

WESTERN CANADA REGIONAL FORUM

FINAL REPORT

June 3-5, 2022

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

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INTRODUCTION

The 2022 Western Canada Forum was held on June 3-5, 2022. Registration for the Forum was **169** This included **72** members attending their very first Forum.

Dear A.A. Friends,

Please mark your calendar for the upcoming 2022 in-person
Regional Forums:

Pacific: September 16-18, 2022

Southeast: December 2-4, 2022

UNANSWERED ASK-IT BASKET QUESTIONS

Do you have any advice for how to work with treatment centers?

As you know the Treatment desk does not give advice only shared experience.

As a resource online at www.aa.org the Treatment Workbook provides information on how to approach a treatment facility. The link to the Treatment Workbook:

https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/m-40i_TFWorkbook.pdf.

In the workbook on page eight highlights' Guidelines and Suggestions for Working Within the Treatment Facilities' Rules and Regulations topics on "Approaching Treatment Facilities Personnel and Treatment Facilities Administration. Some pamphlets you may find helpful: A.A. Tradition How it Developed:

<https://www.aa.org/aa-tradition-how-it-developedAcquaint>, A.A. in Treatment

Settings: https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/p-27_en_0222.pdf and "How A.A. Members Cooperate with the Professionals

https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/assets/p-29_howAAMemCoopProf.pdf

We hope this information will be helpful.

WORKSHOP REPORTS

Modernizing the Literature

Moderator: Paul T. Reporter: Chie W.

This was a cohesive workshop. Each attendee shared with their heart. It was a hot topic. We heard all about aspects of modernizing the literature, and how they would work in synergy together. In the beginning, we chose two topics 1. Would changes the literature hurt A.A.? 2. Is it time for update simplified version?

1. Would changes to the literature hurt A.A.?

- Some pamphlets haven't been updated since 1974. It's time to move on
- Tradition 3 reflects that it doesn't matter who you are, or where you come from. We include anyone (Diversity & Inclusion is important)
- The Big Book uses masculine words; such as businessman, mankind. This reminds us of the men dominant world of the 1930s.
- The new Service Manual was updated recently, some do not agree with concept 11 because Bill W's footnote was missing.

2. Is it time for an updated, simplified version of the Literature?

- Literature is very important to us because it guides us through our recovery and growth
- Simplifying the Literature doesn't only address a concern about reading level, but also accessibility concerns such as: carrying the message for another alcoholic remotely, and translation into different languages.

- Simplified means accessibility
- The purpose of simplified literature gives us more opportunities to carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers (it's not to replace the words)
- Some do not agree to simplify language in the literature because that makes us confused, especially the big book is supposed not to change the first 164 pages.
- Grapevine is a great way to educate us. Our mindset can be narrow, but the Grapevine give us a variety ways of solutions, communicating carry the message for underrepresented populations

Anonymity in the Digital Age

Moderator: Lori R. Reporter: Mona K.

Our group had two main discussion points, how do we lovingly and gently educate others on how to respect A.A. anonymity? And, how do we embrace and encourage new comers or younger generation who use social media as their main source of communication?

The answers to these questions are below:

- Educate membership on how to protect their online identity
- When in doubt, don't do it
- Ensure guidelines to anonymity are available at each group for newcomers
- Educate membership about the You-tube channel, grapevine online, and podcasts
- Sponsorship
- Pass on our knowledge of history and A.A Traditions
- Be open
- Have conversations and listen

Why we still need the Traditions, and how to put them into action

Moderator: Mike M. Reporter: Brad F.

Why we still need the traditions, and how to put them into action:

- It starts with sponsorship
- Sole purpose; resolve contention
- The traditions prevent self-destruction
- Stay away from outside issues
- Being self-supporting: the seventh tradition is only for members
- Teacher financial responsibility
- Group Conscience: it protects the program and teaches us to lead by example
- Implement the principles in daily life
- In the digital age, we need the traditions more than ever
- Unity helps us to stay together
- We are attached to the traditions as a way of life
- Accountability for why we are here
- Personal sacrifices/anonymity – preserves the longevity of AA

- Personal sacrifice/anonymity – preserves the longevity of AA
- Contribute 10% of what we spent on drinking
- The real function of service can be found in the traditions
- Is there a framework on how to live sober?
- Anonymity – Bill declined to have his picture on the cover of Time magazine

AA Grapevine and La Vina

Moderator: Alice G. Reporter: Michelle B.

Question: How do we generate more interest in Grapevine?

Consensus:

- The development of an app would generate interest because people are accustomed to accessing information digitally. However, we need to keep the paper version and make it more functional for older readers
- There would be more excitement generated with a digital/app version because there would be more articles/information available in a timelier manner (weeks vs months)
- Subscription sales would represent support to Grapevine and should be “tiered” from personal to institutional/group/facility levels
- We need to ensure changes are being communicated at group and district level, including having writing workshops to help generate interest

Who’s Not in The Room? – Full Forum Workshop

Moderator: Drew W., Alternate Chair and Grapevine Chair, Area 79, BC/Yukon

Hello friends, my name is Drew and I am an alcoholic. It is truly wonderful to be here with you all, my extended service family. Currently I serve as the Alternate Chair and Grapevine Chair for BC/Yukon Area 79. I have been invited to introduce our workshop topic for today ‘Who is not in the rooms?’ and to share my experience on this topic with you.

I believe the spirit of this workshop calls on all of us to take a look at how effective we are as individuals, group members and services leaders in practicing Tradition 3 (“The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking”) and Tradition 5 (“Our primary purpose is to carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers”) in our daily lives.

The topic of underrepresented populations in A.A. isn’t a new conversation, its one we have been having for years. The bigger question, (and ultimately harder question), is WHY are those folks not in our rooms? What more do we need to do as a fellowship to ensure our life saving program reaches everyone who needs it?

I think we are all here today because we truly believe in the principle of inclusivity and have the same common purpose – to carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers. Believing in this is important, and much like our recovery, faith without works is dead. In

other words - it is the action that each of us takes as members that can back up those beliefs and ideals we strive for.

A.A. has adapted to changing conditions in the past. We can probably all recall a meeting we've been to where the chairperson has been asked to ensure equal participation sharing between men and women. Something that simple came from a need within the fellowship. So, there is no excuse why we can't continue to adapt to the world around us today to carry out our primary purpose (Tradition 5).

I'm going to go out on a limb and assume this: I think we all know who is not in the rooms. I mean look around this room. Heck, look at the data from our last membership survey that was completed in 2014. It's pretty clear from that data we are lopsided in terms of who we serve.

