

U.S./CAN-WEST VIRTUAL FORUM

FINAL REPORT

December 19, 2020

**LAST NAMES OF CLASS A (NON-ALCOHOLIC) TRUSTEES
AND NON-ALCOHOLIC EMPLOYEES ONLY APPEAR IN THIS REPORT**

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The 2021 U.S./CAN-West Virtual Forum was held on December 19, 2021. Registration for the Forum was **2088** This included **799** members attending their very first Forum. In addition, the U.S./CAN-West Virtual Forum marked the **second** ^{Virtual} Forum since the inception of Regional forums in 1975.

Dear A.A. Friends,

Please mark your calendar for the upcoming 2021 *Virtual* Regional Forums:

Northeast June 4-6

West Central September 10-12

Southwest October 8-10

East Central November 19-21

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WORKSHOP REPORTS

Workshop Reports 5:00-6:05 PM EST Session A Workshops

“A.A. Around the World” (Moderator: Newton P., trustee-at-large/U.S. Trish L., trustee-at-large/Canada/Reporter: Mike S.)

Newton P., trustee-at-large/U.S., offered workshop attendees a description of the position and specific duties of the Trustees-at-Large, as well as a description of attendance at various international celebrations and conferences. The breadth of A.A.’s reach into approximately 180 countries was outlined, as well as specifics regarding literature translations into various languages. All travel, translations, etc. is made possible by contributions made to A.A.W.S. Recent trips include 2017: REDELA in Costa Rica; 2018 GSC in Cuba; 30th Anniversary in Latvia; 25th World Service Meeting in South Africa; 2019 50th Jubilee in India; 30th Anniversary in Peru; 47th Anniversary in Honduras; 11th National Convention in Colombia. Photos of locations and highlights of many of these events were shared. Newton reported on the 60th ICYPAA Conference in Baltimore, Maryland and stressed the importance.

Trish L., trustee-at-large/Canada, shared the International Data Map with workshop attendees, and pointed out the presence and growth of A.A. service structures around the world. The importance of intergroups to the beginnings of these structures was stressed. The graphics also pinpointed where initial steps are being made in certain countries, sometimes by lone members trying to carry A.A.’s message. The trustee-at-large/Canada also shared about a panel at RADELA which focused on the challenges of being a woman in A.A., particularly in certain areas, and that even their attendance at an event such as RADELA puts them at personal risk. It was pointed out that Brazil exhibited a very sophisticated service structure and that we have much to learn from each other. Personal stories were shared, such as a single nun in Paraguay who single handedly carried the message throughout her country, as well as a group of nursing students in Argentina who are learning how to work with alcoholics. No matter where or how, vital work is being done by dedicated servants. Finally, Japan was announced as the host of the 2022 World Service Meeting and delegates from Japan present at this forum were introduced.

“2020 Keeping Us Connected — AA Grapevine” Cindy F., AA Grapevine Inc. Board Director, Francis G., AA Grapevine Inc. Board Director, Tommi H., AA Grapevine Inc. Board Director, Nancy McCarthy, AA Grapevine, Inc. Board Director (Class A Trustee)

In this workshop, Grapevine Directors presented information about Grapevine and La Viña in workshops during the U.S./Canada forums. The workshops were well-attended, with up to 50 members joining. The topics covered were: Grapevine News; Keeping us Connected; Self-Support; Grapevine & The Professional Community; and How Did Grapevine Begin? Presentations were followed by questions and answers and open-sharing.

**“Deepening Our Spiritual Practices” (Moderator: Lesley W., Alternate Delegate Panel 69, Area 91 Saskatchewan)
This workshop report is unavailable**

“What Difficult Conversation Are We Not Having in A.A.” (Moderator: Troy B.-D. Delegate Panel 69, Area 67 Southeast Texas)

The session moderator designed the workshop in order to outline an example of how trusted servants could replicate the format to be used at the local level, while also beginning to discuss difficult topics. There was also a desire to create action steps to address any of the difficult topics, again at the local level.

The session began with a call for topics. The moderator also asked that participants add in the chat feature any difficult conversation topics they wanted to discuss. The first few topics were selected, with the exception of one which was repeated multiple times in chat. It was explained that if there was more time, the moderator and workshop attendees would take all the topics given and vote on those that were priority. Since there was limited time for the purposes of demonstration, attendees took those which appeared first in chat.

Participants were then sent into breakout rooms, each having a pre-assigned recorder/moderator. Each room had one of the topics selected. The recorder/moderator was given access to a Google document to record. The instructions given to each group was to briefly discuss the problem (based on the topic), the proposed solution, and finally list any action steps that can be taken to help move toward that proposed solution. Participants were allowed to move between breakout rooms so that they could weigh in on more than one topic. This was difficult during this demonstration since there were over 200 participants. The six topics discussed were: Race and Racism; Tradition Four Being Used to Break Tradition One; Keeping Traditions in Virtual Meetings; Singleness of Purpose; Is There Too Much Autonomy in Meetings?; and Social Media in A.A.

One “difficult conversation,” was “Using Tradition 4 to Break Tradition One” (Moderator/Recorder: Christina S.). Members shared that a problem existed, that “People misunderstand conformity, using religion in A.A. as a group when we are autonomous, justification of doing what we want regardless of guidance, experience, strength and hope.” Attendees offered up solutions, such as “Strong sponsorship in Traditions, persistent communication,” as well as “adding a chapter to the Big Book entitled, “To the Agnostic Group.”” Members also came up with possible actions to achieve desired results, such as “leading by example, not shoving my opinion on others, showing up to business meetings, being an elder statesman, voting minority opinion, showing love and tolerance, and studying the book Our Great Responsibility.” Finally, group members noted that using group inventory and the Traditions Checklist regularly would also be desirable actions when seeking to achieve desired results.

Another “difficult conversation” chosen by group members was “Traditions in Zoom” (Moderator/Recorder: Kathleen T.). The problem identified by members was that, for many groups, Zoom is a new meeting format and many members have not fully “thought through how Traditions need to be applied.” Attendees proposed a solution wherein “groups and members examine their meetings and take action to better apply the Traditions.” Actionable items to achieve this end were offered, such as “Develop a Traditions Checklist modified for online meetings” and “encourage online groups/meetings to hold business meetings, conduct workshops on sponsorship, including sponsoring members attending meetings online.”

Another topic chosen for discussion was “Singleness of Purpose” (Moderator/Recorder: Carole B.). Participants in this discussion identified the issue of “other 12-Step members or non-alcoholics sharing at A.A. meetings.” Proposed solutions by the group were “sponsorship-teaching and reminding [that] when people [who are] not alcoholic share in A.A., [then] it stops being A.A.” Others encouraged members to be welcoming while helping non-alcoholics to people or meetings that can help them. “Sharing experience, asking people to alter their language, and having reminders about singleness of purpose at the meeting” were proposed as possible ways to enable members to better carry the message of A.A. Members also shared possible helpful actions, such as reading the “Blue Card,” not excluding but enabling non-alcoholics to better find help, and using the newcomer meeting format available on G.S.O. website.

Another difficult conversation some members explored was “Social Media and Carrying the Message” (Moderator/Recorder: Carole B.). In essence, members thought that there was confusion about the A.A. message and following the Traditions on social media during the pandemic. Members shared their experience in finding a solution and posited that stressing the “importance of sponsorship, using published A.A. material, remembering the importance of group conscience in finding ways to reach the newcomer, encouraging all members to participate in virtual meetings, and focusing on our primary purpose” were all possible avenues to help A.A. members and groups. Workshop attendees also thought that focusing Twelfth Step efforts among the homeless, incarcerated, young people and/or other disadvantaged groups would be helpful, as well as getting people involved in service immediately.

Group members also chose the topic “Too Much Autonomy?” to discuss (Moderator/Recorder: Meece T.). Attendees’ experience showed that “at some point, autonomy can affect others; groups make their own rules that become divisive and break Traditions.” As a proposed solution(s), members shared that utilizing “Guidelines, qualifying/choosing effective leadership, and reintroducing the meaning of autonomy to our groups” would be effective. In order to do this, workshop attendees proposed that members take certain actions, such as “study Traditions as a group, [take] group inventory, live and let live, listen to others, speak up about issues and concerns, and take a group conscience on a regular basis.” Members also shared that communications about “best practices” from group/district/area/G.S.O. were also a possible solution to better enable members to carry A.A.’s message.

The final topic shared within the “Difficult Conversations” workshop, was “Race and Racism” (Moderator/Recorder: Allise B.). Workshop attendees shared difficulties encountered and issues around race and racism they felt were not discussed, such as: “Professionals believe A.A. is an inappropriate referral for African Americans; meetings don’t match population; feeling ignored and uncomfortable; sharing discounted; feeling alone in the room; myopia by majority; unwillingness to talk about race and racism; Tradition 10 abused to violate emotional safety; lack of participation in service structure.” Workshop attendees shared experience and proposed possible avenues to better address inequalities, such as “seek more understanding; reach out more and include members in Fellowship activities; discuss more; and hold workshops on this topic.” Possible actions to achieve better ends included: “put yourself in a new person’s place; hold workshop and discuss; go to fairs and other places to attract diverse members, go to meetings where you are the minority; be a friendly supportive presence as newcomers trudge the road—trudge with them.” In addition, members shared that it would be helpful to “consider not only skin color as diversity (others, e.g. Iranians, feel excluded even by larger minorities), be especially considerate of newcomers who don’t look like you, focus on similarities — not differences, call on and reach out to member(s) you don’t know.”

Topics not selected for discussion during this workshop included: New members during pandemic; sex and sobriety; how to keep districts in the Fellowship strong; Traditions; self-support; mental health issues being shamed in A.A.; “Cult of personalities”; rewriting the Big Book, sponsorship via virtual platforms; homophobia and non-binary members; getting back to A.A.s original message; “why are we so white” (lack of diverse members)?; where does the money go?; how to attract non-English speaking A.A.s to our meeting; can we stop the Lord's Prayer?; online meetings outside of service structure; gender issues; drunks in meetings; using Covid-19 go to meetings; crosstalk; why so much opposition to general service?; spirit of rotation in virtual meetings; why do we railroad people into general service?; gender-neutral big book?; why do we pray?; keeping outside issues out; people recording virtual meetings; private chats in virtual meetings; sexual predators; quality of leadership; why are we so rigid?; sexism; exclusion of anyone; triangle becoming a flatline; poverty; a growing anachronism; authoritarian A.A.; groups as clubhouses; groups not following pandemic guidelines; whitewashing A.A. history; actual practice of spiritual principles; fading of our A.A. institutional memories; the difference between alcoholism and addiction; politics in A.A.

