

It Is Never Too Late to Start Living Sober

The results of A.A.'s 1996 triannual Membership Survey show that approximately nine percent of the members are aged 61-70 and three percent are over 70. Most of us are acquainted with oldtimers who have been comfortably sober in the Fellowship for years, but perhaps less visible are those who came to grips with their alcoholism late in life and have been living fulfilling, often joyous lives in A.A. ever since.

Following are the stories of two older alcoholics who opened themselves to help, recovery and the restoration of their lives:

From Dearborn Heights, Michigan, delegate Christine H. writes of her beloved grandmother: "It was not uncommon in the '80s to walk into her house and find her passed out on the couch. Her cupboard was always well-stocked with Scotch, and she almost always smelled of alcohol. Widowed since 1960, she turned 76 in 1989, drank a lot every day and passed out at night. She burned furniture and carpet with her cigarettes. It was harder each day for her to go on living alone.

"Finally, after countless discussions and disagreements, our family members overcame their misgivings and agreed to having an intervention with the help of a professional treatment center counselor. Sparing no details, we confronted Grandma about her drinking, but at the same time we told her we loved her and wanted her to live a long time. She made excuses, belittled our observations and resisted all the way. Then, suddenly weary, she let go a little and agreed to go to a hospital to detox. Before she could change her mind, we rushed her off to treatment."

That first month, says Christine, "was very difficult. I can't imagine how many years had elapsed since Grandma got through a day without drinking. Now she was bedridden, incoherent and very angry. I thought she'd die and that, if she lived, she would never forgive us. It seemed as though she would have been better off if we'd left her alone, and I wondered if maybe she was too old to stop drinking and we were making a big mistake.

"Then she began to improve. Her whole attitude changed drastically. Her anger vanished, and she was actually grateful to be sober. After going through the

treatment center program, she attended A.A. meetings, met a lot of friendly people whose continuing recovery from alcoholism formed a common bond, and her life turned around.

"Today Grandma is 85 and has nine years of sobriety. She enjoys her many friends and spends much quality time with her family. She returned to college and took writing classes, getting A's on every paper. She laughs a lot and is happy. When I look at her, it scares me to think how close we all were to writing her off, figuring her life was about over anyway. I thank God for the extra time my family has had with Grandma thanks to her sobriety. I am specially grateful to the A.A.s who hung in there with us during that critical first month of her detox. I'd go to meetings ready to give up on her, and they would give me the strength to get through one more day."

Recollecting some cherished memories, Class B (alcoholic) trustee Carl B., of Rock Springs, Wyoming, tells of his father, nearly 70 at the time, whom he was "privileged to sponsor into sobriety" when he himself was barely three years sober. "My dad, Dan B., was an old cowboy who owned a successful ranch in Big Piney, Wyoming, and for years had served on the board of directors of the local bank. He also was a periodic tippler. Never one to admit to a weakness, he believed that with willpower and determination you could do anything yourself."

But in 1950 came the Korean War. Carl's brother Malcolm was an early casualty; he was listed as MIA (missing in action) for two years before his death was verified and his body was sent home. "The toll on our family was enormous," says Carl. "My own drinking escalated, and I think that was when my dad turned from a periodic into a daily drinker."

In January 1968, Carl found A.A. while living in Coffeyville, Kansas. That fall, Dan came to visit, and his son invited him to "go to a meeting to meet the people who have helped me." Afterward, Carl recounts, "my dad's only comment was, 'That A.A. is something—it probably could even help a fellow who didn't have a drinking problem.'" Dan went home to Big Piney with

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an experiment in mind: to control his drinking. “He tried rationing his liquor,” says Carl, “but there were no meetings in the area at that time, and daily doses of the Big Book just didn’t pack the wallop of those extra whiskeys and beers. So the experiment failed, and Dad beat himself up for another year.”

The next time Dan visited, he asked to go to a closed meeting, but Carl explained that since he didn’t consider himself an alcoholic, he’d have to stick with open meetings since closed ones were for alcoholics only. A few nights later, however, the father and son wound up by mistake at a closed meeting, and Dan listened to a man who was almost his mirror image share the story of his drinking and 10-year recovery in A.A. “The message got through,” Carl remembers. “Dad admitted quietly that he was an alcoholic. Once back home, he put the Big Book and the latest copy of the Grapevine, which I’d subscribed to for him, beside his bed at night instead of the usual whiskey nightcap. He started phoning me a lot, and then he asked me to be his sponsor—‘not because you’re a good person,’ he quickly added, ‘but because I’m a bad alcoholic.’”

Not long after, Carl spent his vacation in Big Piney helping Dan start a group. “The first meeting was great,” he says. “We had an A.A. and an Al-Anon speaker, and about 30 people came.” But the following week’s meeting, in a room of the public library, saw a different scenario. “I had returned to Kansas,” Carl notes, “so I couldn’t help. But Dan perked a big pot of coffee, opened the door and read the Big Book while he waited for someone to show up. Nobody did, not that night nor many more to follow. Yet Dan never gave up. Every Saturday like clockwork he’d make his pot of coffee and read the Big Book. After an hour or so, he’d pour out the coffee, turn off the light and tuck the Big Book under his arm on the way out. This went on for more than a year, until Ray S. moved into the area, heard about the meeting in Big Piney and dropped in. Pretty soon a third alcoholic showed up, then another and another...”