I am proud to be a member of A.A. in BC/Yukon Area 79. I could recite stories about the motions we've passed in our area that were intended to reach these missing, yet-to-be members. We've done some important work for sure. And I'm hopeful and almost certain that you have unique stories to share on our principle of inclusivity (Tradition 3). Perhaps you've witnessed committee work in your area, or even at the group level, that has really kept the principle of inclusivity in the forefront of the discussion and decision making. I think this is terrific. But let's not **just** pat ourselves on the back. It's clear we have lots of work left to do, and we need more people to join us, and we must take the lead.

As someone who is part of the underrepresented population in A.A., when I take a look from a bird's eye view of my story, I can see how someone like me would stay in A.A. I came out as transgender man later in my sober life. I was 9 years sober, so about 5 years ago. Years prior, I had had a spiritual awakening as a result of doing the steps, I was in love with our program of recovery, and I had a host of friends both in recovery and in service. I was already well on my way in my service journey at that point. People loved me for me. They had gotten to know me. **I was a known entity**. I also had a fellowship around me at that time that was full of allies. How lucky am I? But not everyone has that kind of support. Others are more vulnerable. I'm not just speaking about trans people, I'm speaking about anyone who doesn't see themselves reflected back in our recovery meeting spaces.

I am here to tell you that as part of my experience, it was vital that I find others who could share their sober journey around their personal gender transition in sobriety, and how they stayed sober through it all. Special interest groups helped me feel safe. And, as someone active in service it was also critical that I had a sense of safety not just in the meeting rooms of A.A. but also where we gathered for service events. A year or so after coming out, I had the courage to ask for what I needed - gender neutral washrooms at our quarterlies and assemblies. No one before then had thought to ensure we had single stall washrooms for our gender diverse members. The General Service Committee in Panel 65 listened to me, and saw an opportunity to ensure the safety of others as well. They implemented this change right away. It comforts me today when I see other trans and gender non-conforming folks come into a service assembly and know they have what they need in this regard. And interestingly enough, we have those members serve in leadership positions today. I believe that the allyship they felt in those spaces made a difference in their lives, and as a result,

made an impact on their increased participation in our fellowship, and in our service structure.

But we aren't here to talk about the people that are already involved in A.A. who have support. We are here to figure out what more we can do to foster a welcoming environment for people who want to join, stay, and further, to foster participation from those members once they do come in the door.

I've heard a lot of stories in my community from folks who have had a harder time than I have. I listen to them. It's an important act of service I can do. Here is just one of the many stories I've been privy to. During the pandemic, I was introduced to a young person in their 20s in Victoria, B.C. whose mom reached out to me as their child was struggling not only to stay sober, but to believe that A.A. would be a safe place for them. As a non-binary young person, they didn't have anyone like them in their A.A. community. They found it hard to speak up and ask for what they needed and had heard the original preamble at every meeting. They felt that A.A. was exclusive and not for someone like them. I had invited them to attend a special closed meeting that we ran online every Monday night for gender diverse members. Fast forward a year later, and that same member took a one-year cake. After our 71st General Service Conference, it was such a relief to share the exciting news with them that our preamble had been changed and was now using more inclusive language. Their membership was no longer debated by others. They finally felt like they belonged, as A.A. had included them. They told me that going to special interest meetings in A.A. and having support during that time when they felt isolated and alone was one of the biggest reasons why they stayed in the fellowship. Once the preamble passed, they felt a huge sense of belonging.

What's it like being trans in A.A.? Kind of like what it's like being trans anywhere. I have my own challenges. I've had emotional upheavals, let's call them, or meltdowns at some assemblies when I'd been misgendered publicly at the podium (it happened once right before I was to give my service resume). I've cried in bathroom stalls, and prayed to my higher power to help me get the courage to continue in service despite feeling isolated and alone. I've been to meetings where I've personally had hard conversations with members about why using pronouns is important for me, be it on a virtual platform or in person, and why correcting members is equally important when they make mistakes, even if unintentionally. I've been told by some that it's an outside issue. I'm in contact with members in other areas across the border who ask me how I stayed in the service structure as a trans person, after they felt it was too much for them to stay as they didn't have a great experience. The steps working in my life, good service and spiritual sponsorship have all played a huge role as to why I've stayed. We don't do this alone.

A personal highlight in my service was back when I was a D.C.M. I didn't see myself reflected in on our membership survey (Pamphlet P-48) that was last done in 2014. I looked at the makeup of our membership and had no idea how many trans people were in A.A. We simply hadn't asked the question. The only two options were Male and Female for gender. I decided to draft a motion and brought it to the district table to see if they wanted to support it. They did, and it then went to our Area 79 Voting assembly, and it passed. It was a spiritual experience for me. I not only felt included, I felt understood and loved by my fellows. This is a very different experience than being tolerated.

I've also seen some wonderful examples of members in my own area who have had the courage to come out as a trans person, and while serving Area 79 have had members/allies in the room support them, and raise them up by giving them a seat at the table. I feel strongly that if someone has the courage to tell me who they are, then I owe them the courage to support them in the ways they need.

I have enough experience in sobriety to weather these emotional storms and work my spiritual program over issues like changing our preamble to be more inclusive. I do wonder though, how those newcomers have felt knowing their membership in A.A. has been debated over and over again.

We may want to talk about some big ideas today, which is wonderful. And I also want to remind each and every one of you, it is the little things that you can do that make such a huge difference. The point I want to drive home is that we CAN do more. And if we can start by focusing on the smaller actions that help people stay they will have a cumulative effect.

Here are a few examples that helped me:

- It's the member who comes up to me at a service event who hasn't seen me in years who knew me before I transitioned and asks me what my preferred pronouns are,
- It's the General Service Committee taking my request for gender neutral washrooms seriously and implementing a new protocol right away,
- It's the willingness to back up members who are serving and using their pronouns as part of their naming convention on our virtual platform to create a safe space for all,
- It's cisgender folks using their pronouns to help others feel safe
- It's the Grapevine podcast with its diverse line up of guests talking about all things that happen in the rooms,
- It's the Regional Forums coordinator who put on this event that chooses important topics like this one today for us to have these conversations together to build more unity among us
- And it's you today willing to listen to these stories to see where we can all grow and learn together.

I hold firm to the belief that in A.A. we want to do the right thing and be fully inclusive. I just hope there are more moments like the examples I have just outlined that can help point us in the right direction and enact change where we see a need. I also hope that when members speak up and ask for what they need to stay in A.A. and fully participate, that we do our best to respond and find a solution.

So here's an uncomfortable question to ponder, When was the last time that you can remember where you walked into a meeting room of Alcoholics Anonymous and didn't see anyone like you there? Maybe you've never had that experience? Can you imagine what it would feel like? It is something I hope we all reflect on.