“2020: Manteniendonos Conectados - La Vina” (Moderator: Karina C., AAGV/La Vina Associate Editor/Ino F. AAGV Board Director/Reporter: xxxx.)
This workshop report is unavailable.

“Safety in A.A.” (Moderator: Donny M., Delegate Panel 70, Area 80 Manitoba / Reporter: Hannah MacL.)

1. *How has service enriched your life and the lives of others?*

Many shared personal experiences with service work and how, with it, we were able to step out of who we once were and found a healthier way to live. We learn to deal with

difficult people and situations in A.A., our workplaces, and even with our families. Service keeps the doors of A.A. open and gives a sense of purpose and responsibility, all of which promotes a safer environment and helps keep AA alive and well for years to come.

2. How have our groups overcome difficulties?

This subject was primarily focused on online meetings. Some dangers were exposed that many group members had not even thought of including: Zoom bombers, inappropriate backgrounds, 13th-Stepping and such in the private chats. Some expressed fears of screenshots, other people not on the screen but still in the backgrounds (spouses, friends, etc). However, many rose to the challenges of hosting these meetings and keeping them safe by simply closing chats during shares, creating waiting rooms to help greet the newcomers and engaging co-hosts to help maintain order. In some ways, this has been a boon to service work in that many who were once complacent have now become more involved and active in Alcoholics Anonymous.

“A.A. History Tour” (Moderator: Sister Judith Ann Karam, Class A Trustee / Michelle Mirza G.S.O. Archives Director)

Sister Judith Ann Karam of the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine and Class A (non-alcoholic) trustee presented, along with Michelle Mirza, G.S.O. Archivist, the A.A. History Tour workshop. Sister Judith presented on Sister Ignatia. She spoke about her personal connection with Sister Ignatia, as their times at St. Vincent Charity Hospital in Cleveland briefly overlapped. Sister Judith began working at the hospital while still in high school. At the same time, Sister Ignatia was working in the Rosary Hall Solarium at the hospital, caring for alcoholics. Sister Judith discussed how, in 1928 when Sister Ignatia was working at St. Thomas Hospital in Akron, she met Dr. Bob for the first time. They shared the same ideas and believed in the importance of recovery and helping alcoholics in need. This began a connection to Alcoholics Anonymous that would continue until her death in 1966. Sister Judith shared a letter from Bill W. in which he referred to Sister Ignatia as A.A.’s “finest friend and greatest spirit” and recalled her partnership with Dr. Bob.

Michelle Mirza’s presentation focused on Dr. Bob’s letters housed in the G.S.O. Archives. Michelle shared several letters from Dr. Bob, written in 1939 and 1940 the content of which showcased milestones in A.A. history. In a 1939 letter Michelle shared, Dr. Bob discussed how Akron A.A. members were in the midst of separating from the Oxford Group. In a 1940 letter to Ruth Hock, Alcoholic Foundation secretary, Dr. Bob discussed early Akron A.A. meetings where over 70 members were meeting in his small living room and dining room. Michelle stated that, although difficult to decipher due to his handwriting that “wasn’t particularly legible,” Dr. Bob’s letters “tell of his lived experience, his humble character, his zealous commitment to still-suffering alcoholics, and his genuine kindness.” Both presentations highlighted Ohio A.A. history and the instrumental work of Sister Ignatia and Dr. Bob.

WORKSHOP REPORTS
6:10-7:15 p.m. EST Session B Workshops

(Spanish, French, ASL Interpretation) Workshop :
“Fostering Participation in A.A.: Who’s Not In the Room?” (Moderator: Gail P./Reporter: Pauline D.)

The workshop opened with BC/Yukon/Area 79 Delegate Gail P. who shared her experience and research about “Who is not in the rooms of A.A.?” She shared a paragraph from one of her favourite pamphlets: “A Member’s-Eye View of Alcoholics Anonymous.” “I am personally convinced that the basic search of every human being, from the cradle to the grave, is to find at least one other human being before whom he can stand completely naked, stripped of all pretense or defense, and trust that person not to hurt him, because that other person has stripped himself naked, too. This lifelong search can begin to end with the first A.A. encounter.” The workshop attendees discussed the following ideas to the question: “How can we get and keep the attention of professionals involved in the field of alcoholism?”

- Present to local communities — what is A.A. (post Covid-19)
- Go to where the professionals are, they are busy people
- Send a Grapevine subscription
- Distribute information — pamphlets for professionals

The second question posed to attendees was: “Are we reaching out to all who want recovery and what more can we do?” The members gave many suggestions, including the following: Sponsorship plays an important role in how we welcome the newcomer. We seem to be doing well at putting a hand out but what do we do when they show up? We need to be kind and non-judgmental. There was discussion about rural communities and providing time and education to longtimers regarding modern approaches to A.A. The final question was: “A courageous conversation we are not having about “inclusion in A.A. is...?” The shared experience included acknowledging biases and addressing behaviours through a discussion on Tradition 5.

“Rediscovering Grapevine/La Viña” (Moderator: Panel 69 & Panel 70 Delegates: Teddy B.-W., Rhonda F., Kevin F., Jess N., Jerry S. / Reporter: Don Z.)

Teddy B.-W. shared with attendees a presentation about the history of Grapevine and LaViña. Kevin F. Introduced individual presenters of the panel. Ted shared that those who are incarcerated need GV/LV more now than ever before. In fact, GV/LV is more popular than ever inside because live visitors are not often allowed in these times, and new subscriptions have actually increased inside. Another presenter shared that there are new obstacles to distribution of GV/LV issues to PI/CPC contacts. PI has begun offering online subscriptions that can be picked up anonymously.

One member spoke about the response of GV/LV content to the coronavirus pandemic, offering free content for many months after the initial shutdown, producing Covid-19 related articles and recently an entire issue devoted to the pandemic response by AA. Part of

Mare's presentation emphasized the "Carry the Message" project which has been responsible for 4,100 new subscriptions — 750 in November alone.

Kevin reminded workshop attendees that GV/LV gets no support from 7th Tradition contributions. It is supported only by subscriptions, encouraging all to check out the "new and improved" AAGrapevine.org and AALaVina.org. Jess N. then took attendees on a virtual 'road trip' of the new website where members could see the "Carry the Message" button and the "GV Store." She pointed out the "Archives" button and the link to the new Youtube channel where audio and films are found.

Rhonda F. spoke about the various publications offered by GV/LV. Topics include spirituality, young people, diversity, emotional sobriety, jokes and sponsorship, among others. In addition, if you have an idea for GV, they want to know about it. Zoraida spoke about the important influence of LaViña for the community of hispanic women. For instance, since 2010 there has been a section for women in each issue and in 2017, an entire issue for hispanic women was produced. Asked what she would tell a new woman in A.A., she said, "It gets better, you are not alone." She added, "I had to learn to love my Higher Power more than my character defects." Finally, we talked about what to do with old issues of GV/LV. Pass them on.

"Keeping A.A. Relevant in Tomorrow's World" (Moderator: Brad F.)

This workshop report is unavailable.

"A.A. 101: A Brief Introduction to the Service Structure of A.A." — (Moderator: Bill L. / Reporter: Maddy L.)

In this workshop, A.A. members listened to shared experience by the moderator, detailing experience in the service structure of A.A., after which questions were asked by attendees and were answered by the moderator and by the Southwest Region trustee.

One member asked, "What is the appropriate channel for a GSR to elevate an issue?" Another member shared about her experience as a DCM travelling to groups w/o GSR, but to no avail. She asked, "How do you get people interested in General Service? How do you get them involved?" Some other questions were: "What were the most rewarding and most difficult challenges due to COVID?" ; "Is the PPT Slide Deck available?"; "Can you explain why Intergroup and Central offices are not a part of the General Service Structure?"

One attendee pointed out that Zoom opened the doors for so many who cannot get out to meetings, "so if groups remain online, or remain hybrid, will they become a permanent part of AA? Will there ever be a virtual District or Virtual Area?"

Another group attendee, a trustee from Mexico, asked "How often do you meet with your Regional Trustee? [When] Is starting with the Regional Trustee the appropriate place to begin escalation of an issue?"

“Virtual Link in Communications between Groups and G.S.O.” (Moderator: Tom A., Ed L., Cheri S.)

In the “Virtual Link in Communication Between Groups & G.S.O.” workshop, three panelists presented the differences between how communication in A.A. and its service structure developed and was deployed in three different time periods: Pre-COVID-19, at the start of lockdowns and quarantines due to COVID-19, and during present day.

Tom A. (Area 06), shared how communication developed over time—leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as information transmitted through the various levels of general service, including Group, District, Area, Conference and the GSB using websites. Groups and areas used integrated marketing software, newsletters, and emails; communication from GSB/GSO using dashboard, mail etc. He shared the facets of the structure and function of the Conference that kept our members informed. He also included other resources, such as past delegates, Final Conference reports, standing committee chairs, service sponsorship, and other ways of communicating throughout A.A.’s history.

Ed L. from Area 09 shared about a slow transition into the virtual world and how it affected his area’s communication at the start of the pandemic. He noted the difference in communication between large A.A. groups versus intimate home groups, special interest groups, etc. Also shared were the many different structures and formats of meetings and home groups, such as co-host, hosts, sponsors, and GSRs. Some districts meet monthly, with special guests and topics, GSR schools and ad hoc committees. Pacific region delegates meet regularly, participate and attend area elections, state conventions, G.S.O. workshops. Members are sensitive to confidential versus public information, and communicate via mailman and dashboard. Members work to resolve issues reaching hispanic community.

