

***E**ach of us in AA has received the gift of sobriety. All of us have found a new usefulness and most of us have found great happiness.*

*This adds up to the gift of life itself—  
a new life of wondrous possibility . . . .*

*This is the finest gift of all.*

*May the New Year . . . be the greatest time  
of giving and of receiving that we in AA have  
ever known.*

*Bill W., December 1955*



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## Another A.A. Miracle

A.A. doesn't promise miracles. What it promises is sobriety "if you 'have a desire to stop drinking,' use the tools of the program, are willing to go to any lengths to have what we have"—words newcomers hear in meeting rooms all over A.A. Still, there are miracles in the Fellowship. Like the one that happened for Herb C. of Vista, California.

"At age 29," Herb writes, "I got sober by no choice of my own. Something grabbed me, and to this day I don't know what. Then I was asked to read at meetings and could not; I couldn't even read my children's second-grade homework. The humiliation would start me drinking again, harder, and to strike out at my children and wife." Somehow, he recalls, he kept coming back to A.A. "and was told to look up every word I did not know. I did, and pretty soon I learned about serenity and began to know peace—even though I'd returned to high school and failed time after time."

To this day, Herb says, "I don't know what God is up to. It's hard work. I have gone back into the dark where the pain of my past was and cleaned house. I've not only earned my GED, but 16 years after high school I was presented with a diploma dated June 1978. And in June '97 I graduated college with a bachelor's degree in behavioral science. I'd resisted going time and again, but my sponsor kept telling me that this was all about normal living. His wife always said, 'Herb, I know you can do it.' She was right."

Herb still finds the events of his life "beyond comprehension." He "did not want to stop drinking" he recalls vividly. "I just wanted the pain and humiliation to go away. . . . Yet today I do not want to drink. And, of all crazy things, I want to keep learning about life and A.A. I cannot take credit for God's work, but I give thanks to His helpers in A.A. for this miracle of life."

## Deadline for Directory Information—March 2, 1998

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 2, 1998.

Printouts corrected to show up-to-date group information and returned to G.S.O. by the areas, will be used to produce the 1998-99 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.

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## 1998 Regional Forums

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

Mailings regarding each Regional Forum will be sent to G.S.R.s, area committee members, delegates, and central offices and intergroups, approximately three months ahead of time. The final Forum in 1997 will be Southwest, December 5-7, Houston Marriott North, Houston, Texas. In 1998 Regional Forums are planned as follows:

- *Western Canada*—June 12-14: Viscount Gort Hotel, Winnipeg, Manitoba
- *Pacific*—July 10-12: Red Lion Hotel, Sacramento, California
- *West Central (Special Forum)*—August 15-16: Helena and Miles City, Montana
- *Eastern Canada*—September 25-27: Airport Plaza Hotel, St. John's, Newfoundland
- *Southeast*—December 4-6: Ramada Resort Oceanfront, Daytona Beach, Florida

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**Please post *Twelve Tips on Keeping Your Holiday Season Sober and Joyous* (page 10) on your group bulletin board.**

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## Have You Checked Your Home Group's Vital Signs Lately?

"'Vital signs'—words dear to the medical profession—consist of numerical readings and observations that indicate if stress or illness is increasing or subsiding, if the subject is in fit condition or in need of certain health restoratives." And, declared Montana delegate Robbie S., "I can do the same with a home group. I don't come up with numerical readings, but I do have clear indicators of the group's fit spiritual condition."

Speaking at the West Central Regional Forum in St. Paul, Minnesota, in September, Robbie shared her own experience in checking the vital signs of a home group.

*"Blood Pressure.* Or, in A.A., the state of the first of our Three Legacies. At the very core, pumping life into each member should be the Legacy of Recovery. Do I hear solutions? Are references made to the uniform literature of A.A.? Are members sharing their own experience, strength and hope? I might see a few 'bleeding deacons' with hypertension and some members with what appears to be awfully low blood pressure, sometimes called apathy. The measure of health is the extent to which the membership addresses recovery through active sharing, one alcoholic to another, stressing sponsorship, anonymity, meetings on the Twelve Traditions, sharing sessions and group inventorying.

*"Temperature.* The group's temperature, or Unity, is only as vital as the warmth of the members: Are all newcomers welcomed? Is every effort extended to carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers?

