

Unity: Are We Living Up to Our Legacy?

"A good meeting gets my head on straight again, but lately my group's meetings have left me feeling spiritually bereft," Terry L., of New York City told us recently. "The Steps are almost never mentioned," she adds. "Instead, I'm hearing talk of therapy, relationships, weight loss—things that have little to do with shared experience, strength and hope." Speaking of her four years of continuous sobriety, she adds, "I know of my own progress and see how my whole way of thinking is different now. But there's no longer a sense of growing along spiritual lines or any reference to our basic program. I hear less and less talk of relying on a Power greater than ourselves and more emphasis on self-reliance."

From New Preston, Connecticut, comes this message from Mildred P. "I drove a certain distance one night to attend a meeting and was looking forward to it. It had just started when I got there and, after about a quarter of an hour, I began to doubt that I was in the right place. There was talk of P.T.A. meetings, stopping smoking, feeling insecure at work, but not one word about alcohol or recovery through our program. The talk went on and never did get around to the kind of sharing that connects life experience to the Steps, so I left. I've had twenty-two years of sobriety so I could let go of my resentment. But there was a time when missing the spiritual 'fix' I've grown to expect from meetings would have been quite disturbing."

Rex M., of Jackson, Michigan, who celebrated twenty-eight years in A.A. on December 1, and who, at 80, says he doesn't "go much to A.A. meetings these days," tells us that he did go recently and "I didn't enjoy it. I felt uncomfortable." Why? The meeting's speaker, Rex says, used "the worst, filthy language—I don't mean cuss words we're all used to—but language way beyond *anyone's* bounds of politeness. When a woman asked him if he'd mind toning down his language, he told her off in another string of filthy words," Rex says. Rex tells us he doesn't plan to attend another meeting for a while.

Are these isolated complaints? Rare instances of sour grapes? Unfortunately, they are not. In fact, they seem to be cropping up in many segments of our Fellowship. Oldtimers have gone underground; there's a sense that

we're losing some of our conviction regarding our primary purpose; that the special quality of our A.A. meetings is deteriorating; that individual needs are seen as more pressing than the good of the whole; that some A.A.s are breaking their anonymity at a public level. So we're asking ourselves: are these expressions of concern, even alarm, typical reflections of stresses and strains that any living organization undergoes during changing times? Or do they reflect a genuine erosion of our collective and individual understanding of A.A.'s Traditions and Steps?—an erosion so seemingly pervasive that it appears to be undermining our Fellowship's foundation, its primary purpose, its unity.

Are we losing that all-important element of A.A. unity that our co-founder, Bill W., stressed over and over? Are we individual A.A.s forgetting one of our most important legacies: *Our common welfare comes first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity?* Put another way, are we losing our grasp of what Bill called the "sacrificial character of our life together" (*A.A. Comes of Age*, p. 97) by putting our individual needs above the common good?

Realistically, the times *are* changing; they always do. Every thriving association worthy of that description wishes, and must, adapt to change, aiming for flexibility



This old caboose, in the backyard of railroad buff and former delegate Jim D., is the meeting place of the Dryden Group's Sunday night meeting in Harford, New York.

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about things that can be let go of, but resistant to what could destroy its most valuable ideals. No one understood this better than Bill, who frequently talked of A.A.'s early trials and errors, of how the challenges themselves became a vehicle for learning, and how those experiences eventually were filtered through the group conscience to become our Twelve Traditions. In discussing changes and challenges Bill ceaselessly spoke of tolerance, always emphasizing the spirit, rather than the letter of the law. But Bill placed A.A. unity above all else; without it the Fellowship falls apart.

Looking toward the future—*i.e.*, our present—he wrote: “Clearly, our first duty to A.A.’s future is to maintain in full strength what we now have. Only the most vigilant caretaking can assure this. Never should we be lulled into complacent self-satisfaction by the wide acclaim and success that are everywhere ours. This is the subtle temptation which could render us stagnant today, perchance disintegrate us tomorrow. We have always rallied to meet and transcend failure and crisis. Problems have been our stimulants. How well, though, shall we be able to meet the problems of success?” (*As Bill Sees It*, p. 207)

How vigilant *are* we? Have we been lulled into “complacent self-satisfaction”? How well *are* we meeting “the problems of success”? Ironically, the rich mix of our ever-growing membership points both to the power of A.A.’s attraction *and* to that perceived pull from within against unity which so many are experiencing. “There’s been an explosion of new members,” Terry says, in describing the groups she attends. “At most meetings I go to, the majority of people attending are newcomers who don’t yet have a grasp of the program.”

Have we become lax about our primary purpose? “Listen, we’re a living, dynamic Fellowship, in a living, dynamic society,” Tommy H., former Eastern Canada regional trustee, says: “If I go to a meeting and I’ve got a problem with my father, my boss—all those things we’ve *always* discussed—unless I scrutinize those problems through my experience with my fundamental alcoholism and the Twelve Steps of recovery, I’m renegeing on the Fellowship’s primary purpose.” The changing times have certainly put a new face on membership,

he explains—one-third of whom are presently under age thirty-one, “and forty-six percent of them come into A.A. with problems of alcohol and other drugs. As long as we continue with our basic attitude being that alcohol is our primary concern—fine. And as long as we apply our Traditions realistically in light of our membership as it exists today, I’m not worried,” Tommy says.

Oldtimers. What’s happened to them? Have they been driven away by group discussions that seem to them to be less and less A.A. oriented? Or have they themselves lost their sense of responsibility toward the whole of A.A.? “Oldtimers seem to go to oldtimers’ meetings,” Terry says. “A few of them came to my group and when they did, you could really hear program and it was great. But after a while they stayed away. I heard one say: ‘I’m not getting anything out of this, I won’t come anymore.’ And I can understand why they leave. A.A. is *not* therapy, it’s a life-saving program, a healing. To turn things around, I think oldtimers have to stick around and the chairman should make it clear that we should stick with the A.A. literature and follow the A.A. format.”

