

FINAL REPORT

PACIFIC
REGIONAL FORUM

SEPTEMBER 7~9, 2018

SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA

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

Dear A.A. Friends,

Please mark your calendar for the next Pacific Regional Forum, which will take place in Las Vegas, Nevada on the weekend of August 21-23, 2020 at the West Gate Las Vegas.

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INTRODUCTION

The 2018 Pacific Regional Forum was held in San Jose, California. Registration for the Forum was **918**. This included **634** members attending their very first Forum—many were welcomed at the Forum Orientation on Friday evening. In addition, the Pacific Regional Forum marked the **209th** Regional Forum since their inception in 1975.

DELEGATE PRESENTATIONS

Outreach to Remote Communities—Alizon W., Delegate Panel 68, Area 02 Alaska

I am an alcoholic who is grateful to be serving Area 02 Alaska as their Panel 68 delegate. I asked to present on the topic of “Outreach to Remote Communities” because this is of special interest to Alaska A.A.s. Alaska natives make up just over 15 percent of the total Alaskan population, and more than 50 percent live in villages or remote regional hubs. 80 percent of these villages or remote regional hubs are inaccessible by road. There are 229 federally recognized Alaska native tribal entities and 20 distinct languages. Alaska’s history of area actions goes back to 1985, and almost from the beginning outreach to remote communities has been a part of those actions. Just recently, in 2017, an area-level Remote Communities Committee was reestablished after a 16-year hiatus.

Our Remote Communities Committee has a phone meeting three times per week, with a treatment center chairing one of them. They plan an annual Twelfth Step trip to a remote community and, while there, to visit the local hospital or clinic, jail, treatment center, school, etc., to explain what A.A. is and what it isn’t. They hold meetings and/or attend existing meetings. They send A.A. meeting starter kits to those that request them.

Outreach to remote communities is also a topic of discussion with the General Service Conference committee I was assigned to—Treatment and Accessibilities. At this year’s Conference, the committee’s scope was expanded to include the following: “Finally, the committee further supports the work to ensure that A.A. members who live in underserved or remote communities—communities difficult to reach because of geography, language or culture—have access to the A.A. message.” The term “remote communities” was not in the scope of the committee prior to this year. So now that we know what committee such work falls under, it’s time to get specific about what the Conference can do to help us carry the message to remote communities.

One additional consideration coming from the Treatment and Accessibilities Committee was that the trustees’ Committee on C.P.C./Treatment and Accessibilities consider producing a Remote Communities Kit and Workbook. Currently, those working with remote communities are referred to the Accessibilities Kit and Workbook. In the Accessibilities Workbook, there are two pages devoted to underserved or remote communities. In the Accessibilities Kit, there is a pamphlet—“Serving All Alcoholics: Making the A.A. Message Accessible”—with three paragraphs regarding underserved or remote communities. Additionally, there are two pieces of service material in the kit specifically relevant to remote communities—“Online Meetings/Online Groups” and “*Loners-Internationalists Meeting (LIM) Correspondence Service.*” If any of your areas have your own workbooks, pamphlets or service materials, please send me a copy or a link to where they reside. I have already suggested the trustees’ committee review Area 79 BC/Yukon’s workbook, as this was one I was aware of. There’s no need to reinvent the wheel if we can draw from existing publications at the area, district or local levels.

Another suggestion from the Treatment and Accessibilities Committee to the trustees’ committee was to review literature and service material to determine if experience related to

carrying the message for underserved or remote communities is included. If your area, district or locality has an Accessibilities or Remote Communities Committee or if people you know have a special interest in remote communities, here's a potential project. Why not look through the existing literature and service material to see if there are logical places to add information and/or experience about working with remote communities and then identify or draft such additions? I'm going to suggest it to my area's Remote Communities Committee.

Perhaps you have other ideas to further outreach efforts to remote communities. There is a newsletter, the *Remote Communities Communicator*, that comes out once a year right before the start of the Conference. Could the *Communicator* be published more often—perhaps quarterly? What would be included in such a newsletter? Articles about remote communities' events, listings of upcoming events and descriptions of tools helpful to this sort of service work are some of the thoughts that come to mind. Of course, there is always our meeting in print and other media, the A.A. Grapevine, which is a great sobriety tool no matter where you are. That publication has relevant stories from time to time and recently had a call for remote communities' stories for an upcoming issue. Our Alaska area's remote communities chair submitted one! Could there be a Grapevine book with a collection of stories about remote communities?

It seems that several service areas have annual conventions, workshops, etc. For instance, there is the National A.A. Archives Workshop, the National A.A. Technology Workshop, the National Corrections Conference and the A.A. Bridging the Gap Workshop Weekend. Such gatherings typically have presentations and discussions on topics of interest to those doing a specific type of service work. I could see a National A.A. Remote Communities Workshop happening to educate and network those for whom this is a passion.

In closing, I hope you will return to your areas, discuss and/or research how the Conference might help us with our remote communities' work and share your ideas and potential Conference agenda items with me at delegate@area02alaska.org.

Cooperation with Other Twelve-Step Fellowships—Bob H., Delegate Panel 67, Area 17 Hawaii

It's a pleasure and a privilege to speak to you today about our Fellowship's cooperation with other twelve-step fellowships. The topic, as you probably know by now, is one that was suggested at the most recent Pacific Regional Forum in my home state of Hawaii back in 2016.

I investigated this topic with a bit of online searching, by sending out a request for feedback to our area delegates and through several conversations with G.S.O. staff members. I want to thank everyone who helped; I've come to learn that nothing in A.A. is a solo effort.

Where to begin? Let's start with a definition of the word "cooperation." Here are some pretty standard definitions:

1. The action or process of working together to the same end.
2. Assistance, especially by complying readily with requests.
3. In economics, the formation and operation of cooperatives.

Now I'm going to read a couple of things I think you'll recognize, because I think when many of us hear the word "cooperation" we start asking some questions.

1. A.A. is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution.
2. Tradition Six: An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.

It's true that Alcoholics Anonymous doesn't affiliate itself to any other group, and we've strived to live up the ideal of Tradition Six as well. Because of this, the word "cooperation" can start sounding a little suspect. In fact, one of the responses I got from my inquiries stated this plainly: "Cooperate how? Not in any kind of 'official' way, but of course we refer nonalcoholics to other twelve-step fellowships. I'm not even sure what other way there could be that would not be either implied or actual affiliation."

Cooperate how? Indeed.

A potato is a potato and a carrot is a carrot. By themselves they can be eaten but they certainly don't cooperate, much less affiliate. But cook up a stew with both ingredients and you'll have a fine dish. You still won't mix up the bits of potatoes with the bits of carrots, but you'll have to admit that they cooperate in the dish. Any analogy can be pushed too far, and I don't want to take that one any further and overcook it, if you will, but Alcoholics Anonymous does cooperate with other twelve-step fellowships on a number of levels, and happily so.

The first, and most obvious, piece of evidence is that without the cooperation of Alcoholics Anonymous there likely would be no other twelve-step fellowships to cooperate with. I can't tell you how many twelve-step fellowships there are at this time; the list is extensive, but there's one for just about any addictive substance or behavior you can name. I think we are all familiar with the Al-Anon Family Groups, Narcotics Anonymous and Gamblers Anonymous.

Without our Twelve Steps these groups wouldn't exist, or they at least wouldn't exist as we know them. Perhaps they'd have taken the Six Steps of the Oxford Groups directly and be known as six-step fellowships.

We've been quite liberal in letting other groups use the Steps, and almost always on these groups' websites you'll see something like this printed below their adaption of the Twelve Steps: "The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous have been reprinted and adapted with the permission of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. (A.A.W.S.). Permission to reprint and adapt the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions does not mean that Alcoholics Anonymous is affiliated with this program."

I don't know how many groups may use the Steps without permission, but it's pretty clear that we do cooperate with other fellowships at the very basic level of their creation.

I've also learned that at the General Service Office level, we cooperate in other ways. Through our Cooperation with the Professional Community desk we answer queries from other fellowships and even have discussions about our common interests. One example would be discussions with Narcotics Anonymous about taking literature into corrections facilities. We should never be afraid to learn from others what works for them. Further, we also participate with representatives of other fellowships in giving input to national health organizations.

We do not operate nor, I think, do we ever want to operate in a vacuum; we are part of the stew. I would even suggest that through such participation and cooperation we actually strengthen our identity and singleness of purpose, as we have the opportunity to make it clear to all just who we are, what we do and why we do it.

At local levels, areas and districts, I think we are all familiar with A.A. events that include Al-Anon participation. That at least seems quite natural—after all, we do share a special relationship, just as Bill and Lois did. You can read about that declaration in the G.S.O. Guidelines document MG-08, Relationship Between A.A. and Al-Anon. There's actually a lot of good information in that document on just how we manage our relationship and just how we cooperate. Most of the responses I received from other area delegates were specific to the Al-Anon Family Groups and how they cooperate at conventions and other events. Quite often separate but parallel meeting spaces are used in cooperation but still clearly unaffiliated.

And at the personal level, if my own experience is any guide, there's probably a lot of cooperation going on. We all know members who claim to be members of more than one fellowship or who attend meetings of more than one program. I've certainly attended my share of Al-Anon meetings and plan on continuing to do so when the opportunity presents itself. Certainly, they are included at our own International Convention in the spirit of cooperation; just check the agenda of our last International Convention and you can see proof of that cooperation.

In summary, we needn't be afraid to cooperate with other twelve-step fellowships as long as we remember that affiliation and cooperation are not the same thing. "Let's be friendly with our friends" is the catchphrase of our relationships with other organizations, and there's no reason to not carry that idea into our relationships at the world service level, the area and district levels and at the level of our own lives in recovery. Let's get cookin'.

Self-Support: Giving in the Spirit of Personal Sacrifice—Joann L., Delegate Panel 67, Area 06 Northern Coastal California

A sacrifice is a loss or something you give up, usually for the sake of a better cause. From the moment a new member of Alcoholics Anonymous walks into the rooms, they learn about the spirit of personal sacrifice. They hear that they must sacrifice their consumption of alcohol in the hopes that they will find a better way of life. That is only the first of many sacrifices that continuous sobriety will demand. Each of the Twelve Steps will strip away at the selfishness and self-centeredness that results from the disease of alcoholism. By the time the newcomer reaches the Twelfth Step, they realize this is a disease they cannot beat on their own. They must have a home group—an anchor in recovery so they don't drift away.

