

As the holiday lights come on, we give thanks. Thanks for the inner light which is our sobriety in A.A. Thanks for the light of hope in the face of the sick alcoholic who is reborn. Thanks for the light of the present — the awareness of this precious moment. Thanks for the light of new attitudes. And humble thanks for the glorious light of love through fellowship and service.

May the grace of light fill each day of the coming year.



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., 2003

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New York, NY 10163

G.S.O.'s A.A. Web Site: www.aa.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.

■ For A.A.s, a Season of Gratitude

The holiday season can be difficult for many A.A.s, especially the newcomer. The pressure to drink may feel overwhelming when it seems all the world is hoisting glasses in one toast after another. At these times, the prospect of the usual round of holiday parties can be as inviting as a stroll in a minefield to the alcoholic struggling to stay away from the first drink.

The A.A. group, though, can be a refuge. Meeting marathons provide a safe place for recovering alcoholics who are on their own, as well as those looking for a break from family festivities. Some groups schedule dances or potluck dinners, providing a place to congregate and celebrate in sober fellowship.

It's safe to say that A.A. group celebrations are held in most parts of the world, wherever seasonal festivities are celebrated. Large or small, in remote rural areas or big cities, the sharing and hospitality always center on a regular A.A. meeting. But the styles of group gatherings are as varied as the members and regional customs dictate.

Some A.A. members will create a tradition of going to dinner with friends on the holidays. A.A.s generally do better with structure, and we can make it easier on ourselves by planning ahead. Arranging our own get-togethers with A.A. members is a good way to make the best of the holidays. Obviously, we can have a New Year's Eve party like anyone else, minus the alcohol (and the hangover).

Some find it rewarding to throw themselves into carrying the message of A.A. by visiting hospitals, treatment centers or correctional facilities. One A.A. returned each year in December to the rehab where he got sober. Another A.A. bakes "cop cookies" and hands them out to officers who used to arrest her.

The story of the first holiday season for A.A. was the subject of an article in the December 1952 Grapevine. Bill

W. remembered only a quiet day in New York that first Christmas — there were so few members. Meanwhile, the six men who constituted the whole of A.A. in Akron gathered with their families at Dr. Bob's house. The Grapevine article quotes one A.A. member at that gathering: "There were thanks that we had come this far. However, I am certain that there was still considerable fear and trembling. . . not fear that this new way would not work, but doubt that we would be able to hold onto it. We remembered our many failures and thanked God for what he had already granted us and prayed for continued strength."

This time of the year can be fraught with yearning for a feeling about the holidays remembered from long ago. It is also natural that if you imagine yourself out of step with what's called a season of joy, you will feel isolated. And it's widely accepted that the pressure to be merry, on cue, is stressful. A.A. members, though, have the benefit of a program that teaches the value of acceptance, an antidote to the enforced gaiety of a season when loneliness may seem a failing as well as a misery.

And A.A. members have a way or remaking their worlds, or rediscovering what they once had. In the words of the Twelfth Step, the program of Alcoholics Anonymous is about "the joy of good living."

As Doug H. in Maine looks back on his drinking days, he remembers the holidays as "something to dread — too much free time to reflect on how lonely I was, what a failure I was. And how was I going to make sure I had enough booze around to keep the demons at bay? Then there were all the people I 'had' to see, get-togethers that would remind me, lest I forget, what a failure I was. Now holidays are just what they're supposed to be, a break from work, a time to relax. Above all, they are a time to reflect on what the A.A. program has given me and to do what I can do in return."

One member says, "I'm Jewish, but we celebrated all the holidays — had a Christmas tree, the whole thing. Of course, my now ex-wife did everything and I drank." Now sober 16 years, he reports that, "My first wife has invited me and my current wife to celebrate Thanksgiving at her house. It comes around full circle. The journey continues."

And, when all else fails, contact your local intergroup/central office for holiday meetings and events in your area.



Please post *Twelve Tips on Keeping Your Holiday Season Sober and Joyous* (page 10) on your group bulletin board.

■ The Serenity Prayer: 'So Much A.A. in So Few Words'

For A.A.s everywhere, the beloved Serenity Prayer is a mantra for every conceivable occasion—a cooling breeze on a face flushed with anger, a small song of gratitude for good news, a comforting guide for the bad—and reassurance that the world is unfolding as it is meant to.

Says David R. of Oakland, California: “When Route 101 is choked with trailers under a burning sun and a fender-bender has stalled traffic for miles ahead, I start mouthing the Serenity Prayer to ward off road rage, and it works.” Karen M. of Richmond, Virginia, notes that “when I have something nerve-racking to do, like asking my boss for a raise or apologizing for having messed up on an assignment, I repeat the Serenity Prayer several times and it calms me down like magic.” Chicago’s John D. affirms that the prayer “helps me in the up times as well as the down. It comes naturally to my lips when all hell is breaking loose, for sure. But I try to remember to say it as a thank you to God when the good times roll—like my A.A. anniversary or a rare weekend away with my wife.”

A.A. co-founder Bill W. said of the Serenity Prayer, “Never had we seen so much A.A. in so few words.” In *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age* (p. 196), Bill relates that early in 1942 A.A.’s first national secretary, non-alcoholic Ruth Hock, showed him and others in their crowded little New York office a routine New York *Herald Tribune* obituary that ended with these words:

God grant us the serenity to accept
the things we cannot change,
courage to change the things we can,
and wisdom to know the difference.