Anonymity breaks. Each new member of A.A. needs time to fully grasp why Bill said of anonymity, “In my belief, the entire future of our Fellowship, hangs upon this vital principle.” (*A.A. Comes of Age*, p. 131) No one better understood that spirit, Bill wrote, than the nationally-prominent, show business Texas lady, whose manager couldn’t understand why she wouldn’t tell the world that she had joined A.A. “It would make terrific publicity,” the manager said. “Temporarily,” she replied. “A.A. can’t be run like show business,” she said. “A.A. saved my life and my career. Therefore the future welfare of Alcoholics Anonymous is more important to me than any publicity that I could get as an A.A. member.” (*ibid*, p. 135)

Just ‘Being There’ Can Carry the A.A. Message

A.A. member David R., who serves as a pastoral counselor in Cochabamba, Bolivia, shares an experience that brought home an important truth: Just being there for an alcoholic can carry the message more powerfully than words.

“Recently,” David writes, “one of our A.A.s, whom I’ll call Raul, had a slip and got into a fight with a bottle-wielding fellow who blinded him in one eye. During Raul’s convalescence, I visited him at home and found him very down. I was at a loss for words and mainly sat there quietly. Soon another A.A. friend came by who also had lost the sight of an eye, so I left the

two of them alone to share their common experience.”

Some weeks later, David says, “I met Raul at a meeting. He thanked me profusely for the visit—and I was surprised, because I felt I hadn’t done anything. Only later did I realize that the spoken message wasn’t too important. The real message was conveyed simply by my presence at his bedside.”

Upon reflection, David adds, “I feel sure the Higher Power sent that friend to help Raul through his deep depression. The man has gotten along nicely with one eye for a number of years, and the results of his shared experience are beautiful to see. It’s A.A. sharing at another level.

“Today Raul is sober and dealing well with his loss, thanks to the way of the Twelve Steps. I see this as a kind of death followed by rebirth. It is amazing how often we are privileged to see this happen in our own lives and in the lives of those we touch at A.A. meetings.”

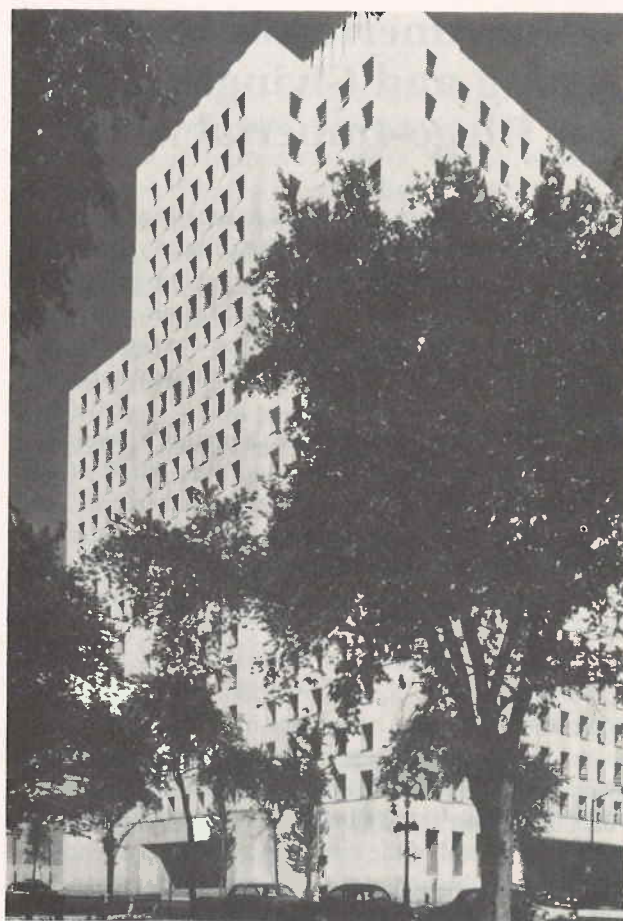
General Service Office Prepares to Move Uptown Early in 1992

After 20 years at its present location in midtown Manhattan, the General Service Office is on the move. Early in 1992, the entire A.A. World Services and Grapevine operations will relocate to new quarters overlooking the Hudson River at 475 Riverside Drive, at 120th Street.

“In our present facility,” says G.S.O.’s general manager, Wayne P., “we are sprawled over five floors. This move will allow us to put all A.A.W.S. and Grapevine operations on just one-and-a-half contiguous floors that provide more usable space than we have now—and at roughly half the rent.”

The 30-year-old 19-story structure, sheathed in Alabama limestone, is run on a nonprofit basis, with the rent divided proportionately among the tenants. The eclectic grouping includes organizations ranging from the Academy of Political Science, Beirut University College to the Foundation for American/Chinese Cultural Exchange. Other tenants are the World Council of Churches and the Federation of Jewish Men’s Clubs, along with a variety of other not-for-profit organizations.

Wayne points out that “the new offices are in the heart of Columbia University, just a few miles north of the theater district. We’re close to the action and excitement of midtown, yet removed from its frenetic hustle and bustle. The surrounding neighborhood is generally peaceful and serene. Accessibility is easy by bus, subway and car; parking is not a problem and the building is fully accessible to handicapped persons.”



A.A. visitors will enjoy not only the unobstructed view of the Hudson River but the amenities the building offers. The basement cafeteria, and the slightly pricier buffet dining room on the main floor, are open to all, as is the gift shop, which carries reasonably priced items from around the world. Also of interest is the oak-paneled Treasure Room, which houses visiting art exhibits throughout the year.

According to G.S.O. services director Tom J., “the offices will be constructed to maximize use of space, increase productivity and efficiency, and allow for flexibility. The office files, instead of being on the far side of the building or on another floor as they are now, will be easily accessible to staff members. It is expected to greatly enhance our ability to serve the Fellowship and to continue fulfilling our primary purpose: to carry the A.A. message to suffering alcoholics everywhere.”

Regional Forum Date Change

The new dates for the West Central Regional Forum are August 2–4, 1991, at the Holiday Inn Central, Omaha, Nebraska. This Forum was previously announced for July 12–14. Please adjust your calendars accordingly.

Native Americans Are Getting and Giving Help in San Diego-Imperial Area

Four years ago, there were no A.A. meetings for Native North Americans on any of the half-dozen reservations dotting the San Diego-Imperial Area in southern California. Today six autonomous groups are alive and well on five of the reservations. How they came to be, says past-delegate Larry N., "is the work of many hands and hearts.

"In 1987, the General Service Conference's emphasis on providing special literature and other kinds of help for Native Americans got some of us galvanized," says Larry. "First, we formed an ad hoc arm of the area assembly to investigate how we might effectively connect with the Native American population both on and off the reservations.