I will close with this. Our responsibility pledge states:

"When anyone, anywhere reaches out for help, I want the hand of AA always to be there, and for that I am responsible"

Yes, we are responsible. I believe it is our responsibility to think about how we incorporate the principle of inclusivity in Tradition Three into our AA lives not only as group members, but as service leaders.

So, what more can we do to then to curate a more inclusive space within our recovery rooms? I surely don't have all the answers, but we may all have some experience and/or ideas to pull from that can help move us forward. All I know is that I'm not giving my seat up anytime soon and will continue to trudge along with you as we figure this out together.

Ok, so now it's time for you folks to weigh in:

- I am going to provide you with a question for you to reflect on, and then ask that you pair up and discuss the question for five minutes (we will provide the timer)
- After the five minutes, we will invite two more people to join your group of two and continue to discuss for an additional five minutes
- Time permitting, we will end with an open mic session and invite all to share about what they've heard

I'd like for you to take the first few minutes to reflect on your own personal experience as A.A. members in relation to the following questions, then feel free to broaden your scope to AA as a whole.

I am going to have you start with a question that speaks to the responsibility pledge:

1. Am I practicing the principle of inclusivity in all of my AA affairs? Where can I improve?
2. Is AA practicing the principle of inclusivity in all of its AA affairs? Where can AA as a whole improve?
3. When we think about who is NOT in the rooms, what more can we do to reach those folks?

PRESENTATIONS

Presentation Reports

7:45 PM – 8 PM EST Session A Presentations

Inclusion and Diversity--- Glenn N., Area 91, Saskatchewan

I was asked to make a presentation and I chose the theme of diversity. Why this theme rather than any other? Well, you see, I realize that our society is becoming much more diverse than ever before. You only have to walk down the streets of our cities to see all kinds of nations walking around. This phenomenon is also beginning to manifest itself in our countryside. What was once seen as a curiosity has now become commonplace. All this has happened in less than 30 years. This paradigm shift confronts us.

Each of the nations that have settled in our midst brings a cultural richness, a spiritual side, and a different set of customs than we were used to. In truth, we are all immigrants, from the first nations to those who are joining us now. Is A.A. still relevant? Are we joining all the

alcoholics who are still suffering? I have some doubt when I look at the composition of the membership in the groups. The diversity is not there. So, what do we do with our Fellowship now? Where do we go from here? What adaptations do we need to make to accommodate the still-suffering alcoholic? How can we remain relevant?

If Christianity used to be the norm, we have to admit that now it is not the same. Not only because of immigration, but also because the younger generations are much less religiously observant than was once the norm. That doesn't mean they are agnostic or atheist, but their spirituality doesn't necessarily come from any religion.

This year I was assigned to the CPC committee at the conference. I would like to provide you a piece of information that was revealed to us in preparation for the 2022 conference. At the 2021 conference, the CPC conference committee requested that the CPC committee trustees look into the development of a brochure for mental health professionals. The trustees decided, as a first step, to convene a focus group of former Class A trustees and mental health professionals to determine what these mental health professionals need when talking to an active alcoholic. The first finding of the consultation was that *there is often confusion between spiritual and religious organizations. When you look at the literature, it is heavily laden with religious texts.* This is a disturbing observation.

Taking into account this comment from professionals, one might be tempted to deduce that we need to change our literature. I don't like the word "change" because it has disruptive meaning to me, which is far from what I believe is necessary to maintain the relevance of Alcoholics Anonymous. No, I think we need to adapt our literature to keep our message relevant.

I know, I know, it's not popular to say that. I remind you that all institutions, all languages, all societies that have stopped adapting have declined and died. On the contrary, those that have adapted have progressed and maintained a vitality. Take the example of Latin: it never adapted and became a dead language.

I also want to remind you that I am not talking about A.A. principles. These principles, all of them unchanging, should not be touched. This is not to say that the words that describe them cannot be modernized to make them understandable and acceptable to any alcoholic who still suffers. For all of us recovered alcoholics, this should not be a barrier to maintaining our sobriety. But how much could it help the still-suffering alcoholic?

That's all well and good, but what to do? I'd like to challenge you. Let's hold focus groups in our groups, districts and areas with a mandate to see how we can adapt A.A. language to make it most accessible to all suffering alcoholics. This exercise would not change our main principles. Let's see how we can make this exercise a civilized and informative dialogue that will result in literature that is accessible to every alcoholic.

I know, I know, I may sound disruptive, but rest assured, I have a great love, a great respect for A.A.; I also have a sense of responsibility to all the alcoholics who do not know us and who are still suffering. I also have confidence that we will rise to the challenge of keeping A.A. relevant. It is not a discounted movement that I want to leave to the younger

generations, but a spiritual movement that looks to the future and is equally respectful of the old and the new members. Are we ready for this challenge?

The Gift of Virtual Sponsorship – Making All of A.A. Accessible to All --- Tami L., Area 78, Alberta/Northwest Territories

On a Sunday night in August 2019, a young gal popped into our “Spirit of the North” online meeting that she came across on the aa-intergroup.org site. She didn’t share but did leave her camera on. I briefly chatted with her during the meeting, passing on my email address. We were all pleased when she came back the next week. She was quiet and a bit shy, but she shared about her struggle with recovery in her small community. She started coming to both Sunday and Wednesday meetings. About a month later, I received an email asking if I would consider being her sponsor. I was surprised, then touched (as always) and then I wondered what God had in store.

Although new to me, remote sponsorship is nothing new to Alcoholics Anonymous. Communications, meetings and sponsorship in ANY and ALL ways possible, helps people get and stay sober. In years gone by, when Alcoholics Anonymous first began, hundreds of active and newly sober alcoholics were remote, isolated and struggling. They sent letters, searching for help. Their letters were personally answered, full of hope. Those people seldom ever saw, spoke to, or met one another. The same goes for our members behind bars with the Corrections Correspondence program. In June 1944, the first Grapevine magazine was sent to about 300 groups and to soldiers far away during World War II. The first Loners International Meeting bulletin was printed in 1949. I mention all this because there have been comments on the perceived ineffectiveness of online meetings, on how online groups are unable to participate in the AA service structure, and concerns about whether sponsorship with a remote member, especially a newcomer can work.

One of our primary acts of service to carrying the message *is* sponsorship – whether temporary, ongoing, or service-related. Our primary purpose has been achieved online – as is quite evident since March 2020. However, great efforts have been made by online groups including all areas of service since the late 1990’s - long before COVID-19 caused the general membership to have their personal experience with it. These anonymous servants made it possible for A.A. to shine brightly in the dark recesses of an alcoholic’s suffering. Like for our new friend. People who are remote – by geography, culture and/or language, and may I add, the kindred souls excluded due to a lack of accessibility to meetings and/or the A.A. fellowship are very much in need of sponsorship.