Someone suggested printing the quatrain on wallet-size cards for inclusion in office mailings, and thus the Serenity Prayer was on its way to becoming integral to A.A. life. It has since been translated into the many languages spoken by members around the world, aloud at their meetings and soundlessly in their hearts. For more than half a century now, the prayer has become so closely woven into the very fabric of A.A. philosophy that members have difficulty remembering it did not originate within the A.A. experience itself.

Yet despite years of delving by serious researchers and a lot of guesswork by Saturday scholars, the exact origin of the Serenity Prayer remains a mystery. What seems undisputed, though, is the claim of authorship by theologian Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr, who told an interviewer that he had written the prayer as a “tag line” to a sermon of his on practical Christianity. But even Dr. Niebuhr admitted to some doubt when he added, “Of course, it may have been spooking around for years, even centuries, but I don’t think so. I honestly do believe

that I wrote it myself.” With his permission, the prayer was printed on cards during World War II and distributed to the troops by the U.S.O. By then it had also been reprinted by the National Council of Churches as well as by Alcoholics Anonymous.

In suggesting that the prayer may have been “spooking around” for centuries, Dr. Niebuhr appears to have been accurate. “No one can tell for sure who first wrote the Serenity Prayer,” Bill W. noted (*ibid.*). “Some say it came from the early Greeks; others think it was from the pen of an anonymous English poet; still others claim it was written by an American Naval officer. . . .” Other attributions have wandered as far afield as ancient Sanskrit texts and into the distinguished company of Aristotle, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas and Spinoza. One A.A. member came across the Roman philosopher Cicero’s *Six Mistakes of Man*, one of which reads: “The tendency to worry about things that cannot be changed or corrected.”

No one has actually found the prayer’s text among the writings of these allegedly original sources. What appears to be really ancient, like the above quote of Cicero’s, are the prayer’s themes of acceptance, courage to change what can be changed, and freely letting go of what is beyond one’s ability to change. Certainly the search for origins of the prayer has been like peeling an onion, sometimes having to start the process all over again. For example, in July 1964 the A.A. Grapevine received a clipping of an article from the Paris *Herald Tribune* in which the writer reported having seen a tablet in a Koblenz, (West) German, hotel that was inscribed: “God give me the detachment to accept those things I cannot alter; the courage to alter those things I can alter; and the wisdom to distinguish the one thing from the other.”

Here at last seemed concrete evidence—complete with quote, author, date—of the Serenity Prayer’s source. But, no, it failed to stand the test of time. Fifteen years later, in 1979, Peter T. of Berlin told Beth K., then a staff member of the General Service Office, that the first form of the prayer had originated with Boethius, a Roman philosopher (480-524 A.D.) and author of *Consolations of Philosophy*.

There are still more claims, and undoubtedly further “sightings” will continue to be reported for years to come. Meantime a thought expressed by many is that the Serenity Prayer, whatever its ancient or modern origin, seems to have been born out of an ancient perception and a wisdom born of suffering. Except for the Lord’s Prayer and the Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi, no other quotation or concept, at once practical yet spiritual, has been felt in the minds and hearts of so many A.A. members on their journey in sobriety to a new way of living.

Bill W. alluded to this phenomenon years ago. In thanking an A.A. friend for a plaque on which the prayer was inscribed, he said, “In creating A.A. the Serenity Prayer has been a most valuable building block—indeed, a cornerstone.”

Speaking of mysteries, cornerstones and coincidences, the building that today houses G.S.O. borders on a stretch of Manhattan's 120th Street, between Riverside Drive and Broadway. It is called Reinhold Niebuhr Place.

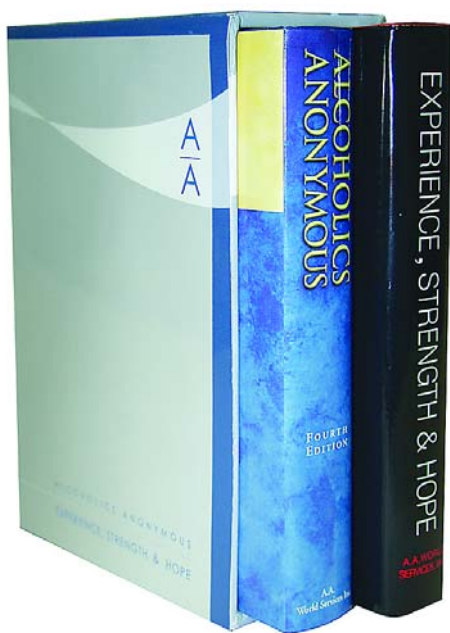
NOTE: A service piece, "Origin of the Serenity Prayer: A Historical Paper" (SM F-129). Available free, upon request from a G.S.O. staff member.

■ Update for A.A. Directories

Starting in January 2004 a reminder will be mailed to all delegates, area chairs and area registrars advising them that it is time for the annual Group Updates to the A.A. Directories. This year our new Area Download Application (MS Access) will be available for the area registrars to bring their area records up to date. Deadline for all information is May 3, 2004.

■ 'The Complete Big Book' Available in Boxed Set

A boxed set of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 4th edition, and *Experience, Strength & Hope* is now available from the G.S.O. The Big Book, which was originally published



in 1939, still has the same first 164 pages, which have been the foundation of recovery for so many alcoholics. The story section, though, has been revised for three later editions to present a more accurate cross section of A.A.'s membership. The stories dropped in these revisions have been collected in one volume, *Experience, Strength & Hope*,

which accompanies the Big Book in the boxed set.