In November 1990, Dan celebrated his 20th A.A. anniversary at a meeting of the Big Piney Drys Group he had founded. Seventeen other members were on hand, as was Carl, who presented his dad with a 20-year medallion. “He knew then,” says Carl, “that he had terminal cancer, but he was feeling fit that day and feisty as ever. I said, ‘Thank you, Dad, for being not only my father but my best friend,’ and he replied, ‘Son, don’t regret my passing. I was dead for all purposes when I came to A.A. These last 20 years have been a bonus I didn’t deserve. Now get the hell out of here.’”

On January 9, 1991, three months short of his 90th birthday, Dan died at home in his bedroom, which commanded a sweeping view of the mountains overlooking the ranch. Says Carl: “My Dad believed, as [A.A. co-founder] Bill W. stressed so often, that ‘faith is more than our greatest gift; its sharing with others is our greatest responsibility.’ (As *Bill Sees It*, p. 13) In his later years he tried to make this creed his own, and he succeeded, overwhelmingly.”

Gratitude Month: A Time to Say, ‘I’m Here for You, A.A.’

November has long been designated as Gratitude Month in the U.S. (October in Canada). Letters to the General Service Office indicate that thousands of A.A.s welcome the chance to ‘give away what I’ve gotten,’ as Vermonter Joann C. observes. They do this in their own special ways, during Gratitude Month and all year long.

Picking up on this theme, delegate Steve T., of El Reno, Oklahoma, sees the expression of gratitude as a vital way to strengthen his A.A. lifeline: “In order to stay sober, we have to get involved in our own sobriety,” he says. “Alcoholics Anonymous is a program of action. I don’t believe that simply sitting in a meeting will make me sober, any more than sitting in a hen house will make me a hen. It is the action of working and living the Steps and Traditions that ensures sobriety.”

At the same time he has found that “involvement in my own sobriety is not enough.” In a recent issue of the Oklahoma area newsletter, Steve says that “more important is involvement in the sobriety of others: Twelfth Step calls, sponsorship, going to meetings—as much for others as for me—and service work. These are the things that make life meaningful in A.A. Furthermore, carrying the message means contributing money—something we dislike talking about, perhaps because we have difficulty connecting money to spirituality.”

During his years in A.A., Steve points out, "I've heard literally hundreds of these discussions, even though [A.A. co-founder] Bill W. has made it perfectly clear that 'there is a place where spirituality and money can mix... in the hat.' (*As Bill Sees It*, p. 324) Too seldom, it seems, we focus on the cash itself and not on the results of our contributions to service.

"What do our contributions buy? They buy services to A.A. groups and the preservation of the artifacts of A.A.'s history so we do not have to relive the mistakes of the past. They buy involvement in the sobriety of those in correctional facilities, treatment centers and hospitals. They help carry the A.A. message to our friends in medicine, psychiatry, religion and the community—friends whom A.A. has needed to survive. They buy translations of the Big Book and other A.A. literature so that people in distant lands can have a chance at sobriety. They buy the means for communication, so that Loners can connect with other alcoholics. In short, they buy a chance at sobriety for suffering alcoholics. I think it's worth it. I think you do, too."

You'd have to search the world over, he notes, "to find a nonreligious organization the likes of A.A., which turns away money frequently from well-meaning contributors. In the spirit of the Seventh Tradition, 'A.A. is self-supporting through our own contributions,' which means that the active input of every A.A. member is vital to the life of the Fellowship."

As a way of showing their appreciation and support of A.A., many members celebrate their A.A. anniversaries by sending in a gratitude gift to their local intergroup, or to the General Service Office for its world services—usually a dollar or two for each year of sobriety. One Canadian group follows this Birthday Plan by collecting contributions from members on a voluntary basis throughout the year, or until the number of dollars matches the membership's collective years of sobriety. On the group's birthday, the total amount is sent to the General Service Office as a birthday contribution.

Gratitude is readily converted into action, individual or group. Some A.A. groups hold topic meetings on the subject, send money to the A.A. entity of their choice, or donate the A.A. Grapevine to someone homebound or in a treatment or correctional facility. Other groups may carry the message by preparing beginners kits—envelopes stuffed with a meeting book, an address book and pencil, a copy of *Living Sober* and a couple of A.A. pamphlets. Individual A.A.s may invite a sponsor or sponsee to lunch, or start a Step or Traditions meeting where there's such a need. Or they may make it a point to greet newcomers and out-of-towners who show up at their home group meetings.

In a letter he wrote in 1959, Bill W. suggested that "Gratitude should go forward, rather than backward. In

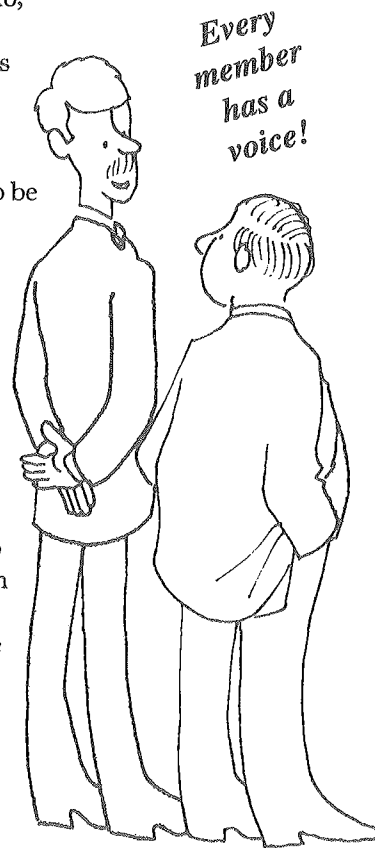
other words, if you carry the message to others, you will be making the best possible repayment for the help given you." (*ibid*, p. 29)