*"Alertness.* Much as a patient might be asked, 'Do you know your name . . . what day this is?' I can ask questions that test the alertness of the group: 'Who's the General Service Representative?' 'How often does the group hold business meetings . . . and sharing sessions in which it seeks to reach a group conscience?' 'Is the Seventh Tradition of self-support utilized fully?' Healthy home groups are filled with members who have learned that it's the responsibility of the group to link to A.A. as a whole. The uninvolved group can get every bit as sick as the individual member going it alone.

*"Heartbeat.* Is the Legacy of Service beating loud and clear? Are folks happy and free as they give away the sobriety that was so freely given to them, and that they can keep only if they give it away? Is the pulse of service stronger because the principle of rotation stays in force? And is the rhythm of the group's heartbeat grounded in Tradition Two, which states, 'For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.'"

Robbie reminded her fellow A.A.s that "vital signs are ongoing. When the doctor checks yours, he doesn't want to know what your temperature and pulse registered yesterday. He's interested in what's happening right now. So it's important to check your group on a regular basis." Then she announced with a smile, "I am a member of the Flathead Valley Serenity Group in Whitefish, Montana. It is one of the two best home groups in the world. If you are not a member of the other one, see me later and we'll visit about how you can find a group like mine."

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## Frank M. and Pat R. Leave G.S.O. Richer For Their Presence

"It is hard to leave this job I love," says Pat R. "Yet for every trusted A.A. servant, whether in a group, on a service committee or as a staff member at the General Service Office, there comes a moment—and it's different for each of us—when one knows it's time to go."

A.A. archivist Frank M. who, like Pat, retires this December, agrees wholeheartedly. "But remember," he hastens to add, "that we're retiring from our A.A. jobs, not from A.A. I think we both identify with what our co-founder Bill W. wrote when he stepped down from active service: 'Like every A.A. member I have a definite responsibility to become a citizen of the world around me; . . . and [am] exploring certain areas of outside activity in which I may be able to make a helpful, and possibly a meaningful, contribution.'" (*The Language of the Heart*, p. 327)

Pat—a Texas transplant born and raised in New York and New Jersey, which explains why she doesn't "talk Texan"—is ending her nine-year stay at G.S.O. on the same assignment she started with: Correctional Facilities. "Every two years, when I've just rotated out of an assignment, that one's my favorite," she says with a smile. "Always, though, it's the people. Wherever I've been—at a Forum in Canada's Northwest Territories, a gathering of Native North Americans in Seattle, a General Service Conference in Manhattan or a meeting of Primary Purpose, my home group in Jersey City—I have connected with the A.A.s. We may speak in different tongues, but that needn't be a barrier; and we hear each other's hearts, so strongly are we joined in our recovery from the devastating illness of alcoholism."

Pat, who started to drink as a child of 12, lived with the devastation firsthand for years. "I now realize," she explains, "that I was using alcohol as a solution, one that quickly turned against me." Nonetheless, she

graduated from Music and Art High School in Manhattan, then earned a B.S. degree from the State University of New York at Buffalo; she later received a Master of Fine Arts from East Texas State University. Pat has taught art and English at every school level from elementary to college, and in 1971 she helped to introduce an alcoholism unit at Houston's St. Joseph Hospital, while serving as a counselor. Speaking of her experience, in early sobriety, of raising three daughters—Linda, Donna and Cynthia—she says, "I look back at that time with a sense of joy and gratitude—I was growing up with them!"

In April 1966, Pat sobered up in A.A. "My sponsor took me to intergroup meetings and conventions," she remembers. "I served in various ways in the group, worked at intergroup in Houston and, after nine years of sobriety, was a G.S.R., then Northeast Texas Area D.C.M., delegate and chairperson. Service has offered me an enormous sense of A.A. worldwide."

Over the years, she adds, "G.S.O. has served as a focal point for A.A. unity and service around the world. It has been an incredible privilege for me to serve the Fellowship that saved my life. The late (nonalcoholic) trustee Bernard B. Smith said, 'We will continue to owe to the generations yet unborn a solemn obligation to insure that this way of life is available to them, as it has been to us.' " (*A.A. Comes of Age*, p. 282) In leaving, Pat says, "I pray for the ability to assimilate the wealth of experience and friendship I've gained here into my life in retirement." Her path takes her back to Texas and old friends, her sister and family, her daughters and their families, including six grandchildren, and a new home group to find and join. She will continue to participate in her online A.A. group (RedRose), and relishes the thought of having more time in which to draw and paint and know the joys of teaching once more.