In the pamphlet, “Questions and Answers on Sponsorship”, we read again, “When Bill W., only a few months sober, was stricken with a powerful urge to drink, this thought came to him: “You need another alcoholic to talk to. You need another alcoholic just as much as he needs you!”” Ah - the definition of sponsorship – the three legacies simultaneously occurring – recovery, unity and service. A continuous, reciprocal process, unique to A.A.

The pamphlet goes on to describe what happens in sponsorship as: “An alcoholic who has made some progress in the recovery program shares that experience on a continuous, individual basis with another alcoholic who is attempting to attain or maintain sobriety

through A.A.” What is needed and is missing, are members willing to sponsor someone they may never meet. Those who need support, guidance and connection, who do not have access to meetings and/or sponsorship.

Adding a virtual component is merely an extension of sponsorship, even though doing this remotely requires some considerations. For myself, I found it was critical to create a connected, open and safe environment. Doing it virtually has some consideration. Seeing ourselves as we share is the most unnatural experience. We managed this through a tech option: “hide self-view”, and by chatting on the phone. We set up scheduled calls, especially when we were on different time zones. Inviting another member to do a 2:1 Big Book Study, and occasionally doing a spontaneous ‘meeting’ with just a few I could round up. We went to other online meetings, did some committee work, attended the group business meetings and workshops together. These things added a much-needed dimension of including unity and service – important aspects of being a sponsor. We listen to A.A. speakers, watch movies and the TV Show, “Mom” and discuss A.A. podcasts. She came to Calgary once for a whole week. It was so FUN! Then Covid hit! She is in the military so was away on activities and eventually deployed. The distance between us grew exponentially. When I found out she was being deployed, I sent her Grapevine magazines. While away, we read articles from them to discuss steps, traditions and concepts. We write letters, send care packages, chat on WhatsApp (because it’s free) and text back and forth almost daily. She stays sober strictly on her Higher Power’s gift - there’s no meetings in the remote location she’s in and has no privacy for online ones.

How can I put into words the gift, grace and power we’ve received as sponsor/sponsee? Or the deep, spiritual experience that came? Being vulnerable, willing, honest and open we both stayed sober, while growing in recovery, being connected, serving the group and A.A. as a whole.

It takes a village to reach the members who are not in our rooms, physically. For this, we are responsible, when anyone, anywhere reaches out for help, we want the hand of A.A. *always* to be there. For that, I am *honored to be* responsible.

Viewing COVID Through the Lens of Tradition 10--- Richard M., Area 80, Manitoba

First of all, I’d like to thank all of you for participating in this weekend’s Regional Forum. I’d also like to thank those that I was fortunate enough to serve with on the G.S.O. and Area 80 Regional Forum committees. And most importantly, I’d also like to thank the volunteers that have stepped up to help out with setting up, registration, greeting, and picking up visitors from the airport.

When first approached about presenting here at the Forum, I had a number of options I was considering. Particularly those having to do with corrections. As some of you are aware, I have been involved with corrections for several years now. However, I kept coming back to COVID and the impact it has had on our fellowship. In particular, the negative impact it could potentially have. And thus, we have “Viewing COVID Through a Tradition 10 Lens.” Well, not quite just like that. Really it swirled around my head for a few weeks. And it has been on my mind for the past two years. When I shared with my friend Tami here what my topic was, her response was “Wow! That’s some heavy lifting!” Yeah, I suppose. I don’t exactly have a reputation of making it easy for myself. But truthfully, I just couldn’t shake the thought.

I do want to make it clear; I am not sharing any personal opinions regarding COVID. Only thoughts, observations, and my own experiences.

Two years ago, I was Chair of Area 80. Prior to March 13th, when everything shut down, I was in my clubroom when a member was talking about a video he watched on YouTube “debunking” COVID. A few of the members talked about the video and COVID. I thought it was odd. We had a few internal conversations. And later on, I had a chat with a nurse practitioner I work with. Then never gave it too much thought after that. Little did I know at the time how those opposing views expressed in our clubroom will become global and the impact it would have on our communities, friendships, families, and our fellowship.

Then March 13th came along. I’m in university at the time. I’m in class when it’s announced that classes are shut down as of next week. Everything is shutting down. We have a Pre-Conference Assembly scheduled in one week. What are we going to do? My phone blows up that day with emails, texts, and calls. That following week I didn’t get much schoolwork done. My time was consumed with doing what other Areas, Districts and groups did that week. We adjusted immediately. It was truly amazing.

However, shortly after that, maybe a month or so, I started to hear snippets of conversations. Minor rumblings. Questions and concerns came my way from the Area and members of my group. I was seeing several members of our group choose not to return when things began to open up again. Over time, I watched as groups with virtual meetings opened up in-person meetings, and maintained their virtual meetings. Some of my initial thoughts were, “how will this affect the group? Will it divide the group?” I began to be concerned about the possibility about COVID dividing our fellowship.

As Area Chair, I found myself being a focal point for many in the fellowship who were asking about the ever changing public health orders. I received many texts and emails from members and groups asking if there were changes, what were the changes, and how would we be affected. I would answer to the best of my understanding, as it wasn’t always clear. In the responses to the public health orders, I began to see the division within our fellowship. I began to hear about groups choosing to ignore the orders under the guise of Traditions 4 and 5, while neighboring groups followed the orders. One group had 30 in attendance, while a neighboring group limited their capacity to 5 or 10, or whatever the guideline may have been at that time. I also saw DCMs not knowing what to do, and they would, in turn, contact me.

Last year, we had a new health order that was a little confusing. So, we reached out to a public health officer for clarification. They confirmed what we thought. Groups were to be shut down completely to in-person that weekend. However, there were others that interpreted it as we can be completely open. There were several emails back and forth. They were convinced. So much so that they put it out to Inter Group, and they posted on a recovery-based Facebook page a few had started here a few years ago.... Ugh! Once it’s on Facebook, it goes out to any number of newcomers. Now, there was a mixed message. Mixed messages had already been happening, but it was the passion behind some of those messages that were out there. The messages that were being communicated to the newcomer. The message that was being communicated to the one that was contemplating their life, but had not yet made a decision.

Over the last couple of years, Alcoholics Anonymous has adjusted to the changes in society. Early on in the pandemic, I read an article in a psychology journal that talked about how the 12 steps of A.A. are perfect for managing the changes in society we were all experiencing. It's really been amazing to watch and be a part of. It's challenged us to seek out new ways to carry the message. Personally, a highlight of the last two years was when I walked a sponsee through the steps in a park one summer. Sitting at a picnic table each week. Hearing his 5 by the river. We truly went back to basics that summer amid all the changes in society and A.A. Both can work. Not just one.