For Unity's Sake, Let's Not Skew Our 'Minority View'

"I cannot think of anything more futile than telling A.A.s—especially those in service—that they can't speak their minds," said Hawaii delegate Tanya E. of Maui. "Fortunately, in the Fellowship's continuing quest for unanimity in decision making, assurance that the smallest voice will be heard is built into Concept V, which states that "Throughout our world service structure, a traditional "Right of Appeal" ought to prevail, thus assuring us that minority opinion will be heard and that petitions for the redress of personal grievances will be carefully considered.'" (*Twelve Concepts for World Service*, p. 22)

Speaking at the Pacific Regional Forum in Sacramento,

California, in July, Tanya noted that "as a frequent member of the minority, I know firsthand that allowing all voices to be heard is absolutely vital to A.A.'s unity—and unity we must have if we are to continue to survive as a movement and carry our lifesaving message. But while I would never want to limit any person's right to express an opinion in A.A., I hope that we may think about the *role* of the minority view and the principles on which this Concept is based. We might ask ourselves if perhaps



From "The Twelve Concepts for World Service Illustrated."

we've become so focused on the minority's 'right' to be heard that we've forgotten this right is designed to ensure A.A.'s unity as envisioned by our co-founder Bill W. when he wrote the Traditions and created the Conference structure."

A real problem arises, Tanya said, "when a minority has had ample opportunity to state their case but, still unable to sway the majority, refuses to accept the group conscience and continues to lobby for their way. To me this endless politicking for a cause violates the spirit of Tradition Two, which counsels us to reach decisions on matters of importance only after thorough debate, then substantial unanimity has been achieved—a process to which the minority voice is integral. In a discussion of Tradition Two, in the January 1948 Grapevine, Bill expressed his conviction that 'The group conscience will, in the end, prove a far more infallible guide for group affairs than the decision of any individual member, however good or wise he may be.' (*The Language of the Heart*, p. 781)

"One of the most important things I learned as a member of the minority," she continued, "was that if I was unable to sway the group, I needed to set my own ego and agenda aside and honor this spiritual process, whether I agreed with the results or not. This humility, or sacrifice, if you will, was essential for my own spiritual well-being. I learned that our common welfare must come first. Unity is more important than my personal opinion."

In A.A., Tanya stressed, "the decision-making process is intentionally slow and deliberate. It sometimes involves lengthy discussions in order to accommodate all views. But I believe the process works as Bill intended: It builds trust, protects minority views and gives us time to become informed and reach a consensus. It is vital that we trust the group conscience process because it has stood the test of time, has proved to be nearly infallible—as Bill predicted back in 1948—and has ensured our unity as a movement these past 63 years. The minority has nothing to fear by trusting the consequences . . . and A.A. has everything to gain."

Help Newcomers Feel Special—Not Different

"If you're new or just coming back,' our secretary said at the meeting break recently, 'don't worry about giving. We need you more than we need your money.'

"I must have heard that said at hundreds of meetings and never liked it," writes an East Coast member, "but this time I suddenly understood why: It's telling newcomers that they are special and unique and needn't

take part in A.A.'s Seventh Tradition. 'My God,' I thought, 'here these new people are already feeling like aliens from another planet, and we're telling them to stay that way—be different, you're not a part of us. What a sad exclusion from what is supposed to help them to feel included!'"

The Seventh Tradition, he emphasizes, "is not only about self-support but about participation: 'We admitted....' 'We turned our lives over to....' 'We are self-supporting....' Sure, many of us came in broke (strangely, I could always get enough for booze). I was handing over nickels and dimes during those early meetings, keeping my dollar bill for cigarettes, but at least I was participating. Nobody told me not to and, furthermore, it was expected of me. I felt so much a part of that group when I threw my coins into the basket—like I was a rich big shot throwing in a grand. I had a piece of the rock, the rock I was building my sobriety on.

"My actions made me a part of A.A. I belonged. I was a member of A.A. because I said I was. For the first time this selfish, self-centered so-and-so wanted to give back, not only to other newcomers but to the whole of A.A.—to my group, my area, the General Service Office, intergroup—give back with my heart and my mouth (from which I often have to remove my foot) and my wallet. The fact is, as A.A. co-founder Bill W. said, 'There is a place where spirituality and money can mix... in the hat.' Money in the Fellowship is spiritual: My dime went into the hat and came back to me with friends, family, an opportunity to serve. Everybody around me was doing the same thing, and I knew I belonged. I get chills of gratitude just thinking about it. In short, telling newcomers that 'we need you more than your money' is nonsense. We need both. We need the newcomers and their money—so that they know they belong and the whole of A.A. can be self-supporting.

"What about all the times we tightwad alcoholics with some sobriety time let the basket go sailing by? Maybe reaching into our pockets even for spare change is too much exercise. A lot of us dodge the basket but scoot out to the pricey gym, or go with our friends for \$3 cappuccinos and mocha-chocolate lattes. I know that I used to spend from \$40 to \$100 a night when I was drinking; in sobriety, I've gotten real thrifty, at A.A.'s expense.

"Since I know I'm not alone, friends, how about this for a meeting opener? 'We have no dues or fees in A.A. but we do have expenses, and if you're new or just coming back, we welcome your participation—your contribution helps this group to be self-supporting and to keep the doors of A.A. open to all who suffer from alcoholism.'"