"Next, district committee member Scott S. and members of the ad hoc committee met several times with Doug and Diane W., a Native American couple living on the Rincon Reservation. After struggling for years to reach out to their community, with no tangible success other than their own sobriety, they were discouraged. Initially skeptical of the visiting A.A.s' 'good intentions,' they soon brightened at the realization that our people could be counted on absolutely for the long-needed support."

The ad hoc committee further identified several issues and courses of action:

1. Encourage support of the A.A. Traditions, primarily through emphasis on sponsorship. Be aware that A.A. meetings on local reservations have failed in the past, possibly because of implied affiliation with government-supported agencies.
2. Understand that groups on reservations should be started and run autonomously by Native American members living on the reservation.
3. Maintain total credibility and responsibility, especially in view of the pervasive confusion and lack of trust. When a commitment is made, it should be kept.
4. Recommend an increase in the C.P.C. committee's presentations about A.A. (what we do and don't do) to local tribal councils, treatment and correctional facilities' staff, court personnel, and other professionals.
5. Facilitate meetings starting up in new locations and build a list of A.A. volunteers willing to act as sponsors.

Even in the beginning, Larry says, "the ad hoc committee meetings were well attended. Those first meetings on the Rincon Reservation were inspirational and exciting; and the group became immediately self-supporting through its own contributions. By September 1988, word of its success had traveled, and a second

group was started on the neighboring La Jolla Reservation. Within several months, two more reservations—Manzanita and Barona—followed suit, then two more. There's still much to be done, but we're finally on our way, thanks to the efforts of many dedicated A.A.s."

Describing her own experience in recovery and service, Della K., a Native American member of the Rincon Group, says she spent her first year in A.A. "sitting in the back of the room." She "arrived late, left early, and was afraid to speak up." Gradually, she overcame her shyness and began to share. When the group elected her secretary she made a commitment to attend every meeting for a full year. "There were many nights when my only companion was the coffee pot," she remembers. "Then one person came, and another and another. Soon we had enough members for me to rotate out of office."

Sunny V., another Native American member of the Rincon Group, lives off the reservation. She says that going to meetings on the reservation has brought "greater identification and spiritual meaning" to her recovery in A.A. For her, alcoholism is a family illness. "My late grandmother joined A.A. in the 1950s," she explains, "and she died a sober woman. She taught me that for every ill known to mankind, there's something the Creator has ready to heal you. She told me, 'If you step in poison oak, you'll see that the Creator has placed a vine with medicinal properties nearby. If a rattlesnake bites, look around and you'll see a healing kind of cactus not far away.' I know now that the same holds true for the disease of alcoholism. When I needed help, A.A. was there for me, to help me heal."

Canadian A.A.s Cross Seven Language Barriers To Carry the Message

In Canada's cold and rugged Northwest Territory, which spans more than a million square miles, carrying the A.A. message to the area's Native North Americans is difficult at best. The challenge has been compounded by the dearth of A.A. literature available in the seven different languages these often isolated people speak.

The picture is changing, thanks to some determined A.A.s in the Yellowknife area. At the Western Canada Regional Forum last May, relates district committee member Bob P., "Finding ways to surmount the language barriers was a recurring theme. During a meeting held at the close of the Forum, we decided to gather all known Native American translations of A.A. literature, confirm their accuracy, and build a file that's easily accessible to A.A. members. Toward this end, we have formed a translation committee that works hand-in-

glove with A.A.'s General Service Office."

A.A.s throughout the Northwest Territory have been encouraged to send copies of any and all translations—either written or on audio cassettes—to the new committee, Bob reports. Each translation is labeled in English, specifying the title of the A.A. book, pamphlet or other literature as well as the name of the Native American language it is written or spoken in.

Looking ahead, Bob says, "When the time seems right—for instance, when the Steps, Traditions and Preamble and perhaps the first part of Chapter Five of the Big Book are in distribution—we hope to expand our store of A.A. literature translations for the thousands of alcoholic Native Americans here who need our help."

The Yellowknife Area Translation Committee welcomes input. Write to Regional Forums Desk at G.S.O.

Our Friend, Jan W.

On November 2nd, as the Colorado Area was gathering for their election assembly, Jan W. (Southwest U.S. regional trustee) and her husband Louis, were en route to join these A.A. friends. Outside of Farmington, New Mexico, a two-car accident took Jan's life and seriously injured Louis.

The shocking news spread to the Colorado Assembly, on to G.S.O., the region she served and passed rapidly throughout the U.S. and Canadian network of friends. As Jan's friends bowed in grief, in the typical A.A. way, they began to share quietly about the enriching legacy of love she brought to everything she did. Jan gave us a unique and enthusiastic dedication throughout her years of sobriety and service.

As she had since her election as trustee in April 1987, Jan had been in New York the previous weekend and participated in the October board meetings, making this tragedy even more difficult for her friends on the General Service Board and among the G.S.O. staff.

Michael Alexander and Wayne P., General Service Board chairperson and G.S.O. general manager, respectively, joined Jan's family and friends for the funeral services in Midland, Texas on November 6th. Among those many friends were Ruth J., past Pacific U.S. regional trustee, and John King, Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee.

In the many remembrances expressing this huge loss were some from A.A. members who had struggled with past sadnesses. One member shared these thoughts of unknown origin:

"Her diminished size is in me, not in her;
and, just at the moment when someone at my side says,
'There, she's gone,' others' eyes are watching her coming
and other voices are ready to take up the glad shout,
'There she comes!'"

New From G.S.O.

- 1990/91 A.A. Directories: Canadian (MD-2); Western U.S. (MD-3); Eastern U.S. (MD-4) \$1.35 each.
- "Tiempo Para Empezar a Vivir," Spanish version of the pamphlet "Time to Start Living," (SS-77) 50¢.
- 1990 Final Conference Report, in Spanish, *Informe Final de la Conferencia* (SS-32) \$2.00. The Conference Report is also available in French, write: Le Service des Publications Francaises des A.A. du Quebec, 230, Henri-Bourassa Blvd., East, Suite 100, Montreal, Quebec, Canada H3L 1B8.
- "A.A. Membership Survey" summarizes the findings of the 1989 membership in the U.S. and Canada. (P-48) 15¢.
- Pocket-folder for A.A. pamphlets, useful for health fairs, exhibits, P.I. and C.P.C. work, now available in pack of 20 for \$10.00 (M-54)

Note: Foreign-language literature is now included on page 12 of the Winter 1991 Literature Catalog.

