

15th World Service Meeting

Thirty-nine delegates from 22 countries gathered in Auckland, New Zealand, October 4-8, 1998, for the 15th World Service Meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous. Many of the participants had traveled 20 to 25 hours to arrive, quite literally, on the other side of the world, but nothing could quench their energy, humor, and A.A. spirit as they plunged into a busy and productive four days.

The theme, "Service—Basic to Personal Recovery and A.A. Unity," opened the door to a rich and varied program of presentations, workshops and sharing sessions. For the first time, proceedings were translated into three languages, Spanish, Japanese and Polish.

Established in 1969, the WSM, which meets every two years, alternating between New York City and an overseas location, provides a forum in which delegates can share the experience, strength, and hope of their countries. Each participating country may send two delegates, and staff members of the U.S./Canada G.S.O. take care of arrangements and organization and provide committee support.

In between the biennial meetings, three zonal meetings (European Service Meeting, Meeting of the Americas, and the Asia-Oceania Service Meeting) include not only WSM countries but representatives from smaller or less developed service structures that are unable to get to the WSM because of financial or other considerations.

Reports from the zonal meetings are important parts of every World Service Meeting.

There are four committees: Agenda, Literature/Publishing, Policy/Admissions/Finance, and Working With Others. While committee actions are not binding upon any of the struc-

tures involved, they express a consensus of world experience and set forth guidelines for developing service structures to follow.

At the 15th meeting, committees made the following recommendations:

Agenda: The theme of the 16th WSM (to take place in New York City, October 22-26, 2000) will be "A.A.: Our Future Is Our Responsibility."

Policy/Admissions/Finance: Lowered delegate fees for the 16th meeting to encourage wider participation, and added that countries can contribute to the WSM over and above the fee; the committee also decided that it was not appropriate for the Online Intergroup of A.A to be part of the WSM.

Literature/Publishing: Recommended that a report on the status of the International Literature Fund be sent annually to delegates and country G.S.O.s, and reaffirmed the importance of protecting copyrights and licenses so that A.A. can continue to control its own literature and protect the integrity of the message.

Working With Others: Discussed working with professionals, correctional facilities, and treatment facilities.

More time than ever before was built in to the agenda for general sharing sessions, and the change paid off in full and heartfelt participation. Initially there was some hesitation, with many participants feeling isolated and

unique. Soon, though,

one delegate came

to the micro-

phone and

revealed some

problems

with the ser-

vice structure

in her coun-

try. After that

another dele-

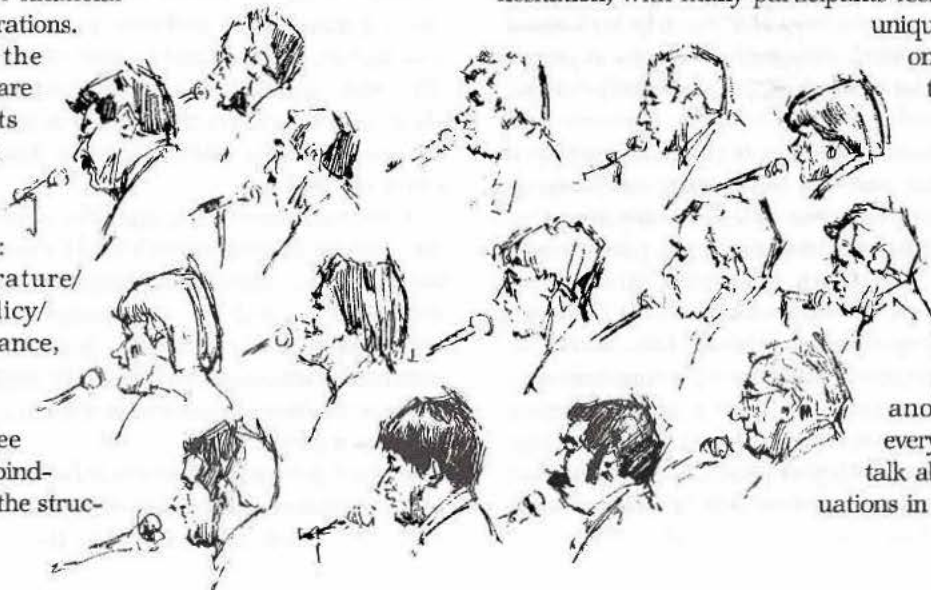
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Box 4-5-9 is published bimonthly by the General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115, © Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1999

Mail address: P.O. Box 459, Grand Central Station
New York, NY 10163

G.S.O.'s A.A. Web Site: www.alcoholics-anonymous.org

Subscriptions: Individual, \$3.50 per year; group, \$6.00 for each unit of 10 per year. Check—made payable to A.A.W.S., Inc.—should accompany order.

tries and benefits from the experience of countries that had found solutions. Differences in culture or extent of A.A. growth did not matter; there was an abundance of information to choose from, as each delegate did what every A.A. member is told to do: "take what you need, and leave the rest."

New Zealand's conference, board, host contact, and hospitality committee pitched in to make sure everyone felt welcome and had a memorable experience and local A.A. members took delegates and staff sightseeing and made sure they got to meetings.

Flights were met at the Auckland airport, even though many flights arrived at four or five o'clock in the morning, by cheerful A.A. members holding up signs that said "Welcome to the World Service Meeting." One group of participants had a driver who seemed a bit uncertain of the route, and confessed that it was her first trip to the airport on her own. It turned out that she had just 90 days of sobriety, and the trip into town became a mini-Twelfth Step call — it was anyone's guess who was most enthusiastic, the newcomer or the seasoned A.A.s.

Every World Service Meeting is characterized by a mix of the familiar and the unfamiliar, as delegates from widely varied cultures meet on common A.A. ground. A delightful surprise for some participants came when they were taken to a "toast meeting," at which one member's service job was to work a toaster and make sure everyone got a slice or two. Both new and familiar was the experience of delegates who attended a local meeting and met a young woman who had been bused there from a treatment program. It was quite a Twelfth Step experience as she listened amazed to sharing from fellow A.A. s from all over the world.