2000 International Convention Most Frequently Asked Questions

In a little less than two years, the International Convention will celebrate A.A.'s 65th Anniversary, June 29-July 2, 2000, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. With a theme of "Pass It On—Into the 21st Century," A.A.s from around the world will converge on Minneapolis to celebrate sobriety, and share experience, strength and hope in meetings, panels and workshops at the Convention Center, the Hubert Humphrey Metrodome, and at other locations throughout that beautiful city. Members of the Fellowship, as always, are now gearing up for this wonderful event and the General Service Office is beginning to receive inquiries. So here are some answers to the most frequently asked questions regarding the Convention.

Registration

Q When will registration forms be available?

A Registration/housing forms will be mailed in the fall of 1999 to the Fellowship.

Q What about on-site registration?

A On-site registration will be set up in the Minneapolis Convention Center. Actual hours have not yet been established but registration will likely open on Wednesday, June 28, 2000.

Q How much will registration cost?

A Registration fees will be established in 1999.

Q Must everyone register? I thought I didn't have to pay to go to an A.A. event.

A Yes. Everyone must register. Attendance at this special celebration is voluntary and, as responsible A.A. members, "we pay our own way."

Q Can travel agents register groups or individuals?

A Payments from travel agencies to register groups will not be accepted. Individuals must register themselves.

Housing

Q Can members contact hotels themselves?

A No. To make the process as fair as possible, all housing requests will be processed through the official Housing Bureau. Hotel requests will be assigned on a first-come, first-served basis. Housing forms will go out with registration forms. We need your help in cooperating with this housing process.

Q What are the main hotels?

A Events will be at the Minneapolis Convention Center, the Hubert Humphrey Metrodome, and the Hilton and Hyatt Hotels.

Q Can travel agents make room reservations?

A Room reservations can only be made in individual people's names. Rooms available through the Housing Bureau, at specially-negotiated Convention rates, are not commissionable to travel agents. Once hotels have been assigned by the Housing Bureau, confirmation will be sent by the hotels.

Q Can we request a room in the same hotel with friends?

A Yes, if you submit your housing forms together, in the same envelope with the same hotel choices and deposits, every effort will be made to house you together.

Q If 50 of us are coming together from the same area, can we be in the same hotel?

A We do make an effort to accommodate group housing requests. There is a separate procedure for this to ensure fairness while trying to meet your needs. More information on this will be available in the future.

Transportation

Q Will transportation be available?

A A.A. will provide transportation to and from A.A.-assigned hotels and motels. This will be at no additional cost to the attendee. City/public transportation routes can also be used (there may be a nominal charge for this service). Free shuttling will be available between all event locations.

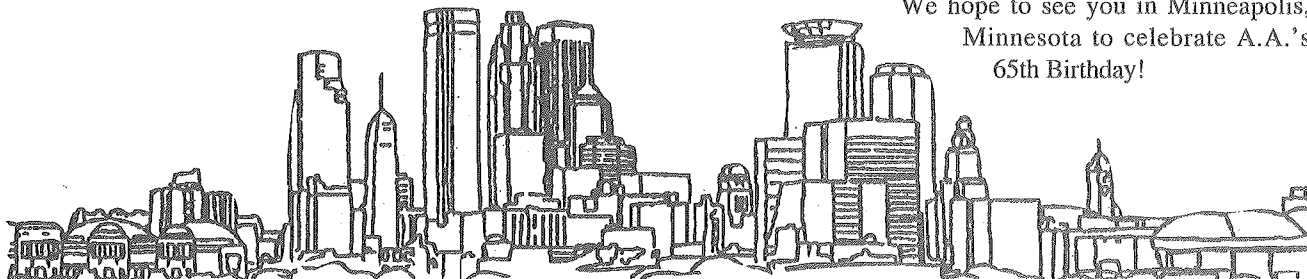
Q What about special airline rates?

A As at other International Conventions, there will be special fares available. That information will be available with the fall 1999 registration information mailing.

Q Where do I obtain more information?

A More information will be available throughout 1999 and 2000 in *Box 4-5-9* and G.S.O.'s website (www.alcoholics-anonymous.org). All necessary information will be included in the registration packet which will be available September 1999. This packet will also list special telephone numbers to call for answers to specific questions about housing, the program, tours, etc. A.A.'s website will be updated as more information becomes available.

We hope to see you in Minneapolis,
Minnesota to celebrate A.A.'s
65th Birthday!



How Do You Make An Old-Fashioned Twelfth Step Call?

With many treatment facilities closing their doors, more and more A.A.'s are seeking guidelines for making old-fashioned Twelfth Step calls.

The 1998 Conference Literature Committee considered a pamphlet on making Twelfth Step calls that was compiled and in use by Area 25 (Kansas). Although Conference committee members felt this effort was fine for local use, they emphasized the importance of the use of "How It Works" in the Big Book, as well as seeking guidance through sponsorship, the experience of older members and workshops.

One such workshop was held last spring by the Answering Services Committee of the Elmira (New York) Area Intergroup. The area's second Twelfth Step workshop, developed its program along lines of the G.S.O.'s service piece "Suggested Workshop Format." Out of the workshop experience has come some suggested guidelines. Because they have proved so useful, the committee has shared them with G.S.O., as follows, in the hope that others will be helped too:

1. *Return calls ASAP.* Call back immediately to listen, share and arrange a time and place to meet—but *not* at a bar. If you are called to a bar, go there only to pick the person up and, preferably, to get him or her to a meeting.