The set, which may fit the bill as a gift to a sponsor or sponsee, also contains a history of the Big Book in a 16-page booklet. To order, contact your local intergroup, or phone G.S.O. at 212-870-3312; fax 800-437-3538; or write to World Services Inc., P.O. Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163. Item number B-11; \$13 for each set (charge orders only, add 6% for handling).

■ Delhi A.A.s Carry the Message with Help from Our Friends in the Media

On September 13, a newspaper in Delhi, India, ran an article about Alcoholics Anonymous in Hindi that contained the A.A. help-line number. Within the next day or so, reports Satya B., manager of the Delhi Intergroup, "approximately 100 calls came in [to intergroup] from alcoholics and their families; another 100 were received on the A.A. help-line, and at least six new members showed up at meetings as a direct result of the article, with more to come. That's a big number, as in total we have approximately 300 recovering members in Delhi."

"More good news," Satya adds, "is that Todd, an A.A. who sobered up in California about 14 years ago, is starting a group in Dharamshala, a small hill town about a 10-hour drive from Delhi. Language seems to be a barrier, so several of us went armed with Big Books and other A.A. literature in Hindi. A week earlier, when I shared at a meeting that I would be going to Dharamshala, I received 12 Big Books as contributions to be given freely to members of the new group."

Glimmerings of A.A. in India go back to the 1950s. A.A. co-founder Bill W. once spoke of a letter sent circa 1956 to the General Service Office by a Jesuit priest: "It told the story of a Hindu schoolteacher who owned a cow and a tiny plot of ground. His wife was stone-deaf and he had a sister who, like himself, drank like a fish. His salary as a teacher was about fifty cents a day. The Jesuit translated A.A.'s Twelve Steps for him. And, in spite of his poverty, in spite of his wife's deafness, in spite of his domineering and drunken sister, he was staying sober." (*Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, p. 80). By 1988 there were about 150 groups in India.

A.A. is constantly transcending the barriers of race, language, religion and even wars to carry the message of sobriety everywhere in the world. The Big Book has been translated into 49 languages, with four more in the works.

■ Corrections From Last Edition

In the Oct./Nov. issue we gave the incorrect Web site in the article "New from the Grapevine." The A.A. Grapevine Web site is www.aagrapevine.org.

Also, a date has been changed on the Regional Forum Schedule. The date for the Eastern Canada Forum is August 27-29, 2004, not in September as previously noted.

■ How Much Money Is Enough? A Prudent Reserve Assures Us That the Hand of A.A. Will Be There

From the beginning, Alcoholics Anonymous has sought a healthy balance between the need for financial responsibility and the dangers of accumulating so much money that we might be diverted from our primary purpose. Our two-pronged guiding principle, as stated in Tradition Seven, is clear. The familiar short form affirms that “Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions,” while the long form cautions that “. . .nothing can so surely destroy our spiritual heritage as futile disputes over property, money, and authority.” Since the days of the founding members — who came perilously close to soliciting any number of outside contributions — this Tradition has kept our Fellowship safe on both a practical and a spiritual level.

Implementing the Seventh Tradition probably raises more questions than any other issue in A.A. Obviously, no Fellowship with more than two million members can exist without some kind of financial underpinning. But how much money is enough? How much is too much? How do we know the difference? And (some would ask) why, in a spiritual Fellowship, do we need to worry about money at all?

The concept of a “prudent reserve” is the key to answering all these questions. At every level — from the group to the General Service Board — the group conscience of Alcoholics Anonymous has made the decision to have enough money on hand to enable us to effectively carry the message to the suffering alcoholic and to provide for emergencies. Beyond that amount, which differs from entity to entity, we have decided to avoid the accumulation of so much money that it could get us in trouble with ourselves or with the general public.

At the group level, the issues are usually quite straightforward. “The A.A. Group” pamphlet puts it briefly and simply. After listing basic expenses common to all groups — rent, A.A. literature, meeting lists, coffee and refreshments, and support of all A.A. service entities — it goes on to say: “A.A. experience clearly shows that it is not a good idea for a group to accumulate large funds in excess of what is needed, plus a prudent reserve, an amount to be determined by the group conscience.”

Most groups find that a reserve equal to one or two months’ expenses is all they need. For a group in a large city, with high rent and other costs, the actual dollar amount may be considerably greater than the reserve needed by a group in a small town or a rural community. The kinds of expenses, as listed in the pamphlet, are not much different from place to place, though some groups do need to provide for special circumstances. In areas such as Florida, for example, where the population swells in the winter, group membership (and con-

tributions) are much larger during tourist season, but the rent remains the same when the “snow birds” go back North. And virtually every year, natural disasters — floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, and wildfires — can wipe out A.A. meeting places, supplies of literature, and other essentials. While a prudent reserve may not cover the entire cost of such a disaster, it provides a foundation for starting over.

Still, the basic rule of thumb remains valid: Keep only what the group conscience decides is necessary, and disburse the rest to A.A. entities. For the most part, groups send extra funds to their local intergroup/central office, district, area, and the General Service Office, in whatever ratio the group conscience has decided upon.