The Traditions are there for Unity, and only in A.A. would a body of unifying principles be observed in such a fascinating variety of ways. Kosei from Japan talked about the extreme importance of anonymity in his country, where members often take false names, like Jack Daniels or Johnny Walker. Without missing a beat his fellow delegate, Junji, came to the microphone and said, "Hi. My name is Tom, and I'm an alcoholic."

Nonalcoholics seem to get caught up in the spirit, too. At the opening dinner on Sunday night, the menu specified butter syrup on the dessert. It tasted a lot like butterscotch—but the hotel staff, not wanting to offend, had taken out the word "scotch." In the spirit of how others see us, the non-A.A. who handled taping was heard to remark, "I have never heard so many people take so long to repeat what they have just heard."

The closing meeting on Thursday afternoon featured a tribute from delegates to the U.S./ Canada G.S.O.'s outgoing general manager George D., who had served as co-chairman of the meeting, along with a closing presentation by Bill S., of the New Zealand General Service Conference. And, as always, the meeting closed with the Serenity Prayer, spoken in the 15 languages of the attending countries. A G.S.O. staff member attending her first WSM described that experience: "I've often heard that the closing of the World Service Meeting cannot be compared to any other experience, and of course I thought that was overly dramatic. But as the delegates lined up at the microphone and began to say the Serenity Prayer in their own languages, a hush came over the room. As we all joined hands and said the prayer together, I — and everyone else—began to cry."

Many of the participants were heard to say that this was the most relaxed and informal World Service Meeting of all. There was "a lightness of spirit and full participation, drunk to drunk, peer to peer." That spirit reached its peak when the four days came to an end Thursday night. Following the closing dinner, given by the host committee, there were native Maori singers and dancers who told the story of Aoteroa—the "land of the clouds."

But no one could let it end. The WSM staff coordinator, Richard B., commented: "And then came a surprise that I think no one will ever forget. After the formal program was finished, no one wanted the evening to end, and prodded by the urgings of Sveinn from Iceland, one attendee after another treated the audience to songs, jokes and stories, a spontaneous happening that can never be reproduced."

If the joy of living is what sobriety is all about, the 15th World Service Meeting was a powerful statement of the essence of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Experience of a WSM Interpreter

"When I attended my first A.A. meetings," reminisces Doug G. of Mountain View, California, "I discovered that even though they were talking in English, A.A. people communicated in a language of their own. So, while I'm fluent in Japanese and English, A.A. lingo wasn't part of my Japanese vocabulary, and I quickly began to create lists of all the A.A.-specific terminology I might need. I also printed out Japanese versions of the Steps, Traditions and Concepts."

These early exercises in understanding have served him well. Doug, an alternate district committee member of the California Northern Coastal Area, recently traveled to Auckland, New Zealand, where he served as interpreter for Junji, the Japanese delegate to A.A.'s 15th World Service Meeting.

"The guidelines stipulate," Doug explains, "that each delegate needs to have a working knowledge of English or Spanish; and while the Japan Service Office (J.S.O.) in Tokyo had several well-qualified A.A.s, none had the language skills required. Because my business frequently takes me to Japan, I've been fortunate in establishing rapport with the staff at J.S.O., where I often stop in for coffee and a chat. When the need for an interpreter arose, there I was, a volunteer at the ready for what I knew would be a priceless opportunity to be of service to Alcoholics Anonymous."

Back home in Northern California, at the August area meeting in Petaluma, Doug spoke of his coming service assignment. "In our area," he says, "we have four Spanish-speaking districts, and one of our bilingual members interprets the monthly meeting as well as the four assemblies, making them accessible to our Spanish-speaking D.C.M.s and general service representatives. At the area meeting I asked to borrow the wireless translation equipment we use in order to take it to Auckland. There was no objection, and I got the strong sense that everyone was excited and honored to think they were helping to carry the message, in some small way, halfway around the world. I was given advice by fellow bilingual members on how to interpret service meetings, making special note to keep lots of water handy and pace myself. The Spanish-speaking delegates would have several interpreters rotating every 20 to 30 minutes. I would be interpreting alone."

To help Doug prepare for the coming World Service Meeting, he relates, "Junji-san at J.S.O. was immensely helpful in reviewing my notes and adding vocabulary terms of his own. G.S.O. New York sent me the agenda, workshop topics and copies of the presentations and country reports so I could familiarize myself with the material in advance. This would later prove to be a huge

help in interpreting for Japanese delegate Junji.

Auspiciously, Doug says, his plane landed in Auckland on Saturday, October 3, "my 11th A.A. birthday. On Monday morning the work began," he says. "A special table was set up for me in the back of the room with a 'Japanese translator' sign on it. I was to spend 48 hours over the next four days here, so I quickly built my 'nest,' which included my laptop computer, translating equipment, headset for hearing the Spanish translation, extra batteries, notepad, Japanese-English Dictionary—and a large pitcher of water. My blood pressure rose a few points as I felt the responsibility of knowing that for Junji-san I was the sole interpreter of everything shared, discussed, debated and recommended at the World Service Meeting."

Sometimes, Doug notes, "my job got complicated. When our Spanish-speaking friends came to the mike, say, I would put on a second headset to listen to the English translation, then translate again to Japanese. If the Spanish/English interpreters missed something, I'd become lost and apologize to Junji-san. Periodically, delegates with unfamiliar accents would share and, despite their speaking in English, I didn't always understand what they were saying. I'd apologize again—I said '*sumimasen*' frequently during the five days of the meeting. But the language of the heart often supercedes words, and I'd watch Junji-san react to something said before I could translate. I just pray that any 'holes' in my vocabulary were filled with that language of the heart."

Throughout the busy week, Doug said "I saw a kind of sponsorship different from any I'd known before: country sponsorship. There are still many places in this world where the A.A. message of recovery hasn't arrived; or if it has, perhaps there's no intergroup office or General Service Conference structure to give it a foothold. Consequently many countries sponsor others to help them carry the A.A. message."