2. *Twelfth Step in pairs, with a same-sex member if possible.* Twelfth-Step calls can be intense, and there is safety in numbers. Besides, two heads are better than one. Be punctual and look your best.

3. *Twelfth Step when the prospect is sober or fairly sober.* Calls on intoxicated alcoholics seldom work because of blackouts. Wait for the end of a spree or a lucid interval when the prospect is still jittery.

4. *During home calls, separate prospect from family if you can (suggest Al-Anon for family members).* Too many people butting in to influence you about the "bad guy" can be disruptive. Learn from experienced A.A.s how to interact with family or significant others on the scene, and when it is wiser to leave than to stay.

5. *Suggest detox/rehab if needed.* If such is indicated, arrange with family or significant others, with prospect's permission if possible. Should violence seem imminent, leave. If necessary, make the appropriate phone call.

6. *Share how it was (your own drunkalog).* Don't moralize or lecture or brand prospects as "alcoholics." That decision is theirs—even as to tossing out alcohol they have on hand. Detail your own symptoms, drinking habits and other personal experiences with alcohol.

7. *Share your understanding of the disease of alco-*

holism. Let the person know that this disease is progressive and can end with insanity or early death. Describe the conditions of body, mind and spirit that accompany alcoholism.

8. *Share exactly what happened to you.* The prospect will probably want to know how long you have been in A.A. and how you got and stayed sober.

9. *Share your A.A. experience.* Share how A.A. has worked for you and helped you to regain your sanity while maintaining sobriety, how it has led to being willing to believe in a power greater than self. Use everyday language and avoid arousing prejudice against theological terms and conceptions.

10. *Share how it is now—your recovery program and spirituality.* Outline the A.A. program of action and emphasize that this isn't the somber end of something (preferably drinking) but the start of a challenging, rewarding way of living based on spiritual principles.

11. *Leave a meeting schedule, A.A. pamphlets and your phone number; and make one follow-up visit or phone call.* Offer to return for further questions, and help with transportation to a meeting if possible. Mention Al-Anon meetings available to family members and significant others.

12. *Understand that success means YOU are still sober.* Practical experience shows that nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as intensive Twelfth Step work with other alcoholics.

Exercising the Right to Be Wrong Can Spell Harmony

These days at meetings of Sobriety in the Park, in Ventura, California, group unity is as palpable as the sun that warms members' faces and the outdoor literature display. "Thanks to an incident that occurred last summer," says secretary Mike H., "I've come to realize that group unity is not a destination; it's a journey that is happening all the time. And there's ample room for ornery individuals like me to change our minds about a particular matter when the group conscience shows us a better way."

The catalyst in this instance was Mike's motion to allocate some of the group's funds to a beach party. "At the time it seemed like a great idea," he recalls. "For the preceding two years this event had been sponsored by our local Horizon Group, and people loved it—last year about 200 A.A.s and their friends showed up. So I was really gung-ho." Much to Mike's surprise, however, not everyone felt the same.

"Several folks expressed strong reservations," he reports. "Specifically, they felt that they had contributed money to the group for A.A. purposes: Twelfth Step work, literature, rent (to the Alano Club, where our group meets in bad weather), refreshments and, with what's left over, following the 60-30-10 contribution plan—60 percent to the Camarillo Central Office, 30 percent to the General Service Office and 10 percent to our area committee."

The consensus was, Mike says, that "to use any of these funds for a social event would constitute a breach of faith. That made sense to me, so I was quick to turn thumbs down on my own motion—and glad to give first priority to the unity of the group."

In the end, he says, "we voted to put out a separate collection can for the party so that anyone who wished to contribute could. We raised \$20 the first time out and to date have collected about as much as if we'd used group funds. The donations were a greater expression of group unity than anything I might have envisioned. The episode also showed me a principle for our trusted servants—that the idea is to provide leadership but at the same time not get in the way. Today I like to think that I'm living up to that notion."

P.I.

New P.S.A.s Offer Help to a Wide Spectrum of People

Four new TV public service announcements (P.S.A.s) have been produced by the trustees' Public Information Committee and are now available from the General Service Office. Approved by an Advisory Action of the 1998 General Service Conference, the P.S.A.s emphasize the membership of young people and minorities, along with generic information, as recommended by the '97 Conference. Closed captioned for the hearing-impaired, the videos also come in Spanish; French versions are in the works.

The 20- and 30-second spots, for each category, are formatted on Betacam SP or 3/4" U-Matic for television. The first ("Male," item TV-14) shows a man at a bar saying (in the abbreviated 20-second spot), "Man, I had lots of problems. So I'd drink to feel better. You know what the real problem was? Alcohol. When I went to my first A.A. meeting, I wasn't sure what was going on. But now, a day at a time, I like being sober." Then speaks the narrator (whose message is the same at the conclusion of all the new P.S.A.s): "If you're concerned about your drinking, give us a call.

Alcoholics Anonymous. We've been there."

The second P.S.A. ("Female," TV-17) spotlights a woman gazing at a picture of her child when very young. "You know, I drank for a lot of years," she says. "My daughter was almost 18 before I got sober. A.A. . . . it never appealed to me until I walked into my first meeting. I'm very grateful to A.A." The third spot ("Young People," TV-20) focuses on a teen girl at a party saying, "Hey, guys, what's happening?" Another girl interjects scornfully, "Who needs her . . . she's always drunk." And a teen boy exclaims, "Watch it! You got a problem!" Whereupon the first girl silently wonders, "What's the matter with me?"