At the world service level the principle is exactly the same, but because of the need to safeguard a multifaceted service office and two separate publishing operations, putting it into practice becomes more complex. In 1954, the A.A. General Service Board established a Reserve Fund, whose principal purpose, according to *The A.A. Service Manual*, “is to provide the financial resources necessary to continue the essential services of G.S.O. and the Grapevine in the event of emergency or disaster.”

Each year, both A.A.W.S. and the Grapevine transfer cash beyond what they need for working capital to the Reserve Fund. In years when literature sales and therefore total income are high, that cash amount can be considerable, raising the specter of too much money for our spiritual well-being. Over the years the General Service Conference has periodically considered the prevailing needs, and has set upper limits for the fund. *The Service Manual* explains that, “Currently, the fund is limited to no more than one year’s combined operating expenses of A.A. World Services, Inc., The A.A. Grapevine, Inc., and the General Fund of the General Service Board of A.A., Inc.” If the total goes above the 12-month upper limit, the Conference allows a year for review and a second year to formulate a plan to adjust the Fund below the limit. “In practice, however, the office, as well as the trustees’ Finance Committee, continuously monitor the Reserve Fund balance, as well as the number of months of operating expenses.”

With income and expenses for the office and both publishing operations running in the millions of dollars, some A.A. members still worry about whether the Fellowship will accumulate more money than we can handle. Gary Glynn, past Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee, responded to such concerns in an October 1994 presentation: “I’ve been asked, ‘If one or two month’s reserve is okay for a group, why do we need ten or twelve at G.S.O.?’ For one thing, it is probably easier to form a new group than it is to form a new G.S.O. There is no

alternative G.S.O. to turn to if ours goes under. The services we provide have been built up out of many years' collective experience and would be hard to recreate. Also. . . G.S.O. needs to publish [A.A. literature] regularly without the threat of interruption so the message of sobriety will continuously be available, both through the written message itself and the services supported in part by literature profits. . . ."

Half a century ago, when the Reserve Fund was established, the possibility of running out of money was more than a cause for speculation — it was a harsh and immediate reality. In May 1954, Bill W. wrote a letter to the groups, explaining a Conference Action that removed all discounts to U.S. and Canadian groups on the Big Book and the Twelve and Twelve: "Our experience here at A.A. Headquarters, in the fifteen years since it was set up, definitely shows, indeed it shouts, that the Foundation [now the General Service Board] must always have on hand *a substantial reserve fund of hard cash* to take care of the frequent deficits that occur and the future possibility of a depression or severe inflation, thereby guaranteeing our world services under all conditions.

"Due to increased expense and inflation in recent years, our reserve fund *now stands at only nine months' operating expense* for the A.A. General Service Office. This — considering the uncertain times in which we are living — was considered by the Conference to be much too low and very unsafe. . . . Hence the Conference action to suspend all book discounts until the Foundation reserve reaches a figure equal to at least two or three years' operating expense. . . ."

Bill's description of "the uncertain times in which we are living" has a decidedly contemporary ring. Financial responsibility today remains essential to A.A.'s future. While as a Fellowship we should never be concerned with money for its own sake, in the concept of a prudent reserve we have a guideline that will help us manage the money we have wisely, so that the hand of A.A. will always be there for any alcoholic who reaches out for help.

■ Holiday Gifts Ideas

Some A.A. members report that they never see *Box 4-5-9*, so a subscription to A.A.'s newsletter provides a year-long gift for your home group. A bulk subscription of 10 copies each of 6 issues is \$6.00.

For years now, subscriptions to the AA Grapevine (as well as La Viña) have been a popular gift and one that may be "passed on" to local institutions committees throughout the year.

Sponsors, sponsees and other friends will surely be interested in two new, hot-off-the press volumes. A boxed set that will cover all Big Book stories (see page 4) and *Spiritual Awakenings* from the Grapevine (see page 9).

■ News Clippings Open Window On A.A.'s Early Years

The General Service Office uses a clipping service to collect newspaper articles that mention Alcoholics Anonymous. The A.A. name may appear in everything from a local newspaper report on a drunk driver ordered to attend A.A. meetings to a profile of a celebrity who mentions his involvement in the program.

A.A. has long been interested in its media coverage and has been collecting and storing articles that mention the program at least as far back as 1939, the year the Big Book was published. That's also the year A.A. membership reached 100.

Reproductions of these early clippings have been collected in oversized spiral-bound volumes that span the years 1939 through the first part of 1944 and are available for purchase from G.S.O.

The first Archives Scrapbook covers 1939 through 1942 and opens with reviews of the Big Book, presumably when this movement of recovering alcoholics first caught the attention of some newspaper writers. Each page is crowded with reproductions of the original articles and their headlines, with the date the article appeared and the name of the publication. Each volume is organized in chronological order and contains hundreds of clippings, offering a window on what A.A. looked like to the world in its early years.

An article in the Aug. 17, 1939 issue of the *Christ Science Monitor* (now *Christian Science Monitor*) notes "that a book recently published on the subject of liquor addiction and its remedy seems designed for a wide usefulness." The article makes the point that the book is timely "in view of the extent of liquor consumption in the United States since the repeal of national prohibition."

Another article reports on a seminal event of the program with the headline: "Rockefeller Jr. Secretly Helps Chronic Drunks." This article from February 1940 by the Associated Press appeared in a number of newspapers and is an account of John D. Rockefeller Jr.'s dinner at the Union Club in New York for 60 members of A.A. The program is referred to as "a 'secret' organization aimed at regenerating alcoholics."