"For instance, Mexico sponsors Cuba, shipping in A.A. literature and helping to print a newsletter. Japan sponsors Korea, and Poland is sponsoring some of the former Eastern-block nations. New Zealand is trying to carry the message to many of the Pacific Island countries and territories, and France is Twelfth Stepping French-speaking countries of Africa. Around the world alcoholics are still dying, unaware that there is a remedy for their illness. So we've a lot of work to do, whether face-to-face or by supporting translations of literature and other A.A. World Service activities."

"For me the World Service Meeting dramatized the fact that in A.A. we each have a job to do. I was in Auckland to be a worker among workers, to help our Japanese delegate participate fully, without limitations. His role as a delegate was different from mine as just an interpreter, but I discovered that our love and passion for Alcoholics Anonymous were equally strong."

Request: Please Separate Mail to G.S.O.

Recently, newsletters received at the General Service Office have contained a generous contribution check and two Group Information Change forms.

We welcome and read area, district and central/intergroup office newsletters. However, these publications may stack up for a month before they are circulated throughout the G.S.O. and Grapevine offices. It would be easy to overlook a contribution, group information or other vital information.

Please remind members in your area to send contributions and group, district and area information changes to G.S.O. separate from more routine mailings.

Area Web Site Helps Canadians to Carry the Message

Now two years old, the B.C. Yukon Area Web site (<http://www.bcyukonaa.org>) has proved effective as a Public Information tool. Says Arnie G., who in January stepped down as chairman of the Web site committee that formerly functioned as an arm of the P.I. committee but now is an independent entity: "We already average close to 2,000 hits a month. The District pages get the highest number of hits, followed by Events. I receive e-mail complimenting us on our Web page from all over the world, and we've been contacted by people in remote parts of Alaska and South Africa. Last fall I was e-mailed by someone in San Francisco who planned on coming to British Columbia and was delighted to learn from our Web site about the Vancouver roundup in October."

He stresses that "even as the Web site is successfully fulfilling its purpose in helping to carry the A.A. message, it also serves as a unifying force. You can't imagine how many A.A.s in surrounding districts have worked together to make the Web site, particularly, the District pages, a reality. Everything has been accomplished by people reaching out and helping each other, which of course is the essence of Twelfth Step work."

The idea for the Web site germinated back in 1995. "Before being approved," recalls Arnie, "it was brought up at two assemblies. Emotions ran high during these discussions, both for and against having a site. Several people were fearful because they didn't really know what the Internet was. Others were concerned that

some D.C.M.s [district committee members] might receive information in a more timely fashion than others if the electronic media were used for purposes of dissemination."

But by January 1996 all signals were go. "In April," Arnie says, "a computer was brought to the assembly for demonstration of the Web site. That was when even the people who had adamantly opposed having one reversed their opinions upon seeing it for themselves. Ever since, support has run strong."

Besides Web pages carrying up-to-date district information and upcoming events, he relates, "the B.C. Yukon Area Web site features general information, about what A.A. is and how it works; Committee Reports, a section that includes job descriptions of all the steering committee positions; and links to G.S.O.'s Web site [www.alcoholics-anonymous.org], the Grapevine site [www.aagrapevine.org] and the Vancouver Intergroup. We did have a couple of other links but had to remove them because they in turn were linked to sites that might be considered inappropriate. We try to be careful about this, just as we are about protecting anonymity. As noted in the service piece the General Service Office compiled recently [Ten Frequently Asked Questions About A.A. Web Sites], we observe A.A.'s principles and Traditions on our Web site at all times."

As a part of the P.I. committee report at each area quarterly meeting, the Web site team, now headed by Hilmar E., includes a Web page write-up. Additionally, Arnie says, "one of us takes along a computer to demonstrate how the site works. We've found this to be a good practice because it allows people who don't have Internet access at home to see the Web site. It also generates a lot of interest. There are always one or two more districts that express a desire to join us on the site after each quarterly."

Now that their Web site is up and running well, the B.C. Yukon group is pleased to share its knowhow on the Internet frontier. "For me personally," Arnie says, "this project has opened up a whole new world of service in A.A. It gives me a tremendous sense of belonging and, as a dividend, I've met interesting, wonderful people. Like most of them, I feel that maybe what we're doing now will help to expand the ways in which A.A.'s message is carried—raising the level of hope and help for the suffering alcoholic another notch higher."

Note: A reminder to members posting Web sites and Web pages related to A.A.: Please bear in mind that these tools are part of a major public forum accessible to millions, that Traditions Eleven and Twelve, relating to anonymity, are as applicable to communication on the Internet as to press, radio, television and film.

So Why Go to The International Convention?

A.A.'s 65th birthday party will be held June 29-July 2, 2000, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. As it nears, Barbara C. of Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, remembers back to the last International Convention in 1995 in San Diego, California. Right afterward, she says, "a friend looked at me, her eyebrows arching. 'So why go the International?' she quizzed. 'Uh, well, uh,' I responded, groping for words and wondering: Why exactly *did* I use my free plane ticket, spend who knows how much money on coffee, food, a trip to Tijuana, and go alone to San Diego?"

But Barbara collected her thoughts quickly. Writing in the July 1995 issue of *The Eye*, her District (25) newsletter, she offered her "top reasons for going to an A.A. International Convention." Here are eight of them:

1. **"Badges.** These identify you by your name, city and state and are passports into a loving community of friends and fellowship not often encountered. They have the magical effect of breaking down any possibility of isolation. You belong, and you are welcomed by name and a handshake!