Each A.A. member gets to decide for themselves how much they will give to their home group. Self-support, our cherished Seventh Tradition, is much more than putting money in a basket. An A.A. member must select how much of their time will be given to the home group, what services they'll perform and how much money to give.

A healthy A.A. group will have discussions about self-support, hopefully on a regular basis. A healthy A.A. member will periodically look at their own personal contribution plan and hopefully ask these questions: Am I giving enough of my time back to the Fellowship that

saved my life? Am I doing my share of service to my group? Am I giving enough money to support my group? Does my group make regular contributions to the other service entities?

In the light of the Twelve Traditions, the journey of personal sacrifice continues. I have a personal contribution plan for Alcoholics Anonymous that is my way of saying thank you to the Fellowship that saved my life. It includes how much I give at my meeting (which is the cost of my favorite drink in today's prices), my yearly reoccurring contributions that I make online at G.S.O. and a section in my will that gives the maximum amount I can donate upon my death. I know this is *my* experience with self-support, not *our* experience with self-support. But if I want this to be *our* experience with self-support, then I have to encourage you to do the same. I would like to encourage you, with all the love I have in my heart for this Fellowship, to have your own personal self-support plan.

Self-support cannot happen without a group's treasurer giving regular reports about the financial health of the group to its members. At this moment in time, I know that the financial needs of my home group, my district and my area are being met. I know this because I attend the business meetings and listen to the reports. It is the responsibility of each of us to know what the financial needs of our home groups are, as well as of our districts, of our areas and of our General Service Office in New York. If these are not being met, then we need to start a conversation about how we can meet these needs. I call these courageous conversations. I know I was uncomfortable talking about money when I first became a treasurer for my home group. But until I gave my group's members the information that they needed to know about the group's expenditure, they could not take the next right action. I believe that when we give to Alcoholics Anonymous in the spirit of personal sacrifice, this Better Way of Life that we were hoping for when we came into the rooms can become a reality. It is the practice of all of A.A.'s principles that will make this happen.

I would like to close with a quote from page 184 of *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*: "The spiritual substance of anonymity is sacrifice. Because A.A.'s Twelve Traditions repeatedly ask us to give up personal desires for the common good, we realize that the sacrificial spirit—well symbolized by anonymity—is the foundation of them all. It is A.A.'s proved willingness to make these sacrifices that gives people their high confidence in our future."

Thank you for letting me share.

Grapevine Subscriptions: What They Are and How to Use Them—Vera F., Delegate Panel 68, Area 58 Oregon

Grapevine subscriptions are primarily Twelfth Step tools that are used to carry the message of hope and recovery from alcoholism. The Grapevine is full of contemporary stories of alcoholics who have been relieved of the obsession to drink by practicing a set of spiritual principles—the Twelve Steps. As a result of working the Steps, these recovered members have gone on to lead happy, useful lives. The GV is your one-stop shop for A.A. history, personal stories, humor, art, diverse opinions and practical tools for recovery. It is a magazine created by us and it is for us.

Bill W.'s primary purpose for the magazine was to carry the A.A. message to alcoholics and to practice A.A. principles in all its affairs. Sound familiar? It sounds like the Grapevine's primary purpose is the same as it is for A.A. members! Bill wanted the Grapevine to be the voice of

the Fellowship. He thought it should print articles expressing the widest differences of opinion on all A.A. topics.

Grapevine subscriptions can go where we can't. They are used in remote communities, with people who are homebound or with people in jail. Members find them useful on vacations, on business trips, while riding the bus and in waiting rooms. Sponsors give gift subscriptions to sponsees, and vice versa. The stories in the GV can help members better understand the Steps, Traditions and Concepts.

A question often asked is: Are the Grapevine and La Viña Conference approved? A 1986 Conference Advisory Action addresses this: "Since each issue of the GV cannot go through the Conference-approved process, the Conference recognizes the GV as the international journal of A.A."

I was two or three months sober here in San Jose the first time I saw an issue of the GV. I focused on the jokes and cartoons. Victor E. was and still is my favorite, and I would always look for him first. Then, I would look for the section "If These Walls Could Talk." Something about seeing photos of the different meeting rooms around the world was comforting to me. The stories in the Grapevine were short enough for my attention span and were contemporary to my experiences at the time. I didn't know it then, but that was my first exposure to general service! The GV didn't just miraculously show up! An active service committee facilitated that.

In 2006 I was diagnosed with breast cancer. During that period of chemotherapy and radiation, I didn't always have the strength to go to meetings. And even though women brought a few meetings to my home, it was Victor E. and the Grapevine that were there when no one else was! The magazine is a vital link to those who cannot get to meetings. In fact, the GV became known as "a meeting in print" during World War II. With no meetings to attend and no contact with other members, every known A.A. member in the armed forces was sent a copy via the magazine's editors. For those men and women, the GV was a vital link to A.A. and to home.

Many groups use stories in the GV for topics of discussion. Some groups give newcomers a phone list *and* a copy of the GV at their first meeting. I have been at meetings where for some reason or another we were locked out of the meeting rooms. Then someone whipped out their copy of the GV and we had a meeting outside! We could do that because it contained the Preamble, the Steps, the Traditions, the Serenity Prayer and the Responsibility Statement—everything we needed to have a meeting!

Grapevine subscriptions can help educate the public and members of the professional community about how A.A. members stay sober, what A.A. is and what A.A. is not. They are more likely to read the 50- to 60-page magazine than the Big Book! Grapevine reps (GvRs) are active participants in the general service structure and can help facilitate their groups and members in sponsoring subscriptions to churches, schools, doctors' offices, parole offices and local jails.

When I served as district Grapevine rep, I used some of the sample letters of introduction in the GV Workbook to get gift subscriptions into homeless shelters, libraries, community centers and treatment clinics. I asked members to sponsor these subscriptions, and they did. This can

also be done with social workers, youth centers, counselors' offices, probation offices, retirement homes and VA centers.

Corrections and Hospitals & Treatment Committees are typically thought of when using the GV to carry the A.A. message—but what about the Archives, Cooperation with the Professional Community and Public Information Committees? These committees can also purchase subscriptions to distribute in their service work. In fact, a 1985 Conference Action recommended that Grapevine Committees seek ways to work with P.I., C.P.C., Corrections and Treatment Committees with the aim of increasing the use of the GV as a tool for carrying the A.A. message. Well, what if we flip that and suggest that these committees actively seek ways to work with the GV reps?! And hey, let's not stop there! How about using GV subscriptions as prizes at A.A. events instead of 50/50 raffles?

During his A.A.W.S. Board Report to the Conference this year, northeast regional trustee Rich P. asked a question that I've been pondering over ever since I first heard it. He asked, "What if we suggest to groups and members that subscriptions to Grapevine is part of self-support?" I'd invite you to let that question sink in for a few seconds; better yet, bring this question back to your groups. "What if we suggest to groups and members that subscriptions to Grapevine is part of self-support.?" What if . . . ?

WORKSHOP REPORTS

7-7:55 p.m.

Supporting Grapevine: From Your Story to Service—Moderator: Ami B., A.A. Grapevine, Inc., Executive Editor/Publisher / Reporter: Anelyse P.

This workshop covered the many methods and avenues to increasing awareness of and sharing the message of A.A. using the Grapevine magazine. Some topics covered were:

How to work with other service committees through utilizing the Grapevine, such as: “Hand out the Grapevine to H&I;” and “Print out Grapevine Topics that relate to service committees.” In addition, utilizing the video on YouTube to increase awareness of the Grapevine, as were ideas about putting the monthly newsletter on YouTube and using the audio stories with teaser clips in order to increase subscriptions.

How to be a Grapevine Representative was also discussed, and information about the 30 pack (kit), and information about The Carry the Message Project was shared with workshop members, as well as a suggestion to “tell the Grapevine office that you are a rep.”

How to put on a Grapevine workshop was discussed, as well as ways in which members found success in doing so (food is always a good idea). Guidelines (written and recorded) and permissions to print were among some of the topics addressed.

A.A. Literature: Accessibility and Attraction—Moderator: David R., G.S.O. Publishing Director & Rosa Rodriguez, G.S.O. Licensing Administrator / Reporter: Teddy B-W.

The publishing director at A.A.W.S. shared a PowerPoint presentation about accessibility and attraction, such as recent translations, large print, audio, and the new ASL video. He spoke of the audio version of *The A.A. Service Manual/Twelve Concepts for World Service* that was inspired by a grassroots effort in Area 06.

The workshop discussed how the current audio efforts mirror the rise of the audio book in society at large. New visuals for pamphlets were introduced, as well as the mention of new directories.

The workshop attendees and moderators discussed how travel opens up new information and opportunities for translation, as well as increased awareness of practices that many may not be aware of, i.e. it was noted that Muslim women and Jewish men may not hold hands at a meeting, so holding a Big Book between them respects this practice and yet allows all to connect.

Ongoing efforts to produce adapted/modified graphic materials were discussed. Also focused on Braille with improvements in format. Some issues mentioned were how staples in the literature were often not allowed in correctional facilities, but not as well known was that there was a problem with glue, too. Moderator shared that staff was working with a consultant in order to get materials into jails. Finally, downloading audio books, such as the Navajo Big Book and other audio books, were among the projects being worked on. Members would stay tuned for updates.

A.A. Around the World: Data Maps—Moderator: Newton P., Trustee-at-Large/U.S. Reporter: Jim F.

Instead of a typical workshop, this was a presentation of some graphical data about A.A. around the world, with feedback from the group. It was noted that the data is not ready for general release, and that we do not keep individual membership records.

Data maps were shown that represent A.A. presence around the world. Measures included G.S.O. presence, intergroups, groups, individual members, as well as no presence at all. Another way of looking at our presence is to ask whether we have A.A. literature in the local languages. It was explained that this is harder to show on a map. Workshop attendees looked at data for several specific countries and then looked at information showing how many languages are spoken in a specific location. Finally, members then examined how many, translated into that language, were available in our literature.

Throughout the presentation, there were questions, suggestions, and discussion. Members were informed that some of the data is not yet clearly defined, and there are political considerations and, sometimes, physical danger in getting involved in some of the countries, etc.

In general, the reception of the data map by workshop members seemed positive and enthusiastic.

Safety in A.A.—Moderator: Roxane R. / Reporter: Dee P.

The workshop “Safety in A.A.” covered two specific items of concern regarding the safety of members in A.A.:

1. Bullying (in all its forms)
2. Predatory behavior (in all its forms)

The common solutions proposed by workshop members were varied and thorough. Members shared that bullying and predatory behavior could be stopped, reduced or eradicated by getting the group involved and utilizing the group conscience. For instance, through the group conscience, define “what is bullying?” and “what is predatory behavior?” One member offered, “Our group has a preamble, which mentions safety.”