A letter to the editor a couple of days later attempted to set things straight. "To avoid misconceptions and for the benefit of any who may be interested, I wish to say that Alcoholics Anonymous is neither secret nor an organization. There are no officers, no dues. It may more nearly be called a fellowship." The bottom of the letter is obliterated, but presumably was sent by an A.A. member.

The scrapbooks contain many stories culled from local newspapers across the country announcing the formation of a first A.A. meeting in a town. The articles often begin with the words "perhaps you never heard of Alcoholics Anonymous. . . ." The 1944 scrapbook has accounts from

local newspapers on Bill W.'s travels to various cities to visit with A.A.s. One headline refers to him as "Chief of Alcoholics," another as the "President of AA."

Browsing through the scrapbooks — reading columnists, reporters, editorials, and letters to the editor — is to see A.A. take shape in the consciousness of the nation. It's obvious, though, that many still had only a hazy understanding of the program.

One columnist in 1942 describes A.A. as "an organization of former heavy drinkers who are pledged to stay on the wagon to the end of their days." A journalist writing in 1944 informs us that "only good excuses are accepted when a member fails to appear at a regular meeting. Intoxication brings suspension, although it is possible to gain readmission." In an article in the *Arkansas Democrat* in Little Rock, a reporter who attended a meeting writes that "three prospective new members who had gone through the preliminary courses were discussed and finally voted into the club as members."

Though some of the accounts are well off the mark, much of the coverage demonstrates that outsiders comprehended the basics of the program and the far-reaching possibilities of this infant society of once-problem drunks.

Most important, the message of A.A. was making its way into the mainstream press. An article in the *St. Paul Dispatch* in April 1944 relates that: "five former drinkers, now members of AA, listed jealousy, envy, resentment, frustration, and fear as the causes for excessive drinking at a meeting of the St. Paul chapter at the YMCA Tuesday night."

The scrapbooks measure 16.5 by 18.5 inches and range in size from 64 pages to 76 pages. The 1939-1942 volume costs \$75, while the 1943 volume and the first installment of the three-part 1944 volume cost \$65 each.

■ Nigerian Prison Nurse Seeks A.A.'s Help in Rebuilding Broken Lives

Olukunbi A. Orimoloye is a registered (nonalcoholic) nurse-midwife who for the past 15 years has worked with the Nigerian Prisons Service in Akure. Writing to the General Service Office, she recalled how profoundly the alcoholism of one inmate had destroyed his entire family—a scene that, sadly, is replicated countless times over. She hopes, with the assistance of A.A., to help these alcoholic inmates achieve sobriety and rebuild not only their own shattered lives but those of their disrupted families.

Wrote Olukunbi of a long-ago event that still haunts her: "When I was a student nurse in the State Specialist Hospital in 1988, my nursing associate Sister Abe (not her real name) was a gentle, caring woman. All her patients, colleagues and student nurses loved her. She would talk about God all the time. Everything looked fine, and we all thought her life was wonderful. We never knew she was miserable, and that work to her was just a temporary relief from the pains at home. Sister Abe had five wonderful children, but her husband was an alcoholic and a wife batterer. She was a slave in her own home, staying there only for the sake of her children, but nobody knew."

Olukunbi related that while she was on duty one day, "Sister Abe was wheeled in on a stretcher, her body badly burned. The doctors and nurses struggled to save her life, but when she woke up hours later, she knew she was about to die. Gathering the nurses together, she told us what had happened to her."

Noting that Sister Abe's husband "had never had a

■ A.A. in Times Square, New York City

With the crowds of Times Square as an audience, the latest public service announcement from A.A. beamed out from the NBC Astrovision Board, where it played twice an hour throughout September. The company that produced the P.S.A. sent NBC a copy as part of a mailing to almost 800 of the larger TV stations and networks in the U.S. and Canada. The Astrovision Board, manufactured by Panasonic, hangs on the building famous as the place where the lighted ball descends during the last seconds of New Year's Eve. There is keen competition for airtime on Astrovision, and it's a testament to the quality of the P.S.A., "We Know What It's Like," that NBC chose it.

Since the Astrovision screen lacks audio, NBC must choose footage able to convey a message without sound. But as a representative at the broadcasting company said, NBC felt the spot "told the story even once the audio was removed."



sober moment in his life,” Olukunbi said that “on this unfortunate night, he had arrived home drunk. When Sister Abe tried to talk to him about his drinking, he lost his temper, picked up a burning kerosene stove and the pot of soup on it and threw them at her. Two days later she died. Her children, unable to forgive their father, drifted away as soon as they were able. Her husband was never himself again.”

Olukunbi has not forgotten Sister Abe. “Since her death,” she said, “I’ve had the desire to help such women, and also to help their alcoholic husbands become rehabilitated—there are many in this prison like Sister Abe’s husband. But in order to do so, I need the support of A.A. Will you help us?”

G.S.O. staff member Eva S., who answered Olukunbi’s request for help, sent her A.A. literature and noted that A.A. has a presence in the correctional facilities of the U.S./Canada and several other countries. In Cameroon, Eva pointed out, A.A. started around 1996 when one French-speaking alcoholic guard found a copy of the Big Book and wrote to France’s General Service Office. Thanks to that one guard, A.A. grew in Cameroon, where today there are more than 110 groups and 500 members, including those in prisons.