For Frank, who came to G.S.O. in 1976 and was named A.A. archivist in '82, the years have flown with dizzying speed. "So much has happened," he says, pointing out that in 1980 there were hardly any area archives, while the latest count shows that 63 of 92 U.S./Canada areas have an active archivist. Several areas have published detailed local histories documenting A.A.'s beginnings and growth, he notes. Judit Santon, the experienced nonalcoholic assistant archivist who will succeed Frank, has made great progress on the never-ending process of scanning archival material for computer access—with the goal of cutting future response time, making a larger body of material available and preventing physical damage to the many fragile original documents in the collection.

In his work, Frank opens windows on A.A.'s past, usually with ease born of experience and joy. Looking back on his own past, he recalls that he drank from age 13 on. From 1959-61 Frank served as a biologist in the

Army. "I drank all the laboratory alcohol I could get," he says, "and graciously served as a bartender at the Officers Club." Once discharged (honorably) from the Army, he became director of advertising for a drug company. "I worked all over—Palo Alto, Tokyo, you name it—and of course had easy access to all kinds of drugs. Everywhere I went, I drank and chewed on every tablet I could get my hands on to mask the results of drinking too much. Then in June 1970 I surrendered to A.A. and have been in custody ever since."

As archivist, Frank says, he feels privileged to have kept his hand on the pulse of A.A. history. "In these past 21 years at G.S.O.," he marvels, "I have served as a General Service Conference member with five G.S.O. general managers, dozens of staff members, more than 80 trustees and about a thousand delegates—what a gift! There is no state, no area that I haven't visited. And the people I meet, the local archivists and members of the archive committees—they are wonderfully warm, and I leave knowing that we are linked not only in our common recovery from alcoholism but in our desire to preserve A.A.'s rich history, to make the past relevant to the present and the future of the Fellowship. A careful study of our history—of the mistakes and the triumphs—translates into powerful tools for survival."

In retirement, Frank is opting for the best of all worlds: seven months of the year in Vero Beach, Florida, as a member of the Hibiscus Group, and five back in Manhattan, where he will return to his Oxford home group and many friends at G.S.O. He is relieved, he says, that his cocker spaniel, Timothy, at 13 more gray than buff, has consented to humor him and go along.

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## ***¡Feliz Navidad!— And Gracias, A.A.***

"Hoping your Holiday Season is full of blessings, I also want you to know that I am a newcomer in this fabulous program and, thanks to your help, am staying sober 24 hours at a time."

Writing in Spanish from his ship the *NV Avon*, anchored off the coast of Cabo Verde, Africa, this grateful seaman named Ivan then thanks the Spanish Services desk of the General Service Office, New York City, for having put him in touch with the Central Mexicana G.S.O., in Mexico City. "After my Higher Power," he says, "you are at the top of my gratitude list—I have come to understand fully what is meant when we say, 'I want the hand of A.A. to be there.' For A.A. was there for me when I first wrote to you for help, and you continue to be there."

Generally, Ivan notes, "I travel in the waters around Africa—the South Atlantic and Indian Oceans, the Mediterranean Sea—but no matter where I am, I want to stay sober. I pray to God that He will grant you His blessings for the correspondence and other services you provide for me and the many other alcoholics who are far away from our home groups. I wish all of you *Feliz Navidad*, with a heart full of gratitude."

## Tapings of Joy Light Up Roads For Homebound A.A.s

The 60-minute audiotape leads off with a medley of Nat King Cole Christmas carols, then switches to Kris Kristofferson singing "One Day at a Time." The warm voice of Diane Y., of Madison, Wisconsin, breaks in at the end. "Good morning, Mary," she says with an almost imperceptible yawn. "I don't know what your weather in Dublin is doing, but here it's raining up a storm and the old joints are creaking along with it. My fatigue level is on the ceiling—you know how that is—but as we say in A.A., it gets better. So let's start the meeting, after a short commercial break for God. We're on Step Eight...."