Unfortunately, our passion for what we believe to be right can divide us. I witnessed it in my group. The passionate belief of what is right has caused some to leave the group. Some have left due to disagreeing with the group conscience. How often have we heard the new groups start due to resentment. That may be true in some cases, but sometimes the resentment leads to someone simply leaving a group, or sometimes A.A. I've seen that happen too. I had a conversation this week where the question was posed to me, "How many groups have we lost during the past two years?" I agreed that that is an excellent question we should be asking ourselves. We talk about the new virtual groups and meetings that have started. But what about the ones that have shut their doors? And why? We've done some very good things, but we also must learn from our mistakes as well. Let's not forget the other side of the coin.

Today, I keep in mind something I've often been reminded of in A.A. We are like a ship. We tend to right ourselves. It'll take time, all our challenges and difficulties will work themselves out if we allow them to. A long timer in our fellowship always reminds me, this too shall pass.

I will not stand here claiming to have the answers for Alcoholics Anonymous. But I do know the answers will come from the fellowship.

I often hear presenters say, "Look to the literature." We get much of our guidance that way. Very true. But what about the newcomer? Do we expect them to read Our Great Responsibility or A.A. Comes of Age? Sure, I read A.A. Comes of Age very early on, but kind of like that. I like reading about history. But really many won't. But they will read the Grapevine. How many stories in the Grapevine the past two years were about staying sober and living life during a pandemic? The absolute current language of A.A. Experience, strength and hope of our fellow members of Alcoholics Anonymous. Emotional sobriety.

I am also reminded of the words of our cofounder. Not Bill, but Dr. Bob.

"...I get a big thrill out of looking over a vast sea of faces like this with a feeling that possibly some small thing I did a number of years ago played an infinitely small part in making this meeting possible. I also get quite a thrill when I think that we all had the same problem. We all did the same things. We all get the same results in proportion to our zeal and enthusiasm and stick-to-itiveness. If you will pardon the injection of a personal note at this time, let me say that I have been in bed five of the last seven months and my strength hasn't returned as I would like, so my remarks of necessity will be very brief.

There are two or three things that flashed into my mind on which it would be fitting to lay a little emphasis. One is the simplicity of our program. Let's not louse it all up with

Freudian complexes and things that are interesting to the scientific mind, but have very little to do with our actual A.A. work. Our Twelve Steps, when simmered down to the last, resolve themselves into the words 'love' and 'service.' We understand what love is, and we understand what service is. So let's bear those two things in mind.

Let us also remember to guard that erring member the tongue, and if we must use it, let's use it with kindness and consideration and tolerance.

None of us would be here today if somebody hadn't taken time to explain things to us, to give us a little pat on the back, to take us to a meeting or two, to do numerous little kind and thoughtful acts in our behalf. So let us never get such a degree of smug complacency that we're not willing to extend, or attempt to extend, to our less fortunate brothers that help which has been so beneficial to us.

Thank you very much."

As true today as when they were spoken. Truly one of my favorite readings in our literature.

Since returning from the General Service Conference, I've been able to return to my Friday night meeting at the penitentiary. Most of the guys in the group these days are very new to A.A. With only a couple of exceptions. When we first returned last year, they were reading through the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous. Every page, plus the stories. When we came back a few months ago, they were doing the 12x12. Every page. Now they have just finished reading through the traditions. When the other volunteers and I go to the group, the discussion before the meeting, the meeting itself, and the meeting after the meeting, is about A.A. and sobriety, and nothing else. They keep it simple.

Safety in A.A. --- Rio D., Area 79, BC/Yukon

Hi, my name is Rio, and I am a grateful alcoholic currently serving as the Alternate Delegate of BC/Yukon Area 79. Thank you for allowing me to participate at this Western Canada Regional Forum. Area 80, you have some warm hospitality, and it is felt by many of us here this morning. Thanks to you and G.S.O. for hosting this event.

The opportunities in service are endless and the topic of safety will always be relevant especially when our rooms, groups and fellowship are in what seems to be a constant wave of change. Saying this has sparked within me the idea of talking about safety in A.A. the same way we share our stories in A.A.

What it was like? What happened? And what it is like now?

Being a solution-based fellowship, we have always sought answers to our problems regarding safety as they arise and over time. Our literature has been created, revised and updated to help guide our rooms, groups and fellowship to be well informed and have good safety solution-based discussion. Informed discussions can allow the conscience of any group to come up with solutions to their specific safety concerns and implement their own solutions according to their own autonomy. And of course, by following the law within their areas, regions, states or provinces. Those familiar pieces of literature have come in handy for many of us in the past, present and will again in the future that I am sure of. Sometimes those familiar words in our literature provide us with the pause and contemplation we need

to work well together. The A.A. Group pamphlet on page 31..." **Safety and A.A.:** ***Suggestions to Consider** - A.A. groups are spiritual entities made up of alcoholics who gather for the sole purpose of staying sober and helping other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.*

One of my favorite lines from our safety card is this, "Alcoholics Anonymous is a microcosm of the larger society within which we exist. Problems found in the outside world can also make their way into the rooms of A.A." Isn't it great that when those outside problems come in, that our solutions also come from within, and that they often work out just fine? It just takes discussion, time, more discussion and patience. Similar to our own recovery, our personal answers or solutions are an inside job.

Staying safe collectively and individually has been around for as long as we have been meeting together in rooms like this to carry the message of sobriety to others and keep ourselves safe and sober too. While attending **in person** meetings, we have seen inappropriate behaviors, disruptive members and even outbursts that have become violent. We have had to lovingly remind our fellowship of the safety choices each group's conscience has agreed upon. The power of example when group members stay accountable to their group conscience decisions regarding safety has an immediate and impactful message to address the unsafe actions as they occur in our rooms. Most of these situations have been ongoing for years and we have managed to stay safely together by practicing principles such as love, tolerance and kindness.

Although some **virtual meetings** had been around prior to the pandemic, it felt like overnight, masses of us had to pivot quickly from mainly in person to mainly virtual meetings. This platform presented challenges and safety issues. I remember being temporarily paralyzed with the concerns of anonymity online in those virtual rooms. Some of these safety concerns we had not even dreamed of. I never heard of a "Zoom bomber" before the pandemic, or avatars, or been so thrust into technology to learn about online meeting settings that help us carry our message of hope. Thank goodness that there was already literature such as SMF-197, "Anonymity Online And Digital Media" and the Understanding Anonymity pamphlet in place to help get the principled discussions get started and to continue.