Toronto Area Finds Our Traditions are the Solution

The New Anchor Group in Scarborough, Ontario, Canada, is the first group in the area to hold weekly meetings on the Twelve Traditions—and they are catching on.

"Last year," says general service representative Bob C., "our group decided to change our Big Book Tuesday discussion meeting to a Traditions meeting. There was a general feeling that we were getting away from what A.A. is all about and that a regular Traditions meeting would set us back on course. Now we have three meetings each Tuesday night in separate rooms—beginners, Step and Traditions."

The group further decided to start each Traditions meeting with a reading of a "preamble" distilled from writings in *A.A. Comes of Age* (mainly from pp. 96-97). It states: "The Traditions are the distilled experience of our past and we rely on them to carry us in unity through the challenges and dangers the future might bring.

"The Traditions ask each of us to lay aside pride and resentment. They ask for personal as well as group sacrifice. They ask us to never use the A.A. name in any quest for personal power, distinction or money. They ask that every individual, every group in every area set aside all desires, ambitions and untoward actions that could bring serious divisions among us or lose for us the confidence of the world at large."

Member Pat O'B., a founder of the 11-year-old New Anchor Group, remembers that from the beginning, the group has been conscious of the importance of general

service. "The Traditions were adopted by A.A.'s First International Convention, in Cleveland in 1950," he relates, "and I was fortunate in having a mentor who made me realize that they are as necessary to the survival of the group as the Steps are to our personal recovery."

Pat notes that the appropriate chapter from *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* is read at each meeting, with members taking a turn if they so wish. "Most members bring along their own copies of the book," he notes, "but if they should forget, or if there's anyone else minus a book, that's okay. Our group has purchased 20 additional copies we keep on hand."

Pat explains that "one Tradition is discussed each week; when we finish Tradition Twelve, we start over again. And before each discussion period ensues, we recite the Responsibility Declaration: 'When anyone, anywhere reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there, and for that, I am responsible.'"

Response to the weekly Traditions meeting has been "slow but steady," Pat reports, "and we've had some positive feedback. One chap who's been coming for the past four or five months told me that he has found the Traditions useful during his home group's business meetings. When some fellow members asked where he had come up with such good ideas, he told them to come to our Traditions meetings and they'd find out."

New Mexico Group Struggles Within Small Community

A group in rural New Mexico is leaning on A.A.'s collective experience to fulfill its primary purpose and, at the same time, to protect the anonymity of its members.

The Grateful Alcoholics Group, in El Valle, is respond-

ing to what secretary Claudia ("Casey") D. characterizes as a "desperate" need for help. "In this remote area settled by the Spaniards in the 1500s," she writes, "the population is probably under 700. It is fantastically beautiful, picturesque and historic, but remote and poor. The twin traditions of faith and spirituality are strong. So too is the tradition of alcoholism."

The fledgling group has received encouragement and help, Casey says, "both from oldtimers belonging to an A.A. group more than 30 miles away and from the central office in Santa Fe, 55 miles north of us. And a local priest, Father Bill, has given us unfailing support, assistance, and a wonderful room for our A.A. meetings. Additionally, others have started Al-Anon and Alateen meetings, and he is helping with those."

Starting the new group has not been "a smooth and easy process," Casey notes, "and it has given me more than an inkling of what the early days of A.A. were like. My gratitude and admiration for our co-founders, Bill W. and Dr. Bob, have taken quantum leaps."

The half-dozen or so regular members of the Grateful Alcoholics Group are grappling with some specific issues that Casey believes were the "cause of the 'death' of a meeting that started here several years ago. Anonymity was broken, gossip ran rampant, and quarrels broke out at meetings that were impossible to control." For more generations than anyone can count, she explains, "alcoholism has been considered a normal part of life, and many people can't comprehend the need for A.A. When a member of their family or community joins the Fellowship, they may joke, mock or actively interfere. Sometimes they even get violent.

"Consequently, we elected to hold closed meetings in order to protect our anonymity and prevent disruption. But this raised a serious question: How can we help others know we're available for help without threat to ourselves, our group and our anonymity?"

Part of the answer, Casey says, "lies in familiarizing the community about A.A. The more people know, the

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less suspicious and antagonistic they are, and the more receptive they become to our program." The Al-Anon meetings are helping, she reports. "All of them are open, so that those of us who are members of both A.A. and Al-Anon can assist in some way. We are making a special effort to reach out to our area's young people, who tend to feel shy and intimidated, and to make them welcome at both the A.A. and Al-Anon meetings. We hope to reach a number of young people through the Alateen group as well."

Although the road is often rocky and obscure, Casey acknowledges, "we are here, and we all feel inspired, blessed and committed to doing the best we can to make our meetings and A.A. a successful, growing part of our community. But we need help."

The Grateful Alcoholics Group seeks the shared experience of other A.A.s who have encountered similar problems. Please write to G.S.O.

Valerie S. Is a Welcome Addition to G.S.O. Staff

Transplanted Canadian Valerie S. joined the General Service Office staff last September, and assumed her first rotating assignment on the Correctional Facilities desk. "I already feel at home," she says, "thanks to the wonderful help I've had from everyone here."

Born and raised in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, Valerie is an alumna of the University of Toronto. Although she looks like today's graduate, she has a 27-year-old daughter she raised in Los Angeles with her husband. "When he died of a heart attack in 1975," she recalls, "my drinking escalated sharply." Coming from a family to which alcoholism was no stranger, she "attended Al-Anon faithfully. But it wasn't until June 1982, two years after relocating to New York City, that I gave up the bottle and committed to A.A."

As a member of the Seventy-Ninth Street Workshop, an A.A. group that holds 52 meetings weekly, Valerie plunged into group service early in her recovery. "I desperately wanted to drink," she says, "but more desperately, I wanted to stay sober. Between meetings, I'd scrub the bathrooms, the meeting room, the coffee pots—anything to occupy my time. Later I served as a group officer; and when the group lost its location, I was very involved in the finding, negotiating and inside construction of new quarters up the street. It was a wonderful time. I felt a part of the Fellowship, made close friendships, and came to believe what I'd heard so often at meetings: that 'in A.A., we no longer have to be alone.'"

