

## Lois W. – 1891-1988

Lois Burnham Wilson – beloved Lois W. to millions of A.A.s and Al-Anons, and widow of A.A. co-founder Bill W. – died peacefully on October 5, 1988, at the age of 97.

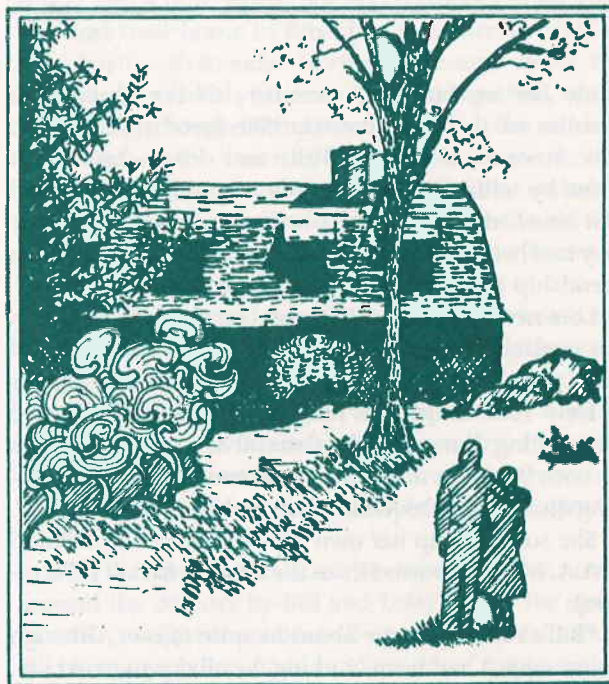
Just a month before, appearing rather frail but sitting alertly on the couch in the living room at Stepping Stones, the home she shared with Bill, she told a visitor, “I’m going to make 100, you know.” She didn’t quite. Two weeks after making this remark, she had to enter the Northern Westchester Hospital. Suffering from pneumonia in her last days, and unable to speak, she continued to communicate by writing on a pad.

Five days before her death, John B., general manager of A.A.’s General Service Office, called on Lois in the hospital. He expressed his personal gratitude and that of the Fellowship because, he told her, “A.A.s owe their lives to you.” A ghost of a smile crossed Lois’s features and she wrote on her pad, “Not to me, to God.” John replied, “But you were His servant.” And Lois wrote, “So are you.”

Upon hearing of her death, John said, “She was the last of the four: Dr. Bob and Anne, Bill and Lois. Her passing is the end of an era for Alcoholics Anonymous.”

Michael Alexander, chairperson of the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous, sounded a similar note in his letter announcing Lois’s death to the Fellowship: “In the early days the entire future of our Fellowship and of countless alcoholics hung on the thread of the determination and ability of Bill W. and Dr. Bob to persist in their efforts to put Alcoholics Anonymous on firm ground. Lois Wilson is regarded by many as someone without whom her husband could not have persisted in that crucial work. Bill referred to her as a ‘full partner’ in the struggles and joys of those early days. Indeed, many A.A.s feel their lives are owed to Lois as well as to Bill, Dr. Bob and Anne.”

The Saturday afternoon after Lois’s death, about 50 family and friends gathered for an informal, Quaker-style service in the living room at Stepping Stones before a roaring fire in the stone fireplace. On that occasion, Michael Alexander spoke of her many talents and many sides: not only the leader and organizer of Al-Anon, but writer, artist, poet, musician, much sought-after and



Lois used this sketch of Stepping Stones on her Christmas cards.

effective speaker, lover of nature, homemaker, tireless hostess, devoted wife to Bill. “She was a remarkable and great lady and we shall sorely miss her.”

That afternoon others shared poignant, bittersweet and even funny memories that emphasized her indomitable spirit until the end of her life, her sharp mind, her sense of humor, her feistiness. Ralph B., hired by the old Alcoholic Foundation to write some of A.A.’s first pamphlets and a frequent visitor to Stepping Stones from the earliest days, said that she was “a force that kept everything going while Bill was thinking or writing or visualizing.” He continued: “I would sometimes stand up to Bill, but I wouldn’t *think* of arguing with Lois.”