Cheri S. (Area 02) addressed communication today (post lockdown) and shared about the speed at which information arrives and is being distributed. For example, there are reassessments of budget with less travel and more technology; communication about how to engage in general service virtually; groups are meeting as hybrids, face-to-face, via phone, and virtual. Districts are doing the same for monthly meetings and interdistrict collaboration. Areas are geographically based and now meet virtually for service committee and assemblies, as well as with standing committees, ad hoc committee workshops and surveys. Regions are also functioning virtually.

Practicing the Traditions in a Virtual Environment” (Moderator: Dan G. Delegate Panel 69, Area 24 & MaryAnn G., Area Chair, Area 24)

In this virtual workshop, moderators posed questions to workshop attendees regarding how they practice A.A.’s Twelve Traditions in a virtual environment. This opened up into discussions where attendees shared experience, strength and hope regarding how they have continued to carry the message of A.A. in a virtual environment, while continuing to

maintain the integrity of A.A.'s Twelve Traditions. The moderators posed four questions, and some responses are as follows:

1. How have you practiced unity in your group/district/area in the virtual environment? Are there specific actions your group/district/area have taken to put A.A.'s common welfare first?

Members answered that the Zoom meetings happened quickly after group conscience occurred and the groups stuck together throughout the process. One of the most important things to practice is to open meetings early and leave it open later. Talking to A.A. members before and after is important.

2. Has your group/district/area conducted elections virtually? What were some lessons learned that you can share with others? Are there any new service positions created for the virtual environment?

Groups use the polling feature on Zoom to successfully conduct elections. Some noted that they must develop guidelines as a group to develop new positions at the group level for virtual platforms. Some re-developed positions such as greeters, but also new ones such as “bouncers” and “troll-slayers.” Many find that waiting rooms are useful to maintain order and safety: “The greeter or co-host admits folks into the meeting room while the host manages those in the room.” Others noticed that “not many people stood for positions—excitement was not there.” Attendees shared that a great way to be of service is to “volunteer to be a zoom or virtual platform tech person.”

3. How is your group/district/area practicing the Seventh Tradition? Are you using Paypal, Venmo, or another digital form for contributions?

Groups report success with Venmo, PayPal, and encourage members to make donations at aa.org.

4. How has your group/district/area protected anonymity of others in the virtual environment? Do you have different practices for open vs. closed meetings to protect anonymity when the meeting is open to the community?

Workshop attendees created positions such as “troll-slayers” and “bouncers.” Many find that the use of waiting rooms and co-hosts to admit those into the meeting protects anonymity and safety. Others recommended using first name and last initial only when logging into meetings. Another recommended creating a PDF regarding how to conduct a Zoom meeting safely and then distribute it to the Fellowship. Another recommended that perhaps the Traditions will need an update to “include Zoom practices and whether folks can be turned away from online meetings.” Finally, another attendee asked that the Fellowship be asked for sharing of experience regarding “successful hybrid meetings.”

“Our Great Responsibility” (Moderator: Julia C, A.A.W.S Editor/Michelle Mirza, G.S.O. Archives Director)

This workshop was about the creation of the book, “Our Great Responsibility” — the first original book from A.A. in over 30 years. The book contains a selection of 16 talks by Bill W. at the General Service Conference between 1951 and 1970. It also features 65 photos, many of which have never been published.

The presenters discussed the publication history of “Our Great Responsibility” and the challenges faced by those working on the project. Twenty years ago, the G.S.O. archives began digitizing historical documents, including audio recordings, on reels and cassettes. When the project began, many of the talks selected were already transcribed. Editors needed to make sure they stayed as close to Bill W.’s original verbiage as possible, but also keep the prose readable. Their main goal was to make sure people felt like they were really hearing Bill W. speak.

The book concludes with Bill W.’s final talk at the 20th G.S.C. A recording was played in the workshop. Bill discussed the overall service structure, the trusteeship, and why A.A. publishes the Big Book. During his talk he was ill and had to step down from the stage.

The workshop ended with a Q&A. Some of the questions and answers were:

Q: Are there more materials or products we can develop from other G.S.C. talks by Bill W.?

A: The best and most powerful material was pulled for this book. But there is talk of an eBook and using some of what’s left to amplify it.

Q: Is there any thought about making an audio book using the original recordings?

A: Not at this time, most of the recordings are lower quality. But A.A.W.S. approved an eBook version.

Q: Is the audio we listened to available anywhere online?

A: No, but we can possibly add it to the audio archives on the website.

PAST TRUSTEES SHARING

Madeleine P., past Class B trustee, 2006-2010

I still feel, especially in my incredible region, I still feel like the kid who’s been kicked off the kids’ table onto the adults’ table at Thanksgiving. That I really don’t fit in with the adults because I still think farts are funny. So, I am grateful for the love and support that I receive from all of my fellow trusted servants. Having this forum, and doing it virtually, is a challenge, like many things have been, and I think sometimes, especially, like when it comes from the ask-it-basket, sometimes I walk away feeling like we are living in the problem. It doesn’t mean we don’t need to ask the questions — we need to ask the questions.

I know from my own experience from serving as a regional trustee, which I did from 2006 to 2010, sometimes it can feel hypercritical. I always say that I learned to get thicker skin as a trustee. I never received so much hate mail in my entire life, as I got when I was trustee. I would get some of the most horrendous letters from people I had never met and really hoped I never would. The short version was something like, “Dear trustee, you suck.” So, I always hope, when we get together, that the one thing we all remember — we all have our

identified Class As who do it out of their love and appreciation for Alcoholics Anonymous, but for all of the rest of us who are here, we are also here because of our love and admiration for Alcoholics Anonymous. I have never woken up in the morning thinking about how I can destroy or disrupt or harm Alcoholics Anonymous. Sometimes I think when we are in a servant leadership position in A.A., sometimes there is this kind of — I have seen — sometimes A.A. members who kind of feel like we have this openness that allows us to attack people.

So, I really want to go out and think about what this is all about and how it all comes back to me and my responsibility. I want to read something, and especially in this challenging time, I think about how the current time always seems like the worst time for anybody. I have to think that in the last eighty-something years, there have been lots of challenging times and adversities that had to be met by A.A., the board, the Conferences, and this is not new news. But I do think that, right now, with our current situation, how do we maintain our unity. Our sole purpose is to carry our message, and try to help the still-suffering alcoholic. That is, at the end of the day, what we are all here for. And it is so easy sometimes, when we start getting involved in all the layers of stuff, to forget that it is about carrying the message at the end of the day — and how can we best do that? And so, I'm going to read from the Conference Advisory Actions, ('cause I'm a nerd and I have it by my bed). It's on page 5, and it is talking about the first General Service Conference in 1951. It says, "Genuine faith, a thoughtful spiritual leader tells us, is more than insight, it is always the beginning of action. It is propulsive, it fortifies the will. It begins as an experiment, and ends as an experience. The General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous fulfilled each particular of that definition. It was an unbounded expression of faith in the future of Alcoholics Anonymous. The Conference reflected the insight of the earliest members into the crucial problems of continuing A.A. unity. continuing service to individuals, and continuing and groups already in A.A. and the compelling need to reach and help the million who don't know. The Conference was, in truth, the beginning of action, designed to strengthen and preserve A.A." The next paragraph says, "The General Service Conference was evolved not to govern A.A. in any sense, but to serve the entire movement. The Conference serves A.A. by assuming responsibility for basic direction of the General Service Office in New York and by advising the Alcoholic Foundation, the custodian of A.A. policy and tradition at the national level."

Sometimes I think we get so caught up in dogma and procedures that we forget, at the end of the day, what it is about. My mantra is how we treat each other is much more important than what we get done. We need a structure that even everything that we have here this weekend and explaining it, is about organization— but it's not about hierarchy. It is about how we all relate to each other. And how every single piece of that puzzle is important for A.A. to survive and for us to be able to fulfill our primary purpose. One of my other favorite writings of Bill is "A.A. is Not Big Business" in AA Grapevine, November 1950, from *Language of the Heart*. "Our Traditions are set down on paper, but they were written first in our hearts, for each of us knows instinctively, I think, that A.A. is not ours to do with as we please. We are but caretakers to preserve the spiritual quality of AA. Keep it whole for those who will come after us and have need of what has been so generously given us."

I read that because I need to remember it, not because I need to preach to the choir. I need to remember that sometimes I get so caught up in procedures and rules and scope that I forget how to make my way through and just focus on how this is going to help us carry the message. I will tell you from my experience as a trustee, I've had times where I've been in

board meetings where people were screaming and yelling at each other. In not nice terms. And I realized that outside, on Broadway, there were people dying in the streets of alcoholism and we were focused on the “stuff,” instead of being able to stop, and pause, and make our way through, and remember that everything we do to those financial reports or publications, it is always important to carry the message. I think I never want to be so sober that I forget how to hold the barf bucket for someone who is dying of alcoholism.

Wednesday was the anniversary of one of my sponsees dying by suicide, and I never want to forget that we can barely do what we do — and if we get caught up in superfluous stuff, that doesn't have anything to do with carrying the message, while we have folks all around us that we are not meeting. That is going to be the downfall of Alcoholics Anonymous. One of my favorite trustees, Bob P., talked about that. If we get caught up in this rigidity, just like back in the Renaissance when the church was arguing about how many angels would fit on the head of a pin — all while there was human suffering all around them. I think that the biggest thing we have to learn in service to Alcoholics Anonymous is to really make sure we have a legacy before we ever, ever involve ourselves in second or third legacies.

I'm gonna close with my favorite story. For context, it has a religious backdrop to it, so I ask your forgiveness if it is offensive if it offends anyone. I apologize if it offends any one. Picture it like this: Jesus is riding into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Everybody is there, because they have heard that the Messiah, the Chosen One, is coming to town. The streets are packed, you cannot fit another person. They are wall to wall — waving flags, throwing flowers and they are all shouting out, “Hail to the Messiah! Hail to the Chosen One!” It is absolutely spectacular.