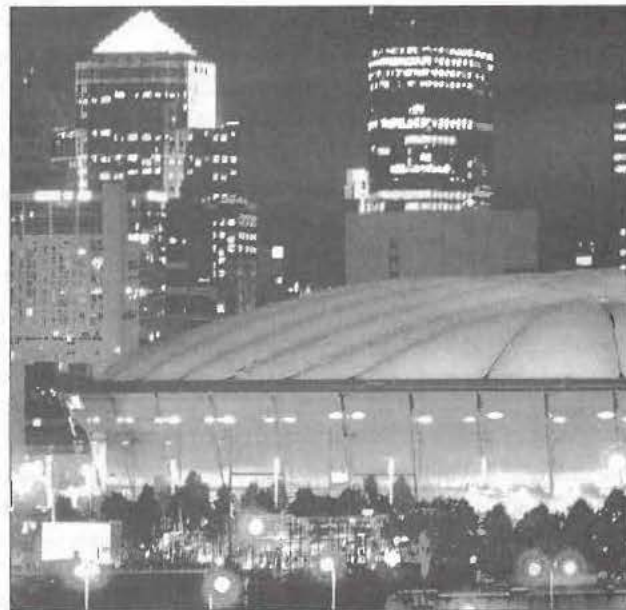
2. **"Hosts.** Wonderful volunteers greet, direct and comfort any confused, terrified or happy A.A.s. The hosts are everywhere—at airports, bus stops, beaches, border crossings—cheerfully asking if they can help you.

3. **"Fun Run/Walk.** You get to run with people who are out to have fun, no matter what! And in this race it is the last-place finishers who get the biggest cheers.

4. **"Panel Discussions and Marathon Meetings** (or any of the many spontaneously held smaller meetings). Meetings, meetings . . . all the time, all languages, all people. Panel-discussion topics ranged from 'Happy, Joyous and Free' to 'A.A. in Eastern Europe.' People told their stories, sharing their experience, strength and hope. Laughter, tears and learning came from those meetings . . . and some great one-liners.

5. **"Stadium Meetings.** Imagine 60,000 happy people celebrating their sobriety and yours. Imagine line dances in the aisles and a wave that includes the speakers on the stage. Imagine a 'count-up' to find someone with more than 50 years of sobriety. Imagine saying the Lord's Prayer in that many voices. Imagine the power of A.A. in all those lives.

6. **"People.** Take the funniest, greatest people you know in A.A. and multiply them by the thousands. The feeling of being included, the genuine warmth, friendship and gratitude all envelope you. Wow.



Hubert H. Humphrey Metrodome

7. **"Joy and Celebration.** Awesome! Nonstop! Incredible!

8. **"Presence of a Higher Power.** Stadium speaker Cora Louise B. said, 'I don't have goals anymore. I have a way.' The miracles around me confirmed the true power of A.A., a loving Higher Power that shows us the way, one day at a time. See you in Minneapolis!"

Bill A. From Montreal Joins G.S.O. Staff

There is a special synchronicity to the A.A. story of past Canadian delegate Bill A., who in October joined the General Service Office staff, with assignment to the Treatment Facilities desk. Under the current structure, the staff member on the T.F. desk also covers the Loners, Internationalists and Homers assignment, and is responsible for the *Loners-Internationalist Meeting (LIM)*.

In the early 1980s, although in the throes of his own alcoholism, Bill helped to steer his older brother Dave into recovery via a treatment facility and then into Alcoholics Anonymous. Five months later, in a 360-degree turnabout reminiscent of A.A. co-founder Bill W.'s relationship with his lifelong friend Ebby T., Dave guided his younger brother into the Fellowship.

"First," remembers Bill, "Dave literally saved my life. At the time, in the spring of 1984, we were living togeth-

er. He came home early from a meeting and found me on the couch, in a drunken stupor and catching fire from a smoldering cigarette I'd let drop. Later, when the fire was out and I found myself still alive, I was shaken up. Soon after, on May 21, 1984, I went with Dave to a meeting of Monday Central, the oldest surviving A.A. group in Montreal." Noting that "my brother, who's two years older than I, was my measuring stick growing up," Bill says that Dave "was the key to my recovery. After drying up himself, he saw with clear eyes what trouble I was in with alcohol, yet he didn't push. He watched and waited and hoped and was himself a vibrant example of sobriety in action." Bill adds with a smile, "You might say that over the course of many years, Dave and I lived, drank and got sober together."

Bill's sobriety took. And grew. "I had a lot of help," he says, "especially from Don, a member who was warm and welcoming, then from my sponsor Frank, who unstuck me from Step Three and encouraged me to climb the other 11 Steps as well. Just 30 at the time, I joined Sobriety and Beyond, a young people's group. After the third week I agreed to make coffee (making sure to buy a gourmet blend), and though I didn't know it then, I was starting to use that remarkable tool of recovery in A.A.—service.

"Six months later I was elected group secretary; over the next decade, even as I was figuring out all those A.A. acronyms—from P.I. [Public Information] to C.F. [Correctional Facilities]—I served as general service representative, district committee member, area chair and, from 1996-98, as Southwest Quebec delegate [Panel 46]. As a delegate from a province where maybe 80 percent of the people are French-speaking, I worried that my language skills weren't up to snuff. But everyone was understanding and kind, and thanks to their patience, my faulty French improved noticeably."

Predictably, Bill's personal life also saw many changes. "Early in sobriety, I got a job in sales," he says. "But seven years later my lust for wealth, power and prestige imploded. As an active drunk, I had always thought myself much too bright for university, but now that changed, and I hit the books with the idea of becoming a teacher. I also became a June groom in 1997. I'd met my wife, Audrey, in A.A. in '92, when she was a G.S.R. and I was the area chair. As I keep discovering, good things happen to people sober in this Fellowship of ours."

In July '97 the newlyweds traveled to Nagoya, Japan, where for more than a year they taught English and did some language study of their own. "Audrey and I had expected to be A.A. Loners," Bill relates, "and we were a bit apprehensive. But instead we became part of the Nagoya International Group, and it was a heartwarming experience I'll never forget. Firsthand we saw for sure that language is never a

barrier in A.A., where communication is truly in the language of the heart."