Recording messages and meetings is practically a daily occurrence for Diane, who delights in being one among approximately 30 Tapeworms, as she has dubbed them—especially at Holiday time, when she shares her favorite Christmas music with housebound A.A.s as close as Arizona, as far away as Indonesia, Australia and Sweden—"and they do the same," she says.

For meetings on tape, Diane points out, "it takes just two drunks sharing our experience, strength and hope, like Bill W. and Dr. Bob did in the beginning. Some like to start with the A.A. Preamble, others with the opening paragraphs of Chapter Five in the Big Book. The one big difference between a tape and a letter is that on the tape I can *hear* the emotion, all the shades of feeling that come through. My friends and I may be thousands of miles apart, but with this kind of sharing we get close as peas in a pod." Here she notes that she exchanges letters with a number of people who don't have access to taping equipment, as is sometimes the case in developing countries, and finds "these relationships rewarding as well."

How did Diane become a Tapeworm? "Back in 1988, at the end of my first year in A.A.," she relates, "it became apparent that rheumatoid arthritis was making it increasingly difficult for me to keep up with my regular 'live' meetings. So I joined LIM. (the international



correspondence service for Loners, seagoing A.A.s and the housebound that is coordinated by the General Service Office). That worked for awhile, but after a couple more years I was finding it harder and harder to write, and often my energy level was zerominus.

"My husband, Carl, in Al-Anon since I sobered up in August '87, and my now-85-year-old father will testify to the fact that I was no dreamboat to live with. But then I received a taped letter from a blind friend who wanted to show me another way to get to meetings besides going in person or by letter. So I began my journey as a Tapeworm, and my outlook on life spun around from thinking about what I didn't have to wondering what I had to share. As for Carl, he was not only relieved, he began to tape with me sometimes—other Tapeworms get a kick out of hearing both our voices occasionally."

It's a journey that has been "both frustrating and fantastic," Diane observes. "The obvious frustration is my not always having the energy to finish a 60- or 90-minute tape in one day, but I've learned to listen to my body and spread a taping over several days, or a week if need be; and it's fun because I get to talk from a lot of viewpoints, depending upon my mood at the time. At first I was shy about taping. I had to learn to share even when there was no visible person to share with. I was microphone shy for many months but have gotten over that. A day at a time, those of us who rely on our mail for meetings have found the taped letter to be an absolute joy. When I start talking on a tape, I might be

feeling down and depressed, but communicating out loud works miracles. Before I know it, I've talked myself from nothing but problems to all kinds of solutions."

And inspiration. "I have one friend who's a quadriplegic," she says. "But nothing keeps him down. He bought a van, a PC, and with his wife is traveling in Australia. He gets to live meetings there too. This fellow and others I'm in touch with are living and breathing the A.A. program; they're always reaching out to life. I have a friend in Wales who sets out to learn something new every year—weaving, flower arranging, you name it. And do they love music! I tape to Marcia, an A.A. in Texas, who can't get enough of Pavarotti. Another loves Bing Crosby's 'Christmas in Killarney' around the Holidays and, of course, his 'Jingle Bells' and 'White Christmas.'"

Whether it's music or simply one-on-one sharing between two alcoholics, Diane says, "a most important ingredient is humor. You know, what we do in A.A. is deadly serious; for us, to drink is to die. But just as meetings are our medicine—and sponsorship and Twelfth Stepping and the Steps and Traditions—so is laughter. When we start losing the ability to laugh, with others and at ourselves, that's when we go downhill. So when I brag on tape that I'm the world's best cook 'because I can burn water' . . . or advise, 'Now don't drive faster than your guardian angel can fly,' it's mainly to hear'em laugh. *That's* music to my ears, the best in the world."

Diane is eager "to let people in A.A. know about the Tapeworms, especially those of us with special needs. A.A. saved this alcoholic's life, and whatever works to pay the debt of gratitude I owe for my sobriety, I am willing to do. I pray that anyone interested in taping letters will contact me and enjoy as much pleasure and shared experience in recovery as I do. And I wish a beautiful Holiday season to all my fellow A.A. members who, in Bill W.'s words 'have trudged the Road of Happy Destiny.'"

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## New from G.S.O.