Hybrid and beyond is a wonderful opportunity to work once again in the solution, no matter what safety concerns arise. Remember that most solutions can't happen without the problem being identified first, and a lot of discussion is necessary to find a collective solution that most are comfortable with. Decisions based on health regulations and personal choices are going to be much easier after sharing our solution based experience, strength and hope during the past few years.

Our work, as I see it, in the role we all play collectively as our needs around safety continue to change. The helpful service material piece SMF-209 from our General Service Office says a lot just in the title: "Safety and A.A.: Our Common Welfare - Safety is an important issue within A.A. — one that all groups and members can address to develop workable solutions and help keep our meetings safe based on the fundamental principles of the Fellowship.

This safety piece also asks an important question... *“What Can Groups and Members Do?”* and provides some guidance. *“Groups and members can discuss the topic of safety, to raise awareness in the Fellowship and seek through sponsorship, workshops and meetings, to create as safe an environment as possible for the newcomer, and other members or potential members.”*

Here are a few more suggestions and reminders from this service piece...

- *Talk about issues of safety before they arise*
- *Safety is something each member attending an A.A. meeting can be mindful of*
- *Include Safety and the A.A. Meeting Environment as topics for a group inventory*
- *Consider developing group guidelines and procedures on safety*
- *In all discussion about safety, keep the focus on our primary purpose, our common welfare, and place principles before personalities*

Our safety issues are our responsibilities to solve. We may not get it right every time, but we still have to come up with whatever is needed to solve our own problems safely and responsibly. It really is an inside job that is best accomplished by being well informed and having as many members participating in discussion as possible. Funny, isn't it, that if we do the work, we get the reward. A safe place to carry a lifesaving, life changing, life giving message of hope.

In closing, I want to thank you for teaching me that the problem really isn't the problem: it is the first step to the solution. That having a little bit of courage and little more kindness can go a long way in our fellowship. Most importantly, that the joy in service comes from working toward a solution to our problems together, one day at a time.

Thank you for my sobriety and for listening.

PAST TRUSTEES SHARING

Phil C. past trustee, 1988-1992

I'd like to thank all the members for coming, because the more we learn about what we belong to, the better we are equipped to carry that message. It's good that we become aware of what avenues exist to carry the message and how we can direct certain people who do not respond to face-to-face conversations, and who get their motivation from other avenues, that they be aware of these other avenues, whether it's video, literature or other opportunities. The new stuff is good and a lot of people rely on them.

I like Grapevine and I like the humor, sometimes. Here's a joke I enjoyed, "I was like a magician when I drank. I could make a bottle of whiskey disappear." The A.A. book says we can make a lot of things disappear when we drink and the first one is love. That's the most important one.

Prior to Alcoholics Anonymous, I didn't feel accepted or successful. I didn't feel like I belonged or was a part of everything that was going on around me. I wanted to be, but I wasn't sure how. But when I found booze, I fit right in. I probably didn't, but I thought I did. I felt much more comfortable doing whatever I did. I thought I was a success at this business of living. If someone brought it to my attention that things were not going so well, I ignored those people. I denied their stories or their proof or their wishes or their evidence because I was happy in my space for the first time in my life.

I remember during my first year of university I wasn't doing so well in classes because I was a joiner. I was in the debating society, the drama club, the glee club, I was doing all sorts of things — including drinking seven days a week. My classes suffered. When asked to read a few books to write an essay, I didn't have time. I would get some interesting remarks from teachers, as well as poor marks. So, they wrote home. I wasn't living at home because it was one of the places I didn't fit, so I didn't think it was any of their business what I did, but the school thought it was. I got a call from my mother. She asked me how things were going, and I told her things were going well. But somewhere along the line, people were finding out about me and that my life was a charade, a surface show. The success I thought I was exhibiting to everyone was becoming unraveled. I remember sharing with a friend who said I should go to more classes. I said, "I am so enjoying all these things that I am a part of, that if that's all I get out of this experience, I will be satisfied."

A couple years later, that was all I was getting. I left and went to prove to the world that I could survive and succeed without a degree. I went out and I got a job and that job paid well. It didn't demand too much of me. And it gave me a title. That title was what I needed. It made me feel important. I managed to camouflage my performance for a few years before they caught on and asked me to go look elsewhere for employment. That began the real downfall. During this time I encountered some women who were very suitable life mates, but I didn't have anything to offer them; I knew my life had no future — I could see no future for me. Not only that, but they had seen through my behavior and mentioned, on more than one occasion, how I drank too much, too often. I didn't fit in, booze helped me fit in, and then booze destroyed my performance at every level, anywhere I was and it started to become

obvious. Finally, my brother who was well-educated, well-disciplined, and successful at everything said, “Why don’t you call Alcoholics Anonymous?” So I called Regina, and asked for A.A. I found out it was over on the wrong side of the tracks, and I thought, *Well, that figures*. They asked if I would visit. I said “No.” I wasn’t going over there. Then they asked if they could visit me, and I said, “Definitely not!” They asked, “Well, why are you calling?” And I said, “I’m not sure!” They invited me to call back. But I figured I could at least tell my brother I phoned A.A.

So, I did call A.A., but I had no change in attitude. And then I got married. I found a girl, and she will tell you that I asked her to marry me when I was drunk and that I married her while I was drunk, and that I was drunk a great deal of time after that. My own description differs a little, but only because if I was drunk, then I don’t remember what happened. But now I could no longer say, “I am not hurting anyone else with my drinking” because she was in the other room, crying. For what I thought was no good reason. But there was a good reason.

I had another brother who was a teacher, and I phoned him in the middle of the night — or the wee hours of the morning — and did not remember until the phone bill came. He called me back the next day and said, “You agreed to go to treatment last night, do you remember?” I said, “Oh, tell me?” I went to treatment and it still didn’t change my attitude much but I was exposed to the first five Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. We had visitors from A.A. come in. But I hadn’t crossed the identification line yet. I thought they were all nice, good people, living a good life, but all I had to do was manage better. All I had to do was minimize the consequences. Because as far as I knew, the only time I felt all right was when I was drinking. I knew it was an issue, but it wasn’t an issue all the time. I just wanted to control the bad times. I was in and out of Alcoholics Anonymous after that.

During that period, I was exposed to the promises at a meeting, they were read out loud and I identified strongly with two of them. The first one was financial. I had issues with money all the time. I earned a lot, I worked hard — at several jobs at a time. I earned enough to drink but not enough to pay anything else. I was in financial difficulty, I had judgments against me all over the place, so when they talked about freedom from economic insecurity, I looked at the room and I thought, *Who can afford to free me from my economic insecurity?* In those days, many of us smoked, and one guy had a cigar. I said, “Must be him.”