In his assignment on G.S.O.'s Treatment Facilities/LIM desk, Bill replaces Valerie O'N., who has her hands full coordinating A.A.'s Eleventh International Convention, to be held in June 2000 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. "Right now," says Bill, "I'm learning the ropes, hardly a chore since everyone is so friendly and helpful. I especially relish corresponding with A.A.s on my particular beat—West Canada and West Central U.S. The A.A. world may be far-flung but it's intimate. One of the first letters to cross my desk came from a Loner in Arctic Bay, the Northwest Territories. It was written by a member named Sharon, who happens to be my wife's first sponsor."

Just another example of that synchronicity that colors Bill's life. And, oh, yes, he and Audrey have found a new home in Brooklyn Heights—a stone's throw from 182 Clinton Street, where that other Bill—Bill W.—and his wife, Lois, lived and held meetings in A.A.'s formative days.

The Hand of A.A....

The winds that roared through Honduras—Hurricane Mitch—had hardly died down when the General Service Office in New York began receiving calls from groups and members in the U.S. and Canada, asking how serious the destruction was as far as A.A. in Central America was concerned, and offering to help.

Staff members on the International and Spanish Services desks were able to contact the Nicaraguan General Service Office by phone immediately and were thanked for the thoughts and prayers, but they did not have storm-related devastation that required outside help. In mid-January they reported extreme difficulties in getting delivery of literature they had ordered internationally.

Also, El Salvador, Guatemala and Costa Rica were contacted by G.S.O. New York to learn about the situation after Mitch, and they reported minor damage and expressed gratitude for the hand of A.A. being there in a time of need.

The story was different in Honduras. All efforts to reach G.S.O. following the storm failed, so a letter was sent in early December to let them know of the concern that had been expressed to us by members here. A letter to G.S.O. in early January said "we are thankful for your interest and good wishes in these days when Nature has caused great economic, moral and spiritual damage to our community." They reported that 1,423 members have been directly affected. Three were known

dead, 24 groups have physically disappeared, 38 groups have been partially affected and the economic damage was substantial. However, a great number of these groups are getting on their feet.

G.S.O. Honduras also suffered losses because of looting following the storm, and were badly in need of literature. New York G.S.O., with the cooperation of the Grapevine, immediately sent literature. A continuing discussion is taking place by the management and the A.A.W.S. Board as to how we may best respond to the immediate needs expressed by the Honduras office staff and board.

If there are groups and members who would like to share by sending any Spanish literature to Honduras, it would be much appreciated by them. Also, in the spirit of the Twelfth Step, we are sure that letters of support, love and prayers will be received with much gratitude.

The address of the Honduras G.S.O. is: Oficina de Servicios Generales, Bo. Lempira, 8 Avenida, 13 y 14 Calles-No. 1329, Tegucigalpa, Honduras, Central America.

Frank M. In Memoriam

It was with great sadness that we learned of the death of Frank M., former G.S.O. archivist, on January 19 in Vero Beach, Florida.

Frank, sober since June 10, 1970, was widely known throughout the U.S. and Canada, as well as abroad, as a dedicated A.A. member and A.A. historian. He was a 21 year employee of the General Service Office—first as administrative assistant and, from 1982 until his retirement 13 months ago, as G.S.O.'s archivist.

In Vero Beach he was a member of the Beachside Beginners Group. When back in New York he could be found every Monday and Wednesday evening in his regular seat at the Oxford Group—his spaniel Timothy at his feet.

Members of the Oxford Group shared their memories of Frank at their Wednesday meeting the day after his passing. A rose had been placed anonymously on his empty chair. The theme running through all the sharing was Frank's ability to make everyone feel special. "You're my favorite," he would say, and "I appreciate you." "Maybe you need a bigger God," was a frequent suggestion made when someone talked to him of a problem. At a memorial service in Vero Beach, Florida, Brenda S., the current South Florida delegate, recalled that "he taught me how to pass the message of A.A. on." Phone conversations inevitably ended with, "Pray for me."

Frank often referred to himself as "the Happy Archivist." In his many talks about the G.S.O. Archives,

he emphasized the chief reason for having an archives was so "we don't forget where we've come from." His family, his many friends and those with whom he shared his strength, hope and experience of A.A. will not forget Frank.

Update

The A.A. Message Is Breaking the Ice In Remote Villages

"The definition of a remote community is any one to which it is difficult to carry the A.A. message because of geography or differences in language or culture." Furthermore, Northwest Quebec delegate Monique N. told the Eastern Canada Regional Forum in September, "in carrying the A.A. message of sobriety, our members are guided by the admonition on page 102 of the Big Book: 'Your job now is to be at the place where you may be of maximum helpfulness to others, so never hesitate to go anywhere if you can be helpful.'"

More than a decade ago, she reported, "information received in A.A. indicated the serious problems encountered by our Northern Native people concerning their drinking habits. A committee had been formed to communicate with the Native communities and heighten their awareness of A.A. However, this assistance ceased, for whatever reason, and we heard no more until 1993. At that time our then Area [90] delegate, Michel G., was in contact with Noah, from Salluit. Afterward Noah wrote to Michel, thanking him for the assistance A.A. was giving. His note was read aloud at the General Service Conference in New York City."

Listening to Noah's words, Monique recalled, "we realized for the first time that we had some people right here at home with serious alcoholic problems. This awareness led to the formation of a committee of five Canadians. Their mission: to look into how we might be of service to our Northern friends."

In 1996, she noted, "the Quebec government closed five prisons and relocated the incarcerated Natives to the St. Jerome detention center in our area. The local authorities asked us to start an A.A. meeting for the Natives—mostly Inuit, though we see a Cree once in a while. Some of the Natives translated A.A. literature into Inuktitut.

"In Inuktitut we now have such material as the A.A. Preamble, the Serenity Prayer, *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, the pamphlet 'Twelve Traditions,

illustrated' as well as the flyers 'Where Do I Go from Here?' and 'A.A. at a Glance.' What joy it is to see the people's eyes light up when they read the A.A. literature in their own language!"