To her new post at G.S.O., Valerie brings not only her A.A. service experience but years of working behind the scenes on feature films and commercials for television production companies. She also has taught English as a second language in Toronto.

"I like people and have interacted closely with them on various projects, something that translates well to my new assignment," Valerie observes. "Being able in my work life to communicate daily with people who are reaching out for help—one drunk talking to another—is an amazing privilege that I don't take for granted. If anything, it has increased my commitment to personal service."

Direct involvement with inmates, she notes, "has made me realize that what I contribute to the meeting basket means so much. Just a few extra dollars cover the cost of the Big Book, *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, and other literature we send free of charge to inmates upon their request. For many A.A.s behind walls, these are a lifeline to recovery in A.A."

In addition to her other responsibilities at G.S.O., Valerie is working with the trustees' Correctional Facilities Committee on a collection of correctional facilities' stories that have previously appeared in the Grapevine.

"There is so much to learn, so much to do," Valerie says. "I'm excited to be here. And when I walk into the reception area and see A.A. members from all over coming to visit or pick up literature for their groups, it's a constant reminder of the healing power of service."

Home-Baked Birthday Cakes Sweeten Group's Commitment to Self-Support

Members of the small Deer Valley West Group in Glendale, Arizona, have found a delicious way to practice A.A.'s Seventh Tradition. Instead of buying cakes for anniversary celebrations, they bake them, thus saving an average \$20 per cake. The savings are then forwarded as a group contribution in the celebrant's name either to the area assembly, intergroup, or G.S.O.

"Whenever one of our 18 members has an A.A. birthday," explains general service representative Tom D., "another member volunteers to bake the cake and provide the plates, forks and lemonade. The men are as involved as the women and everyone gets a kick out of the whole thing. When it comes to decorating the cakes, our originality makes up for any lack of artistry."

"Waiving reimbursement, we have agreed instead to regard this as a Seventh Tradition commitment to support A.A. services. Our current agenda calls for two

birthday contributions to intergroup, one to the area assembly, and one to G.S.O.”

Each contribution is accompanied by a letter announcing the celebrant's A.A. birthday and number of years sober. After describing the group's philosophy about anniversaries, the group's letter concludes, “Our group conscience has decided that money saved by baking our own cakes would be better spent if used to support the A.A. support system. We as a group therefore ask you to join in our celebration by accepting this contribution in (the celebrant's) name to help other alcoholics.”

The “cake-bake” idea is a welcome group expansion on the long-standing A.A. “Birthday Plan,” whereby many individual members, at the time of their anniversaries, voluntarily contribute a dollar or two for each year of their sobriety to G.S.O. for worldwide A.A. services. “We have found,” Tom notes, “that our plan is not only simple but workable, because it stretches our limited funds beyond the necessary obligations of rent, literature and coffee, and puts them to use in helping other alcoholics.”

P.I.

P.I. Outreach Begins At Home, Inside A.A.

Experience has shown that there are no short cuts in Public Information work. Efforts to educate the community about A.A. can succeed only when backed by groups and their members who understand our Traditions and the safeguards they provide for the Fellowship as a whole.

Taking this realization to heart, members of Eastern Massachusetts' General Service Committee/Boston Central Service Joint Public Information Committee have stepped up communication with area groups. A case in point is the way they recently handled a rash of local anonymity breaks.

Not content simply with its standard practice of contacting the newspapers or radio/TV stations that carried the breaks, the joint committee directed a mailing to all A.A. group secretaries, asking them to read an attached letter during “the regular meeting, not just at a business meeting.” Additionally, it suggested that “you not read this during the usual time for the secretary's report. Instead, consider setting aside a few minutes right after the opening, or just before the close, of the meeting. . . . You may wish to make copies of the letter to have available in case members want to read

it themselves later.”

In the letter, which was addressed to “Dear Fellow A.A.s,” the committee detailed its concern about the anonymity breaks, explaining that some of the A.A.s involved “have been relatively unknown to the public, and have offered their opinions, as A.A. members, on such issues as drunk driving laws, zoning ordinances, and alcohol and drug treatment programs. Others, better known for personal or professional achievements, have revealed their A.A. membership in the course of their public lives.”

The letter included quotes on the importance of anonymity from the writings of Bill W. and from *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*. “As members of the general public, especially the press, become more interested in our Fellowship,” it stressed, “we must each assume more responsibility for protecting our ‘greatest safeguard.’ It is not the responsibility of non-A.A.s to adhere to our Traditions; that responsibility lies squarely with each one of us.” In conclusion, the letter urged members to ask their group's general service representative about “any questions regarding our Tradition of anonymity.” It also invited them to attend monthly meetings of the Eastern Massachusetts P.I. Committee.

Leaving no stone unturned, the committee, in its cover note to group secretaries, suggested: “If your group wishes to discuss the issues raised in this letter, a member of the P.I. committee would be glad to attend a business meeting to provide more information.”

C.P.C.

A.A. and EAP

The pamphlet “A.A. and Employee Assistance Programs,” a revision of the title “A.A. and Occupational Alcoholism Programs,” is now available. This four-page piece is especially useful in aiding C.P.C. committee members in making presentations to professional organizations. (P-54, .08 ea., quantity discounts available.)

Through the cooperation of employee assistance programs (EAP) many A.A.s are sober today. This program, which developed in the workplace, may have evolved from Chapter Ten, “To Employers,” of the Big Book, which gave early employee assistance programs guidance. A.A.'s history reports that around 1939 a director of a large company in Delaware heard that a bunch of alcoholics were meeting in Baltimore. The director got to know these A.A.s and referred some of his drinking employees to the group. Then he invited

A.A. co-founder Bill W. to come to the company and talk to the board of directors about Alcoholics Anonymous. Today, fifty years later, A.A. continues to be an important resource for employee assistance programs.

This pamphlet outlines how A.A. can help professional and government organizations. It points out that A.A. welcomes the opportunity to:

- Meet with union, management, medical, social services, human resources and EAP professionals to discuss ways A.A. can cooperate.
- Conduct employee meetings to explain the A.A. program of recovery.
- Take employees with a drinking problem to A.A. meetings.
- Provide information on nearby A.A. groups, through meeting lists and contacts.
- Offer a tabletop exhibit about Alcoholics Anonymous at an employee health fair.
- Offer to take any professional in a company or agency to open A.A. meetings.