The script for the 30-second "Information" spot (also TV-20) develops thusly: Senior male: "They told me alcoholism is a disease." Young female: "It can happen to anyone." Adult female: "Alcoholism cost me my job." Senior male: "It cost me my family." Young female: "Alcoholism almost cost me my life." Adult female: "Nothing helped until I went to my first A.A. meeting."

The trustees' P.I. Committee suggests that introduction of the new P.S.A.s be staggered over a period of time, with a new P.S.A. being introduced to stations about every six months. The more frequent and stronger the contacts that local committees establish with TV stations, the thinking goes, the better the chances that the P.S.A.s will be aired frequently over time—thus expanding A.A.'s window of opportunity to reach the still-suffering alcoholic. As co-founder Bill W. observed, "Good public relations are A.A. lifelines reaching out to the alcoholic who still does not know us." (*The Language of the Heart*, p. 91)

Scripts for the new P.S.A.s are available upon request. If you have questions, or wish to place an order for the scripts or P.S.A.s formatted for television use (price: \$10 each, 20% discount applies), please call G.S.O.'s Public Information desk: (212) 870-3119.

Where Does Carrying The Message Start— Where Does It Stop?

"Shoemaker, stick to thy last!" admonishes Tradition Five, whose principle is A.A.'s reason for being: "Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers." As countless A.A.s committed to this concept have discovered, however, mere practice doesn't always make perfect.

"Now and again," reports Bill E., chairman of the Northern New Jersey Public Information Committee, "we receive a request for a speaker to address a group of elementary school children, say, or a young scout

troop, on the dangers of alcohol—in the hope, conceivably, that the youngsters will think twice before experimenting with alcohol. But, do we A.A.s have a place in this scenario?”

Writing in the summer issue of *This Day*, the newsletter of Area 44 New Jersey General Service/Intergroup, Bill says, “My fondest desire would be realized if no one had to undergo the hell I did in my active alcoholism. But I need to remember that we are not a temperance society, nor do we preach abstinence. Temperance movements and anti-alcohol legislation were tried in the past, and they failed.

“All of us know any number of people who can drink successfully,” he points out. “We, members of A.A., cannot. We are uniquely qualified to share the message of recovery from alcoholism. But our experience does not qualify us to address the dangers of alcohol in general. For the majority of people, alcohol poses no danger.”

Besides, Bill notes, “there is the matter of having opinions on outside issues and the warning embodied in the Tenth Tradition, which states that ‘the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.’ When we speak before a non-A.A. group, we are A.A., even though when we speak, we’re encouraged to give a disclaimer to the contrary. A.A. has no opinion on the manufacture, distribution, sale or consumption of alcohol. We have no opinion on the legal drinking age or the definition of ‘blood-alcohol level’ for purposes of law enforcement. It may be harsh to say we don’t care about these things; many of us have strong views about them. But as A.A. members we have no opinion on outside issues, which these are.”

Then just where, Bill says, “do we carry the message? We carry it to any individual or group that wants to hear what A.A. is and does. We’re not experts in alcoholism; we carry the message to persons who have lost control of their drinking and to groups interested in our message of recovery from alcoholism. We do not carry the general message ‘Don’t drink.’ But if you have a problem with alcohol, we do carry the message ‘Don’t drink and go to meetings!’”

In the Northern Coastal California area, Tim P., who chairs the Sonoma County committee on P.I./C.P.C. (Cooperation With the Professional Community), offers a caveat about speaking before non-A.A. groups. In the July issue of the newsletter of the Sonoma County Intergroup Fellowship, he says that “it is easy to get sidetracked—to get drawn away from the one thing we’re there to share: our alcoholism and our recovery in A.A.”

For example, he explains, “take the question of drugs: That can be a challenge to answer honestly, in a way that does justice to the trust being placed in us by the entire Fellowship and at the same time puts the issue to bed and allows us to return to our main topic—Alcoholics Anonymous.”

C.P.C.

Being Friendly with Our Friends Requires A Helping Hand

A.A. has utilized exhibits to carry the message since the mid-1950s. As the C.P.C. Workbook confirms, most area or district C.P.C. committees learn of opportunities to staff a booth at a local, state or regional professional meeting through contacts with professionals, convention bureaus, chambers of commerce and offices of professional societies.

Recently, G.S.O. received a letter from John V., chairperson of the Wyoming Area C.P.C. Committee. “Cooperating with the professional community,” John wrote, “affords us a wonderful chance to do our part in providing information to the public and helping to change its age-old, negative attitude toward the drunk.

“Think, for example, about the millions of alcoholics who haven’t hit their bottoms in prisons and skid rows,” John suggests. “A.A. would do these people some good if they could hang around our meetings long enough. But where will they get a glimmer of hope that they don’t have to die this way? We can help carry the message to police departments, lawyers, classrooms from elementary to college, members of the clergy, health-care workers and many more professionals who are on the front lines when it comes to helping sick alcoholics and steering them to recovery in A.A.

“In September,” John reports, “we were given a golden opportunity to ‘put our money where our mouth is’ after being invited to have an exhibitor’s table at a meeting of the Western Corrections Association in Cheyenne. We went into this with an attitude of cooperation, not affiliation, and a strong spirit of being friendly with our friends. Thanks to the teamwork of our area Corrections, Public Information and C.P.C. committees, the exhibit featured an array of literature and videos appropriate for these professionals.”