But I want you to think for just one second: What if the donkey thought all of that was for him? He's got the same view. He is seeing the same thing as Jesus is seeing. And haven't I done the same thing as a trusted servant in A.A.? Haven't I gotten caught up in the accolades or the attention, or gratitude, or anything else that comes my way, because I get to serve Alcoholics Anonymous? I get to be a member of this Fellowship, and I get to have this perfect program? So, I hope when we leave here today, and we can put it all together, I hope we remember all that stuff and that it has nothing to do with me — but I do get to be the jackass carrying the message.

Conley B., past Southeast regional trustee, 2007-2011

I want to congratulate the board and the staff and everybody that had anything to do with putting this on. I think this is one of the best Regional Forums that I've attended in quite some time. I think it sort of reflects, in general way, what has gone on this year. As the world changed, it forced us to find new avenues to experience Alcoholics Anonymous. For years we've said we need to come into the twentieth and twenty-first century, and have something to do with the internet and be involved in that way. The ultra-conservative said, “Yeah. but our Traditions say we gotta be honest, we can't do this, we can't do that.” Within two weeks of when we couldn't get together, the Fellowship found [a popular web-conferencing platform] and it's been history ever since. We are an amazing lot. I know in the beginning, when it happened, my friend Howard, he passed away from Covid-19 during this time, and even Al the Class A, they would invite me to attend their web-conference meetings. And, contempt prior to investigation, I avoided them like the plague in the

beginning. Finally, one morning, I got on Howard's meeting, and I thought, Well, I will see what this is all about. And within two hours after that, I was on a meeting with Al and I was hooked. I was like, "Wow, look at this". When I figured it out, I got an account for our home group, and we started meeting by web-conferencing 'cause we couldn't meet face-to-face anymore.

This has been a phenomenal year, and it's had its pains, and we've all come out of pain in our recovery program, and it's had some joys. I think one of the amazing things, just like this forum, is to be able to meet with people all across the country — and even the world. I heard earlier that there are people from Japan that were way up early in the morning over there. I know I was astounded to be on web meetings with people from four different continents at one time and to hear them expressing the same problems that they were having with Covid-19 in the Netherlands, England, Africa and Afghanistan that we were having here in the States. What an amazing thing to find that Tradition One and come together, in unity, to deal with these same problems at the same time.

When I was on the board, one of the guys that sobered up in our group had 20 years when I got here, and he sobered up in Cleveland. Cleveland's been missing a lot tonight. But he said something: That what they discovered up there is what we know from our history. We came out of the Depression, so when times get bad, more A.A.s or alcoholics start looking for some kind of solution. Alcoholics are always out there living on the edge. They've utilized their money, as much as they've got, to keep the lifestyle going and when something changes, either in their personal life, or in the world as a whole, and the edge moves back, a bunch of them start falling off.

Felix would describe how when they had plant closures — the automobile plants up there — the rooms of A.A. would start to fill up. I personally believe that we are on the verge of probably the greatest input in A.A. that has happened in years. In just the next year in a half, two years, just because of the way the economy's gone, and the way this pandemic has affected everything. I think we are on the verge of seeing a lot. And I've been amazed at how many newcomers have actually found us on web meetings. If that is any indication, then we are just at the beginning of this process. And so I think our focus, as has been said all day long, needs to be on the future and how we are going to deal with these people and how we are going to relate to them. I'm convinced there is going to be a combination of things, just like in my homegroup. In my homegroup, there are people who never joined us on the web-conference meetings, there were some that joined us for a few times and then they quit. There have been some who have stuck with it, and they've been really pleased with it and have indicated a desire to have it continue, even when we are totally face-to-face again.

My home group has gone back to meeting three times a week, but now I'm in a position that I'm in several of those categories that it would not be good if I came down with Covid-19, so I am not in any hurry to go back to face-to-face meetings. The web meetings have spoken to me, sometimes, in a way where I've found more intimacy over the computer than I did face-to-face when we were going all the time. So, it's going to be interesting to see what combinations [happen]. I don't think virtual meetings will go away, or if it does, something will replace it where there will be virtual meetings. I think there is going to be more face-to-

face meetings. But I haven't seen anybody who has pulled off a good hybrid meeting, yet. Although maybe we can accomplish that, at some point.

The class As were all sharing. I've said this for several years: I think we need to work more at having friends of A.A. and making friends. If you look back at that Forward to the Second Edition, Bill talks about the ministrations of friends and how much that did to bring people in. We have got to a time, because of court rulings or whatever, or just because we are selfish and self-centered, that we don't reach out to those people in our communities. We don't involve them in the way we did when the Fellowship was young. If you look at the history of most of the groups in our area, the Fellowship, lots of times, was started because of some minister, or some doctor who got involved, somebody who was bringing people in who were interested in making the connections possible. I think we need to be thinking or looking at how to involve these people, how can we get them to a district meeting, how can we get them to our home groups. The idea of an open meeting was originally to get people from the community so they could come and see what A.A. is all about. And now we don't even think about inviting the doctor or lawyer who is dealing with cases, and the ministers in the community and whatnot, to attend open A.A. meetings. I think we need to work on that and I think we need to get them involved. Invite them to district and area meetings and forums.

It's a shame that we weren't able to have the International Convention this year. There were some 40 people that would have been invited as nonalcoholics to speak at that meeting, and it would have been our first chance to really evaluate them, and them us, as to whether they might be future Class As. I agree with Al, and the rest of them, that we need to work at making those relationships, so they will start referring people back to us again, and being able to make that commitment for alcoholics. I'm flabbergasted, with what I'm seeing in our Fellowship. I'm excited to hear the board members who have spoken today and to hear their visions for things that can happen in the future, as well as their interest in it. I think they've shown that in their selection of the new chair-elect, someone who has been involved in the Greenleaf Foundation and served on that board as vice-president.

Spending more time looking at the future (and I'll agree with Madeline), if left to our own devices, we tend to be pretty divisive — even in service work. But if we've got something to focus on, and to look at the future, we can all join together 'cause we agree that that's something that needs to be done. As Bill said, at the end of the Big Book, "A Vision for You." We need something where we can join in harmonious action to go into the future, and let us get back to us doing what we need to be doing, which is working with those newcomers and teaching them the elements and the Concepts which is service, and get to that point. I'm excited that they did that session with the Archives this evening with the book *Our Great Responsibility*. I think that's the greatest book that's come out in Alcoholics Anonymous in a while, certainly in the last thirty years, and it's telling us, every time we develop humility, when we do a Step, Tradition, or Concept, that we also have a new corresponding responsibility where we have to step up to the plate and do our job. Appreciate it, thank you all for being here and for allowing me to share.

Andrew W., West Central regional trustee, 2003-2007

Before we get started, I'd like to thank the interpreters, both the ones you can see and the ones you don't. I want to thank Sandra for the loving invitation to put my name in the hat. It's always something I love, the ability to participate in any event, and thanks for this — that my name came out of the hat.

I remember when I came to A.A., I wasn't participating in anything, not even in my own life — I wanted out of that, as well as everything else. I was taken back to when I was first taken into A.A. I was a teenager. I drank my way out of college and was just miserable, but I got told to go to A.A. meetings. What I remember, I don't know about you guys, but the only thing I really remember about that first meeting is a sense of welcome. I don't remember much that was said during the meeting, but I had a sense of welcome. A lot of people said 'hi' to me after the meeting, welcomed me to A.A., and that kind of stuff. That was a lasting impression.

You might wonder why I am bringing it up here, cause I'm thinking about that now, and I've been thinking about it over the last nine months, as we've transitioned, and my home group has transitioned to a web-conference meeting. We were told by the place that we used to hold meetings that we are not welcome back, ever. They decided they were not hosting meetings ever again, so we've been on web meetings. My experience has been a lot like what Conley talked about. Some people got on the web conference meeting, and we've got some regular members — actually some members from New York and Mexico now, which is great — but we've also lost a lot of our old regulars, they just don't want to go to video/web conference A.A. meetings.

The other thing I've been thinking about is that we've gotten a lot of newcomers. I think, in some ways, we get less newcomers, and in some ways we get more, but different types of newcomers. One of the local — kind of like half-way — houses have decided that our meeting is the one that we are going to have people from. We've had people from a local meeting center come from the treatment center, they wanted to have an A.A. meeting and so they log into our web meeting, and I always love that. I love when we get newcomers in the meeting and I think about that as part of our purpose as a group. One of the purposes of our group is to help carry the message to the alcoholic. And so I am thankful for those kinds of things, I am thankful for seeing the people in the meeting.

I'm also thinking about questions in there, like, how is my group still following the Traditions? How are we still participating, we are still a group in Missoula, Montana, we are part of our local district and we still have a G.S.R. We just had elections for our group service positions, and we elected a new G.S.R. We participate in the local district, which lately, has also had its meetings via the internet. So, the local area assembly was via video conferencing. A lot of our meetings are still via video-conference, but we are still participating in that structure and still thinking about the newcomer, at least I certainly am, and how we reach out to that still-suffering newcomer. There are a lot of ways we can't, right now we are not allowed to go into some of the local facilities, so it is more of a challenge. I was really glad, earlier today, to hear about the idea of having Grapevines be accessed by people in correctional facilities in Maine via the pads they have — they were actually talking about getting Grapevines on those pads, so they could have access to them. I'm grateful for those kinds

of efforts, thinking of new ways where we can still carry that message to people who would otherwise not have any access to it.

I'm also thinking about, in terms of the general service structure and what we do in meetings like this, in forums when all the people participate — that was a great panel of Class A trustees and all the other staff members who participated throughout the day. The reason why we do this is not only so that A.A. groups can carry the message right now, but we are doing this so that A.A. is going to be here in a year, in five years, in ten years and beyond. We are doing this so that A.A. is still here and still available to the suffering alcoholic. So I'm really grateful that we have adapted at the General Service Conference that was held via web-conference and the General Service Board meetings have been held via web-conference, too.