Others shared their experience with these issues: “When bullying or predatory behavior is identified, approach in a group of 2-4 people;” there is “safety in numbers;” and many adhered to a standard practice to avoid issues: “Men talk to men, women talk to women.”

Others agreed that while the problem may be clear, sometimes we may create problems. Therefore, “love and tolerance is our code.” Members said, “We want all to have the opportunity to recover and not be shunned from the meeting, if possible.” Should emergencies arise, it was advised by the group member(s) to

“call 911.” There is no A.A. police, but there are real police. If someone is demonstrating illegal behavior, report it. The safety of the group members is more important than the person not behaving appropriately. Others agreed: “We are not kicking them out of A.A., we are asking them to attend meetings at another location. Tradition One maintains group unity, while not taking punitive action.

Others in the workshop referred to the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* as a method to deal with bullying or predatory behavior: “In the “Twelve and Twelve,” the Twelve Steps are a group of principles, which, if practiced as a way of life, can expel the obsession to drink and enable the sufferer to become happily and usefully whole.” Finally, another group member offered that their home group “opened with the Serenity Prayer and closed with the Lord’s Prayer” and their “group does not seem to have these problems.”

Challenges in Long-term Sobriety—Moderator: Allen D. / Reporter: Wade J.

Workshop members shared experience, strength, and hope regarding the topic: *How to approach long-term sobriety challenges — what if a long-timer is in trouble?*

One member reminded others to be good to old-timers, while a few others recommended seeking outside help and suggested that members should “get the word out” about outside help. Many others espoused support for a more personal approach, such as “convince them to go to lots of meetings;” “it is our responsibility to reach out to the person in trouble;” make “phone calls, check on our old timers” and be aware of “changes in patterns.” Still others recommended that A.A.s “talk about this in home groups, districts, and areas” and help find answers on “how to keep things fresh/how to encourage continuous learning;” “how to be an elder states person;” how to address the “challenge of honest, accurate self-appraisal;” and, finally, how to address the “thoughts and feelings of [those with] long-term sobriety.”

Strengthening the Home Group—Moderator: Phil W. / Reporter: Bruce D.

In this workshop, members shared their experience and thoughts about strengthening the home group.

Workshop attendees were asked: *How can we incorporate change while keeping group vitality up?* In response, members suggested:

- Use job descriptions for the group;
- If a need is identified, talk with others, one-on-one, before going to group;
- Use literature for topics, have discussion on literature topics;
- Keep and utilize a list of topics for speakers to choose from;
- Use the “blue card”

Attendees were also asked to share their experience on: “What are the mechanics for conducting a group inventory? How do you get it going? How often do you do one?” Workshop members had varying responses:

- Group bylaws require inventory;
- Groups use a group inventory to address group spending;
- Talk to members one-on-one and let them know about the practices of other groups;
- Get someone “non-local” to lead inventory;
- Use the Grapevine Checklist;
- Before participating in a group inventory, the group needs to be willing;
- Find out what is bothering members (use this to focus on what to address);
- Use the pamphlet “The A.A. Group”

Spanish-Speaking Women in A.A.: Submit Your Story Moderator: Sandra W., G.S.O Staff, Literature Assignment & Irene D., La Viña Editor / Reporter: Sandra W.

After brief introductions and a summary of the development of a pamphlet for Spanish-speaking women alcoholics, participants were provided a suggested format for use in writing their own stories.

Participants were encouraged to complete their submissions (if not completed during the workshop, then after the forum) and submit to literature@aa.org.

8:05-9pm

Supporting La Viña: From Your Story to Service—Moderator: Irene D., La Viña Editor/ Reporter: Brayana G.

This workshop addressed six (6) questions, issues, and comments members had with La Viña. The following is translated from Spanish:

1. Why don't many subscriptions reach subscribers? There are problems with the distribution of La Viña, what can we do about it?
2. How do we motivate fellow A.A.s to contribute stories to La Viña?
3. Instead of translating stories about sponsorship into Spanish, why don't we publish a sponsorship book with the stories of other Spanish-speaking A.A.s?
4. How can we get La Viña to be published monthly?
5. What do I like most about La Viña?
6. How do we motivate La Viña Reps?

In response to the above questions, the following answers were provided to workshop members.

1. Write an email to Grapevine/La Viña (Ami) to address distribution issues with U.S.P.S. or the distribution company.
2. Write your story: What it was like, what happened and what it's like now. To help with motivation, ask your district if it can organize story-writing workshops.
3. We have many Spanish-speaker stories. The reason why the book was translated from English to Spanish was because of request(s) for the book to be translated based on sponsorship. Solution: Spanish-speakers need to write stories about sponsorship.
4. On the proposed monthly printing of La Viña: In order to do so, subscriptions need to increase, and increase with continuity.
5. What do I like most about La Viña? We like stories that touch our hearts and that can cross borders and unite through stories. It's like having all of A.A. in one issue. And, every two months, that issue can visit loved ones in prison — or wherever they may be.
6. It would help to motivate RLVs about La Viña if stories published in it were relevant to members who are the RLVs. Also, mention to other A.A.s how important those stories are to A.A.s in prison, as well as how we are responsible for ensuring that that service continues.

Finally, workshop members were informed that the magazine is working on a directory of La Viña that will allow a search for stories by topic.

A.A. Literature: Accessibility and Attraction—Moderator *David R., G.S.O. Publishing Director & Rosa Rodriguez, G.S.O. Licensing Administrator* / Reporter: *Andrea W.*

In this workshop, the moderator presented a review of literature successes, such as: “Access For All Alcoholics,” *Voices of Women in A.A.*, and the LGBTQ book (*Sober and Out*).

Topics reviewed: Recent translations, three large print pamphlets, audio (Twelve Concepts in English, Spanish, and French), audiobook clips from the Big Book (“Another Chance,” and Chapter 5: “How It Works,” Video (ASL)) — subtitles will be a choice available, as well. In addition, A.A. is searching for the newest technologies and looking at how they can positively impact attraction and accessibility. Graphics and visual representations will be added. Recently reviewed were large print pamphlets for people with low vision, such as: “A.A. for the Older Alcoholic — Never Too Late” and “This Is A.A.” The publishing office will begin with pamphlets and will then move to the Big Book. Also reviewed were anonymity posters and translations of the Big Book. Many committees, working together, made this happen.

Additional questions were asked about podcasts, a C.P.C chair requested that PowerPoint presentations be available on the website, and a review of color and backgrounds for better visibility was mentioned. Moderator fielded questions about content in: “Is A.A. For Y?”, “Is A.A. For Me?”, newcomer packets and “Sponsor Your Doctor.” In addition, there are now systems for looking at when pamphlets were initiated and updated.

Finally, 1000 copies of the Big Book in Navajo were printed and will soon be back in stock.

A.A. Around the World: Data Maps—Moderator *Newton P., Trustee-at-Large/U. S.* / Reporter: *Jacki B.*

During this workshop, attendees took part in a discussion about data maps. Attendees questioned and discussed what they were and how they could be used to carry the A.A. message. Workshop members also asked many question and shared concerns and observations.

Feedback: “Types of A.A. presence” maps - is there a numerical version with specific data? Workshop members discovered that just because there is a G.S.O. or an intergroup in a country or location, it doesn’t mean we are reaching all alcoholics, so what does map really mean?

Members discussed what the reaction would be if we put it on website. What would be some benefits? Problems?

Also discussed: How does one country sponsor another?

In response: We share experience and strength and hope. In addition, one country will visit, share PI/CPC experience, etc. — just like individual sponsorship. A sponsoring country allows a country new to A.A. to make its own decisions.

Another question from a workshop member: How much control does the North American General Service Conference have over other countries? Answer: No “control;” we respond to requests for assistance. Some other questions were covered, such as “do we respond to requests for help from countries with an A.A. presence, or do we pursue carrying the message into places with no A.A. presence? Again, we respond to requests for assistance.

Members focused on the data map asked, “Are country names too cluttered? (a live link will let you zoom in). The dilemma of color-coded translation in a country with many translations was broached.

Workshop attendees also saw the “Map of Big Book Translations” and noted that India has 448 languages spoken. There are 10 translations, i.e. Hindi, Punjabi . . . So, how do you color India on the map?

In addition, attendees considered how members can use this map to be helpful? In response, A.A.s answered that it can help us be aware of the need around the world, it motivates why we put money in the basket, and it is something to show sponsees and newcomers about the presence of A.A.s around the world. We are not alone.

Finally, many workshop members stated that they liked the map, but found it misleading. Putting the U.S. and Mongolia in the same color is misleading. Can there be gradients of color? Good to do it, but easy to miscommunicate it.

The moderator shared that there was a thought to do something similar in the U.S. and Canada with a map showing remote communities.

Safety in A.A.—Moderator: Roxane R. / Reporter: Dee P.

The workshop “Safety in A.A.” discussed two issues that had an effect on members safety in A.A.:

1. Risky behavior and anonymity
2. Predatory behavior in all its forms

In response, workshop attendees contributed their experience, strength and hope and offered the following:

- The law is the law — whenever the safety of the group is a risk, call 911.
- One member shared “We had to get restraining orders against repeat offenders.”
- Be careful to make sure it is predatory behavior and not just boy meets girl on A.A. campus.
- Sponsorship — Explaining the possible predatory behavior, what to do, what to look out for, what is appropriate and inappropriate behavior.
- Personal responsibility: we are all responsible to make sure our meetings are safe. Continue to talk about it and announce safety in the group.
- Another member shared, “We have the yellow safety card. They are free. We read it before the meeting.”
- Others said, “There is not perfect safety in A.A. We want our members to be safe while helping others get and stay sober. No-one among us has gotten here without some sort of risky behavior. Awareness within our groups and carefully review on a case by case basis.”
- “Who were we before we came in? We learned the principles and we changed. It is my responsibility to help others per our Responsibility Statement. Although we have problems inside and outside of A.A., we have a process to overcome these difficulties.”

A.A. Group Inventory—*Moderator: Shannon C. / Reporter: Melissa S.*

In this workshop, members addressed two questions regarding the A.A. Group and its conscience.