Were it not for professionals in the medical community who use A.A. as a resource and refer alcoholics to meetings, the Fellowship as we know it would not exist. Today, Eva told Olukunbi, “we are aware of a few A.A. groups and contacts in Nigeria—at Lagos, Carki, Igbajo and Warri.” She offered to arrange for an A.A. member to contact Olukunbi and further suggested that she get in touch with Al-Anon/Alateen Family Group Headquarters in Virginia Beach, Va., for help in reaching out to families of alcoholics.

Soon afterward, Olukunbi wrote again. “I’m so grateful to G.S.O. for the books and the other contact addresses you sent me,” she said. “I’ve given a friend of mine a copy [of the Big Book] and have gotten two people, including my husband, to help me help the alcoholics in our area. Additionally, my boss in the Prisons Service has agreed to help me organize the inmates who need help with their alcoholism. Long live A.A., and may God bless all its members.”

■ The D.C.M.: Linchpin Between Group Reps and The Area Service Structure

Of all the offices in general service, perhaps one of the least understood is that of the district committee member. Just what is a D.C.M.? How are these trusted servants elected, and what do they do?

To understand, let’s start with the District itself. The term “district” was mentioned during early General Service Conferences, and both “district” and “district committee member” were used informally in the 1950s. The term “district” was included in the 1955 draft of *The Third Legacy Manual of World Service* (now titled *The A.A. Service Manual*) and 20 years later was formalized in a 1975 supplement to *The Service Manual*.

In today’s *Service Manual* a district is clearly defined as “a geographical unit containing the right number of groups — right in terms of the D.C.M.’s ability to keep in frequent touch with them, to learn their problems, and to find ways to contribute to their growth. In most areas a district includes six to 20 groups. In metropolitan districts the number is generally 15 to 20, while in rural or suburban districts it can be as small as five.” (To encourage maximum group participation, some areas have incorporated linguistic districts. These usually have a bilingual D.C.M. or liaison, and their boundaries may be independent of the conventional geographic district boundaries.)

Now to the D.C.M.: The heart of A.A. is the group, which elects a general service representative. G.S.R.s attend district meetings that are made up of the groups in that district and elect a D.C.M. As noted in the flyer “Your D.C.M.,” available from the General Service Office, the D.C.M., who serves a two-year term, is the vital link between the group’s G.S.R. and the area service structure (including the area’s delegate to the General Service Conference).

Usually the D.C.M., who is elected by other G.S.R.s, has already served as one of them and so knows the ropes. Time, energy, and commitment are important attributes, because D.C.M.s take the collective group conscience of their district’s A.A. groups to the area committee. Among other things they hold regular meetings of all G.S.R.s in the district and keep them informed about Conference activities; help the delegate obtain and update group information for appropriate A.A. directories; and hold workshops on carrying the message of the Seventh Tradition of self-support to A.A. groups.

Across the U.S. and Canada several thousand D.C.M.s are doing all this, and more. In Long Beach, California, D.C.M. Phil L. stresses that “we D.C.M.s do not work alone. It takes a lot of people working together to accomplish whatever we are able to do here, and many of our ideas come to us as the result of the sharing of other A.A.s in service.” One of them, the idea of putting together visitation kits, came, Phil says, “from seeing one at the Pacific Regional Forum in July 2002; and the idea of the flyer that’s included came from a fellow D.C.M. Then it took a team to put them together, took the district to vote and approve it, and the D.C.M.s to take it out on visits to our groups.

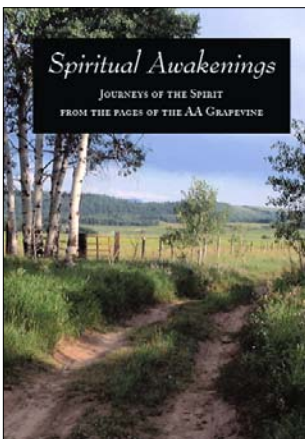
“Our visitation kit consists of an information flyer listing the addresses of the area, district and local services committees, such as Hospitals and Institutions (H&I) Committee, our Harbor Area Central Office, as well as

G.S.O. and the pamphlets ‘Your A.A. General Service Office,’ ‘The A.A. Group,’ and ‘G.S.R. May Be the Most Important Job in A.A.’ We remind them to include their group service numbers when making contributions to any of these entities. Our kit also contains the Self-Support Packet (F-19), which includes the pamphlet ‘Self-Support: Where Money and Spirituality Mix,’ the service piece ‘Memo to a Group Treasurer,’ Self-Support flyers and a Group Service Number Card.” This Self-Support Packet is available from G.S.O. at no charge.

Once prepared, the kits are taken by the area’s nine D.C.M.s to the groups they represent—approximately 30 in each district. “Wherever I’ve gone with the kits,” Phil relates, “the groups have been receptive. Part of our purpose is to update and check the accuracy of group registration information that is forwarded to G.S.O., and to extend a warm welcome to our district meeting. It is held once a month and anybody can come.”

Phil takes the demands of being a D.C.M. in stride. “I joined A.A. over eight years ago,” he says, “and in my Icebreakers Group I’d see my service sponsor, Pete B. [now Mid-Southern California delegate, Panel 52], and a lot of other people keeping service commitments come rain or shine. They were staying sober — it was inspiring and in turn helped me to make and meet commitments. This is where the road took me, and I’m grateful. I love general service.”