Ron S. told of accompanying Lois, a speaker at the Desert Roundup in California only three years ago. As he pushed her wheelchair across the hotel parking lot, she spied a huge, gleaming motorcycle, which she asked to go over and admire. Once there, she asked to be photographed alongside it. When she was introduced the next day, the motorcycle group of A.A. members

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made her an honorary member, to the cheers and whistles of the huge crowd. "She loved it!" declared Ron. Steve S., a Bedford Hills taxi driver, brought it home by telling in a few words how Bill and Lois had first touched his life when he was a drunk, and how they had helped turn his life around and gave him warm friendship through more than 20 years' sobriety.

Lois never stopped. Until the last weeks of her life, she continued to accept invitations to speak, planned trips, appeared at the annual Bill W. Anniversary Dinner in New York to deliver "Bill's Last Message," attended the opening dinners of the General Service Conferences of both Al-Anon and A.A., welcomed visitors to Stepping Stones and frequently lunched out with friends.

She summed up her own life as it related to Bill and to A.A. in these words (from the Preface to *Lois Remembers*):

"Bill's recovery came about in spite of me. Although it was what I had been working for all our married life, I had gone about it the wrong way. My love, deep as it was, was also possessive; and my ego was so great I felt I could change him. . . . Bill *was* my life. . . . For the first 17 years of my recovery and Bill's, there was no fellowship for the families of alcoholics. . . . A.A. was therefore my first love. Although not alcoholic, I feel even today as much a member of A.A. as of Al-Anon, at least in spirit."

Lois Burnham was born March 4, 1891, in Brooklyn, New York, the oldest of six children. "My childhood was an extremely happy one," Lois wrote.

She also had happy memories of summers in Vermont with her grandparents and at a lakeside cabin owned by her parents. She was a tomboy, joyfully going barefoot, riding her bicycle, climbing trees. With the other youngsters, she swam and boated on the lake, and as she grew up, went into Manchester for tennis, golf or dancing.

There she met Bill, who was a friend of her brother Rogers. Bill and his sister Dorothy lived in East Dorset with their grandparents, their parents being divorced. Lois was not particularly impressed with Bill at first because he was four years younger and was a native Vermonter, whereas she was a sophisticated summer

resident. But as they spent many summer hours in mutually shared good times — hiking, picnicing, boating, and above all, talking — her interest quickened and all differences were forgotten.

The couple carried on a romance by mail — she on a daily basis, he more sporadic. Bill was in and out of Norwich University, and when the U.S. declared war in 1917, his class joined the Army Reserves and Bill was sent to Officers Training Camp. He was commissioned a second lieutenant in August and stationed in New Bedford, Massachusetts. During this two and a half year period, he and Lois visited as often as possible in Brooklyn or at his various posts and had wonderful times together. Then it was rumored that Bill's regiment was about to go overseas, and they were married January 24, 1918.

They left for New Bedford and four months later were transferred to Newport, Rhode Island. During most of their courtship, Bill had not touched alcohol, as his father's drinking had been a contributing cause to his parents' divorce. Now, however, he occasionally drank at parties — and when he did, he got drunk. It didn't worry his bride, as she believed she could "fix" him.

During the war, Lois worked at Walter Reed Hospital in Washington, D.C. Upon Bill's return after the Armistice, they lived in Brooklyn. Unprepared for any civilian job, Bill floundered. "To think things over," Lois said, "we took an extended walking trip through Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont," thus starting a lifelong habit. Bill went to law school for four years, while Lois worked as an occupational therapist.

During this period and the years that followed, Bill's drinking grew steadily worse. Although they had dreamed of having children, Lois suffered three ectopic pregnancies with accompanying surgery. At the last one, Bill was too drunk to come to the hospital to see her. After learning they could not have children, they applied to an adoption agency — but without results, because apparently one of their references reported that Bill drank to excess.

A bright spot came in 1925, when they both gave up their jobs, bought a Harley-Davidson motorcycle with sidecar, and took off for a year of vagabonding.