The first question: **“Ways to conduct an inventory and how to begin?”** And the second question: **“What to do with the findings after the inventory?”**

Responses:

- Conduct regularly scheduled inventories and have them scheduled as part of group guidelines.
- Use A.A. Group pamphlet questions and Traditions and/or Concept Checklist.
- Let group participate in selecting questions.
- Limit number of questions to discuss in time allowed. Ask a district or area servant to facilitate and another to transcribe.
- Limit findings to a number that can be reasonably implemented. Forward findings to the business meeting for implementation. May need to change guidelines of group.
- Interestingly, it seemed that most groups either have regularly scheduled inventories or don't have any. There were not many in-between responses.

The takeaways from the workshop were: Reach out to district or area for assistance. Don't wait for a problem or crisis. Have regularly scheduled inventories and keep number of questions and number of findings to reasonable amounts.

Serving as a General Service Representative (G.S.R.)—*Moderator: Vera F. / Reporter: Nick N.*

In the course of this workshop, attendees came up with a great many ways and methods to serve the group as a G.S.R. First, members offered effective ways to present a report to the group, such as the making sure the report has a clear intention — i.e. what is important to the group? The workshop members provided a host of specific examples in which General Service Representatives can serve their home group well: “Make yourself available for questions;” “utilize phone app to get information out to group;” “[use] three bullet points or key points when transferring information to the group;” “distribute information incrementally;” share events happening in the district; break it down into categories of interest; make announcements and share excitement and responsibility with alternate; and make sure “notes are posted at the meeting” place.

Workshop members shared suggestions that not only addressed to the mechanics of G.S.R. duties, such as report sharing, understanding job duties, attending events and including alternate, but also tended to the personal and/or spiritual side of the G.S.R. job: “check motives/humility as a servant;” “listen to home group/get to know them better;” and “hone in on what home group is interested in.”

Finally, workshop members addressed issues that some attendees shared regarding the G.S.R. position, such as one comment that the group was “good at getting G.S.R., but they would not show up.” In response, members suggested making an “invitation to join district at general service BBQ;” “find a “role model from G.S.R. passes the torch to new G.S.R.” and “become a service sponsor.”

FULL FORUM PRESENTATION/WORKSHOP

What Can We Do to Assure A.A. Will Be Here Tomorrow?—Thomas B., Delegate Panel 67, Area 05 Southern California

In A.A., our Fellowship is at a crossroads. We live in a time of extraordinary change—change that's reshaping the way we support our services, the way we communicate, the way we work with one another and the ways we can carry A.A.'s message of recovery and support A.A.'s place in the world.

It's change that promises our movement an amazing opportunity for growth—or the specter of an apathetic decline. And whether we like it or not, now it is our generation's turn to be responsible. This is our moment.

Alcoholics Anonymous has been through big changes before. By and through our Conference process over the years, we have thought anew and acted anew. We have made change work for us, always extending A.A.'s promises outward to reach the suffering alcoholic, to more and more people. And because we did, our Fellowship emerged stronger and better and richer and more vibrant than before. But change doesn't come from the Conference. Change comes *to* the Conference. Because unlike a corporation, which operates with edicts from the top down, the ultimate authority and responsibility for the guidance of Alcoholics Anonymous resides in the A.A. groups.

Every generation of alcoholics that has come before us has come to understand, at least in part, that it is the members who are all responsible for the perpetuation and growth and health of the Fellowship. A.A. may have come of age, but we have yet to reach maturity. It is time to clearly communicate this collective responsibility—and this exciting vision and opportunity—to our Fellowship.

So as we look forward to our future, what could more profoundly vindicate the vision of our founders than every A.A. group and every A.A. member working together to support and provide the services required to carry our message of hope and recovery to the millions of alcoholics we have yet to reach, growing our movement, and coming together to strengthen our common welfare and shape our Fellowship's course?

What greater expression of faith in this bold experiment of our A.A. service structure than the principles that A.A. is not yet finished, that we are a dynamic movement and a society of alcoholics in action, that we are strong enough to be self-critical and that through our Conference process each successive generation can look upon our imperfections and decide that it is in our power to improve the welfare of our Fellowship in addition to the means and effectiveness by which we carry the message of hope and recovery to ever more closely align with our highest cherished spiritual principles and ideals?

For our founders, the success of A.A.'s experiment in self-government through the Conference process rested on the principle of engaging all our A.A. groups and A.A.

members in this work. Our unique strength as a movement—our Twelfth Step focus on doing our best to carry the message of recovery to alcoholics, our values, our commitment, our inclusivity and diversity and our reliance upon the collective informed conscience of our Fellowship as our guiding light—gives us everything we need to ensure our growth and well-being for generations to come.

But such progress is not inevitable. While our values may seem self-evident, they are certainly not self-executing. Our A.A. movement and the future of our Fellowship is threatened whenever we take it for granted. While much encouraging progress has been made in recent years, we need to be clear: As a Fellowship, the magnitude of the challenges A.A. faces are not yet met by the measure of our collective actions. This bears repeating: As a Fellowship, the magnitude of the challenges A.A. faces are not yet met by the measure of our collective actions.

If we are looking to support our future, we must *all* work now to support our present. Our future is the result of what we do now, who we are as a Fellowship and as a movement, what we stand for and the incredible things we can do together as partners in a common effort. Such action requires that we shed our cynicism. For when it comes to carrying the A.A. message, growing our movement and strengthening our common welfare, we can afford neither complacency nor despair. A wise man said, we are capable of bearing a great burden once we discover that the burden is reality and arrive where reality is.

So, let's look squarely at our future. What we can and must do to meet and transcend the two big **interrelated** challenges we have to answer:

The relative flat growth of our membership. A.A. membership enjoyed double- or triple-digit growth in every decade until it reached 2.2 million in 2001. Since then, A.A. membership surveys show only incremental “flat” growth each year and has even dipped in the United States.

And, the need for our Fellowship to recognize and meet the responsibility of self-support of A.A.'s services. With the ever-present possibility that print sales will decline in the future, it is vital that the Fellowship fully embrace the Seventh Tradition by (a) active participation in and (b) financial support of A.A.'s services.

How to address these problems? Well, at the Conference level, we've already begun. In the past two years following A.A.'s 2016 Feasibility Study and the Trustee's Strategic Plan, the Conference has vastly expanded and improved the scope, depth and breadth of A.A.'s reach through social media and other communications means—that is, reaching alcoholics where they are and professionals who come into contact with alcoholics on the platforms they frequent.

Through good communication and engagement of our entire Fellowship, A.A. has completely reversed its downward spiral of Seventh Tradition contributions to create a strong new upward trend of increased Seventh Tradition participation from groups and members, resulting in a historic contribution high of \$8.4 million this past year. We are busy revamping our communications inside and outside of A.A. to carry the message of our A.A. program in ways that are more effective, more visible and more relevant to today's alcoholics and the society in which we live. We are greatly strengthening and securing the

health and well-being of our A.A. groups through safety literature. We have affirmed that we are inclusive and never exclusive, officially opening the doors of A.A. to welcome atheists and agnostics on equal footing. We have looked to see who is not in our rooms and why, and we have made it possible to actively reach those with accessibility issues and these underserved communities: active armed services and veterans, Spanish women, LGBTQ, alcoholics with mental health problems, today's women and the deaf community—all to ever more inclusively answer our Twelfth Step call. But in the end, when it comes to the challenges our A.A. movement faces, the need for our collective action always exceeds the limits of what we can do at the General Service Conference. While there's plenty that the Conference can and must do, there's a lot that the Conference alone cannot do.

And that's where active, engaged A.A. members like you come in. That's the grand scope and purpose of service in our Fellowship. And that's the point I want to emphasize here today: Our participation in A.A. service isn't separate from our recovery or secondary to our unity; it's integral to supporting and achieving our primary purpose. *It's how we will meet the challenges of our time.*

Our Three Legacies of Recovery, Unity and Service give our Fellowship everything we need to meet our present challenges. Recovery and unity are the ties that bind the human spirit. Our legacy of unity captures A.A.'s greatest gift: the recognition that we are all bound together in ways that are invisible to the eye; that there is a oneness to all who suffer from the disease of alcoholism; that we of Alcoholics Anonymous complete ourselves by sharing ourselves with others, extending ourselves in compassion and caring for those around us. Love and effort and selfless giving of ourselves in service to this sacred task underlies all we do.

Those who have come before us learned through hard experience what our founders once taught: that our recovery from alcoholism, individually and collectively, and the growth of our movement to provide the services required to bring the message of recovery to all who need and are willing to receive it are not "a given"—they must be won through effort and struggle and discipline, persistence and faith.

Through our efforts these previous two years, we began to defy the cynics. The tremendous progress made at these past two Conferences teaches us that we are not trapped by habits of fear and cynicism and that we are masters of our fate. But it also teaches us that the bright promise of Alcoholics Anonymous—of fulfilling our Responsibility Pledge—will be kept only when we work together and are informed and engaged. That is why good communication of our common purpose throughout the service structure of our Fellowship is so important. We'll have to reignite in each of us the embers of commitment and responsibility, of true caring and compassion for the suffering alcoholic, the coalition of conscience that found expression in our A.A. movement more than 80 years ago.

A.A. does not have a money problem. It never has. What we have is a participation-apathy problem. And that is entirely within our power to change, because the change we need starts within ourselves. Our collective participation is the key.

But this change will only happen through our effort and increasingly effective communication with one another, strengthening and uniting all of us as partners in our common effort, reaching and engaging every A.A. group and member. The alcoholics we

will reach and the quality of the Fellowship we will grow—that's the kind of future our children and their children deserve. Our co-founders and early members knew it was imperative to seek the means by which we might carry the message of A.A. to as many as possible as quickly as possible so that others might be spared the destruction of alcoholism. If we want to honor their courage and commitment, then all of us are called to possess their moral imagination.

All of us will need to feel, as they did, the fierce urgency of action *now*. All of us will need to recognize, as our founders did, that we are indeed a society of alcoholics in action and that our future of tomorrow depends on our actions today, on our commitment and on our efforts and our informed communications with one another. Looking forward, we must more effectively engage our entire Fellowship in supporting and performing the services required to make Twelfth Step work possible. And if we make such an effort, no matter how hard it might seem, we will indeed grow our A.A. movement and strengthen our common welfare—and make sure that A.A. is always here for the many generations of alcoholics to come.