- *A.A. Service Manual/Twelve Concepts for World Service, 1997/1998 edition.* A history and explanation of A.A. services. (BM-31) \$1.55. Spanish edition, (SS-42) \$1.55.
- *1997 Final Conference Report.* Detailed report of the annual General Service Conference. *Confidential; for A.A. members only.* (M-23) \$2.00.
- *A.A. Guidelines on Archives.* Shared experience on topics of concern for area and local archives. (MG-17) 15¢ each.

## The Birthday Plan— Icing on the Gratitude Cake

Down in Broward County, Florida, some A.A.s have reinvented the Birthday Plan, which since the 1950s has provided a way for members to celebrate their individual and group anniversaries by setting aside a dollar or more for each year of their sobriety and sending it off to the General Service Office for A.A.'s services worldwide.

Last spring at the General Service Conference in New York, relates South Florida delegate John K., "there was talk about how effective the Birthday Plan used to be, how it's another place in the A.A. hat where 'spirituality and money can mix,' as our co-founder Bill W. put it—and how maybe we need to remind our members, especially the newer ones, about using the Plan to say, 'Thanks, A.A.'" Later, John did some thinking. "Once back home," he recalls, "I did the smart thing; I turned it all over to my local higher power"—his wife of 39 years, Joyce, herself an A.A. who in August celebrated 20 years of sobriety. "And she ran with it."



Barely three months later, on a sultry July day, Joyce and several members of the area's newly created ad hoc committee for the Birthday Plan, set up a booth at the quarterly A.A. assembly in Sarasota. On display were candy, birthday hats and whistles, and blue and yellow balloons flying—real-life versions of the balloons pictured on nearby mounds of "giving" envelopes addressed to G.S.O. For many A.A.s walking by, the booth was a magnet.

"We explained that the Birthday Plan is a real beauty because it gives us a chance to express personal gratitude and at the same time support the A.A. support system," Joyce says. "After all, A.A. is self-supporting through its own contributors—and that's us." By day's end, she reports, "we were amazed to find that we'd distributed Birthday Plan envelopes to about 1,500 members, mainly district chairpersons, D.C.M.s (district committee members) and G.S.R.s (general service representatives)." Several weeks later, she adds, "we had a booth at the 26th anniversary meeting of our Coral Springs home group, and again were met with enthusiasm. With the help of Bill B., an alternate committee member, we did a repeat in October at District 9's service fair in Fort Lauderdale, and we're not about to stop."

"In several of our area groups," Joyce points out, "a member celebrating an anniversary is presented with a medallion, and a Birthday Plan envelope along with it." As for the envelopes, they can be had for the asking from G.S.O.

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## Viewpoint

### Do Rituals and Rules Dilute the Message?

Are we in A.A. confusing the message with the message of rules, rituals and psychobabble? Former delegate (Panel 28) Annette F., of Fresno, definitely thinks so. Speaking at a Central Northern Interior California Area Assembly, she said, "I don't know how a lot of this stuff begins, but in my opinion it's sophomoric, immature. My biggest problem is pumping our clasped hands up and down after saying the Lord's Prayer while reciting this mantra: 'Keep coming back, it works.' Each year something new is added to the litany, most recently, '... it really works if you work it, so work it.' I try to picture our co-founders Dr. Bob and Bill W. as part of this scenario but cannot."

In A.A. meetings, Annette continues, "certain statements are made with such authority, you'd think they came straight out of the Big Book. For instance, the question often asked at meetings, 'Are there any newcomers here?' followed by the explanation that 'newcomers are those sober under 30 days.' Who says so? I was a daily drinker. To me, a week without a drink was a miracle; I certainly didn't feel like a newcomer. I know people who've gone to meetings and didn't identify themselves as newcomers; they waited till they had 30 days' sobriety, then said so. And some are slippees who have relapsed numerous times—for sure, they don't feel like newcomers. How then did this get started?"

"Also, we are told to go to 90 meetings in 90 days. I don't see that in our literature. Some towns may have just one or at most a few meetings a week and are many miles from other meeting places.

"Some may have to work at the time meetings nearby are held; or, perhaps some woman alcoholic, say, can't afford to pay for a babysitter 90 days in a row. Where do such decrees come from? One A.A. said back in the '70s that our program was being diluted; I agree that it has happened.

"As my friend John W. commented recently, 'Aren't we letting the practice of rituals become more important than the practice of A.A.'s principles?'" It appears, Annette says "that we want recognition instead of being willing to grow along spiritual lines. I believe that it's time we start scraping a lot of these barnacles off the bottom of the good ship A.A. so it can sail more smoothly. Think about it."