And what I hope now, my optimism, I believe, is that we now start to ask ourselves what, out of all of this, has been working really well? We've been going through some trials and tribulations, we've had some challenges, and I want to think about how we are making sure we are still applying our Traditions and our Concepts throughout all of this. What can we keep with what we've done over the last year, almost a year, and what could we keep that when we do start meeting back in-person, what do we want to keep about this? What do we want to keep about that ability to connect? Does that board want to have a meeting one out of every four meetings via web-conference? I don't know, but I think we should have those discussions and I think it's a great opportunity. As somebody said, "We got pushed to adopt this technology very rapidly, but now let's have those more slow, more deliberate conversations that we love to have in A.A." Let's talk about this. Let's talk about what worked and what we can use, ongoing, now. How can we grow from this, how can we better serve A.A. and how can we better serve that still-suffering alcoholic?

I still hope, because of my remembrance of that first meeting and being welcomed, that we are going to eventually have those in-person meetings, 'cause I like that welcoming sense, especially when we have a newcomer in those meetings. I think about when we have those newcomers, I know my group has given out a lot of Big Books, and it's really hard on a web-conference meeting to give out a Big Book. So, that's another concern I have, whether it will affect when we do start, again, having more in-person meetings. 'Cause there are some going, even now. When we have more of them, that will affect literature sales as well. That will affect the General Service Office.

I really missed the International Convention. I'm sure all of us did, but I think it was the correct decision, as tough as it was. I can't imagine those discussions, and those anguished decisions, but it was the right decision. And I'm really looking forward to Vancouver in another five years. My love for Alcoholics Anonymous has not diminished in this whole nine months. You know, I'm still just thankful for A.A. There are people that are still coming to my home group, I still have a home group to go to, I still have that ability to participate in my own recovery. I'm still meeting — either going on walks, or talking on the telephone, or having web meetings — with my sponsees. I'm the same way with my sponsor, talking to him on the phone and keeping that connection. I'm applying the same principles that I've learned throughout my sobriety, it's what I've learned to do and it doesn't matter that we are in a pandemic, we can still apply these principles in all our affairs.

So, in the last kind of couple of minutes, I want to finish up with the hope that, as we go forward, this really emphasizes the importance in our general service structure of the Traditions and the Concepts, and we think deeply how we can apply that in terms of our meetings. And, maybe some of the things we learn about how groups that have gone to web conferencing are still participating in the service structure, maybe we can apply that to some online meetings, and some other meetings as well. I think there is a lot in there, and a lot of good things we need to discuss, but I'm really grateful for this forum. It's been great, I've enjoyed all the good questions and the sometimes tough questions. I think those are excellent — we should always have those tough questions. It has been great to see everyone, as well. Thank you very much.

Vic P., past trustee, 2009-2011

I like to stay in touch with the service structure by going to the assemblies and keeping in touch. Of course, with this situation we have now, I haven't. So this has been a real restorative day for me to see that Alcoholics Anonymous is in such excellent hands — with the trustees that have spoken, the staff members, and so on. We are so fortunate that it rolls on and on and on, and A.A. promises to continue with whatever the world confronts us with. I have a note here: My Service Highlights. You know, service was one big highlight and a million smaller highlights. I think, for all that we supposedly are self-centered alcoholics — we are self-centered in the extreme. I look at the Three Legacies: Recovery, Unity, and Service. For myself, I just can't imagine that I could have had any kind of meaningful recovery without the service element. It happened that I had a fellow walk into my home group and suggest that I become the G.S.R. when I was about six months sober, because there wasn't one there. From then on, I was in service.

I don't think that the initial Steps were necessarily a reduction in self-centeredness, they might even have been a little bit egotistical about it, and of course, that element never leaves entirely — it hasn't left me — but the thing that brought me forward in kind of a leap was eventually becoming a district committee member (D.C.M.). For some reason, I had this sense that these G.S.R.s gathered around, waiting for me to take a lead, was real A.A. and I started to think about it. My position as the D.C.M. was a "lead by following" thing, and from there on out, it just grew and grew and grew. I'd say, the word that, of course, pops out most is "unity." As area chair, that sense of unity took another leap forward, and then again as delegate and going to the Conference.

There, at the Conference, was an experience of being a small part of a large and very meaningful pool. I think that probably most of the people who are attending this Forum are in service or will be, shortly, because it is hard to go to a Regional Forum and not get inspired into service. That's what happened to me, back in 1992. I think that was my first Regional Forum. But the General Service Board experience and my A.A. experience was a whole new ballgame, as far as unity goes, because I think the best example is the way A.A. works. The group conscience, I think, today, is the pinnacle of the A.A. structure as far as unity goes. And how we implement the group conscience.

I can't remember, but I think it was my second year on the A.A.W.S. Board. I was talking to a friend of mine and she said, "Do you know, I am on thirteen committees and

subcommittees? And I hadn't really thought about it, so I stopped and listed the ones that I was on and it was fourteen committees. So I know how hard everyone there is working. That burden, I am sure, hasn't lessened any, especially with this challenge that we have today. I'm sure that the trustees and staff members and everyone else involved is, no doubt, working very, very hard. But, of all those committees and by practicing this group conscience (because that's what every committee is about), there are two that stand out. First, I was on a committee that worked on the logistics for the Conference inventory that we took back then. Actually, I was never part of the Conference inventory, because I rotated off before it started in 2015, but that committee was made up of trustees, staff members, and delegates. We did it all by conference call, and it went on for months and months. I was the chair, so my task was to facilitate this long list of decisions regarding logistics. But it was the experience, that sense of unity, that connection, that still touches me today when I think of that. And those were in the days before video and web conferencing, so we weren't able to see each other, but we got the job done.

In A.A.W.S., the second committee that I was on, one I really enjoyed and can recall, George M. was the chair of the A.A.W.S. board, at the time. He was selecting a committee to determine or implement digital production of the Big Book. He selected, I think, four or five people from around the board room table, and I thought, Wow, those are good people. I knew they knew something. Then he said, "Vic, I want you to do something. Chair this committee." I didn't say no. I said, "Thank you, okay, I will." Afterwards I said to him, "George, why did you pick me as chair? I don't know anything about this stuff." He said, "That's why you are the chair. Everyone else in the committee has a lot of knowledge regarding this sort of thing." I went away thinking, Yes, this is right. "Chairmen chair and speakers speak." It was a really rewarding experience. It turned out that I had no input, I only had to facilitate the meeting to its ultimate decision. But when I think of that, I think of how important it is to come up with a group conscience.

A good example is, sometimes, I've seen areas where committees get together and I don't think that we sometimes don't emphasize the importance of facilitation and chairmanship in A.A. What worries me about these committees is if, at the area level, they are not facilitated very well. Then we don't have a good group conscience process and we risk ending up having G.S.R.s who have not had the kind of fulfilling experience that they might have had with a "chairman who chairs and a speaker who speaks." So, I think, in A.A. the group conscience is also the biggest contributor to unity. It ensures our survival through unity. Every board has had its challenges. I'm not up to date, but I'm sure the General Service Board has had its challenges, the A.A.W.S. Board and the GV Board, have all, from time to time, had really brutal challenges and a lot of controversy. But the beauty of it is that group conscience, if given enough time, and enough information, does surface, and then everybody can get back to hugging everyone again. So that is what I saw in Alcoholics Anonymous. And I don't think we are likely to be threatened in A.A., as long as we continue to effectively implement the discovery of an informed group conscience. Thank you all again for this amazing experience.

“Your G.S.O. and Grapevine” (Moderator: Kathi F., Panelists: Greg T., Carolyn W., Francis G., Jon W., Janet Bryan, Diana L.)

Kathi F., Pacific Regional Trustee (Moderator)
Greg T., G.S.O. General Manager
Carolyn W., A.A.W.S. Board Director
Francis G., AA Grapevine Inc. Board Director
Jon W., AA Grapevine Inc. Senior Editor
Janet Bryan, AA Grapevine Inc. Dir. of Operations
Diana L., G.S.O. Staff, Cooperation with the
Professional Community

Participants on this panel shared information and interacted with members regarding the status, development and progress of the General Service Office and the AA Grapevine during 2020. Roles of participants are listed above. Each panelist provided a brief overview of their roles and duties within the Grapevine, G.S.O. and its respective boards.

Moderator: The General Service Office and Grapevine video provides an excellent overview of what the G.S.O. and the Grapevine did, pre-pandemic. But with both offices operating virtually for almost 9 months, what’s the biggest challenge now, and what is on the horizon?

Greg T.: The G.S.O. story mirrors the intergroup/central offices stories. In the beginning of the novel coronavirus pandemic, it became clear that it would impact our organization's finances, our delivery of services, our revenue streams, and our expense base, our workforce and sustainability of the office and the operations and services they provide. New York City and the state closed nonessential business offices on Friday, March 20, 2020. Due to some effective planning, we successfully transitioned to telework — about 90%. Now we are deliberately analyzing a return to the office, as well as looking at the shape, size, and function of the workforce.

Visioning for the 2nd quarter 2020 through January 1, 2021, of maintaining cost efficient measures, sustainable business operations. We took a 3-tiered approach that included but was not limited to:

2020 Budget was reforecast; instituted with the Board’s approval voluntary retirement and incentive program for the longest term and most valuable employees; Analysis how to achieve workforce efficiencies, savings, and productivity this year and into the future; Teams worked with the General Service Board to address important meetings and events for the year. i.e., canceled and deconstructed 2020 IC; All registration fees for IC were refunded to the people (3 million was paid out between June and August); Planned and executed 2020 General Service Conference; First ever virtual GSC. Conducted board and committee meetings (all virtual)throughout 2020; Planned and executed these US/CANs; First virtual World Service Meeting; Netsuite ERP system implemented.

All this was achieved virtually and in a remote environment. We are planning to return to the workplace. We are fortunate to have enough space to socially distance.

Jon, Senior Editor of Grapevine, answered the question, as well. John said that they “haven’t missed a bit with our tiny hard working staff.” Biggest challenge is staying close, but the staff has been closer than ever before. GV employees are also working closer with G.S.O. employees. GV and LV are the international journals of A.A. and it is one of the places in the U.S. and Canada where there is a current, ongoing, up-to-date sharing

between members. It is the members' magazine sharing stories with each other. Members have been sending in their Covid-19 stories, stories about isolation, about how their groups are working. Grapevine and La Viña have filled in the gap because prisons and detoxes have stopped having people from A.A. come in. The GV office gets letters from prisoners. Jon read one from someone behind the walls. "We are still putting out books and we are doing it all from our homes."