In 1929, "distraught over Bill's incessant drinking," Lois poured out her anguish in a document that was heartbreaking but remarkable for its insights. It read in part:

"What is one to think or do after so many failures? . . . If I should lose my love and faith, what then? I see nothing but emptiness, bickering, taunts and selfishness. . . . I love my husband more than words can tell, and I know he loves me. He is a splendid, fine man . . . everybody loves him . . . a born leader . . . so bighearted he would give away his last penny . . . has a delightful sense of humor and an unusual vocabulary . . . a

compelling talker . . . remarkable memory. . . . Details bore him, his mind being of the farseeing, long-perspective kind. . . . He continually asks for my help, and we have been trying continually for five years to find an answer to his drinking problem. . . .”

Lois was to need her remarkable spirit over the next five years, as her husband sank into hopeless alcoholism. He lost job after job until he became unemployable. Lois took a job clerking in a department store to buy food for the table. Bill “became a drunken sot who didn’t dare leave the house,” according to Lois. Twice, she put him in Towns Hospital to be dried out and twice took him on trips to the country, to Vermont, to nurse him back to health herself. Nothing did any good. Finally, he virtually stopped eating and drank around the clock.

Then one day in the late fall of 1934, Bill made his way once more to Towns Hospital. There he had his transforming spiritual experience.

Lois wrote, “The minute I saw him at the hospital, I knew something overwhelming had happened. . . . His whole being expressed hope and joy. . . . From that moment on, I never doubted that at last he was free.”

On leaving Towns, Bill tried to sober up all the alcoholics at the hospital, in missions, and anyplace else he found them – without success. He and Lois were also attending Oxford Group meetings. In May 1935, Bill carried the message to Dr. Bob in Akron. When he returned to New York he began to have success in working with alcoholics. And he began bringing them home to the house on Clinton Street. “We used to have as many as five in the house at a time,” he wrote later (in *A.A. Comes of Age*), “and sometimes they would all be drunk at once.” There were fights and one suicide – after the victim had sold hundreds of dollars worth of Bill and Lois’s clothes and luggage. Lois would come home exhausted from her work at the department store and then have to cook dinner for a houseful of drunks who didn’t even pay board.

Bill and Lois were still going to Oxford Group meetings during this time. One Sunday, a trivial incident occurred which Lois later called the turning point in her life. When her husband said casually, “We’ll have to hurry or we’ll be late to the Oxford Group meeting,” Lois, with a shoe in her hand, threw it at him as hard as she could and cried, “Damn your old meetings!”

As she analyzed her behavior later, she saw that she had always had great faith in her own power; she believed she was “master of her destiny.” She now resented the fact that Bill’s newfound friends in the Oxford Group had accomplished in a twinkling what she had failed to do in 17 years. She had also become accustomed to running things as nurse, breadwinner, decision maker; now Bill was living his own life, spending much of his time with the alcoholics who were beginning to form the first New York group. She wrote, “I

have come to see that well-intentioned good deeds often fail when they are done from our own power alone; the only real good is accomplished by finding God’s plan and then . . . carrying out that plan.” Out of this thinking, Al-Anon eventually was born.

As Alcoholics Anonymous began to take hold and grow – as an office was acquired, the Big Book written and published, and groups sprang up in other cities – Lois’s life, along with Bill’s was filled with furious activity. “It was a hectic and fruitful time,” she recalled. It was also a time when they had no money at all. After they lost their home in Brooklyn, they literally lived off the charity of friends. During 1939 and 1940, they moved an incredible 51 times! In February 1940, as they were going through Grand Central Station, she suddenly sat down on the stairs and burst into tears, wailing, “Will we ever have our own home?” They ended up living for several months in a tiny room in the old 24th Street Clubhouse in Manhattan with only a borrowed bed and two orange crates for furniture.

Their wanderings ended in April 1941, when it was made possible for them to buy the lovely house in Bedford Hills, New York, which was later named Stepping Stones. Brown-shingled and hip-roofed, it stands among trees on a hill, overlooking a valley. It was not only their home as long as they lived, but became a mecca for countless A.A.s and Al-Anons for the past 47 years.