The fledgling committee, Monique pointed out, "now communicates with members in a number of communities: Kuujuarapik, Inukjuak, Povungnituk, Ivujivik and Salluit along the Hudson Bay coast; and Kuujuaq, Kangirsujuaq and Kangiasualujjaq along the Ungava Bay coast. Personal contact continues when these Native members return to their communities." At present, she said, "we have a member from a Cree community who has shown interest in becoming a district committee member. Our area is reviewing the possibility of creating a new district that would be composed of Native groups."

Not long ago, Monique added, "I heard an Inuit express his feelings about the Fellowship: 'I understand,' he said, 'that I must transmit and share what I receive with my brothers.' Which in any language tells exactly how A.A. works."

Sobriety Is a Family Affair

"With much sadness I am writing to advise you that my father, Stan F., passed away in August. By far the most important part of Dad's life was his sobriety, but A.A., he so often said, was his life. Although times were less than easy for him, I could not imagine what kind of person he would have been were it not for the lifeline of A.A. and the wonderful people he met and became life-long friends with through this organization."

So writes Stan's daughter of Hampshire, England. "Recently," she explains, "I received correspondence from LIM [*Loners-Internationalist Meeting*, an A.A. correspondence service for members in isolated areas]. It had been sent to my Dad, then redirected to me. The family also found in his belongings many papers relating to your association. Therefore we thought you would want to know of Stan's passing.

"Dad started going to meetings in 1979 when I was 9 and my sister 7. Even then we understood he was an alcoholic. This awareness also meant that we would appreciate in later life just how A.A. turned things around, for the better, for both Dad and his family."

Stan's daughter notes that "one of the parts of A.A. I most admire is the important link to God without being allied with any sect or denomination. Through this concept Dad became a wonderfully spiritual person—though no angel! I truly believe he would not have achieved this without A.A.; nor would he have

shown his children such a lovely path. For this we will be forever grateful to him.

"Dad would have celebrated his 19th A.A. birthday on November 15; I always remember his saying this was more important to him than his 'other' birthday. It was very touching when going through his personal effects to come across all his birthday cards for this special date in the year."

P.I.

Anonymity Letter: At 50, It's Still Our Main Media Event

The annual Anonymity Letter that the trustees' Public Information Committee sends to the media is now 50. As befits the computer age, it is crisp, compressed and featured on A.A.'s Web site (www.alcoholics-anonymous.org), unlike the rather wordy missive that was first sent off in 1949. Yet the message, however many the tucks and trims, remains the same, asking that the media present A.A. members in stories (1) only by their first names and (2) using no recognizable pictures. And it thanks the media for favorable coverage worldwide that "has been a principal means of bringing alcoholics into our Fellowship."

This year's Anonymity Letter, dated February 1999, is being released to a media list that includes nearly 9,000 daily and weekly newspapers and radio and TV stations in the U.S. and Canada (including Spanish media in U.S. and French media in Quebec). Hopefully it will be seen, absorbed and heeded by managing editors, news reporters and photo editors, radio and TV editors and producers, talk show hosts, publicity personnel and many others.

The letter states that "anonymity is the spiritual foundation of our Fellowship and assures our members that their recovery will be private." It further points out that A.A. "is not affiliated with any other organization, although many have adapted A.A.'s Twelve Steps for their own use. A.A. is self-supporting, declining any outside contributions; and we are nonprofessional, offering only the voluntary support of one alcoholic helping another."

Despite the saturation coverage of the Anonymity Letter, and the vigilance of A.A. groups and individual members everywhere, anonymity breaks do happen—a number of them at the hands of well-meaning celebri-

ties eager "to help other alcoholics like me." What is done about such breaks and the hundreds of others that occur yearly? As mail received by the General Service Office reveals, members have expressed continuing concern about such violations of the Anonymity Tradition, which the Fellowship's co-founder Bill W. called "the key to A.A.'s spiritual survival."

When a specific anonymity break occurs, A.A. members frequently ask G.S.O. to send a letter to the publication or broadcast station involved. But it has long been the consensus of A.A.'s General Service Conference that responsibility for protecting the Anonymity Tradition at the public level, and for responding to breaks in the media, rests with the individuals, groups and service committees within the Fellowship. So when there is an anonymity break at the public level, the P.I. desk at G.S.O. writes to the appropriate area delegate, recommending that a gentle reminder of the Anonymity Tradition be sent to the member. Only if the delegate so requests does G.S.O. write the actual letter.

C.P.C.

Calgary Committee Fits Good Things In Smaller Packages

Reaching out to professionals in Calgary, Alberta, is not the cumbersome proposition it used to be. Says Duane T., who chairs the area committee on Cooperation With the Professional Community: "We have developed what we feel is a simple implementation package based on the C.P.C. Kit and Workbook developed by the General Service Office. There was, and is, no intent to replace either, just a desire to make the job easier to pull off."

At the same time, Duane says, "we developed a tabletop literature presentation kit consisting of four small signs with stands. The kit serves two purposes: (1) Its low profile appears professional; it does not consume the whole room; (2) it allows us to separate the categories of literature as outlined in the C.P.C. Workbook: 'For C.P.C. Committee Members,' 'For Professionals' and 'For the People Professionals Serve.' The professionals are not self-conscious about pamphlets such as 'Is A.A. for Me?' when the sign clearly states they are doing so for their clients' use rather than their own."



Now, Duane notes expansively, "with our implementation package and our literature kit, we can travel anywhere with all our needs contained in a 12"x12"x12" plastic milk crate. It's a far cry from when I became C.P.C. chairman and thought I'd have to trade in my home and car for roomier models so I could store and deliver all the bulk I'd inherited." He adds that "we have been putting our theories to work with numerous C.P.C. workshops and presentations, and the results so far have exceeded our expectations."

Correctional Facilities

Signed Meetings Give Deaf A.A.s the Sounds of Sobriety

Thanks to a lot of persistence, cooperation and caring, four deaf inmates at a North Carolina correctional facility are attending its regular A.A. meetings, which are equipped with an ASL (American Sign Language) interpreter.