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## A.A.s en Espanol Hold Fifth Birthday Party in Atlanta

The theme "Everything Is Possible With Love" was confirmed in the smiling faces of more than 300 members who gathered in Atlanta last spring to celebrate the fifth anniversary of A.A. en Espanol. They came from as near as Charlotte, North Carolina, and Washington, D.C., from as far as San Juan, Puerto Rico.

In Atlanta, just a handful of people came together for the first meeting of Spanish-speaking A.A. in 1992, in the apartment of a local A.A. member. Today there are six vibrant groups in the metropolitan area; importantly they are attracting young newcomers on a daily basis.

The newspaper *La voz del Pueblo* ran a front-page story about the anniversary celebration. After giving a thumbnail introduction to A.A. Traditions and how groups live by them, reporter Winston A. Garcia, a good friend to A.A., wrote that he had expected to see many elderly people "with white hair" at the roundup, with faces denoting extreme suffering. Instead, he said, he found laughter and plenty of young people there, a number of them on the "southern hospitality" committee that went to any lengths to make visitors feel at home.

"I was impressed," Garcia wrote, "at what they call in A.A. the sobriety countdown—when I saw people with one day of sobriety all the way to 33 years, and everyone applauding and laughing and crying with happiness. To someone like me it was an eye-opener to see firsthand how the Fellowship of A.A. works, not only in our own lovely city of Atlanta but around the world."

## Correctional Facilities

### The Tortoise Triumphs Again

In the fabled race between the tortoise and hare, patience and fortitude won over haste. As the experience of Tony B., a member of the Southern New Jersey Correctional/Treatment Facilities Committee, shows, dogged persistence works in A.A. too.

When he accepted a commitment to a prerelease program last spring, Tony says, "I thought it would be a piece of cake: All I had to do was match soon-to-be released inmates with willing A.A. contacts on the outside. But there were roadblocks from the get-go. For starters, when I sought my home group's approval to list the names, addresses and phone numbers of volunteer contacts, a number of members at the business meeting expressed concern about possible conflicts with anonymity and confidentiality. Explaining that only I would have access to the list, I further stressed that inmate information would be given to the outside contact, not the other way around. Finally, after considerable discussion, the group agreed to the plan."

All systems go? No way, says Tony, who is his group's general service representative. After making an announcement at the group's regular meeting, he circulated a form to be signed by volunteer contacts. "Out of the more than 50 people present," he notes, "maybe 10 listed their names, and several of them left out their addresses. Not to be discouraged, I repeated the process at the next few meetings and came up with just two more names. A real surprise, since my home group is known for being strong on service."

Soon after, Tony received his first request for help, just two days prior to the inmate's release. Unable to reach anyone on his thin volunteer list, he decided to fill the gap himself: "As we'd prearranged by phone, I picked John up at his house, just hours after his release, and took him to a meeting of my group. About halfway through, he raised his hand, identified himself as an alcoholic and shared that he had been released from prison that day. He said he was grateful that someone was there to take him to his first meeting outside because he didn't think he could have gone on his own."

Then, relates Tony, "a group member—the one who had been most resistant—told us how pleased he was that John had come, and that it made him appreciate the value of the prerelease program. That fellow wound up not only contributing to our LIP (literature in pris-

ons) can but putting his John Hancock on my contact list. Other members followed suit."

Since that night, Tony reports, he has had "no problem" finding contacts for newly released A.A.s. Importantly, he adds, "I have talked to John and am glad to say he's sober and attending meetings close to his home." Looking back, Tony observes, "I understand that patience and tolerance, even in the face of defeat, are necessary if I am to be of service to my fellows. From my sponsor I heard early in recovery that service is the rent we pay for our seat in A.A., that gratitude is an action word—'Don't tell me, show me.' It is amazing what can happen in A.A. if we have faith in the experience of those who came before us and offer our services to those who want it. I must remember that 'I am responsible for . . . the hand of A.A. to always be there.'"

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### 'Was That an A.A. Commercial I Saw on TV?'