The decade of the ’40s also saw extensive travels around the country by Bill and Lois; and in the spring of 1950, to eight countries in Europe as well. Lois found that in many places, wives and families of A.A. members were meeting in groups themselves, and she usually talked at these meetings. In 1951, Bill urged her to open a service office for the Family Groups. She was reluctant at first because she was so excited about working in the house and garden at Stepping Stones. But as she considered the need, and after meeting with other wives to explore the idea, Lois opened a service office with the help of a friend, Anne B. Beginning with a list furnished them by the A.A. General Service Office of family members or groups who had written requesting help, they soon had more work than they could handle alone. They moved their activities in early 1952 from Stepping Stones to the 24th Street Clubhouse, where they enlisted volunteers to assist. And thus Al-Anon was formed. Today, including Alateen, 30,000 groups exist worldwide.

In 1955, at the St. Louis International Convention, Bill stepped down as leader of A.A., turning the responsibility over to the groups working through the General Service Conference. Lois was present, of course, and made the first address after the “Coming of Age” ceremony. In fact, Lois attended every International Convention from 1945 until 1985, and participated in every one.

In early 1970, while doing a chore on the roof at home, Bill fell to the ground. It marked the beginning

of a decline in his health. His emphysema took a marked turn for the worse. Following a last brief appearance at the International Convention in Miami in July, he required Lois's constant care, and later had nurses around the clock. He died on their 53rd wedding anniversary, January 24, 1971. Lois was with him until his last few hours.

A symbolic culmination of Lois's life was her appearance in July 1985 at the 50th Anniversary International Convention of A.A., and the accompanying Convention of Al-Anon, in Montreal. At age 94, she addressed a hushed audience of over 45,000. The very appearance of her tiny figure on the stage in the center of the vast Olympic Stadium brought the huge crowd to its feet in a tumultuous standing ovation that went on and on.

From the time of Bill's death, Lois was concerned that Stepping Stones continue to be maintained and kept open after her own death for the benefit of A.A. and Al-Anon members. She also wanted to use a substantial portion of the money which had come to her from Bill's estate (largely from royalties on A.A. books he had written) for alcoholism education and prevention. Therefore, in 1979, she formed the Stepping Stones Foundation for these purposes.

Until her late 80s Lois insisted on living independently, with only her housekeeper, Harriet, to help. Then after suffering several falls and fractures, she surrounded herself with aides and helpers who, along with devoted friends, enabled her to live comfortably and graciously during her last years. This staff was supplemented by regular attention from Nell Wing, Bill's aide and secretary for 27 years and Lois's long-time companion as well; Ann Burnham Smith, Lois's second cousin; and other devoted friends.

On October 20, 1988, a memorial service for Lois W. was held at the beautiful, historic Marble Collegiate Church in New York. The large church was nearly filled for the moving service. In his eulogy, the minister, Dr. Arthur Caliendo, emphasized how unusual and remarkable it was for such a huge crowd to turn out for the funeral of a 97-year-old person – and how they symbolized the larger family of many millions who lived new lives because of Bill and Lois.

Lois's devoted day nurse for more than four years, Ethyl Dumas – whom she dubbed "Eternal Ethyl" – recalls that "this lady always knew what she wanted." She relates that on the afternoon of October 5, Lois wrote on her pad, ". . . want to go to sleep." "And," says Ethyl, "that's just what she did."