Question for A.A.W.S. and GV Directors: *What are the most critical changes that must be made to effectively face 2021 and beyond and help carry the A.A. message to alcoholics both in and out of A.A.?*

Carolyn: A few areas are a critical priority: Communication is at the top of the list, carrying the message to the alcoholic is the entire reason for our existence. We need to communicate where they are. We need to seek ways for new communication methods for the sake of fulfilling our life-saving primary purpose. Also, we must keep it accessible to professionals who are dealing with people like us.

As far as unity—we have had our challenges over the last year. I hope we will keep in mind the lessons we have learned over this year. We pivoted on a dime to meet the needs of A.A. Someone said that it takes five years to have a knee-jerk reaction to A.A. We made a lot of mistakes this year, but that is what happens when you try things.

Also—self support is a changing landscape. 2020 saw a reversal of where our funds come from (Publications vs. contributions). Contributions increased while literature decreased in revenue. November 2020 saw 50% of our revenue from contributions. Typically, it is 40%. Response from A.A. members regarding contributions was immense. However, some groups have reported a depletion of group funds, and members are no longer contributing in the same ways in the virtual basket. In 2021 and beyond, we need to be deliberate about communicating the value of our self-support dollars to all levels of service. The methods and needs and contributions of shifting and we need to keep track of it.

Francis: We want to be the voice of Fellowship at G.V. That means large print, ebooks, audio, video, etc. An important question is "What is our social media presence and how will we approach podcasts?"

Janet Bryan (nonalcoholic), *Director of Operations*, in response to the question "What impact has the past 9 months made on your role at the office?" Janet noted that there were difficulties ramping up, as she had to find a best practice approach to managing staff remotely and finding a work/life balance. What effect did the past nine months have? Janet said that her role at office has become more critical, "My responsibility is to keep things organized and flowing, keeping Grapevine staff focused on projects at hand. 'I'm doing the best I can with what I've got' is what I have learned to remember. I look for and encourage streamlining, I am committed to keeping staff stress free and as comfortable as possible. And I do that by giving them what they need to be productive, whatever it is. A benefit to remote working is being able to meet with staff on a regular basis. In the office, only management met weekly, but now the entire staff meets weekly to discuss projects. We have grown closer and I am better informed about everything than ever before. We continue to look for ways to be helpful to all."

Question for Diana: *As Staff member on Cooperation with Professional Community Assignment, can you talk about changes made to adapt to an increasing virtual environment at the office level and at the local level?*

Diana: Before March we were discussing the pandemic, and we tried to think of ways this might impact the Fellowship and how we can be of service. With this pandemic, this was a different type of disaster. So we really talked about how we can adapt these services. A lot of solutions you already know about, like this virtual forum, the virtual General Service Conference, and communicating with different service desks. These are the services in the U.S. and Canada that are carrying the message. We started to consider discussing with the local communities how they might consider to continue carrying the message.

In addition, the office provides sharing about how we are not the authority for questions about Covid-19. If you are concerned about health, then you should consider listening to the local health authorities. We can only provide shared experience about how groups are carrying the message. So, regarding going into facilities or settings, people started to share about using the digital literature that is on the website, aa.org/literature. That was very useful in helping groups carry the message in the digital meetings.

Another big event regarding the International Convention: Although we couldn't meet, in the matter of weeks, there was a page, people from all over and we were getting a phone call with a message of their sharing, or a web-conferencing call and we put it together. We were getting a lot of questions, like, "how does a group sign a court card digitally?" "How do you deal with anonymity on web-conferencing"; "How do you deal with common welfare, disruptive members?" We, at G.S.O., have been in the process of putting together the sharing we have from the Fellowship. Lots of groups are trying to carry the message with different web-conferencing platforms.

Lots of people are going to a local professional event, or a school, to present Alcoholics Anonymous. The resources that we have, that we ship out in kits, are all available digitally online at aa.org. This is helpful to all carrying the message digitally.

There is a new shift, and it is happening now. Some groups are considering reopening, and are asking "How do you do that? Do you have a hybrid meeting? What about the Traditions of Anonymity?"

“A” Class Act Panel discussion

““A” Class Act” (Moderator: Irma V., Western Canada Regional Trustee, Panelists: Class A (nonalcoholic) trustees: Leslie Backus, Nancy McCarthy, Al Mooney)

Moderator Irma V., Western Canada regional trustee, moderated a panel of Class A trustees sharing their experience, strength and hope in light of their roles as nonalcoholic trustees of the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous. The moderator began with a reading of: "A.A. Anonymity (Announcement for reading at meetings open to the public)" She also gave a brief introduction to the many-faceted backgrounds and invaluable cadre of Class A trustees — A.A.'s friends. Most importantly, it was noted that "Class A trustees can reach out to the public without concern about anonymity. Nonalcoholics, Class A trustees can be our public face of A.A. While the statements state that images of A.A. members ought not be broadcast to media, Class As are not so constrained. They can speak out."

Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee Leslie Backus:

Hi, my name is Leslie Backus, I am a Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee serving on the General Service Board, and this year serving as your treasurer. People ask, “Why (I think all Class As answer this question) do we serve? Why would we do this work?” And my answer is — because of my profession. I run a treatment center, and what I know is that I can get anyone sober, that’s the easy part, what I can’t do is lead them into a lifetime of recovery. That is where the Fellowship comes in. I’ve watched the miracle happen many times. It always takes my breath away. Some of the miracles I have seen over time — I will never be able to forget.

At the last session, they were talking about being inclusive. And I will tell this story: We had a young girl. She had purple hair, she had tattoos, piercings in places that I personally didn’t know you could have piercings on your face. And, when she went to her first A.A. meeting, there were a lot of oldtimers at the meeting, and they totally welcomed her. There was no hesitation. She’d been very scared to go, but when she came back, she found a sponsor, at least a temporary one, and she told the story of acceptance. Something nobody else could have given her, because she could be understood. There were many differences, but there were many things alike.

That has been the reason that I have chosen to do what I do with Alcoholics Anonymous. I also feel that I have the ability to talk with people in my area: other treatment providers, psychiatrists, physicians, about what A.A. is and is not. I feel that being able to speak publicly does have its benefits. This year I had the amazing experience of speaking at a medical conference in Cuba. It was an international conference and it was just amazing to hear the recovery stories, they were so similar from around the world. But it was nice to not have to worry about anonymity, and that’s what the special privilege of being a Class A does, it allows us to speak without worrying about our anonymity.

So, a typical Class A, we serve on a number of board committees. I serve on Finance, International Convention, and at the same time I do my committee work, I’m also doing some work out in the community that only Class As can do. It’s been an amazing experience, I’ve made my share of mistakes. As a Class A, you don’t always know the Traditions and the Concepts as well as you should, and so, just like any other human being, I have made my share of mistakes. But the Fellowship has been good, and they have helped educate me. Learning the Concepts, the Traditions, as well as the Steps, really has expanded my understanding of the Fellowship and given me a better platform from which to speak. So I am grateful for when I make my blunders, and I’m sure I will continue to make them, and members of the Fellowship will contact me and help me and educate me. So, I really like the partnership, and I really like the Fellowship, and I hope that you will allow me even after I step down from the Board, to always feel a part of this amazing, amazing organization. Thank you.

Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee Nancy McCarthy: Thank you for the opportunity to share my story tonight. I am a Class A. As I go forward, I know the sharing of my story is intertwined with stories and journeys of others — both friends and families and individuals I’ve worked with who have struggled with alcohol. Without their struggle, without their courage, I would have no story and I would not be here with you tonight. So, as Leslie talked about, we get asked, oftentimes, two questions: “Why are you here and what have you learned?”

I started with the Missouri Board of Probation and Parole in 1984 — back when dinosaurs roamed the earth. At the time, I knew a little bit about alcoholism, and I knew a whole lot less about treatment.

Like all good correction staff, I went to three weeks of training, and they taught me everything I needed to do and they said, “Go manage all these individuals.” So I went into the business of managing people on community supervision, both probation and parole. I did what all good probation officers did: I looked at their file, I looked at them, I said, “I think you are alcoholic and I think you need to go to A.A.” And I’d give them a slip, I’d send them on their way. When they came back with their slip all filled out, and gave me their slip, I made sure it didn’t match their handwriting, I made sure it was different ink, different signatures, different times, and that it didn’t look like their signature or their families’. And I did what all good P.O.s (parole officers) did, I threw it in their file and I gave them another slip.

I didn’t talk to them about why I sent them to a meeting, I did not talk to them about what they learned, I did not talk to them about the experience that they had. I was the P.O. who would send clients to the meeting so I could check it off my list and move on to the next.

So, it was during this time that my brother Mike was very active with his abuse of alcohol. He had lost several jobs and he had gotten thrown out of the union, and he went into the Navy, came out of the Navy, got a job, lost a job, back into the Navy again, all the time while he was drinking, and all intermixed with this he would go into treatment and out of treatment, and at the same time, he’d still go to A.A. meetings. He was the individual who was the last one in the door, and the first one out the door. And that sponsor thing? We’ll think about that tomorrow. And so when Mike said he was going back to treatment and was going back to A.A. I thought to myself, Same old, same old.

But I waited and I watched. I saw him go back into the rooms of A.A. I don’t really know what his moment of clarity was. Whether it was the fact that he had gotten arrested or he was in jail. Whether or not he was in the psychiatric ward, or if he was just sick and tired of being sick and tired.

But what I did is this: I watched and waited. And what I saw was the beginning of change. And (I saw) the beginning of the change in how he viewed his world, and how he lived his life. And I began to see the spirituality that had left him, decades before, slowly re-enter. This time Mike had a sponsor, and he didn’t have a sponsor “dujour” that he refused to call, but rather a sponsor who he relied upon to give him the guidance that he needed, and the support that he needed, [and the support] that was asked of him. And I began to see the offering of himself as he entered into the Third Legacy of Service. As I watched, I realized that what I was doing with my clients had to change. That if what I wanted was for them to get and obtain true sobriety, I needed to work with them differently. How I sent them to A.A. and how I supported what you had taught them. And so as Mike progressed with his sobriety, so did I.

