Dublin 8, Ireland

May

- 9-12 - Ermioni, Peloponnese, Greece. Eighth International Conv. Write: Ch., 156 Ippokratous Street, 11472 Athens, Greece
- 10-12—Dayton, Ohio. Dayton Women's Workshop XXIV. Write: Ch., Box 1527, Dayton, OH 45401-1527
- 16-19—Daytona Beach, Florida. 12th Daytona Spring Conf. Write Ch., Box 214911, S. Daytona, FL 32121
- 17-19—Bakersfield, California. XXVII Convención Estatal de California. Write: Com. Org., Box 3336, Bakersfield, CA 93385
- 24-26 - Gander, Newfoundland, Canada. 44th Annual Nfld/Labrador Service Weekend and Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 511, Gander, NF A1V 1W5

Planning a Future Event?

To be included in the Box 4-5-9 Calendar, information must be received at G.S.O. three months prior to the event. We list events of two or more days. 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): _____