The other promise that stuck with me from that day to this was: “That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear.” Because I don’t know how often I felt useless, and that would bring on a bout of self-pity. That was a key turning point for me in my sobriety

The service that we render and the service we offer is at the will of the group. The group elects us to do this or that and we answer to them. We don’t take over the running of anything. Leaders who do this are successful. Every generation has new leaders that excite everyone around them and bring more people in and invite them in to share their experience, strength and hope so that we can grow. I could not have lived without the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. In sobriety, I became comfortable in my own skin and my own place at whatever time of day or night it was. That’s a wonderful thing that happened that only Alcoholics Anonymous could offer me. I am grateful for the program and the people in it and it’s comforting to see so many friendly faces.

Jo-Anne L. past trustee-at-large/Canada, 2007-2011

I thank my group every time I speak at something like this because it is because of them that I am here. When I was a newcomer, they were active in service and participated in service events. When I began to put my hand up for service it wasn't because I knew what I was doing, it was because I was willing. When I came into A.A. I was screaming at the top of my lungs and nobody heard me, but you did. I got a sponsor. She turned 93 on Friday. She's been falling a lot lately. She looks like a newcomer with her bruises and smiling away on her birthday card. I thank that woman for helping me and going through the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous with me.

I've had many service jobs. I live in Manitoba, and I really didn't know a lot about my province until I became a member of A.A. But now I've been on every road, I've been in those little groups on the sides of the road, we've traveled together, all over this province. We put up our hand for service, but it's the people we meet along the way. As I look around the room, I find I have a story for everyone, whether it's a few words of exchange or a dinner. I have been fortunate that along the way I've gotten different views of A.A. How it looks as a G.S.R., a D.C.M., a trustee. What it's like serving on the General Service Board. When I was elected as trustee-at-large/Canada, I had no idea how big Alcoholics Anonymous was. I was talking to someone last night about what it's like serving as trustee. I attended two World Service Meetings. One in New York and one in Mexico City. In Mexico City, there were 80,000 people in a soccer stadium. A girl was leading me out to greet those A.A.s on behalf of all of you; I was your representative. I was nervous. She asked me how long I was sober. I was 26 years sober, I think, but it was she who gave me courage—she was three months sober and so happy.

I've been an archivist for my area and I try to live by three little words: Do no harm. When I find a piece of paper or a bit of history, I try to preserve it. I feel privileged every time I go into our repository, and I look at our history. I pray and hope that we do no harm, that A.A. will always be there for whoever needs it. Even to other guests and staff in this hotel, we are A.A. to them, so whatever I do here is A.A. and I try to do no harm. It's in our groups, how we pay our rent, and what we do in the parking lot. Everything is reflective of Alcoholics Anonymous, so I hope that the vision we share with ourselves, and others is always one of "Do no harm." Thank you.

Scott H. past trustee-at-large/Canada, 2015-2019

I started to make some notes about what I wanted to talk about. But for those who know me, you never know quite what you are going to get. The question was asked earlier in this forum: "What were you doing there?" So, I'll tell you what I am doing. I am here to get re-energized, meeting some lifelong friends again, making some new lifelong friends. I am here to learn a little about what's going on in Alcoholics Anonymous. I am here to be able to look at A.A. with some fresher eyes. I am here to do that because Alcoholics Anonymous is important enough for me to invest my time. Coming back here reminds me of people who were a part of my journey, who chair this event and then nine days later die of cancer. Alcoholics Anonymous was important enough to him to do that.

About the fresh eyes: I am the kind of alcoholic who suffers from the recurring condition of “I think I know something.” I come here to be reminded that I don’t know what I think I know. I can get this idea of Alcoholics Anonymous where this is the way it is. This is how I got sober, so this is the way everyone has to get sober. This is my A.A. and it can’t change. I get to hear presentations like yesterday’s “Who’s not in the room?” And the vastness of my ignorance is exposed. That’s why I’m here, so I can go home and tell my group that I don’t know what I think I know about how Alcoholics Anonymous should be. I don’t know what I think I know about what people need to get sober in A.A. That’s what these weekends do.

This weekend, I found out a little bit about what’s going on in A.A. because once you rotate as a trustee, it’s like you fall off the edge of the earth. People say, “I’m sure you heard this.” But no, I haven’t. I used to know a lot of what is going on and now I don’t have a clue. That’s a good thing, because I had my time, and now I need to mind my own business.

On Friday night, Bob talked about how this was a Tradition Two kind of weekend, where we start to formulate group conscience, and the only way that can happen for me is if I hear some different perspectives. As much as we are the same, we come from different places, and we have different experiences in Alcoholics Anonymous. We get to share those and that was one of the great gifts in being a trustee-at-large: I got a chance to go a little further afield and get some different perspectives on A.A. Yesterday, someone talked about how, when we go to other places, our structure is seen as the senior structure, and that’s not necessarily a good thing for us. It’s a little like being the old-timer in the back of the room who knows stuff. A chance for someone in our structure to go somewhere else where they are a little bit newer and a little bit fresher is good for us because it brings back some new perspective and fresh ideas. A story was told about how A.A.s in Mexico were cooperating with their government correction system. That’s different for us. Is something like that possible here? Maybe, maybe not. But at least it gets the wheels in our mind turning and it is different than: “The reason we do it this way is because it’s always the way we’ve done it.” That’s one of the great gifts Class A trustees bring to our board. That’s not a reason for anything, to them. And it’s the only reason for some of us.

Someone talked on Friday night about A.A. being somewhere that we don’t move all that fast. We have a few people, like me, in A.A. who think, “Oh, what’s this button do?” Most of A.A. wants to first look and see where all the wires go. I want to press the button and see what happens. It takes all of us though, right? We get to hear those stories where people are doing A.A. like it’s the 1950s and 1960s. They are still going into the bars and pulling people out, still showing up at the drunk tank and waiting for people to get out so they can take them home and detox them, then take them to a meeting. And we need to hear those stories to keep A.A. fresh for us.

When they ask you ‘what you were doing here?’ You were loving Alcoholics Anonymous; you were showing up to be able to look at Alcoholics Anonymous with fresh eyes because that’s what A.A. needs.

I am going to end with a story that has to do with the recent celebration of 50 years of A.A. in Peru. We had come to the end of Saturday night. They don’t have a countdown, but they have something going on. Our interpreter was back at the hotel because he and I had eaten something we ought not to have eaten. I was sitting in the back of the room, and everything was happening in Spanish. I was not sure what was going on. But all of a sudden, a person comes out with a box of candles and they hand me one. I know they are going to light them.