I learned that, first of all, Corrections could be very difficult to work with. I learned the tenacity and the great lengths the Fellowship goes to extend the hand of A.A. — that members of the Fellowship, regardless of rain or snow, would drive 100 miles to a prison. And Mike was one of those individuals, he began to do service in Corrections. I remember members of the Fellowship — he would take a call, any hour of the night, so that there

was someone to listen. What I learned was the willingness and generosity of the Fellowship who would take a collection to purchase a Grapevine. Not just for one prison, but every prison in the state.

I learned that Corrections people would say, “You have to drive 75 miles to a training session,” although there is one 10 miles away. But you did it for your love of A.A. and you did it because someone did it for you. And what I learned is that what I did in my work paled in comparison to what you offered in your service to the Fellowship and the still-suffering alcoholic. I have a very special place in my heart for those who go behind the walls. Because I know the impact of what you do for those who are on the margins. For those who are in prison or in jail, the person is stripped of their name and identity, and they become a number. Every single item they own has this number on it. Every piece of property — it is who they become. Clients will be out of prison for years, and they will call with some issue. They will provide their name, and then they will immediately follow it with their number.

But for those members of the Fellowship who bring meetings into prisons, you do what no one else does, you call them by name and you do what no one else does — you ask them to come back. The Fellowship offers no judgment, no sarcasm, but rather you provide hope for those whom hope has become a distant memory. And I learned that whatever small part that I could help, that I could do, I was responsible for that.

A couple of years ago, my husband [Joe] and I took a trip out West. We went out to the Badlands to South Dakota. It allowed for 15 hours of karaoke with Nancy. When we got to the Badlands, Joe said, “We are going to see this [Badlands] movie,” because he was so sick and tired of hearing my voice. He reminded me that my priest had once told me, “Sing loud and let God know that periodically he can sometimes make a mistake.”

As you know, the Badlands is a national park out in South Dakota. It’s 200,000 acres of horrible land to travel through. Hence the name “The Badlands.” During the movie, they talked about the vastness of the land and how it has endured the test of time. The movie talked about the role that nature plays in maintaining the legacy and the spirit over time. It told how the buffalos, when they walk, their fur picks up seeds and drops them along the way, and allows for new growth and new development. Their hooves crush the seeds into the ground and allow them to ferment and grow. They have prairie dogs who dig their home and this creates holes for owls and also aerates the ground and allows it to come back strong. Even the fires, which are always viewed as destructive, allows for nature to return stronger than it once was. If there is one aspect missing, the Badlands would wither.

As we left, we took a tour of this beautiful land and we saw this beautiful sunset. It reminded me how much the Badlands was like the Fellowship. And how grateful I was to be there. For just this moment. That what we do, our service work, within A.A., that no matter what service role we have, whether we make coffee or set chairs, or we service delegates, whether we are buffaloes lifting our hooves and crushing seeds into the ground, or are prairie dogs digging holes for owls and allowing for the aerating of the ground. Or we allow the fires — which brings us to our group conscience, and from this group conscience, we begin to understand, and come to a deeper understanding of the Traditions and the Concepts, and like the burnt grounds, we emerge stronger. That we are all interconnected, and without each of us doing our piece of service work, this beautiful

landscape of A.A. that has lasted for 85 years, would wither. Each night the sun rises and sets on the landscape of the Badlands and just like that, for us, each day allows us a new opportunity to reflect on what we've been given through A.A. — and another day to provide to us an opportunity to be of service, and the opportunity to for us to carry the message as we are called. And just as I treasured that moment, in the Badlands, I treasure my time with you.

My brother Mike passed away the year before I interviewed for the Class A position, and his last gift to me was his Big Book. The quote on the last page of his Big Book says, "Good sobriety is graded, and rests on a kind of gentleness." And for me, this is the essence and the heart of service work. The immortality of Bill's influence lies within these pages, and it's the immortality of influence that each of us have with every act of service we perform for the still-suffering alcoholic. Whether we open the doors, or we make coffee, or it's the gentle touch of the arm, or we welcome the newcomer or we share our experience, strength and hope through the Grapevine. That we do this with love and gratitude, the work and the love that you do so quietly with no fanfare, and from this, from you, I have learned. And for this, I thank you.

Class A trustee (nonalcoholic), Al Mooney:

I want to thank the staff, the service volunteers, my fellow Board members for all three of the organizations. It's just such a privilege, the privilege of a lifetime, to be in the service of A.A. I like to talk about that. I'm enthusiastic. I'll share with you in just a minute where some of that interest and curiosity and enthusiasm came, but it seems to never fade. And to have an opportunity, first as a friend of A.A., and now as a Class A trustee, is really just an honor.

I'm the new guy on the block, so I'm looking forward and I'm remaining vigilant to see how I might best fit into my service. I've got one job description line, and that is to be of service to the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous. I am still looking for ways to do that. But I've been around A.A. a long time. I've qualified for A.A. in a very different way to be connected to A.A. than most people who are watching. As a matter of fact, some friends in A.A. found out that I'm doing some service with A.A. at a pretty high level, and they'll ask me, "We know you are not a member of A.A. . . .and you've got a different path in your recovery. How did you get involved in your service?" Almost universally, I will ask them if they've read *The A.A. Service Manual/Twelve Concepts for World Service* and they say "No." I'll say, "That's the book where they have the upside down pyramid. If you read that, we can have an intelligent conversation." Because I've always loved Alcoholics Anonymous, but I've always felt like a fifth wheel because I didn't know how I fit in, and there was a point in my journey where somebody said, "If you are going to, you have to read *The A.A. Service Manual/Twelve Concepts for World Service*." So much of my journey presently comes out of Bill's description and a lot of rules written, but like the Big Book, there are some suggestions and philosophies in there that I've tried my best to adhere to.

It didn't start there — my association with Alcoholics Anonymous. I'll take you back — there may be some significance in this because the average (according to the Membership Survey) age of A.A. members are 50 years of age. Well, I was first

introduced to A.A. in 1959. That was 60 years ago. I've been around A.A., to some degree, curious and absorbing A.A. as a family member. There are two chapters in the Big Book on family. That's kind of where I started out in 1959 when my dad got out of prison. I've been absorbing things and coming back since then. The one thing I don't know is whether that is a good thing or not, because when you find someone at a meeting who's just too crazy for you to think of anything constructive to say, the one thing you always say is, "Keep Coming Back."

Well, I'm like the poster child for "Keep Coming Back." Here I am in two-thousand-soon-to-be-twenty-one, when my first association with A.A. was in 1959, and one of the reasons I remember that was because my father had just gotten out of prison and I had just turned 11 years old. I didn't know where he was. He was a physician, we have a family of physicians, I'm the sixth generation physician in our family line, my dad was the fifth, a prominent surgeon. People didn't want to talk about what was really going on, maybe they actually didn't know what was going on. We didn't know much in science and medicine about alcoholism, then. The Big Book was so, so right, but very few doctors read that.

My dad got into trouble. I was very confused about what A.A. was, because my dad was a paratrooper in World War II and he parachuted behind Italian lines in Sicily. He flew gliders into Normandy, and in the 82nd Airborne, he had a shoulder patch that said, "AA." He would always talk about these war stories because that's what actually gave a lot of fuel to his addiction. After the war, he cycled through some injuries, and drank and used drugs in a way that was very destructive in our family. He would go away from time to time, and reappear. I didn't know where he was. I would say, "Where has Daddy gone?" And they would say, "He's off learning how to be a better doctor." I thought that meant a medical meeting, but there were a lot of things that went on in the periphery — they don't make bookshelves and toy shelves in medical meetings, like I was told. Finally, I lost trust in whatever I was told. When he came back from what I know now was prison, he was doing Ninth Step work with his family to get life underway. He talked about what had been going on.

There were a couple of things that stick to me to this day: One, he was smart, he could have talked about all kinds of things, but he didn't. He said, "I've been in prison and I've learned some things about the way I'm sick and I'm going to try to better our family. I've got to go to these meetings." He mentioned A.A. and I was intrigued by that because he could have thought of a lot — he was a smart guy and could have thought of a lot of other lies if he wanted to. But that was the truth. In a weird way, a burden was lifted off of me when he had told me he had been in prison. I knew it was the truth, and maybe it was the first time I had ever heard the truth.

The other thing that I noticed was that the first day he was home — this was something I've come to understand better, but in the Big Book it talks about a psychic change. When my dad came back home from prison, it was the same body I had always known, but it was a different person living in that body. That just blew me out of the water. Most of the rest of my life, I've chased my understanding of how that could possibly happen. I went to medical school and got instructed on some things that were, kind of, partly true, but not completely so. Remember, the Big Book from 1939 talked about this stuff, and just in the last five or ten years, my profession, medicine and science, has begun to investigate and document what we call neurotoxicity. And little did I know that the psychic change in my

dad, some sixty years later, was going to be something that people would try to explain to me in medical meetings. I think that is so cool.

One of the things I carry with me today is a curiosity about the things in the Big Book that relate to the things we know — and need to know — about medicine and science today. I chased that, I'm vigilant in trying to learn about those things. I could go on and on talking about how the program of Alcoholics Anonymous has influenced my life and profession, but I need to wrap it up. I look forward to talking to people about these things, because I'm still vigilant. There may be some of this experience I've had, most of my life in recovery, that might offer something in the discussion with A.A. members who are out there doing the work of A.A.

The A.A. Service Manual/Twelve Concepts for World Service that I've mentioned really points me in several directions, and I'm still trying to get a better grasp of [it]. One of them is that Bill saw the Class A nonalcoholic trustees as offering a different perspective on alcoholism and recovery. He also saw the Class As offering new ideas because they had not come from the same path that alcoholic members had come from. And he also makes mention of the wisdom of life and career experiences that was already mentioned earlier. I want to thank all of you for just allowing me to just be at a conference like this. It's beyond my dreams and I look forward to having more interaction as I learn more of what my role might be and continuing to follow that path, hopefully making some kind of contribution to the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous that can be related to service.