■ New From The AA Grapevine



Spiritual Awakenings, a new collection of stories from 60 years of the AA Grapevine, chronicles the spiritual journeys of individual A.A. members. Bill W. said one of the main aims of the Big Book was to put recovering alcoholics in touch with a Power greater than themselves, and these stories in *Spiritual Awakenings* reflect the many ways A.A. members have made that connection. Some

discovered a Higher Power for the first time, while others regained a faith they once had. Above all, in their journeys, they discovered themselves. And they tell how, “having had a spiritual awakening,” they learned to practice spiritual principles in their everyday lives. Copies of *Spiritual Awakenings* (GV-14), which comes out Nov. 15, can be ordered by calling 212-870-3404, writing to PO Box 1980, Marion, OH 43306-8080, or online at www.aagrapevine.org, 240 pages; softcover; \$7.95, plus shipping and handling.

Correctional Facilities

■ Inmates Getting Out Can Take Heart From a Grapevine Issue

The General Service Office is sending a copy of a special correctional facilities edition of the AA Grapevine to inmates who write in with their coming release dates. The magazine, entitled “Released,” contains eight articles from the Grapevine’s July issue written by inmates or former inmates sober in A.A. Since many prisons forbid inmates to have material with staples, the edition sent to the correctional facilities is thread-bound.

The G.S.O. staff member on the correctional facilities assignment, Mary Clare L., says that an A.A. member about to be released from prison is at a critical juncture. “If the inmate can make the leap from A.A. inside the prison to A.A. outside the prison, they tend to stay sober and avoid a return trip to jail,” says Mary Clare. “It may be hard to get a job and they might not be welcomed back by their family. But if they can stay sober, they have a lot going for themselves,” she says.

G.S.O. gets 150 to 300 letters each week from inmates, and they are all answered. Some of those writing want literature, some are looking for an A.A. member on the outside to correspond with. “We put them in touch with an A.A. member on the outside, someone who is part of the Correction Correspondence Service,” says Mary Clare. More than 10,000 A.A. members “inside” correspond with “outside A.A.” through the C.C.S.

Some letter writers want to start a meeting in a jail. These requests are sent to the correctional facilities area chair in that part of the country.

To inmates close to their release dates, G.S.O. sends the pamphlet on sponsorship, the listing of central offices and intergroups, and the “Released” Grapevine issue.

“The special correctional issue is full of success stories from inmates, and that’s great for those on the verge of being released, because it can be very scary facing the world outside,” says Mary Clare.

Their requests for an A.A. contact, someone to introduce them to A.A. on the outside, are, like the requests to start a meeting, passed on by G.S.O. to the appropriate correctional facilities area chair.

The “Released” issue is available for \$1 a copy (including postage) for orders of 10 or more. Contact the Grapevine at 212-870-3404 or on the Web at www.aagrapevine.org.

Twelve Tips on Keeping Your Holiday Season Sober and Joyous

Holiday parties without liquid spirits may still seem a dreary prospect to new A.A.s. But many of us have enjoyed the happiest holidays of our lives sober—an idea we would never have dreamed of, wanted, or believed possible when drinking. Here are some tips for having an all-round ball without a drop of alcohol.



1 Line up extra A.A. activities for the holiday season. Arrange to take newcomers to meetings, answer the phones at a clubhouse or central office, speak, help with dishes, or visit the alcoholic ward at a hospital.



2 Be host to A.A. friends, especially newcomers. If you don't have a place where you can throw a formal party, take one person to a diner and spring for the coffee.



3 Keep your A.A. telephone list with you all the time. If a drinking urge or panic comes—postpone everything else until you've called an A.A.



4 Find out about the special holiday parties, meetings, or other celebrations

given by groups in your area, and go. If you're timid, take someone newer than you are.



5 Skip any drinking occasion you are nervous about. Remember how clever you were at excuses when drinking? Now put the talent to good use. No office party is as important as saving your life.



6 If you have to go to a drinking party and can't take an A.A. with you, keep some candy handy.



7 Don't think you have to stay late. Plan in advance an "important date" you have to keep.



8 Worship in your own way.



9 Don't sit around brooding. Catch up on those books, museums, walks, and letters.



10 Don't start now getting worked up about all those holiday temptations. Remember—"one day at a time."



11 Enjoy the true beauty of holiday love and joy. Maybe you cannot give material gifts—but this year, you can give love.



12 "Having had a . . ." No need to spell out the Twelfth Step here, since you already know it.

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.