What Can We Do to Assure A.A. Will Be Here Tomorrow?—*Moderator: Kathi F. / Reporter: Michael K.*

In this full forum workshop, attendees at the Pacific Regional Forum shared experience, ideas, questions, and thoughts about what today's A.A.s can do to assure A.A. will be here tomorrow. Many suggestions focused on new methods, such as listening for suggestions on new service positions; consider forming a "newcomer committee;" examine "new delivery methods in the recovery and medical community;" and "change pronouns in Big Book," as members thought that the "language of the Big Book is outdated" and suggested that text be "updated similar to what is done with other outdated literature." Another suggestion for "new" methods included a new saying: "Keep A.A. alive, put in a five" in order to address the significance of the Seventh Tradition in assuring that A.A. will be here tomorrow. Indeed, many offered ideas to increase self-support, such as letting members know that "\$17.86 today was \$1 back then" and that the "cost of a drink today be encouraged as amount to be contributed in the basket at meetings."

Other suggestions focused on strengthening standard practices that ensure our continuity and growth, such as "get into action;" "practice all three legacies;" "encourage more C.P.C. work within the Fellowship;" "practice enthusiasm to carry the message;" and "eliminate cynicism and practice inclusiveness."

Some A.A.s also shared: "keep up with technology" — using the GV app as an example of something that is effective and "easy to use;" and, finally, "use technology to meet (for area assemblies)."

Other members had concerns and questions regarding current issues in A.A. today. Some included: "How can we deal with private companies marketing outside our meeting hall?" and "How should we deal with alcoholics who have a grave mental illness?" Others addressed membership growth and thought that we could "consider using data show A.A. works" and "Identify who is in the rooms (to find out who is not in the room will help increase our membership)."

PAST TRUSTEES SHARING

Madeline P., Pacific Regional Trustee, 2006-2010

Today I would like to talk about the same thing I probably talk about every time — my love for Alcoholics Anonymous and how A.A. has fulfilled Bill W.'s vision of growth and change — because I think the demographic would look very different if we were sitting in a meeting in 1935.

I am so grateful for A.A. today, although I still bristle because I see a lot of cultish rigidity creeping its way into our rooms. I think that it is one of the reasons why we are not growing. For instance, I'm a grown woman; I know how to dress myself. I don't need anybody, inside or outside our service structure, to tell me what to wear and what is appropriate. It is a kind of elitist attitude and I wish we'd stop telling people what to wear at the General Service Conference. I think there is nothing more immaterial than what I am wearing. There can be something deeply spiritual about someone being exactly what they are — they should not be made to feel like they have to look like someone different in order to serve Alcoholics Anonymous.

In regard to talking about a “plain language” version of our text: I am not one who holds the words of our text with some type of sacred rigidity and I don't think that we have to continue utilizing something that many find insulting and offensive. I refer to that type of recovery as “missionary position A.A.” I see it many times in the rooms. You can usually recognize them — they are usually beating the crap (figuratively) out of some newcomer with the Big Book. But I believe our program is one of love and we should use tools of love. I believe it should be open, inclusive and never exclusive. There is more than one way to do it, so I hope we can open ourselves and realize that we may not have all the answers. I'd like to continue to be a seeker, because that has been the integral part of my staying sober for almost 33 years. I hope to continue to be a seeker in these rooms and to be open to new information.

Lastly, I want to talk about safety. I know it makes everybody uncomfortable — but it is even *more* uncomfortable to be a victim of sexual assault in the rooms. Sexual assault is any unwanted sexual contact. If you ever want to know why people aren't here . . . I can speak for the ones that I know personally, those who have never come back to the rooms because of what happened to them. I want to make sure that we put feet to the words that we say — about how important the newcomer is, how important it is that people to stay here and feel safe — and we show it by our actions. I also want us to look around and ask, “Who is not here?” There are about 15 million people in the United States suffering from alcoholism. So, before we get excited about our one-point-whatever million, let's look at all the people who are dying. Those are people who we know to be alcoholics. When we look at that demographic, I hope we can say to ourselves, “What happens with all the micro-aggressions I hear? What about the language that I hear used by someone at the podium or when they are sharing? Do I have the courage to go up to them, say something, and ask him or her to realize that they may have just offended someone who may be teetering on the brink of staying in these rooms?”

I hope we always look out for that person and that we make a point of making them feel welcome. I know how it feels to walk into a room and feel different — and like I don't know anybody. So, will you always look out for this and ask yourself, "How welcoming is my group?"

Paul C., General Service Trustee, 2005-2009

I was not always old. One time, a young guy decided I should know what a rave was — it's when young people stay up all night, listen to music, drink, dance, and take drugs all night long. I told them, "You know, I had something like that when I was young. We called it "the weekend."" There is nothing new under the sun.

Today, I want to talk about sponsorship. In my world and in my life, sponsorship is a horizontal sharing among members in A.A. It is not a hierarchical thing. I am not anybody's "grand sponsor." Or "great-great-grand sponsor." I don't care about your lineage. Maybe next time we are going to have a Conference-approved 23 or genetic testing that says, "Sorry! You weren't really related to Bill. Get out!" [laughter]

I recently started sponsoring a guy who is sober a long time, a wonderful guy. His sponsor died, so he came to me. I made a mild suggestion and he asked, "Is that sponsor-direction?" I said, "You are never going to hear sponsor-direction from these lips. You will hear sponsor sharing, and sponsor suggestion, but you are never going to hear sponsor direction."

At some point in Alcoholics Anonymous, you may realize, as I've realized, that the best definition of a sponsor is in our Big Book where it discusses who you take your Fifth Step with. "We search our acquaintance for a closed-mouth understanding friend." In our "Questions and Answers on Sponsorship" pamphlet, it talks more about an alcoholic who has made some progress in the program of recovery and shares, on a continuous individual basis, with someone else who is attempting to attain or maintain sobriety through Alcoholics Anonymous. In my world, that is a closed-mouth understanding friend. The key word, or one of them, is that it is on an *individual* basis. Sponsorship takes time. One of my sponsors said, "Paul, if you are too busy to have lunch with your friends, then you are too busy." I agree with that. For example, when I was in A.A. just a few years, my girlfriend moved out and got an abortion without my agreement or knowledge. A guy came over to me and said, "She got an abortion, that's terrible. But look on the bright side — it probably wasn't yours." I said, "Look, don't help me anymore. I'll get over this on my own." Do you know what saved me? Not sponsorship. My sponsor was too busy helping other new guys. The men I sponsored saved me. One guy, Mark, was sober just six months, but he came over every night. He'd say, "C'mon, Paul. Get dressed; it is time to go to a meeting. Remember when you used to tell me that?"

I think we have to be able to ask for help from the people we sponsor. And we have to realize, as I realize every single day, that many of the men I sponsor in A.A. are better men than I am. They're better fathers, better A.A. members, better sons and better brothers, etc. And all of that all goes into this wonderful mix of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Tom M., General Service Trustee, 1997-2001

I used to work for a television network so I'd fly home every weekend. My wife had just gotten sober in A.A. in southern California. She would pick me up at the airport, and I'd down the breath freshener as I got off the plane. Once, after she picked me up and we were loading the luggage into the car, she said, "There is an A.A. meeting tonight and it's an alkathon. I hear there's going to be some really funny speakers." And I thought, Oh God, I'd better go just to keep her happy. So, I went along. The first and then the second speaker got up. He introduced

himself as Dr. Paul. Wow, the writer of the “Acceptance Chapter.” Fortunately, I did accept what Dr. Paul said. That was my sobriety weekend.

I mention that because if I talk about the Grapevine, I want to let everyone know that I still like the Big Book! I was a non-trustee director for the Grapevine for four years. I have a deep love for the Grapevine. The Grapevine started in 1944 and, right away, Bill started writing in it. He used it to lobby, because he was worried that he and Dr. Bob were not going to live forever. Those of us in the sticks of California were not going to know who the trustees were – since the majority of the trustees were in the New York area and they were Class A nonalcoholic trustees. So, he used the early Grapevine to lobby for this whole goofy idea of delegates, D.C.M.s, G.S.R.s, etc. service idea of his. And he lobbied like heck for it. So that’s one of the great first accomplishments of the Grapevine.

What has the Grapevine been since? Well, I worked for one of the networks and we knew that at six o’ clock, boy, we’d better be in front of the camera. And the Grapevine knew that every month, on the 30th or the 31st, that thing better be out in the mail. They live in a deadline world where they have to be nimble and that’s one of the advantages of the Grapevine. We have our stories in the Big Book, but in the Grapevine, each month they put out fresh stories. I like to kid people. I say, “Don’t talk about how you came to your first A.A. meeting in a Pack, a Studebaker, or a Kaiser, ‘cause they don’t know what the heck you are talking about!” And so the Grapevine has always had a different mission than some of our other publications. I love the “Twelve and Twelve” because it is just written five, six or seven years later — when we got the potholes fixed on the road of “Happy Destiny” and we opened the off ramps that were closed.

All of these publications have a different mission. The Grapevine’s mission is to bring new stories of people, who walk around living things, doing things, and using these things [smart phones] that I don’t even understand. The Grapevine brings us fresh perspectives. Now, I was in the circulation business; in television it was ratings and in print (the newspapers) it was about how papers were printed and how many were being sold. And so, today, ask the New York Times or the Washington Post how they are making it? They are making it in the digital social media world. That’s where they have had to go to survive. I hope that we make it possible for the Grapevine to continue, in a healthy way, to bring us all the healthy and fresh perspectives, and move into the digital world of social media. Thank you for listening.

Jim C., Pacific Regional Trustee, 1998-2002

I was a delegate from ‘92, and then I was an appointed committee member for three years. But then my name I came out of the hat. At first I thought they made a mistake. Sometimes I still think they made a mistake, but it was a joy of my life to be able to serve A.A. at that level — at any level.

Today, I serve as my home group treasurer. I’m not a big talker, but I am a doer, so I do a lot of things. It’s easier for me than talking a lot. There is usually about 25 or 30 people every day, and it keeps me busy — out of trouble and sober. I haven’t thought about a drink for a long time.

I was lucky to be part of the group involved in the Fourth Edition of the Big Book. It took a long time for that to happen. We ended up having stories from the Fellowship to fill that edition. We

got over 1200 submissions of stories from the Fellowship. In the end, I think we ended up with about 30. It seems to me that the point is that when we said, "We want to hear from you," the Fellowship responded. That was a marvelous experience for me. The Fourth Edition was published in 2001. It is now over 15 years old. I am 81 years old and I don't feel 81. I feel like there is a 25-year-old trapped inside this body that seems to be getting older and older. But I crawl out of the bed in the morning and if I can stand upright, great. I wanted to tell all of you how much I appreciate being here and being alive.