But the walls were hung with flammable drapes. I am thinking, *Oh my God. If they light these candles there's going to be a fire in here and if there is one person who is going to die, it will be me.* And I am about as far away from the door as you can get. I find a guy who speaks some English and he starts to tell me what is going to happen. He said, they are going to give everyone a candle, they are going to find a newcomer, they will light your candle, then you will light the newcomer's candle and all the candles will be lit by someone else. *Ok, for sure I am going to die,* I think. But there is this guy, it is his first day of sobriety and he is standing right beside me. He is doing what we do on our first day — he is pretty shaky. They turn down the lights, come and light my candle, I light his candle and slowly the room goes from being dark to being lit by a wonderful golden light from the candles. That's exactly what we do in Alcoholics Anonymous — someone lit my candle, and I lit the candle of someone else. The light from my candle was not diminished one bit by the candle of the person next to me. That is what we do when we carry the message of Alcoholics Anonymous. But I was still keeping an eye on “Mr. One Day” — ‘cause he was pretty shaky!

Kate W. past W. Canada regional trustee 2016-2020

I am always astounded at how many people I know in A.A. My experience at my first forum was as a G.S.R. I hadn't caught the service bug, yet. I was there because it was “strongly suggested” that I go there and I wanted to please people, so I signed up to register people outside the conference room. I enjoyed it. But then they made me go into the big room. I hadn't planned on doing that. I sat at one of the round tables and a gentleman joined us and started asking me so many questions about being a G.S.R. I don't even think I'd been to an assembly at that point. He seemed very interested and I thought I was being very, very helpful. I shared a lot. Eventually, he left, and the forum started. He went up and took a seat at the podium—he was the General Manager of the General Service Office. So, I knew a lot when I was a G.S.R., but now that I am a past trustee, I know almost nothing. Why do I keep on coming here? I come here for information, inspiration and fellowship. Yesterday I put my arms up when I came here and I got a hug. I kept my arms up the rest of the afternoon and I got lots of A.A. hugs. Attending the session yesterday afternoon got me the information and inspiration I needed. While now I know that I know very little, I share what I do know. I was there for the G.S.O. presentations. I assume they practice their Steps, Traditions and Concepts but I was happy also to see that they practice Rule 62.

What I liked about coming to these things. We each do our little part, and when we put it all together, it is so much more than the sum of the parts. I did a Step Five with someone once and he said to me, “God is just what happens between people.” I've worked with that ever since. A.A. is more than what we each individually do. We each add to it. Thank you for sharing it with me.

CLOSING REMARKS

Linda Chezem (nonalcoholic) past trustee (A), 1997-2003, General Service Board Chair, 2021-present

I have to leave early, I must make my flight and don't want to miss it. I have an obligation back in Indiana. It's called a husband [laughter]. I wish I could stay another day with you. But in leaving, I want to quickly give you a summation of what this weekend has meant. Last night I mentioned Mrs. Marty M. and how she wrote a primer on alcoholism. And the purpose of that book was really intended for the nonalcoholics' world in which alcoholics lived. She wanted to explain how Alcoholics Anonymous and its functions, what to expect and what not to expect for those of us who don't exactly understand alcoholics or Alcoholics Anonymous. She wrote, at the beginning of Chapter 11:

“Alcoholics Anonymous has been called an organization of society, a movement, a fellowship, a semi-religious group and a method of treatment. None of these descriptions is wholly accurate. Some of them are completely wrong. Alcoholics Anonymous is neither an organization nor a society in the accepted sense of those words. Neither is it a semi-religious group. It's not a movement, whatever that may be. But it is also a fellowship and a method of treatment. And it's many other things, so that neither word, in itself, (i.e. method of treatment, fellowship) is descriptive enough. But to its own members, Alcoholics Anonymous is first a way back to life and then a design for living. And to the outside world [like me, nonalcoholics] it is simply a miracle.”

To each of you, I say thank you for letting me share this weekend with your miracle, your return to living, your way of life. I am so very grateful.

Bob W., G.S.O. General Manager, 2021-present

It means so much to be together with all of you, here, in person. My heart is full and the sharing this weekend has been impactful on many levels and in many different things. These weekends really supercharge us with this level of connection that we get being amongst one another. This forum (and forums like this) feed our Second Tradition and our discussions all year long. We have a year-long Conference process and things that come out of the sharing, workshops, presentations, and questions feed all of those discussions and find their way into our General Service Conference structure and that's how change happens. Participation is so important. I often speak about *how* we do things and not necessarily what we do. The spirit of love and tolerance and unity — I feel that here. That's the future of Alcoholics Anonymous. Especially today. I know there are times when our society experiences a topsy-turvy voice that we can't understand, so I am so grateful for our First Tradition, which is the theme of all our Traditions of unity. Without it, none of us are really willing to accept anything else.

Often, those of us involved in service in A.A. hear: “Thank you for your service,” and that is wonderful. I do that, too. But I also thank you for the service of all our family, friends, and loved ones back home. My wife pushed the mower the other day—and for me to let that

happen...well, for those who know me... Since they do things for those of us who are serving A.A., they are serving A.A. as hard and strong as any of us. I think it's important to remember that.

I was so touched by the sharing from the first-timers. That's what carries me, hearing the gratitude in your hearts and seeing the tears fill up in the eyes of the folks who were here for the first time, and what they saw. I remember feeling that. To all the first-timers: It seems like about half who attend are first-time attendees; so please come back. Remember, when the time comes again for another one of these in two years' time, you might say, "Oh, I've been to one of those, I don't know if I will come back." Remember what you felt and maybe return, if not for yourself, but for someone else who shows up and is a little scared. We need you, your experience, and for you to keep your hand in the air. You're the lifeblood of Alcoholics Anonymous.

My mother got sober in Alcoholics Anonymous when I was just a young boy, and I went to Alcoholics Anonymous for years before I ever picked up a drink. I quip sometimes that my drinking was ruined before I ever started. And my forum experience was made before I even got here. Because when I flew here on Thursday, I fell asleep on the plane and woke up 45 minutes before we landed in Vancouver. I woke up to the guy sitting next to me doing shots of Jack Daniels. He was pretty chatty. Eventually, he asked me what I did for a living and why I was coming here. So, I told him. He said, "Oh." But here's the thing, he shared with me that he had done about 3 months in A.A. after he had 2 DWIs, and he had seen combat. So that last 45 minutes was a chance to plant one more seed, sharing my experience, strength, and hope with a 29-year-old ex-Marine. In particular, my fear about the Steps and sponsorship. I shared that I was only 23 when I got here and A.A. has given me the greatest life I ever had. That's the deal, what we are getting here and what we bring forth, the way we can carry A.A.'s message just sitting next to people on planes. I know a lot of you have that same experience. I want to end with gratitude and to remember that guy I gave my number to on the plane.