No way, Kay, Kevin—and others who have made similar inquiry. That 30-second television spot you saw that ended with a voice saying, "A.A., it works. Look us up in the phone book," was a public service announcement (p.s.a.), not to be confused with a commercial. The creation and circulation of TV and radio p.s.a.s was approved by an Advisory Action of the General Service Conference as far back as 1966. They are designed not to promote A.A. but to provide information about who we are and how to find us; and it is estimated that they have been instrumental in helping thousands of alcoholics and their families to become aware of the Fellowship as a resource for recovery.

Before making any decision concerning A.A.'s public relations, the Conference weighs every aspect in terms of Tradition Eleven, which states, "Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films." Indeed, in 1956, when the Public Information Committee of the General Service Board was formed, the Conference established a clear over-all policy. "In all public relationships," it stated, "A.A.'s sole objective is to help the still-suffering alcoholic. Always mindful of the importance of personal anonymity, we believe this can be done by making [our experience] known to alcoholics and to those who may be interested in their problem."



As A.A. co-founder Bill W. observed in an October 1957 Grapevine essay, "While word of mouth and personal contact have brought in many a newcomer, we can never forget that most of us are able to trace our chance for recovery back to our friends in communications—we read, or maybe we heard, or we saw." (*The Language of the Heart*, p. 181) Bill frequently pointed out that public information takes many forms: a simple "A.A. tonight" sign outside a meeting place, a listing in the local phone book and information provided in newspapers and the electronic media.

A variety of 30- and 60-second TV and radio p.s.a.s are available from the General Service Office. Some are close-captioned for the hearing impaired; others can be had in Spanish and French as well as English. One multi-reel TV tape, for example contains five 30-second spots: "First Meeting," in which members describe their feelings upon first coming to A.A.; "Calling Intergroup," in which A.A. volunteers answer calls for help at an intergroup/central office; "B.G.'s Advice," in which a woman tells of her lonely drinking life and new happiness in A.A.; and "Picking Up the Telephone," in which a man, after much hesitation, calls Alcoholics Anonymous.

Last spring the General Service Conference recommended, in an Advisory Action, that "a minimum of three television p.s.a.s emphasizing membership of young people and minorities, and generic A.A. information, be produced—the first stage of a plan to study and update, where necessary, all TV and radio p.s.a.s, including cultural references and their availability in French and Spanish and in formats compatible with current technology."

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## C.P.C.

### Jersey Med Students Learn There's Hope For Alcoholics in A.A.

"What do we tell our patients if we think they have a drinking problem?" This was the question senior medical students most frequently asked at orientation sessions offered by Northern New Jersey's District 20 Committee on Cooperation With the Professional Community.

"Tell them," urged alternate district committee member Bill L., "that there is a solution, that in A.A. we carry the message of hope." By combining the C.P.

orientations with open-discussion beginners meetings, he says, "we were able to give future doctors a look at alcoholics with a lot of years, months or days coming together for the sole purpose of helping the alcoholic newcomer. All with one thing in common: trying not to drink, just for today."

Writing in the Area 44 newsletter, Bill relates that he had been alternate D.C.M. for less than a week when he learned a local university medical school—the only one in the area, he says, that makes attendance at an A.A. meeting a mandatory requirement for graduation—needed help in steering seniors to an A.A. meeting. "The school didn't want the students attending a speaker meeting," he explains. "Past experience, it seems, showed they hadn't learned much about how Alcoholics Anonymous works from open speaker meetings."

Since there was no district C.P.C. representative at the time, Bill jumped in to fill the void: "I called on our district Public Information chairman for help, and he suggested taking the students to the open beginners discussion meeting he attended regularly." Arrangements were made, thanks to the cooperation of the group and the P.I. chair. "We recommended," Bill notes, "that the students come 10 minutes early for a brief rundown on A.A. and what to expect at the meeting. We asked that they introduce themselves as guests when we went around the room, not contribute to the basket since A.A. is self-supporting, and sit back, relax and listen but refrain from joining in the discussion.

"After the meeting we were available to answer whatever questions the students had. We also offered explanations of some of the terms they had heard—90 meetings in 90 days, sponsor, home group and more. We saw 36 medical students in eight weeks, and I was pleasantly surprised by their genuine interest in A.A. They arrived early and, despite their busy schedules, stayed for the Q&A session after the meeting."