Frequently, C.P.C. committee members are invited to various companies to make presentations on A.A., provide literature, meeting lists and local contacts, and show videos explaining what A.A. can and cannot do.

A.A. is a twenty-four hour program—and a three-hundred and sixty-five day resource for employee assistance programs.

Treatment Facilities

Convention Workshop Focuses On 'Bridging the Gap'

"Bridging the Gap from Treatment into A.A." was the focus of a spirited workshop held during the Fellowship's International Convention in Seattle, Washington last July. "In a nutshell," said Dennis C. of Albuquerque, New Mexico, one of the three former treatment facilities committee chairpersons who spoke at the workshop, "we make ourselves available to the patients or clients of a treatment center to call them on the date of their release and take them to an A.A. meeting."

Dennis pointed out that "bridging the gap is not the same as a temporary sponsorship program, which may be initiated by the treatment center, must have its permission, and usually begins while the alcoholic is still there. We consider ourselves temporary contacts, no more no less, and leave it up to the newcomers to find their own sponsors."

It is very important, he said, "to make contact within a few hours after patients' release, since this can make

the difference between their staying sober or picking up a drink. So our work begins early on. At A.A. meetings inside the treatment facilities, we make a brief announcement telling how the temporary contact program works. 'At your request,' we explain in part, 'we will have an A.A. member call you at home on the day of your release. This is strictly voluntary on your part. We are in no way affiliated with any treatment facility or organization other than Alcoholics Anonymous.'

"If the alcoholics express interest, we ask them to fill out a simple card with their name, address, phone number, release date and age. Having them provide their own vital statistics assures us that they are the ones requesting contact, not the treatment center. Also, the information helps us to match men with men and women with women, and to match people in the same approximate age group."

The New Mexico Bridging the Gap program was initially patterned after the Oklahoma plan, which took off in the early 1980s. And, related Oklahoma City's Sally J. at the workshop, her area got the idea after listening to a New Jersey delegate to the General Service Conference. "His people were concerned because they were not reaching nearly enough of the alcoholics coming out of treatment centers; and, of course, so were we."

The power of the shared experience took effect. Forming a committee, the Oklahomans went into action. Sally attributes much of the program's present success to a simple "Bridging the Gap" pamphlet, printed by the Oklahoma Area Committee, explaining what A.A. is and is not, and what temporary contact is all about. "Within one year after starting," she told workshop attendees, "we became a funded area committee, operating in seven districts across the state. This involves a lot of A.A.s in Twelfth-Step work."

Like Sally and Dennis, speaker Terry L. of Bloomington, Minnesota, stressed the importance of Bridging the Gap programs. "I'll tell you what I think the gap is," he said, "from two standpoints: One is the alcoholics coming out of centers who need our assistance but may be confused about where to go. Without a helping hand, the alcoholics sometimes wind up at Narcotics Anonymous meetings and the drug addicts at A.A. meetings, if indeed they get to any meetings at all."

"At the other end of the spectrum are the many A.A.s who have no idea what a Twelfth-Step call is. They think sitting in an A.A. meeting once a week and sharing their experiences of the past week is 'Twelfth-Stepping,' but it's not—that's fellowship and helping each other. Twelfth-Step work is helping a drunk who doesn't know how to get and stay sober."

Noting that any problems with treatment facilities often stem from lack of information, Terry emphasized the need to maintain close contact with staff. "In the Southern Minnesota area," he said, "we make available to treatment facilities what we call an A.A. information

presentation. It allows us to tell the people who are talking to our drunks about A.A.'s singleness of purpose. Many treatment professionals don't know or understand that, and most of them are very interested."

Ideally, Terry suggested, "local Bridging the Gap programs will someday have a regional, then worldwide hookup. Recently, I received two letters of inquiry from Australia, and it's something a lot of people are thinking about. Imagine having the ability to arrange a temporary contact anywhere in the world for any alcoholic needing it. Wouldn't that be something?"

'We' Can Do What 'I' Can't Do Alone

A.A. sharing has a way of turning despair into hope for the alcoholic who is receptive to help. One such is Troy, a patient in a Massachusetts treatment facility. His willingness to reach out and share is what many members have found to be the bedrock of recovery.

In a letter to G.S.O., Troy writes, "At our A.A. speaker meetings, which I've attended every Wednesday night since I've been here, I've met some really great people who understand what I'm going through. I'm about to ask one of them to be my sponsor."

Continuing, he says, "I've enjoyed reading of the progress that others have made in the pages of the Big Book, and I want you to know what it has meant to me, along with the meetings and the people. I know I can make it with all the help and support that's out there. I realize I don't have to slowly kill myself—as I have been doing—now that I no longer feel alone."

Correctional Facilities

Correspondence Service —A Vital Link

Many A.A.s are unaware of the existence of the Corrections Correspondence Service (C.C.S.), which is one of the most positive Twelfth-Step ways for members to carry the message to inmates on a one-to-one basis.

At this time, more than 2,000 A.A.s active in their local groups are participating in this rewarding program of the General Service Office. Relates Al M., of Ontario, California: "I started corresponding in 1979. Sober seven

years, I'd been deeply depressed because of a severe physical ailment contracted during my years on Skid Row and knew my life needed another 180-degree turn. I wrote those first letters in tears, and it worked for me. I knew that someone somewhere needed me regardless of how sick I was. Taking part in the Correspondence Service has played a major part in my staying sober."

C.C.S. is simple to join: Write to the Correctional Facilities Desk, P.O. Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, N.Y. 10163. G.S.O. sends the name and address of the inmate desiring correspondence to the outside A.A., who then initiates the first contact. Some members prefer to use their home group's address or P.O. box, rather than their home address, for receiving mail.

Out of the accumulated experience of A.A.s participating in C.C.S., guidelines for both inmates and outside A.A.s have been developed by G.S.O. that are available for the asking. Among other things, these suggest that in their opening letter, writers qualify briefly as recovering alcoholics. The emphasis should be on sharing sobriety and sobriety only; and it has been found to be best for all concerned to steer clear of emotional or romantic involvements. Most importantly, in the spirit of A.A.'s Twelfth Tradition, anonymity should be respected at all times.

The guidelines for corresponding inmates further suggest that they answer all incoming C.C.S. letters or else request to be removed from the list. They are also asked to notify both G.S.O. and their A.A. correspondents upon release or transfer to another facility.