Greg M., Pacific Regional Trustee, 1990-1994

I have relocated to Henderson, Nevada, and I am active member in my new home group. Over the years, I've been to over 70 regional forums. I want to share, today, some of the wonderful attributes of my five different home groups and four different delegate areas over the years. But first, I want to set the stage for that and take us back to 1990 in what used to be the 6 points that defined an A.A. group. They were found, at the time, in "The A.A. Group" pamphlet.

1. All members of the group are alcoholic and all alcoholics are eligible for membership.
2. As a group, they are fully self-supporting.
3. A group's primary purpose is to help alcoholics recover through the Twelve Steps.
4. As a group, they have no outside affiliations.
5. As a group, they have no opinion on outside issues.
6. As a group, their public relations policy is based on attraction, rather than promotion, and they maintain anonymity at the level of press, radio, television and film.

It is simply a restatement of our Traditions and it lived for quite a few years. Today, we have a "keep it simple" way of defining the A.A. group and it can be found on page 13 in the pamphlet "The A.A. Group...where it all begins": "The main difference between meetings and groups is that A.A. groups generally continue to exist outside the prescribed meeting hours, ready to provide Twelfth Step help when needed."

All my home groups have been very structured. Early on, I realized that since I was such an unstructured guy, I needed lots of help. That continues today. All these groups always depended upon the guidance of a higher power through the voice of the group conscience. I'd like to share a few of the many Twelfth Step services that these groups offer in the community where they are:

- Sponsor weekly meetings at the Salvation Army or detox or other treatment facilities.
- Hold yearly camping trips – a great way to see A.A. working outside the meeting place.
- Bi-annual group inventories – that's where the fun came in. I got sober in Hawaii and they were always in parks. There were picnics and families would come and the group members would circle around and then have this experience of looking at ourselves and seeing how well we were doing our Twelve Step work.
- Maintain literature racks at business establishments, schools, assisted living, and YWCA, all within a five-block radius of our meeting hall. We felt a profound responsibility that the neighborhood ought to know there was a meeting on Tuesday night at 7 o'clock at the Chinese Lutheran Church.
- Annual projects to paint and clean our meeting hall.
- Area service, intergroup service, annual Founders' Day.

The list goes on and on. I've relocated four times in my sobriety and each time I've joined a structured group holding regular A.A. meetings focused on 12 Step services. Once, in the 1980s, while traveling for business, I visited a central office in Anchorage, Alaska. While chatting with the volunteer at the front desk, I asked for a local meeting schedule. Her response was curious. She asked me which one I wanted. Did I want the list of meetings, of A.A. groups, or do I just want the list of meetings? I did a little research . . . Are there more standalone meetings not tied to an A.A. group than A.A. groups who hold meetings? How's the Conference serving the needs of these meetings? It seems they meet the "two or more gathered for sobriety" suggestion, so why don't they want to be listed as an A.A. group at the General Service Office? Maybe the local service entities are meeting their needs? Can A.A. ever expect to be self-supporting if the number of A.A. groups have flattened? I'm sure you have many more thoughts and questions on that. I will save my answers for next time, since we are out of time.

In conclusion, I'll offer up a statement from Bill W.'s April 1958 Grapevine article, "Guardian of AA: Our General Service Conference": "Once the miracle of sobriety has been received ... Providence expects all of us to work and to grow—to do our part in maintaining our blessings in full force. A perpetual miracle—with no effort or responsibility on our part—simply isn't in the cards. We all understand that the price of both personal and group survival is willingness and sacrifice, vigilance and work."

Ruth J., Pacific Regional Trustee, 1986-1990

I was a panel 29 delegate — that's 1979 and 1980, so it was back in the dark ages. I was a Pacific region trustee, from '86 to '90. Now, I have spoken about many things, including how I feel about chanting. In my area, some things have crept into meetings and groups and I have noticed because I have been sober in the same place for my whole 48 years of sobriety. I have even talked to you about how to properly hang the toilet paper [laughter], and how you have a choice of prayers; you do not have to close with the Lord's Prayer. The Third Step Prayer or the Serenity Prayer is allowed. It is up to your group.

The most recent thing that has crept in the last 10 or 15 years is that, within the format of some meetings, cross talk is addressed. I've never heard it before then and I never heard it when I first got sober. I think we need to be careful about putting rules in about what we can and cannot do in A.A. groups and meetings — other than our primary purpose. At first I thought crosstalk meant people being rude in the back of the meeting and talking when somebody was sharing. I don't call that crosstalk; I just call it being rude. But what it really means is commenting on somebody else's share in derogatory way. Or even in a nice way. But I'll tell you my experience when I first got sober: many of the comments people made about the ideas I shared helped me in my sobriety. If I was saying something that was inappropriate or off on a wild track of some kind, and they said, "Well, I found that didn't work for me and I did such and such." I didn't take it as an insult; I took it as an offering of help. And so I still do it. I don't pay any attention to the directions on crosstalk. If I want to comment on someone's sharing, I comment on it. It is usually not in a derogatory way – if I think they are really off base, I'll do it after the meeting — I'm not going to strip someone down in the meetings. But I wonder, when we add to our formats are we giving direction?

I was born in the 1930s and I understand the language of the Big Book. I learned to read in the 40s and 50s and so I understand those archaic words. But I also understand that people

born now do not understand those archaic words. And I've heard the conversation in the last 20 years (at least) about — I like the word “translating” not “changing” — the Big Book into something more understandable. That's the way Daily Reflections came about, and the Fellowship was asked if we wanted it. We said, “No. We don't want it.” Many of us liked what Hazelton published. And then we were asked again, “Do we want it?” And this time, the answer was “Yes. We do want it.” So, now we have it. Another time we were asked, “Do we want a Fourth Edition Big Book?” And we answered. “No. We are happy with the Third Edition.” We were asked, a second time, if we wanted it. Our answer was, again, “Yes, we do want it.”

So, things change. Be open to change and just be patient. I've told the elephant joke many times — that doing things in Alcoholics Anonymous is like two elephants making love: It seems to be done in a rather high area, there's a lot of trumpeting and noise accompanying the act, and it takes at least two years to see the results. It most often takes more than two years in A.A.; so, if you see something done from start to finish in two years in A.A., question it!

Also, no matter how much we publish or do, we are still more successful one-to-one. We can publish all we want for the professionals, but they get a lot more out of a visit from one of us and an explanation of what A.A. is and is not than from reading our pamphlets. So, remember that. Just like recovery, one-to-one works best. Thank you.

George D., Pacific Regional Trustee, 1978-1982

I wish we'd do this on Friday night. You guys wear me out . . . You've got to remember, I'm not ninety anymore! [laughter] I just want to say; to begin with, this was an outstanding forum. I like to have fun up here and I have a couple of stories to tell for whatever that might be worth. This is A.A. history that, as far as I know, has not been written up anywhere. I got them from Bob H. who was the general manager of the G.S.O. before and at the time of Bill W.'s death and for several years after that. On a Monday morning, following Bill's death, the A.A.W.S. directors, who were all in the New York area at the time, met G.S.O. and made a decision to disassemble Bill's office. They took what had been two large offices, including Bill's, and made three offices out of them. They threw away every piece of furniture that was in his office. They just discarded it. I'm not sure if that was a good idea, it's up to you to figure that out. And I am not sure of the motives. Or what it may be a metaphor for. But I think it was a very significant decision and one with some potential underlying spiritual content.

When I became trustee, as many of you know, during the last Saturday of the Conference (when it is adjourned), we have a farewell breakfast. At that time, the outgoing trustees give some remarks. My first such breakfast, as a first-year trustee, Martin L., who was the president of a major industrial banking firm and a very top level corporate executive, spoke and expressed his concern that we might be in danger at the level of the office and the board, and even the Conference, of becoming too corporate and of even sounding too much like a corporate business. He said that we really didn't need to do that. We should strive to continue to sound like A.A.

The following year, Jerry D., who was Nelson Rockefeller's principal P.R. guy, talked. He said, “I don't think we have to get every screw tightened and every bolt fastened tight. Leave a few things loose; we are not IBM . . . We can mess up a little bit. We'll be all right. And it might be better if we did that.”

The subject of all this is humility. Not my humility, of course. That would take a lot more time! My third year, Sam S., a successful lawyer from Florida and my great friend, talked about his concern that A.A. would lose its humility.

At the last Conference, I spoke. And I talked about my concerns that as institutions become powerful and mature, they tend to become too protective of the institution, and it is at the expense of that primary mission of ours. I have felt that A.A. was safer than most organizations because our mission—which is to help drunks—is so vital to each one of us, personally. We need to do it, not for other people, in which case we might start protecting the institution at the expense of the mission... but for ourselves.

Though many years have passed, I confess that, with over 45 active years in service, I've been concerned that even the perception that there is some central authority that can tell any A.A. member or group how they should behave or how they should approach the program, would be dangerous to a movement which is not organized. We talk about the fact that A.A. is not organized, but I don't know if we talk enough about the spiritual significance of that idea. In *A.A. Comes of Age*, it is related, on page 125, the decision the Third General Service Conference made to **not** organize the Fellowship as a whole. One of their concerns, stated very honestly, is about too much accumulation of power in one place.

I cherish the time I spend here, because I get reacquainted with people I meet here once or twice a year. I cherish the friendships and the support that many of you have given me throughout the years. Bill W. used to say our critics could be our best friends. So, I cherish my critics, too. And, if that idea is true, some of my very best friends are critics! See you next year.

“WE’LL GET BACK TO YOU”

Unanswered Ask-it-Basket Questions

1. Why are there 71 translations of the Big Book but 102 language translations of AA literature? Does that mean there is literature that is translated into languages which don't have a translated Big Book yet?

The Big Book is currently available in 71 languages, which is comprised of 70 approved translations and the original English.

There are 102 total languages, which includes books, pamphlets and other items of literature. Often, a literature committee may start with translating pamphlets for their groups' use while they may or may not be working on the larger task of translating the Big Book, 12 x 12, or other more-lengthy books and booklets. Translations of the Big Book in particular, require much diligence, as this endeavor often takes years of painstaking translation efforts and the necessary local translation-committee review and our independent translation-evaluation service reviewing and reporting.

2. Are there personal stories in all of the translated Big Books? Are the stories that are in the back of Big Books unique to that translated language? The stories in the back are not translated stories from the American Big Book?

All Big Book translations must include the front-matter, the Prefaces and Forewords, and a couple stories and appendices (“Dr. Bob’s Nightmare,” for example. Each country may decide by group conscience whether to publish an “abridged” translated version; that is, without any other English-language stories or to include original new ones from that country.