Panel Question: As Class A trustees, and as we approach 2021, what is your vision for Alcoholics Anonymous in reaching the still suffering alcoholic?

Leslie: It's a particularly important question during the pandemic. The sales of alcohol have skyrocketed and I want to see the Fellowship be able to continue to serve the still-suffering alcoholic. I think we have to look at how we are providing that outreach now. For the first time, the electronic world has been thrust on us, and it has worked surprisingly well. I didn't expect it to. So I see, as A.A. moves forward and the Fellowship continues their work, that they are embracing new things and that's really going to help us move forward.

Nancy: I agree with Leslie. I think for the Fellowship that moves at the speed of trust, when we were faced with not having meetings — meetings surfaced overnight. Whatever fear we have about technology, we overcame it. But in doing that, we still have individuals who do not have the ability to access our message and don't have the ability to attend meetings. For those who may be in prisons, and I know we talked about this a little bit earlier, probably in most jails and prisons you have individuals who have most meetings stopped in March of 2020 and may not start back up again until July of 2021. And that's if Corrections can get their act together and make sure all of those things that need to be in place are in place for us to go back in. We still have individuals who are in homeless shelters, who may be in halfway houses. Who may not have the ability to have technology, to have internet, to have smart phones and tablets. So, as creative and dynamic as we've become, there are still those who cannot access our message. So I think we still have to be mindful of that and still work to get that where we want it to be.

Al: We've been through a very new and, in some ways, a very painful year. I've had a lot of fear and disruptions in my family. And one of the things that I have gone to for strength

is the hope and service that I've always seen in Alcoholics Anonymous. In the Foreword to the "Twelve and Twelve" it talks in a surprising way about how the Steps have made a difference in the lives of people who are not alcoholic. And the Step in the "Twelve and Twelve" was kind of written with the alcoholic in mind, but it was also written enough to apply to people who may not have the alcoholic experience. This has been a year of that. I've watched A.A. come to the plate in the darkest of times and give hope and happiness and openly invite others.

I've been getting to a lot, more A.A. meetings than I've ever had a chance to go to. I look forward to finding ways that that gift of recovery, in attitude and way of life, can somehow find its way back into a traumatized society. I don't know how that is going to happen, but I've heard people talk about Bill's later teachings, in his mature recovery, we talk about the *Language of Heart* and *Emotional Sobriety*, but one of the phrases that Bill used in "As Bill Sees It" is he talks about, in his words, becoming a citizen of the world. And I know I've experienced over this last year, a real tangible example of how A.A. has presented itself as a citizen of the world in the most difficult times we've faced in our lifetime. How that moves forward, I'm not sure. But I know that some of the things that A.A. offers are some of the things we miss.

In my earlier years, we had a town drunk who finally got sober, but he spent twenty years drinking and coming to A.A. and I knew him. Finally he got sober. He said he wasn't interested in the Steps, but he said he kept coming back for "the huggin' and the kissin' and the eatin' fried chicken." It kept him alive until he got ready for the Steps. I've never quite understood what he was talking about until this past year. I've got the program and the Steps and a lot of the things that make A.A. work, but I have missed "the huggin' and the kissin' and the eatin' fried chicken."

Panel Question: Reviewing your service on the General Service Board, what stands out? Are there any do-overs?

Leslie: Do-overs. . . . Sure, there are lots of do-overs. In the first few years I had on the Board, I didn't fully understand the "right of participation." So, sometimes, in my mind, not necessarily out loud, I was not allowing the open-mindedness that allows everyone to participate, and I would do that over. I would more carefully listen to everyone, because what I've come to learn is: it isn't until every expressed opinion that I begin to understand a healthy group conscience. It's not what I think, and it took me a while to get past myself, if you will, enough to really listen and get past myself. That's what I would do over. To be more open from the beginning, and understand "right of participation" more fully.

Nancy: When I look at a do-over, I wish that I would have made more of a purposeful effort to educate the professional community about what A.A. does and the value of A.A. and what it can do in their work. Two years ago, myself and Christine Carpenter, a retired judge, a nonalcoholic Class A, had the opportunity to go to Montana to do some training in various places, to really help bridge that understanding of the professional community and the A.A. community. It can be immense. I did my description of what I did with my A.A. slips. There were two gals sitting in the front audience, and they started laughing and looking at each other. I said to them, "You guys are parole officers and that is exactly what you do." They said, "Yeah. It is." So afterwards, I was talking with them. There were members of the Fellowship there, and one parole officer said, "You see that gal over there? She was my client." I said, "How does she look?" She said, "She looks great." I

said, “Bring her to a staff meeting and let her tell her story to your peers. But even let her tell her story to new people coming on supervision. Allow her that opportunity to help bridge that gap.” So that would be my do-over. Thank you.

Al: I haven’t been around long enough to screw much up, even if it is possible. But I do miss the face-to-face piece, I’ve been to virtual conferences and Regional Forums, but not face-to-face. I’m not sure what’s in my path. But there are two things that I remain excited about, and one of them is discussions of the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous. I love it, but I do realize there is a historical place the Big Book fits in, and I’m so excited that a lot of the present science, at least the way I understand it, brings the Big Book back to life. I look forward to exploring things that are going on that bring new life into the Big Book. The other thing is that my journey with Alcoholics Anonymous as a friend has been something that I don’t often feel that enough of my fellow professionals understand there is an opportunity for. So I’m hoping to help the Fellowship build friendships outside of A.A. and I might make a contribution, at least something on the order of what I felt, always advocating standing up and helping to get people to A.A., as a friend of A.A.

Moderator: Al, with you being relatively new on the Board, so as a newcomer, what excites you as you look ahead as to your service to Alcoholics Anonymous?

Al: The thing I am most excited about is getting back to face-to-face meetings and finding some way to give somebody a hug when that time arrives. This is a journey for me. I know A.A. well enough to know I don’t have to set a goal, I just have to do some work, and God has always delivered on outcomes better than my planning would have done. I see a lot of mystery in my journey ahead with A.A. and I’m excited about how that mystery will unfold. I’m confident that with the “giants” in my world with principles — fellow Board members, members who commit their life to service — I really have feelings of inadequacy, and I look forward to how we can move forward together to carry the message of Alcoholics Anonymous to the alcoholic who still suffers and needs it so desperately.

Panel Question: When I think about the Class A trustees, and the ways that you can serve Alcoholics Anonymous and be that face for Alcoholics Anonymous, I hear at times that the Class A trustees are underutilized and that you are willing to serve the Fellowship; that you are available, whether that be for presentations of otherwise. I know some of you have had that opportunity to share at different events, and I’d like to give you the opportunity to share a little bit about your experiences in that regard, and how the people in the Fellowship can be in touch with you and how you can serve, if you are available.

Leslie: I’ve been able to, as a Class A trustee, go to professional conferences, to man an A.A. booth and also to talk about how A.A. can work with treatment and court systems more effectively. So, in talking in the professional setting, both at the conferences and as a trainer, I have found the opportunities haven’t been as broad as I would have liked. In the beginning, I got a script to talk from. That’s no longer true. In the beginning, I probably needed a script. But now they let me loose and they let me make my mistakes and everybody smiles affectionately. It’s been a really great experience.

I recently went into our local emergency room. I thought I was going to talk about detox, and how to get people into detox. But that’s not what they wanted to talk about. They wanted to talk about the fact that there were nurses who were drinking too much, and what could they do? There was this unique opportunity that presented itself so I could talk

about A.A. I could talk about starting a nursing meeting right there at the hospital. They didn't have to say they were alcoholic, because they were worried about their careers, but at least they could start seeking the help they needed. So there were opportunities I hadn't expected. If someone would like me to speak at something, I'm often available. I'm sure our email addresses are out there somewhere, feel free to contact me by email. I'm happy to talk to people in the criminal justice setting, but not like Nancy: I was in California, and a probation officer knew who Nancy was — it blew my mind. We also have a judge, who is retired, we have Al, he is a doctor, he can talk to all those doctors. Feel free to talk to any of us, we are available and happy to talk.

Nancy: With the pandemic and the emergence of web-conferencing, it's really given the opportunity for some of us to be able to participate in some area assemblies and workshops across the country, where we may not have normally been able to do that. I've had the opportunity to participate in two area assemblies in Manitoba, where normally they don't have the opportunity to bring in outside speakers, so we do have the ability to do that. I think, as we move forward, even when we are able to resume face-to-face meetings, and be able to give each other a hug, it still will give us the opportunity to make use of technology to connect with the Fellowship and the professional community. We are more than happy to do that, if we have the time available, I think that I could speak for all the Class As, we'd be more than happy to help.

Moderator: So, you have met three of our wonderful Class A trustees, and they are definitely a class act. In closing, I would like to quote Bill W., who once said, "Now you have met our nonalcoholic trustees, where would A.A. have been without them? As for me, I'd rather not guess."

CLOSING REMARKS

What a wonderful day. I hope you agree. I heard a lot of ideas supporting the vision of a vibrant AA fellowship carrying the message of hope and recovery. And I especially hope some of you have caught the service bug [a healthy bug].

There is so much to this wonderful fellowship. The more you do, the more there is to learn; the more you learn, the more you become connected to the worldwide AA fellowship. It's a vibrant fellowship. Service keeps it that way.

Thanks so much to Sandra for her idea and vision and to her team; to all GSO staff and employees; to all the participants who spoke; to those who shared at workshops and to those who asked questions —you are the next link that started with the first regional forum in 1975.

Finally, in the new Box 459 that just came out, there is a piece on the responsibility declaration, what I'd like to close this forum with. The Responsibility Declaration was first used at the 4th international convention in Toronto, 1965. It was written by AL S, a trustee of the GSB. Bill W wrote a powerful essay just before that International titled: Responsibility is Our Theme. It covers a number of responsibilities each member of the fellowship should consider. You can find it in the language of the heart. It's one of my favorites.

So, thank you and let's say the statement together. Those who can unmute, please join me in your favorite language. ...