On the whole, Bill says, "the students were amazed when told that there are more than 1,200 A.A. meetings every week in Northern New Jersey alone and that we have a 24-hour-a-day 800 number alcoholics can call for help. They were pleased to see firsthand how the newcomer is welcomed with a cup of coffee, listened to, given a meeting book, phone numbers and told to 'keep coming back.' I spoke with the doctors-to-be as if they couldn't understand what it was to be an alcoholic; then several of them mentioned that they knew other medical students who might have a problem. One student, who kept asking about ways to get someone to that first A.A. meeting, finally admitted he was worried about a brother who had vowed to drink himself to death. His face really brightened when he heard that while alcoholism can't be cured, it can be arrested."

## Twelve Tips on Keeping Your Holiday Season Sober and Joyous

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



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



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



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



**4** Find out about the special holiday parties, meetings, or other celebrations

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



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



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



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



**8** Go to church. Any church.



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



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



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



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

## Calendar of Events

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

### December

- 5-7—*Houston, Texas.* Southwest Regional Forum. Write: Forum Coordinator, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163
- 5-8—*Fuengirola (Malaga) Spain.* 10th Southern Spain Conv. Write: Ch., Apto 360, 29640 Fuengirola (Malaga) Spain.
- 26-28—*Joplin, Missouri.* Winter Holiday XVII. Write: Ch., Box 626, Monett, MO 65708

### January

- 15-18—*Raleigh, North Carolina.* 31st Tar Heel Mid-Winter Conf. Write: Ch., Box 18412, Raleigh, NC 27619
- 16-17—*Norfolk, Virginia.* Virginia Area Committee Winter Meeting. Write: Ch., 3383 Whipple Court, Annandale, VA 22003
- 16-18—*Biloxi, Mississippi.* Mississippi Gulf Coast Round-Up. Write: Ch., 9304 Cavalier Circle, Ocean Springs, MS 39564
- 16-18—*Yakima, Washington.* Ninth Annual Yakima Valley Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 8206, Yakima, WA 98908
- 22-25—*Fort Walton Beach, Florida.* Eighth Annual Emerald Coast Jamboree. Write: Ch., Box 875 Fort Walton Beach, FL 32548-0875
- 23-25—*Blytheville, Arkansas.* 41st Annual Tri-State Coon Supper. Write: Ch., Box 675, Blytheville, AR 72316

### February

- 5-8—*Harvey, Illinois.* We Are Not Saints Conv. Write: Ch., 15651 S. 94th Ave., Ste. 382, Orland Park, IL 60462
- 5-8—*Cleveland, Ohio.* 34th International Women's Conference. Write: Ch., Box 12730, Cleveland, OH 44112
- 6-8—*Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada.* 11th Annual Mid-Winter Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 472, Station A, Fredericton, NB E3B 5B4
- 6-8—*Brawley, California.* Imperial Valley Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 393, El Centro, CA 92244-0393
- 6-8—*Ocean City, Maryland.* Footprints in the Winter Sand. Write: Ch., Box 3772, Salisbury, MD 21802-3772
- 6-8—*Salem, Oregon.* Soberfest. Write: Ch., Box 17403, Salem, OR 97305-7403
- 13-14—*Kingston, Ontario, Canada.* International Institutional Conf. Write: Ch., 43 Lennox St., Kingston, ON K7M 4S3
- 13-15—*Syracuse, New York.* Salt City Mid-Winter Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 3588, Syracuse, NY 13220-3588
- 13-15—*Temple, Texas.* Sixth Annual Corrections Conf. Write: Ch., 1207 N. 12th, Temple, TX 76501

## Closed Meeting Topics From the Grapevine

For more detailed suggestions, see the pages noted.

*December* (page 43): Working the Twelfth Step

*January* (page 43): Making amends

27-March 1—*Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada.* Saskatoon Roundup. Write: Ch., 311-220 3rd Ave. S, Saskatoon, SK S7K 1M1

### March

- 6-8—*Boise, Idaho.* PRAASA 98. Write: Ch., Box 7652, Boise, ID 83708
- 27-29—*Butler, Pennsylvania.* Seventh Annual Getaway Weekend. Write: Ch., 210 Mansfield RD., Washington, PA 15301-8931

## Planning a Future Event?

Please send your information on December, January, February events, two days or more, in time to reach G.S.O. by *October 10*, the calendar deadline for the Holiday 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): \_\_\_\_\_