Some translations of the Big Book, therefore, contain all the English-language stories translated into other languages, and some, a few of them that the committee feels folks in their country can relate to.

Some translations include all original stories from that country (which need no review by A.A.W.S. since they are not translations of copyrighted material).

Some translations include a mixture of those translated from the English (which have been reviewed) and those original to a country's Fellowship. It's up to them.

3. I consider myself to be early in my sobriety and new to service. But after only two years at an Area level I find I am getting tired of hearing about committees. What is a good trick for dealing with the monotony and focusing on the fellowship and feelings of usefulness when you're 9 hours into an 8-hour business meeting?

It's understandable that '9 hours into an 8-hour business meeting' you would feel tired. Standing, stretching, and doing posture exercises have all been shown to help with what social psychologists call 'decision fatigue.' It's also important for chair people to build in

breaks and perhaps vary the program, mixing a sharing session in between presentations, for example.

Bill W.'s essay "Leadership in A.A. – Ever a Vital Need" can be found in the Service Manual after Concept IX. While Bill doesn't specifically mention 'creating a realistic agenda' or 'knowing when to take a break,' he does discuss qualities such as vision, prudence and flexibility. Perhaps next time you are bored or restless during a business meeting you can give that essay a quick read.

4. I think that at some point all our attempts to be more adaptive and inclusive, or PC, will start to backfire because we are accommodating away the level of desperation needed to stay long enough to accept the idea of changing their lives. Thoughts?

Generally speaking, changes in A.A. literature come about when there is a widely expressed need emanating from groups and members, and as the result of having gone through the General Service Conference process. The Conference is the closest thing we have in A.A. to representing a group conscience of A.A. as a whole in the U.S. and Canada.

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. Yet, we are not immune to the difficulties that affect the rest of humanity. Alcoholics Anonymous is a microcosm of the larger society within which we exist. Experiences found in the outside world can also make their way into the rooms of A.A.

When there appears to be a widely expressed need, the Conference has approved the creation of literature that may broaden the identification for a wider pool of still suffering alcoholics who have yet made their way to A.A.

At the same time, if in the future there is a similar request from the Fellowship to retire literature which no longer serves a need; then the Conference can listen to that expressed need as well.

For further sharing on the subject of inclusion, A.A. members can also read sharing from the July General Service Board Sharing session topic "Love and Tolerance of Others is our Code - Philosophy or Practice?" in the July Quarterly Report.

5. Have you always been gung-ho for service, or were you ever volunteer-told to get involved? And have you ever regretted any service commitments?

In our experience A.A. members often share (sometimes very enthusiastically) that service has added a new dimension to their sobriety. While some of us quickly volunteered for service some of us needed to be volunteer-told. Whether quick to volunteer or "volunt-told", a good number of us benefited from service by getting a sense of usefulness and by feeling part of A.A. Our experience also indicates that while some service opportunities can be more enjoyable than others, the less enjoyable services will often provide us with helpful opportunities for growth. In the balance, there is little or nothing to regret!

6. I understand that meetings are autonomous, but if they are not using A.A. approved literature, are they not violating the 4th Tradition because their actions might taint someone's idea of other groups or A.A. as a whole?

Thank you for your question about the use by a group of literature that is not Conference-approved. Just to clarify, the General Service Office U.S./Canada is the publisher of A.A. literature and a repository of A.A. shared experience. This office is not a final or central authority and has been given no authority over the behavior or practices of groups, service entities or members. Each A.A. entity including this office is autonomous.

It might be helpful to know that the General Service Conference of A.A. represents the largest group conscience of A.A. as a whole that we can collect, thus the literature that goes through the Conference process has been deemed reflective of A.A. as a whole — as opposed to any one individual or group's perception of A.A.

The Conference has discussed the use of literature that is not Conference-approved in A.A. meetings. In 1986, the General Service Conference made a recommendation reaffirming previous Actions and recommended, "The suggestion that A.A. groups be encouraged to display or sell only literature published and distributed by the General Service Office, the A.A. Grapevine, and other A.A. entities. I have attached a couple of items which I hope will be helpful. One is a service piece that describes what the term "Conference-approved" entails, and the other is a Box 4-5-9 front page article entitled, Conference Approval: A Lengthy, Careful, and Necessary Process

While it continues to be a matter of group conscience whether or not to use or sell non-Conference-approved literature, it is conceivable that when other literature is available within the AA community that, no matter how good it is, A.A. members, particularly newcomers, may be understandably confused about what is and what is not literature dealing solely with the recovery program and the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous. I think it is safe to say that the above-referenced Conference actions had the intention of keeping the focus of the A.A. meeting on the A.A. message as expressed in our literature rather than outside material.

It is also worthwhile to note that Conference-approval does not imply disapproval of other publications that are helpful to an individual's sobriety. There is an abundance of recovery literature published today by other organizations. Many of us, on an individual basis, use other literature for inspiration and guidance, just as our early members did when there was no A.A. literature to turn to.

7. Yesterday I included aa.org in a text. A note about the next International meeting in 2020 was attached automatically. It was a surprise! I don't have a problem with it, but how am I protected online? Is any data collected?

G.S.O.'s A.A. website includes a full page with information about the 2020 International Convention in Detroit, which is updated regularly. Nevertheless, the webpage does not include automatic notifications or pop ups. We do have analytics software running on aa.org. We use the information only to improve the website and our services to the fellowship; our data is stored on a private server to preserve the anonymity of our visitors.

8. *Search engine optimization and social media are now established avenues for the hand of the suffering alcoholics to reach out. What is GSO activity doing to meet this demand?*

Search Engine Optimization:

We are currently in the process of developing a totally new website.

- *One of the top priorities identified before we began the process was to increase organic Search Engine Optimization. Organic in this context means naturally occurring and therefore free.*
- *At every step in the website development process, we discuss how to optimize organic SEO through well-written content, and using best practices in user experience, design and development.*
- *We have a Google for Nonprofits account which would give us access to Google AdWords at a reduced rate offered to all non-profits enrolled in the program. The Conference has considered and taken no action on this program at this time.*

SEO ties into our YouTube channel. Linking of content and videos being embedded in other websites will increase the search rankings of all the sites involved and improve organic search results for everyone.

YouTube:

General Service Conference Actions from the 2017 and 2018 Conference Committees on Public Information requested the creation of the YouTube page:

2017

“A.A. World Services, Inc. create a Google for Nonprofits account, with use of the account limited to the YouTube Nonprofit Program and with a guarantee that comments not be shown on A.A.W.S. YouTube pages. The committee requested that a report including information from website analytics and the usefulness and effectiveness of the A.A.W.S. YouTube account be brought back to the 2018 Conference Committee on Public Information.”

2018

A progress report including website analytics and the usefulness and effectiveness of the A.A.W.S. YouTube account be brought back to the 2019 Conference Committee on Public Information.

The YouTube Nonprofit Program is a powerful tool that will allow A.A.W.S. to accomplish three goals:

- a. *Share A.A. video content more broadly in a contemporary medium while improving our search engine optimization; making A.A. easier to find.*
- b. *House A.A.W.S. video content in a location which gives local service structures and Intergroups the ability to embed this video content directly into their websites. This linking of content and websites will improve the rankings of sites containing these videos for people searching for A.A.*
- c. *Measure and improve engagement with the general public, professional community, those seeking help, and local service structures.*

Twitter:

A General Service Conference Action and Additional Committee Consideration from the 2016 and 2017 Conference Committees on Public Information refer to the discussion of a Twitter account:

2016 Advisory Action

A proposal for the implementation of a Twitter account for carrying the message of A.A. to the public be developed and brought back to the 2017 Conference Public Information Committee for review.

2017 Additional Consideration

The committee reviewed the report from the trustees' Public Information Committee on the Implementation of a Twitter account and took no action owing to the Tenth Tradition's direction to avoid public controversy and concerns regarding the viability and modernity of Twitter. The committee requested that the trustees' Committee on Public Information continue to pursue options for carrying the A.A. message to the public on social media.

LinkedIn:

Discussions are still in initial exploratory stage.

Facebook:

Was explored and the Trustees decided not to pursue at this time.

No other avenues of social media have been explored at this time.

9. What's the latest on the A.A. Membership Survey?

From the July minutes of the trustees' committee on Public Information:

The committee discussed the A.A. Membership Survey and recommended that a professional analysis of the Membership Survey methodology be conducted by an outside consultant...

Note: Ongoing discussions regarding the survey's purpose and methodology will continue at their October meeting.

10. Given that an individual can only contribute \$3000/year to the General Service Office, is there a similar maximum contribution when donating to a group? How about a group contribution to a District or Area?

The General Service Conference has set the limit for contributions each year from an A.A. member to G.S.O. at \$5,000. While some other A.A. entities use this same amount, the amount that they will accept is determined by their own group conscience. They are not bound by the action of the General Service Conference. The Conference does not have authority over groups or intergroups.

There is no limit on group contributions to G.S.O. If there were to be limits on donations from a group to a district or area, setting them would be up to the group conscience of the district or area.

11. Does GSO still sell the 12 Concept window shade?

Yes, the Twelve Concepts "Window Shade" Display is item M-20 and sells for \$29. The description in the A.A. Conference-approved catalog states, "3' X 5' display for meeting rooms rolls up like a window shade. Comes with an attached chain for easy hanging.

12. Digital Basket—Experience, Strength and Hope share request. I would appreciate successful groups sharing the steps they took to 1) establish their group checking account so signers change but account stays the same 2) Get Federal ID# 3) Which app they're using (Venmo, other) 4) fees to group and/or payee.

While we are aware of a few groups which rely on digital Seventh Tradition baskets, G.S.O. has yet to gather widespread sharing on the topic. Local sharing from Washington is available in the form of a detailed description of the use of card payments for Seventh Tradition. The sharing details a pilot program to accept card payments (credit and debit cards) for the 7th tradition at a meeting. Perspective on the technology, meeting type, decision making process, challenges and impact on contributions are shared.

Gathering shared experience at the local level is recommended for the topics of establishing group checking accounts, getting Federal Identification numbers and choosing which app to use and fees that may be involved. Of course, you can contact the Federal government concerning identification numbers and bank professionals for information on checking accounts.

13. How do you handle a meddlesome past delegate in your Area?

The answer to this question may best be answered through shared experience located in several historical Box 4-5-9 articles on the subject of the "spirit of rotation."