Explains Tony S., of Angier, South Carolina, who serves as an outside sponsor: "We had our first meeting with a signer named Mary just before Thanksgiving. It was a closed discussion on slipping. After the opening readings, Jerry W., another outside sponsor, announced that Mary was not an A.A. member. She was there to sign for the deaf A.A.s, with her expenses paid by the correctional facility. I admit it was a little awkward at first, but after a short while we hardly noticed her."

People shared freely and, after the guys returned to their dorms, I asked Mary if it bothered her to listen to some of the graphic details of experiences in slipping. 'Oh, no,' she said. 'I was so busy signing, I wasn't paying attention to what was being said.'

Tony feels the signed meetings are important not only to the deaf inmates but to their A.A. friends and outside sponsors as well. "Like so many things in the Fellowship," he says, "this experience teaches me to step out in faith. I turned 42 on November 25, my eighth sober belly-button birthday, and know that service goes a long way in keeping me on track. Here in North Carolina we'll keep carrying the message and leave the results to God."

He reports that "the A.A. material for the hearing impaired sent recently by the General Service Office has been very helpful." Included was the new service piece, "A.A. Literature and Audiovisual Material for Special Needs" catalog, which affords complete listings of available films and videotapes, closed-captioned videos and illustrated, easy-to-read pamphlets.

Treatment Facilities

So. Florida Grows A Committee from The Ground Up

When Mindy W. was elected chair in 1996, the Tampa (District 2) Treatment Facilities Committee was not very active and there were no regular meetings. A few commitments were being met by individual members of the A.A. community, but no communication existed between these volunteers and the district.

Speaking at a South Florida Area (15) T.F. workshop last October, Mindy recalled that "my first priority was to establish monthly meetings and to spread word of them to home group members. The meetings were held consistently even though there was only a handful of participants to begin with." At the outset, she said, "we depended heavily on ideas from other T.F. committees, such as distributing a flyer that announced our next meeting and invited A.A.s to come." She also contacted the intergroup office and made sure it had information about the committee to offer local facilities.

As time went on, the T.F. committee received an increasing number of requests for meetings from treat-

ment centers in the vicinity. At the same time, in order to attract A.A. volunteers, members put together information packets, distributed at the district's quarterly meetings, that described the work of the committee and explained how to get involved. Additionally, home groups were encouraged to send T.F. committee representatives to the meetings. Another useful tool for spreading the word was the intergroup newsletter.

Preparing to rotate out of her A.A. chair, Mindy told the workshop participants that she had discovered "a hidden benefit" in building a committee from scratch. "I've learned," she said, "to trust that while there may never be an abundance of workers, the Higher Power will always provide the resources that are needed to accomplish the work."

At the South Florida workshop, which focused on helping new District T.F. committees get started, David H., of the St. Petersburg (District 1) T.F. committee, shared that it had been up and running when he became chairman. There was, however, a continuing need for more volunteers. "We followed the procedures that had worked in the past," he reported, "such as naming a coordinator for each facility where meetings are taken. This person is responsible for securing meeting chairpersons; they in turn find the speakers." When seeking volunteers, he noted, "we make frequent announcements at meetings, but I find that face-to-face contact with individual A.A.s works better."

One workshop participant, Ed, from the Lower Florida Keys, observed, "We need to remember that most times, pushing people into service work only pushes them away from it. I find I'm more apt to attract people by telling them how involvement in treatment service work has kept me sober." Echoing him, Tom, from Lantana, remarked that general service is the best-kept secret in A.A. "We need to let people know why we do this work," he declared, "and what it has done for our own sobriety."

Larry of Broward County said he approaches people at meetings who are celebrating their anniversaries and offers them a chance to express gratitude for their sobriety by taking a treatment center meeting. He is careful not to discourage people who are sober just a short while. Instead, he said, "I urge them to join the T.F. committee and learn the ropes while getting more sobriety under their belts."

In conclusion, Area T.F. committee chairman Jim C. observed that close communication between the T.F. committee and other service entities, such as Public Information and Correctional Facilities, generates cooperation and help. He also emphasized the importance of giving people a job to do: "This helps them to feel a part of A.A. and keeps them coming back. Remember, enthusiasm is contagious, and watching a fellowship grow up about you can be very exciting."

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

- 5-7—*De Haan, Belgium.* Tenth North Sea Conv. Write: Trsr., Hof ter Linden 9, 2640 Mortsel, Belgium
- 5-7—*Richmond, British Columbia, Canada.* WRAASA. Write: Ch., Box 27150 Collingwood P.O., Vancouver, BC V5R 6A8
- 5-7—*Brawley, California.* Imperial Valley Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 393, El Centro, CA 92244-0393
- 5-7—*Burbank, California.* 24th Annual SFVAA Convention. Write: Ch., Box 45, Agoura, California 91376-0045
- 5-7—*Ligonier, Pennsylvania.* Midwinter Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 55, Laughlinton, PA 15655
- 11-14—*San Jose, California.* 35th IAAWC. Write: Ch., Box 1049, Milpitas, CA 95036-1049
- 12-14—*Little Rock, Arkansas.* 17th Annual Winter Holiday. Write: Ch., Box 26135, Little Rock, AR 72211
- 12-14—*No. Falmouth, Massachusetts.* Second Annual Cape Cod Pockets of Enthusiasm. Write: Ch., Box 991, No. Falmouth, MA 02556
- 12-14—*Liverpool, New York.* 12th Annual Salt City Mid-Winter Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 3588, Syracuse, NY 13220-3588
- 19-21—*Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada.* Saskatoon Roundup. Write: Ch., 311-220 3rd Ave., So., Saskatoon, SK S7K 1M1
- 19-21—*Ninth Southeastern Iowa Roundup.* Write: Ch., Box 298, West Point, IA 52656
- 19-21—*Mitchell, Kentucky.* 48th Annual State Conf. Write: Ch., 530 Berry Ave., Bellevue, KY 41073
- 19-21—*Corpus Christi, Texas.* 45th Annual Coastal Bend Jamboree. Write: Ch., 5433 S. Staples, Suite F, Corpus Christi, TX 78411
- 19-21—*Virginia Beach, Virginia.* Ocean Front Conf., Write: Rgstr., Box 2801, Virginia Beach, VA 23450
- 26-27—*Sikeston, Missouri.* 18th Annual Five Corners Conv. Write: Ch., 501 Maple St., Kennett, MO 63857
- 26-28—*Gulf Shores, Alabama.* 15th Annual District 19 Jubilee. Write: Ch., Box 1183, Foley, AL 36536
- 26-28—*Kansas City, Kansas.* 17th Annual Sunflower Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 26141, Overland Park, KS 66225-6141
- 26-26—*Pattaya, Thailand.* Thailand Conv. 1999. Write: Conv. Ch., Box 1032, New Petchburi Road Post Office, Bangkok 10311, Thailand