Exhibits at national or international meetings of professional groups, on the other hand, are coordinated through the C.P.C. desk at G.S.O. Invitations that arrive at the C.P.C. desk are reviewed by the trustees’ C.P.C. Committee, which is responsible for approving A.A.’s participation in specific national meetings. With the agreement of the local C.P.C. committee, and at the same time keeping the area delegate informed, A.A. members staff these exhibits. All costs and advance arrangements are handled by G.S.O., including shipping the C.P.C. traveling exhibit to the chairperson or responsible committee member.

"If any of you," John concludes, "throughout Wyoming [or elsewhere] have an opportunity to be helpful in carrying the message to any professionals and need help in getting started, feel free to contact me." Also, G.S.O. would be pleased to know what is going on in your districts with C.P.C. work, so we may share it with others.

Treatment Facilities

Suggested Goals for T.F. Committees

The 1998 General Service Conference Treatment Facilities Committee discussed creating a list of suggested goals for distribution to all delegates and Treatment Facilities committee chairs.

This list is intended as a committee "starting point" only. It is A.A. experience that if a committee group conscience selects a single project and follows it through to completion, there is a great sense of unity and love and service shared by all committee members.

For further experience, please review the Treatment Facilities Workbook, talk to experienced members in the area, and remember that our first responsibility is to the Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous.

1. Study the Treatment Facilities Workbook.
2. Purchase Treatment Facilities Handbooks (M-40H) for all committee members.
3. Send a list of Treatment Facilities meetings to all D.C.M.s and to local intergroup/central offices.
4. Invite Correctional Facilities, Cooperation With the Professional Community, and Public Information Committee liaisons to Treatment Facilities committee meetings.
5. Make presentations to three Treatment Facilities and offer follow-up presentations every four months to accommodate staff changes.
6. Set up Treatment Facilities literature displays at district meetings, area meetings, seminars, conventions, etc.
7. Create a local Treatment Facilities presentation based on the Treatment Facilities Workbook and local experience, i.e., for psychiatric hospitals, nursing homes, youth noncorrectional facilities, shelters, halfway houses.
8. Create a Temporary Contact (Bridging the Gap) program.
9. Contact three nursing homes to offer A.A. presentations or meetings.
10. Contact three psychiatric hospitals to offer A.A. presentations or meetings.

11. Fight apathy within the Fellowship; find a co-chair and interested people in order to achieve all of the above.

12. Write to the General Service Office with additional suggestions for this list.

Correctional Facilities

Carrying the Message Into Youth Detention Centers

A.A.s doing service work in Youth Detention Centers face a myriad of special challenges. According to a 1996 survey of area Correctional Facilities committee chairpersons, A.A. volunteers need help carrying A.A.'s message to mounting numbers of incarcerated young people. In response, this year's General Service Conference recommended that a new section on Youth Detention Centers and short-term facilities be added to the Correctional Facilities Workbook.

The question of how to better carry A.A.'s message into Youth Detention Centers is of growing concern to many of those involved in C.F. work. Citing differences on a number of levels, A.A. volunteers raise many questions—yet the answers escape even the more experienced "outside" A.A. sponsor. For example, A.A.s want to know:

1. Will young people who have barely scratched the alcohol surface be able to identify with the stories of seasoned adults? Many youngsters deny having a drinking problem.
2. How do we deal with resentful, angry youth that have been mandated to attend A.A. meetings?
3. How have others been able to connect with youngsters, given the rapid turnover rate at many youth detention centers?

There are many unanswered questions. Are there answers out there? We think so. The trustees' Committee on Correctional Facilities would like to hear from A.A.s who have answered the questions cited above and any others not listed here. Please tell us about your successes and how they were achieved, so that we may share your strength, hope, and experience with others.

Coincidentally, the 1998 Conference Treatment Facilities Committee asked that sharing from U.S./Canada T.F. committees regarding carrying the message into non-correctional youth facilities be gathered in a report to be reviewed by the 1999 Conference Treatment Facilities Committee. Hopefully, your experience and sharing will encourage A.A. members to reach out to alcoholics of all ages, including young people.

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.



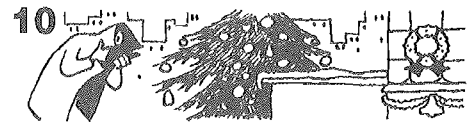
7 Don't think you have to stay late. Plan in advance an "important date" you have to keep.



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.

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

OCTOBER - NOVEMBER 1998

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.