Former G.S.O. general manager, Bob H., in a Conference talk on the subject of rotation shared: "When [servants in A.A.] rotate out of office, they're obeying 'the letter of the law,' but are they obeying its spirit if they still try to run the show? Inability to let go can become something close to an illness. Sometimes, these unfortunate folk need help in learning to really step down. We may even have to pry their hands from the helm, figuratively. But whatever needs doing to make them let go do it! You'll be doing everyone concerned a favor, including the reluctant ex-servant.

VOL. 28, NO. 5/ OCTOBER-NOVEMBER 1983

"Rotation is practiced not to put somebody out of a job, but to ensure that the selfish ones do not hold on, and that all have an opportunity to serve."

VOL. 28, NO. 5/ OCTOBER-NOVEMBER 1983

What happens to trusted servants when they rotate? Putting it bluntly, Tradition Two suggests that "Ultimately, they divide into two classes" . . . "elder statesmen," who understand, even embrace, the wisdom of rotation; and "bleeding deacons," who are rigid, bossy and power-driven. "Happily," the Tradition points out, most trusted servants survive rotation and "live to become elder statesmen . . . the real and permanent leadership of A.A." (Twelve and Twelve, p. 135). VOL. 47, No. 6/ HOLIDAY ISSUE 2001

14. Why don't we mention or even link to the Quebec/French version of the Grapevine? They could perhaps offer insight into how they manage self-support as a minority language magazine.

Published in Quebec, Canada, the French language "La Vigne" is an A.A. magazine. A "La Vigne" presentation is a part of the program and a display table is set up during the Eastern Canada Regional Forums held by the General Service Board. Your question about providing a link to La Vigne has been forwarded to G.S.O.'s Communications Desk as well as the A.A. Grapevine for consideration. For more information about "La Vigne", go to lavigneaa.org.

15. Are there any efforts underway to help minimize the number of agenda items that the GSR have to get their groups to vote on before the Conference?

No. Our General Service Conference agenda process does not lend itself to minimize the number of proposed agenda items sent in to the Conference Coordinator, G.S.O. Staff member on the Conference Assignment, each year. The G.S.R. is responsible for obtaining their group's conscience on the agenda items and to provide that information to their local area delegate as they prepare to attend the General Service Conference.

An idea, suggestion, question, concern or subject can come from any A.A. member, G.S.R., D.C.M., Area Committee member, Delegate, Trustee, or G.S.O./GV Staff, and may be shared or discussed at the group, district and Area Assembly. The deadline for proposed agenda item submission is December 15 of each year and if we receive an item then we initiate sending it through the board committee review process. However, each proposed agenda item that is received may not make it to become a final agenda item for a general service conference committee, and the Fellowship-at-large, to review and discuss. It may take more than a year to be ready to be sent to a conference committee.

Finally, the Board is looking at creating a proposed workable plan for equitable distribution of the workload (agenda items) assigned to a Conference committee by combining and/or creating committees.

16. Is there a better way to communicate and get our group's votes through technology to help with these efforts?

This is an excellent question to handle at the local level. The area delegates are responsible for obtaining their A.A. group's conscience on the agenda items. Some areas have implemented the process of summarizing the full General Service Conference Agenda and Background to make it easier for G.S.R.s to review and provide feedback from their group's based on questions that are then produced called "What does the delegate need to know?" questions. For the areas that use such feedback forms, it seems feasible that they could be made available in a technological format. Each area delegate handles the process of obtaining their area's informed group conscience autonomously.

17. YPAA are you here?

A number of attendees referenced their participation in Young People in A.A. as the weekend went along.

18. You made a point of introducing every selection of attendees: from 1st Time attendees down to past trustees and GSO staff/assistants. No mention was made of past delegates. Don't we deserve a little love, too?

The format of Regional Forums is ever evolving to provide information, keep the program on schedule and even stir enthusiasm. Introductions, which include quite a number of trusted servant roles, were recently shortened, only due to limits on time, not any limits on love. Past Delegates certainly deserve love!

19. Why do the hearing-impaired need a video?

G.S.O. makes some material available in American Sign Language for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Many people who are deaf or hard of hearing do not use English as their primary language, and a video in ASL allows them to get the message in the literature. Providing translations in ASL on video helps make the A.A. message available to Deaf and Hard of Hearing alcoholics who want and need sobriety.

20. How do we work with our friends in Al-anon?

As early as the 1950s, both A.A. and Al-Anon recognized the importance of maintaining separate fellowships. However, there are many ways to cooperate with each other. Most A.A. convention committees invite Al-Anon to participate by planning their own program, and the committee arranges for facilities for the Al-Anon meetings. Al-Anon conventions often do the same.

This past July, Al-Anon held its International Convention and many A.A. members were in attendance, with A.A. meetings available throughout the weekend.

Currently the Group Services Coordinator at G.S.O. is the liaison with other 12 Step Fellowships, which includes Al-Anon Family Groups. We exchange information on things like outreach to professionals, website design, and the use of social media.

The A.A. Guidelines on the Relationship Between A.A. and Al-Anon is a helpful resource. Among other things, it has the full text of a resolution of gratitude to the Fellowship of the Al-Anon Family Groups, which was unanimously approved by the 1969 General Service Conference of A.A. It recognizes "the great contribution which the Al-Anon Family Groups have made and are making in assisting the families of alcoholics everywhere."

CLOSING REMARKS

Michele Grinberg, Class A (nonalcoholic) General Service Board chairperson

This is, absolutely, the largest forum I have been to so far. I've made a few notes; you've all seen me typing away this weekend. I am not sending emails or posting on social media; I am taking my notes. This is a true bilingual event with one basic language that I am learning to say, "El lenguaje del corazón." I always hear an unofficial theme emerge from every regional forum that I go to. At this forum, for me, it was breaking through the barriers so we can share the language of the heart with those who need us **and** do it in a safe space. Thank you.

So, as you've learned, I am Michele Grinberg. I am another Class A trustee. The "A" stands for amateur. I am here because I love you. This is a love affair for me. I love you and I am honored and privileged to serve you. I've had an absolutely wonderful time this weekend; I hope you have, as well. My heart has been touched many times — I cannot tell you how many times. But never before have I sat through a general sharing questions at the mike and felt the tears leaking out of the corners of my eyes. You have really touched my heart.

There was some terrific sharing going on in the workshops, too. I kind of dipped in and out and took some notes—there is powerful stuff going on, and I look forward to seeing the report. I have already told you what I thought the unofficial theme was, how we are breaking barriers so we can share the language of the heart with those who need us. I am so impressed with the good spirit that I feel in this room. Here are just a few of the many things that I heard from the incredible delegate presentations, from the sharing on the floor from the workshops, and from our wonderful past trustees, some of whom are also past general managers. Please never hesitate to reach out to them and let them share their wisdom and their stories with you, they are wonderful people and I love them dearly. So, some of the few things that I heard from the excellent presentations:

- Identifying our remote communities and reaching out the hand of AA. And related to this, from the floor, a hope that someday our remote Hispanic women, African American, and other communities will no longer be remote. It was not the first or the last time that tears were brought to my eyes.
- From the workshop of the whole, in ensuring that A.A. will be there tomorrow, here is what I heard that really resonated with me: We are all responsible for the perpetuation, growth and health of our Fellowship.
- I've heard lots of kindness expressed from the floor. I also heard lots of calls for help to open our hearts and let us each be of service in order to help break down those barriers — whatever they are. As an aside, I don't think our Accessibilities Committee has ever been more important than it is right now that we recognized that there are barriers, whether we like it or not. We don't live in a fairytale, we live amongst each other and we bring a lot of things to the table. Some of those ideas, notions, languages and body parts create barriers. We want to break those down, whether someone speaks another language—we heard about the efforts happening at the General Service Office to offer materials in as many different languages as there is need—to offering materials to the community that cannot hear—there is that new wonderful version of the Big Book in American Sign

Language. I agree with many of you, if you know where they are, you can just follow along by watching the love. It's a beautiful language.

- And how do we reach those in institutions? I was overwhelmed by a gentleman who started out by saying that Corrections Correspondence Service worked for him. He has now been serving on the Corrections Correspondence Service for some thirty-odd years. In Corrections Correspondence—writing to inmates—there is always a need, particularly for men, and particularly for the Spanish-speaking men in this group. You don't have to be a great writer. You are not going to do anything except share your experience, strength, and hope in writing. Or it can even be orally now; some prisons are now allowing phone calls. Some prisons are now allowing the Internet. I know this because I know someone who has been in Corrections Correspondence for years as a servant and I have seen it. It is wonderful and it is breaking down more barriers. How many inmates cannot read or write? I bet it is an unusually high number, compared to the population as a whole. So, once we open the doors of being able to do it by telephone, it will be wonderful. The opportunity is there. So, if you are looking for a way to be of service, consider that, please.

I hope you heard something about how we even need to provide the Big Book in other languages here, within our service structure, in the U.S. and Canada. We had to produce the Big Book in Punjabi because there is a big population here that needs access to the Big Book. Hopefully, you've also heard that we've licensed the Big Book CD in Arabic, in Russian, in Navajo. I had the incredible privilege to stand at the mike and give that CD set to the president of the Navajo Nation, and watched how that man's face changed—it went to that spiritual space. He got it. It was amazing. You know what? That is your dollar in the basket. We are spreading the language of the heart.

And, you know, we are very privileged people. Many of us can afford to put at least a dollar in the basket, maybe five. But there are so many folks out there, in our service structure, who do not have a penny to their name, and they do need recovery. I am in awe of all of your efforts to reach those folks. And what we do, at the General Service Office and on the board, is try to help you do that work. So let us know what you need, put those dollars in the basket, and we'll do our darnedest to meet those needs and to help you. As George said, "This is a one-on-one program of recovery. There is always other stuff going on to help you do that well, so that someone else might live." As you can tell, I'm passionate about this.

I am trying to process everything that I heard, everything that I hear at regional forums. I do come away with some questions that I want to leave you with: What more can each of us do to communicate that A.A. is welcoming to everyone? And how do we communicate with each other and encourage more folks to come in to our wonderful service structure? That's the challenge that I see.

I saw some great ideas here, I saw some great stuff, and I will tell you that this regional forum reflected great inclusion. But, of course, as someone said, one of the magic things about A.A. is that we are never done, we are never finished. What more can we do? This regional forum is for anyone and everyone that wants A.A. to be here tomorrow. So, I hope there will be maybe 1500 of you in Las Vegas in 2020. I want to close with something that Bill W. wrote, and I love it. I guess I would say it is my theme: "Honesty with ourselves and others gets us sober, but it is tolerance that keeps us that way."