December

5-8—*Fuengirola, Spain*. Living In The Solution Conv. Write: Ch., C/ Sistema Iberico 19, Urb. Los Alamos, 29620 Torremolinos, Malaga, Spain

24-26—*Copperas Cove, Texas*. Seventh Annual Christmas Alkathon. Write: Ch., Box 1386, Copperas Cove, TX 76522; www.centraltex-aadist5.org or coveAAGroup@hotmail.com

January

15-18—*Raleigh, North Carolina*. 37th Tar Heel Mid-Winter Conf. Write: Ch., Box 18412, Raleigh, NC 27619; nconference@nc.rr.com

16-18—*Mahnomen, Minnesota*. Wild Rice Round-Up. Write: Ch., Box 203, Mahnomen, MN 56557

16-18—*Columbus, Ohio*. New Year of Acceptance Conf. Write: Ch., Box 06429, Columbus, OH 43206

16-18—*Rotorua, New Zealand*. 41st New Zealand Conv. Write: Ch., Box 189, Rotorua, New Zealand

22-25—*Fort Walton Beach, Florida*. 14th Annual Emerald Coast Jamboree. Write: Ch., Box 875, Fort Walton Beach, FL 32549-0875

23-25—*Clarksville, Tennessee*. Area 64 First Quarter Assembly. Write: Ch., 87 Grassmire Dr., Clarksville, TN 37042

23-25—*Corpus Christi, Texas*. Coastal Bend Jamboree. Write: Ch., PMB 482, 1220 Airline Fleet 130, Corpus Christi, TX 78412

29-Feb. 1—*Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada*. 30th Annual Conf. Write: Ch., 208-323 Portage Ave., Winnipeg, MB R3B 2C1; aambco@mts.net

30-Feb.1—*Midland, Texas*. XX Reunión de Zona Norte de Texas. Write: Ch., 1800 N. Big Spring St. #127, Midland, TX 79705

February

6-7—*Phoenix, Arizona*. Fourth Annual Corrections Conf. Write: Ch., 508 West Piute Ave., Phoenix, AZ 85027

6-8—*Imperial, California*. 14th Annual Imperial Valley Round-Up. Write: Ch., 845 Commercial Ave. #1, El Centro, CA 92243

6-8—*Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada*. 17th Annual Mid-Winter Round-Up. Write: Ch., Box 742 Station A, Fredericton, NB E3B 5B4; www.brunnet.net/area81aa

6-8—*Largo, Florida*. Largo's Step 'n Ahead 12 Step Study. Write: Ch., P.O. Box 1273, Indian Rocks Beach, FL 33785

12-15—*Melbourne, Florida*. Spacecoast Round-Up. Write: Ch., Brevard Intergroup, 720 E. New Haven Ave. Suite #3, Melbourne, FL 32901; aaspacecoast@bellsouth.net

13-15—*Little Rock, Arkansas*. Winter Holiday Conv. Write: Ch., Box 26135, Little Rock, AR 72221-6135; winter_holiday@hotmail.com

13-15—*Aguadilla, Puerto Rico*. 48va Conv. Area Puerto Rico. Write: Ch., Box 321, Aguadilla, PR 00605; xilef@coqui.net

19-22—*Buffalo, New York*. 40th Annual International Women's Conf. Write: Ch., Box 234, Sanborn, NY 14132

20-21—*Sikeston, Missouri*. Third Annual Five Corners Conv. Write: Ch., Box 158, Sikeston, MO 63801

20-22—*Virginia Beach, Virginia*. 28th Annual Oceanfront Conf. Write: Ch., Box 66173, Virginia Beach, VA 23466

27-29—*Foley, Alabama*. 20th Annual District 19 Jubilee Conv. Write: Ch., Box 1183, Foley, AL 36536

27-29—*Burlington, Iowa*. 14th South East Iowa Round-Up. Write: Ch., Box 85, Keosauqua, IA 52565

27-29—*Kansas City, Kansas*. 22nd Annual Sunflower Round-Up. Write: Ch., 10604 Bluejacket St., Overland Park, KS 66214

27-29—*Nashua, New Hampshire*. 13th Annual NERAASA. Write: Ch., Box 5524, Manchester, NH 03108-5524; www.nhaa.net/neraasa2004

27-29—*Pattaya, Thailand*. Ninth Annual Thailand Round-Up. Write Ch., Box 1551, Nana Post Office, Bangkok 10112 Thailand; www.aathailand.org or info@aathailand.org

March

5-7—*Irvine, California*. PRAASA. Write: Ch., Box 2154, Huntington Beach, CA 92647-2154; www.praasa2004.org

12-14—*Jekyll Island, Georgia*. 17th Unity Weekend Conf. Write: Ch., #34 Glen Falls Dr., Ormond Beach, FL 32174; fwb34@aol.com

12-14—*Troy, Michigan*. 52nd Michigan State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 1164, Belleville, MI 48112

12-14—*Sioux Falls, South Dakota*. 15th Annual Sioux Empire Round-Up. Write: Ch., Box 76, Sioux Falls, SD 57101

18-21—*Greenville, South Carolina*. 57th South Carolina State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 80043, Simpsonville, SC 29680; www.area62.org or sc2004convention@yahoo.com

19-21—*Lincoln, Nebraska*. Spring Fling Conf. Write: Ch., Box 30691, Lincoln, NE 68503

19-21—*Hood River, Oregon*. HOW-L Conv. Write: Ch., Box 973, Hood River, OR 97031

19-21—*Toronto, Ontario, Canada*. Ontario Regional Conf. Write: Ch., 31 Adelaide St. E, Box 804, Toronto, ON M5C 2K1; www.aatoronto.org or orc@aatoronto.org

26-28—*Ames, Iowa*. Aim for Ames Round-Up. Write: Ch., Box 2522, Ames, IA 50010; www.aimforames.org

Planning a Future Event?

To be included in the *Box 4-5-9* Calendar, information must be received at G.S.O. three months prior to the event. We list events of two or more days.

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 _____, 20 _____

Name of event: _____

Place (city, state or prov.): _____

For information, write: (exact mailing address) _____

Contact phone # (for office use only): _____