In their letters, outside members are urged to let inmates know that they are not alone; and that corresponding, like all forms of sharing in A.A., helps the A.A. writer on the outside as much as the one within. They are further urged to encourage "inside" A.A. group activity, and to stress the importance of attending that first meeting on the day the inmate leaves confinement. Finally, the guidelines suggest that gifts to inmates take the form of A.A. books and literature or Grapevine material. (Before sending, check the facility's regulations. Many institutions permit inmates to receive only literature sent directly from the publishers.)

Valerie S., G.S.O. staff member on the C.F. desk, reports that one outside A.A. corresponded with an inmate in Florida for more than a year. While on vacation, he drove 250 miles to visit the inmate and take him a copy of the Big Book. Another member, who has contacted almost every inmate listed in the C.C.S. program, says, "I hope my writing has helped someone else, but for sure it helps me most of all."

For inmates, correspondence may provide their only opportunity to share experience, strength and hope with another A.A. This is particularly true of the many inmates who are on a waiting list to attend A.A. meetings inside; or who are in protective custody or solitary confinement and cannot go to meetings.

Calendar of Events

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

February

- 1-3 — *Casa Grande, Arizona*. Area Assembly & Sharing Session. Write: Ch., Box 828, Casa Grande, AZ 85222
- 1-3 — *Universal City, California*. 16th Annual San Fernando Valley Conv. Write: Ch., Box 44416, Panorama City, CA 91412-0416
- 1-3 — *Schaumburg, Illinois*. ISCYPAA. Write: Ch., Box 5099, Palatine, IL 60067
- 1-3 — *Salem, Oregon*. Soberfest. Write: Ch., Box 5167, Salem, OR 97304
- 1-3 — *Brugge, Belgium*. North Sea Conv. (English-speaking). Write: Sec., Box 3, B.8000, Brugge 1, Belgium
- 1-3 — *Berchtesgaben, Germany*. Spirituality Weekend. Write: Ch., S & S Co., 711th MI Bn., Cmr 32, APO NY 09458
- 1-3 — *Cagayan de Oro City, Philippines*. Ninth National Conv. Write: Ch., Box 268, 9000 Cagayan de Oro City, Philippines
- 1-3 — *Nanaimo, British Columbia, Canada*. 23rd Annual Rally. Write: Ch., 779 Townsite Rd., Nanaimo, BC V9S 1L6
- 1-3 — *Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada*. District 5 Mid-Winter Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 1435, Woodstock, NB E0J 2B0
- 2-3 — *Brawley, California*. Imperial Valley Roundup. Write: Ch., 860 Brentwood, Holtville, CA 92250
- 2-3 — *Kindersley, Saskatchewan, Canada*. 20th Annual Roundup. Write: Ch., #4 O'Connor Crt., Kindersley, SK S0L 1S1
- 7-10 — *Ft. Walton Beach, Florida*. Emerald Coast Jamboree. Write: Ch., Box 875, Ft. Walton Beach, FL 32549
- 8-10 — *San Jose, California*. ACYPAA Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 700126, San Jose, CA 95170-0126
- 9-11 — *Elliot Lake, Ontario, Canada*. Ninth Annual Weekend Conf. Write: Ch., 4 Hemlock Place, Elliot Lake, ON P5A 2H7
- 14-17 — *Orlando, Florida*. 27th National Women's Conf. Write: Ch., Box 940254, Maitland, FL 32794-0254
- 14-17 — *Pine Mountain, Georgia*. Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 12455, Columbus, GA 31907
- 15-16 — *Greeley, Colorado*. 40th Annual Greeley Stampede. Write: Ch., 2644 11th Avenue #D, Greeley, CO 80631
- 15-17 — *Montgomery, Alabama*. 47th Anniversary & 10th Heart of Dixie Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 6043, Montgomery, AL 36106
- 15-17 — *North Little Rock, Arkansas*. Ninth Annual District 9 Conv. Write: Tr., Box

- 6641, Sherwood, AR 72116
- 15-17 — *Hagerstown, Maryland*. MCYPAA Sixth Annual Fall Conf. Write: Ch., Box 19821, Baltimore, MD 21225
- 15-17 — *Las Vegas, Nevada*. 12th Young People's Roundup. Write: Ch., 5612 Churchill, Las Vegas, NV 89107
- 15-17 — *Syracuse, New York*. Fourth Annual Salt City Mid-Winter Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 871, Syracuse, NY 13205
- 15-17 — *Afton, Oklahoma*. Four-State Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 2146, Joplin, MO 64803
- 15-17 — *El Paso, Texas*. 29th El Paso Jamboree. Write: Ch., Box 3115, El Paso, TX 79923
- 15-17 — *Virginia Beach, Virginia*. 15th Anniversary. Write: Ch., Box 9332, Virginia Beach, VA 23450
- 15-17 — *Dryden, Ontario, Canada*. 13th Roundup. Write: Ch., 150 Parkdale Rd., Dryden, ON P8N 1S2
- 15-18 — *New Bedford, Massachusetts*. Second S.E. Massachusetts Roundup. (sponsored by gay & lesbian members) Write: Ch., Box E-736, New Bedford, MA 02742-0736
- 16-17 — *San German, Puerto Rico*. Convention. Write: Ch., Box 497, San German, PR 00753
- 22-24 — *Burlington, Iowa*. Southeastern Iowa Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 188, Bonaparte, IA 52620
- 22-24 — *Lexington, Kentucky*. 40th State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 23, Lexington, KY 40501
- 22-24 — *Kings Island, Ohio*. Eighth S.W. Ohio Mini-Conference. Write: Ch., 710 Miami St., Waynesville, OH 45068
- 22-24 — *Chattanooga, Tennessee*. Ninth TCYPAA. Write: Ch., Box 8861, Chattanooga, TN 37411
- 22-24 — *Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada*. 24th Intergroup Roundup. Write: Ch., Box

Closed Meeting Topics From the Grapevine

For more detailed suggestions, see the pages noted.

February (page 19): 12&12; humor.
March (page 31): Responsibility; special interest exchange; cooperation not affiliation.