March

- 5-7—*Jekyll Island, Georgia.* 12th Unity Weekend. Write: Ch., Box 214911, South Daytona, FL 32121
- 5-7—*Kailua-Kona, Hawaii.* PRAASA. Write: Rgstr., Box 161271, Honolulu, HI 96816
- 5-7—*Rochester, New York.* 18th Annual Conv., Write: Ch., 10 Manhattan Square Dr., Ste. D. Rochester, NY 14607-3997
- 12-14—*Fresno, California.* 52nd Annual Spring NCCAA Conf. Write: Trsr., Box 508, Rocklin, CA 95677
- 12-14—*Victorville, California.* 15th Annual High Desert Conv. Write: Ch., Box 1894, Apple Valley, CA 92307
- 12-14—*Ivoryton, Connecticut.* 24th New Beginning YP Conf. Write: Ch., Box 17, Bozrah, CT 06334
- 12-14—*Romulus, Michigan.* March Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 37931, Oak Park, MI 48237
- 18-21—*Miami Beach, Florida.* Florida Roundup 98-99. Write: Ch., Box 7273, Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33338-7273
- 19-21—*Salmon Arm, British Columbia, Canada.* 31st Annual Roundup. Write: Ch., Salmon Arm Community Center, Salmon Arm, BC V1E 4N6
- 19-21—*Anchorage, Alaska.* Pre-Conference Assembly. Write: Ch., Box 222606, Anchorage, AK 99522-2602
- 19-21—*Cherry Hill, New Jersey.* 35th Annual Area 45 General Service Conv. Write: Ch., Box 3724, Cherry Hill, NJ 08034
- 19-21—*Hood River, Oregon.* Seventh Annual Columbia Gorge How-L. Write: Ch., Box 26, Bingen, WA 98605
- 19-21—*Amarillo, Texas.* 14th Annual Top of Texas Oldtimers' Reunion. Write: Ch., 4711 Virginia #1706, Amarillo, TX 79109
- 26-28—*Osage Beach, Missouri.* Circle of Unity Conf. Write: Ch., Box 356, Linn Creek, MO 65052

Closed Meeting Topics From the Grapevine

For more detailed suggestions, see the pages noted.

February (page 35): "Return to Forever"

March (page 19): The Third Step

- 26-28—*Lincoln, Nebraska.* Spring Flng. Write: Ch., Box 30691, Lincoln, NE 68503
- 26-28—*Dayton, Ohio.* 16th Annual Mini-Conf. Write: Ch., Box 3595, Cincinnati, OH 45201
- 26-28—*Newport, Rhode Island.* Rhode Island Conv. Write: Ch., Box 553, Portsmouth, RI 02871
- 26-28—*Ames, Iowa.* Aim for Ames Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 2491, Ames, IA 50010

April

- 1-5—*Brisbane, Queensland, Australia.* 1999 Australian International Conv. Write: Reg. Officer, Box 5745, West End, Queensland 4101 Australia.
- 2-4—*New Orleans, Louisiana.* 31st Big Deep South Conv. Write: Ch., 3117 Independence St., Ste. D., Metairie, LA 70006
- 9-11—*Grand Forks, North Dakota.* Northern Spring Weekend. Write: Ch., Box 14121, Grand Forks, ND 58208-4121
- 9-11—*Sandusky, Ohio.* 24th Mini Conference. Write: Ch., Box 3834, Akron, OH 44314-0834

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 - for events on reverse side

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



15-18—*Eureka Springs, Arkansas*. 23rd
Springtime in the Ozarks Conv. Write:
Conv. Trsr., Box 742, Eureka Springs, AR
72632

16-18—*Ermioni, Peloponnese, Greece*. Fifth
Int'l. Conv. Write: Ch., Box 52185, 14610
Nea Erythrea-Athens, Greece

16-18—*Banff, Alberta, Canada*. 26th
Annual Banff Round-Up. Write: Ch., Box
6744, Station D, Calgary, AB T2P 2E6

30-May 2—*Pocatello, Idaho*. Area 18
Spring Assembly. Write: Ch., Box 4573,
Pocatello, ID 83205-4573

30-May 2—*Sioux Falls, South Dakota*.
Area 63 1999 Spring Conf. Write: Ch.,
Box 1872, Sioux Falls, SD 57101

30-May 2—*Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin*.
48th Annual Spring 1999 Conf. Write:
Trsr., 159 Whitetail Blvd., Baraboo, WI
53913

May

14-16—*Dayton, Ohio*. Women's Workshop
XXI. Write: Ch., 39 Redwood Ave.,
Dayton, OH 45405

13-16—*Daytona Beach, Florida*. Ninth
Spring Conf. Write: Ch., Box 214911,
South Daytona, FL 32121

28-30—*Okefenokee, Georgia*. Okefenokee
Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 403, Waycross,
GA 31502

28-30—*Dallas, Texas*. Gathering of the
Eagles. Write: Ch., Box 35865, Dallas, TX
75235