October

- 1-4—*Amarillo, Texas*. Top of Texas Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 412, Amarillo, TX 79105
- 2-4—*Tucson, Arizona*. 1998 Arizona Area Conv. Write: Area Secy., 1730 E. Lehi #3, Mesa, AZ 85203
- 2-4—*Crescent City, California*. Sobriety by the Sea. Write: Ch., Box 871, Crescent City, CA 95531
- 2-4—*Modesto, California*. 51st Annual Fall Conf. Write: Tr., Box 508, Rocklin, CA 95677
- 2-4—*Aspen/Snowmass, Colorado*. Joy of Living Roundup. Write: Ch., 626 Vine St., Aspen, CO 81611
- 2-4—*Muscataine, Iowa*. Melon City Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 1244, Muscatine, IA 52761
- 2-4—*Spearfish, South Dakota*. Area 63 Fall Conf. Write: Ch., 8816 Valley View Dr., Sturgis, SD 57785
- 3-4—*Rochester, New York*. Weekend "Do It." Write: Ch., Rochester Central Office, 10 Manhattan Square Dr., Ste. D., Rochester, NY 14607-3997
- 9-11—*Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, Canada*. 43rd North-East Area Conf. Write: Ch., Box 1298, Sault Ste. Marie, ON P6A 6N1
- 9-11—*Petit Jean Mountain, Arkansas*. 16th Annual ARKYPAA. Write: Ch., Box 25039, Little Rock, AR 72205
- 9-11—*Quincy, Illinois*. Mississippi Valley Regional Conf. Write: Ch., 604 Huckleberry Heights, Hannibal, MO 63401
- 9-11—*Sioux City, Iowa*. Area 24 Fall Conf. Write: Ch., Box 5246, Sioux City, IA 51102
- 9-12—*Murcia, Spain*. Sixth National Convention. Write: Ch., Apartado 170, 33400, Aviles, Asturias, Spain.
- 10-11—*Dickinson, North Dakota*. Fall Fellowship Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 1764, Dickinson, ND 58601
- 16-18—*Campbell River, British Columbia, Canada*. Dist. 3 Rally. Write: Ch., Box 652, Campbell, BC V9W 6J3
- 16-18—*Austin, Minnesota*. Hiawathaland Get-Together. Write: Ch., Box 5792, Rochester, MN 55903
- 16-18—*Portsmouth, New Hampshire*. 10th Annual Woman to Woman Conf. Write: Box 189, West Nottingham, NH 03291-0189
- 16-18—*Richmond, Virginia*. Fall Assembly. Write: Ch., 3383 Whipple Court, Annandale, VA 22003
- 16-18—*Lake Geneva, Wisconsin*. "Happiness Is" Conf. Write: Ch., ON115 Windermere Rd. #2101, Winfield, IL 60190-1281
- 22-25—*Hagerstown, Maryland*. 14th Annual Area 29 Fall Conf. Write: Ch., 7021 Garden Walk, Columbia, MD 21044

- 23-25—*San Bernardino, California*. Inland Empire Conv. Write: Ch., Box 9362, San Bernardino, CA 92427-0362
- 23-25—*Mackinac Island, Michigan*. 10th Annual Fall Weekend. Write: Ch., c/o Lansing Central Office, 302 S. Waverly, Lansing, MI 48917
- 23-25—*Greensburg, Pennsylvania*. 50th Laurel Highland Conf. Write: Ch., Box 6, Bovard, PA 15619
- 24-26—*St. Cloud, Minnesota*. St. Cloud Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 125, St. Cloud, MN 56304
- 30-November 1—*Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada*. Kelowna Roundup '98. Write: Ch., Box 2012 Sta. R, Kelowna, BC V1X 4K5
- 30-November 1—*Boise, Idaho*. Area 18 Fall Assembly. Write: Ch., 22658 Caitlin Lane, Middleton, ID 83644-5665

November

- 5-8—*Honolulu, Hawaii*. 37th Annual Hawaii Conv. Write: Ch., Box 23434, Honolulu, HI 96823-3434
- 6-8—*Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada*. 54th Manitoba Keystone Conf. Write: Ch., #505 -365 Hargrave, Winnipeg, MB R3B 2K3
- 6-8—*Burlington, Vermont*. 28th Annual NE Regional Conv. Write: Ch., NERC, RR #1, Box 677, Cuttingsville, VT 05738
- 12-15—*Orlando, Florida*. Big Book Study. Write: Ch., Box 4911, South Daytona, FL 32121
- 13-15—*Fitchburg, Massachusetts*. 35th State Conv. Write: Rgrs., Box 344, Westminster, MA 01473-0344
- 20-22—*Buffalo, New York*. 57th Buffalo Fall Conv. Write: Ch., Box 1552, Amherst, NY 14226-7552
- 20-22—*Fontana, Wisconsin*. Ninth Annual McHenry's Soberfest. Write: Ch., Box 717, McHenry, IL 60051
- 26-29—*Las Vegas, Nevada*. 32nd Las Vegas Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 43177, Las Vegas, NV 89116

Closed Meeting Topics From the Grapevine

For more detailed suggestions, see the pages noted.

October (page 39): Lightening up

November (page 19): Beginners meeting

27-29—*Diamond Head, Mississippi*. Ninth Annual Gratitude Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 7851, Gulfport, MS 39507-7851

27-29—*Omaha, Nebraska*. Great Plains Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 34222, Omaha, NE 68134

27-29—*Tulsa, Oklahoma*. Sixth Annual Green Country Thanksgiving Weekend. Write: Ch., Box 54079, Tulsa, OK 74155-0079

December

4-6—*Daytona Beach, Florida*. Southeast Regional Forum. Write: Forum Coordinator, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163

4-6—*Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, Canada*. 15th Family Roundup. Write: Ch. 888 5th Ave. NW, Moose Jaw, SK S6H 3Y3

4-6—*Gibraltar*. I Gibraltar Conv. Write: Sec., Nazareth House, Hospital Hill, Gibraltar

24-26—*Copperas Cove, Texas*. Second Annual Alkathon. Write: Ch. Rt. 2, Box 2596A, Kempner, TX 76539

31-January 1—*Franklin, New Hampshire*. Dist. 11 Second Annual New Year's Eve Celebration. Write: Ch., Box 1615, Laconia, NH 03246

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): _____

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

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



January

8-10—*Laughlin, Nevada*. Ninth Annual
River Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 1063,
Bullhead City, AZ 86430

29-31—*Christchurch, New Zealand*. 36th
New Zealand Conv. Write: Secy., Box
2062, Christchurch, New Zealand