- 8878, Saskatoon, SK S7K 6S7
- 23-24 — *Suwanee (Atlanta), Georgia*. District 16 Weekend. Write: Ch., Box 1333, Norcross, GA 30091-1333
- 23-25 — *Colville, Washington*. Colville Valley Roundup. Write: Ch., 404½ N. Oak St., Colville, WA 99114
- 27-March 3 — *St. Simons Island, Georgia*. 29th St. Simons Island Weekend. Write: Ch., Box 892, Statesboro, GA 30458

March

- 1-3 — *Gulf Shores, Alabama*. Seventh District 19 Jubilee. Write: Ch., Box 1183, Foley, AL 36536
- 1-3 — *Tucson, Arizona*. Pacific Regional Service Assembly. Write: Ch., Box 40693, Tucson, AZ 85717
- 1-3 — *Albuquerque, New Mexico*. Third High Desert Soberfest. Write: Ch., Box 44096, Rio Rancho, NM 87174
- 1-3 — *Monticello, New York*. 18th Annual Fellowship Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 485, W. Haverstraw, NY 10993
- 1-3 — *Perrysburg, Ohio*. Ninth Annual NW

Planning a Future Event?

Please send your information on April, May or June events, two days or more, in time to reach G.S.O. by *February 10*, the calendar deadline for the April/May issue of *Box 4-5-9*.

For your convenience and ours — please type or print the information to be listed on the Bulletin Board page, and mail to us:

Date of event: from _____ to _____, 19____

Name of event: _____
Place (city, state or prov.): _____

For information, write: _____
(exact mailing address) _____

Contact phone # (for office use only): _____

Flip up this end of page — more events listed on reverse side

March (cont.)

- Ohio & SE Mich. Area Mini-Conference. Write: Ch., Box 401, Toledo, OH 43692
- 1-3 — *Eau Claire, Wisconsin*. Alano 12 Group 32nd Annual Banquet. Write: Ch., Box 292, Eau Claire, WI 54702-0292
- 1-3 — *St. Albert, Alberta, Canada*. 14th Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 22, Morinville, AB T0G 1P0
- 1-3 — *Victoria, British Columbia, Canada*. 40th Annual Rally. Write: Ch., 8-2020 Douglas St., Victoria, BC V8T 4L1
- 1-3 — *Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada*. 1991 Mid-Winter Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 414, D.M.P.S., Dartmouth, NS, B2Y 3Y5
- 8-10 — *Fresno, California*. 44th Annual Spring Conf. Write: Tr., 1046 Irving Street, San Francisco, CA 94122-2290
- 8-10 — *Cherry Hill, New Jersey*. 27th Annual Southern New Jersey General Service Conv. Write: Ch., Box 347, Pennsauken, NJ 08110
- 8-10 — *Amarillo, Texas*. Sixth Annual Top 'O Texas Oldtimers Reunion. Write: Ch., Box 9302, Amarillo, TX 79105
- 14-17 — *Albany, Georgia*. Big Book Seminar. Write: Ch., Box 1464, Tifton, GA 31793
- 14-17 — *Rock Hill, South Carolina*. 44th South Carolina Conv. Write: Ch., Box 2512, Rock Hill, SC 29732
- 15-17 — *Victorville, California*. Seventh Annual High Desert Conv. Write: Ch., Box 2890, Apple Valley, CA 92307

- 15-17 — *Calgary, Alberta, Canada*. Sixth Annual Roundup (presented by gay and lesbian members). Write: Ch., 40 Bankview Postal Outlet, Box 32009, Calgary, AB T2T 5X6
- 22-24 — *Effingham, Illinois*. Southern Area Spring Conf. Write: Ch., 1007 Edgar St., Effingham, IL 62401
- 22-24 — *French Lick, Indiana*. 38th Annual Indiana Conv. Write: Ch., Box 11171, Ft. Wayne, IN 48656
- 22-24 — *Red Deer, Alberta, Canada*. Area 78 Assembly. Write: Ch., 272 Southridge, Edmonton, AB T6H 4M9
- 29-31 — *Portland, Maine*. MCYPAA. Write: Ch., Box 7716, Portland, ME 04112
- 29-31 — *Reno, Nevada*. 20th Annual Reno Spring Festival. Write: Ch., Box 72, Reno, NV 89504
- 29-31 — *Cape Town, South Africa*. National Conv. Write: Ch., Box 2047, 8000 Cape Town, South Africa
- 29-April 1 — *Fremantle, Western Australia*. 28th National Conv. Write: Ch., GPO Box 6221, East Perth, Western Australia, 6004, Australia

April

- 5-7 — *Grand Forks, North Dakota*. Northern Spring Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 1262, Grand Forks, ND 58206-1262
- 5-7 — *Clarksburg, West Virginia*. Jackson's Mill Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 825, Clarksburg, WV 26302-0825

- 5-7 — *Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada*. Southern Alberta Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 212, Lethbridge, AB T1J 3Y5
- 5-7 — *Fort St. John, British Columbia, Canada*. 21st Annual Roundup. Write: Ch., #205-8804 86th St., Fort St. John, BC V1J 5L7
- 5-7 — *Kaiserslautern, West Germany*. Roundup. Write: Ch., 230 MP Co., Box 7623, APO, NY 09227
- 11-14 — *Palm Desert, California*. Fourth Greater Palm Springs Conv. Write: Ch., Box 3003, Palm Desert, CA 92261
- 12-14 — *Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*. Philadelphia Area Intergroup Roundup. Write: Ch., Room 309, 311 S. Juniper St., Philadelphia, PA 19107
- 12-14 — *Wichita, Kansas*. Spring Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 1814, Wichita, KS 67201
- 12-14 — *Eau Claire, Wisconsin*. Area 74 Spring Conf. Write: Tr., Box 615, Menomonie, WI 54751
- 12-14 — *Toronto, Ontario, Canada*. 41st Ontario Regional Conf. Write: Ch., 234 Eglinton Avenue East, Toronto, ON M4P 1K5
- 26-28 — *Lincoln, Nebraska*. The Spring Fling. Write: Ch., Box 30852, Lincoln, NE 68503
- 26-28 — *Banff, Alberta, Canada*. Banff Round Up. Write: Ch., Box 6744, Station D, Calgary, AB T2P 2E6
- 26-28 — *Nassau, Bahamas*. Bahamas Area First Annual Conv. Write: Ch., Box SS6089, Nassau, Bahamas
- 26-28 — *Dublin, Ireland*. 34th All-Ireland Conv. Write: Ch., GSO, 109 South Circular Road, Leonards Corner, Dublin 8, Ireland