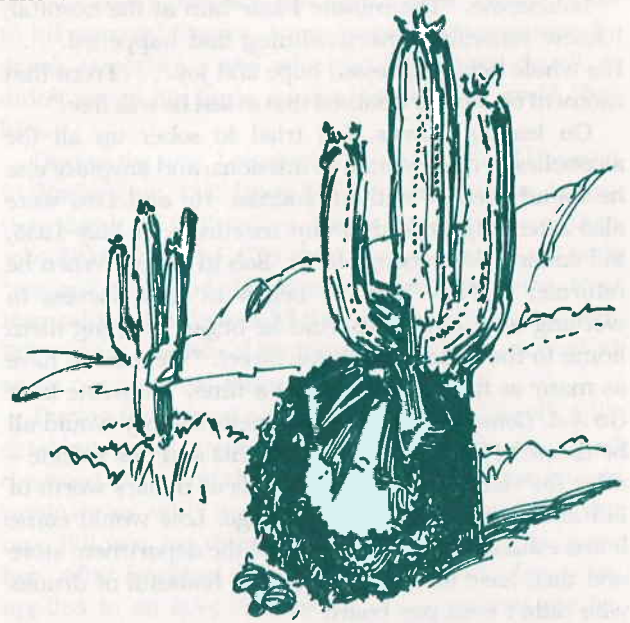
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## Christmas in Mexico – A Cheery Update

In its 1987 holiday issue, Box 4-5-9 adapted Christmas messages from around the world that had appeared over the years in the A.A. Grapevine. One of these messages, sent by Kent W., of Sierra Vista, Arizona, described a 1976 Christmas Eve alkathon he had attended in Mexico: "One fellow told about a neighboring town that also was starting an alkathon and observed that they had two new men – but the translation came out that they had *dos pavos*, meaning 'two turkeys.' Someone asked if the A.A.s in question were having a dinner and eating the turkeys, whereupon the translator, Graciano, said he meant 'new men.' The light dawned and I said, 'Oh, you mean "pigeons (*palomas*)."' Graciano looked relieved: '*Si!* I know you call them some kind of bird.'"



Twelve years later, Kent writes again to tell what has happened to the little Grupo La Buena Vida. "In 1976," he relates, "it was the only A.A. group in the Guaymas-San Carlos area of Sonora, Mexico. There were ten members in all – five Mexicans, four North Americans and a lone Canadian. Since then, two of the North Americans have died, and the Canadian has returned home. All the original Mexican members are still living, and only one has picked up a drink since 1976. Happily, he is back again with three years' sobriety."

According to Kent, the two North Americans left to start their own group in a nearby town. The Mexican group, with its five members, has mushroomed into seven groups that each have a well-attended meeting every day. What's more, he reports, "the macho men have allowed the ladies to be alcoholics instead of

drunks in the closets, and there is now a women's group."

The original Mexican members get together to celebrate each other's A.A. anniversaries, birthdays and other special occasions, says Kent. "They are the *abuelitos* – the dear little grandfathers – and they watch their flock with care as it grows and the newcomers stay sober *un dia a la vez*. Graciano is still there to translate, and he now knows the difference between *pavos* and *palomas*!"

At the Christmas alkathons, Kent continues, "people drift from group to group. Whole families come, bringing even their youngest babies. The food includes the good Navidad tamales; menudo (a special festive soup); frijoles refritos; tortillas; bunuelos; and salsa casera with the picante jalapeños. A few hungry kids come in off the streets and they are fed, too. Chairpersons trade places as the night goes on. The festivities continue as long as there are people to celebrate.

"As the members emerge from the meeting rooms, they find it is daylight; and the bells signaling the early Christmas Mass are ringing. The palm fronds sway in the breeze and the smell of the sea air is sweet. As the light brightens in the east, we can see the islands in the bay and the huge Saugus cactuses standing with their arms stretched upward as if they, like us, are thanking Someone, somewhere, for this special day of sobriety.

"*Vaya con Dios!* And Happy Christmas to you all!"

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## Service Veterans Pat R. and Richard B. Join G.S.O. Staff

Last June, A.A. Richard B. flew from his home in Arkansas to New York. His destination: the General Service Office, which had invited him to interview for a staff position. "I walked off the plane into crowded LaGuardia Airport," Richard recalls, "and the first person I saw was Pat R., a Texan who had served with me as a Panel 35 Conference delegate in 1985-86. We hugged A.A. style and I said, 'What in the world are you doing here?' 'Oh,' she exclaimed, 'I'm being interviewed for a staff job at G.S.O.!' "

On a hot day in August, when Richard had started his first G.S.O. assignment on Cooperation With the Professional Community and Pat was feeling her way on Correctional Facilities, the two friends confessed that when they bumped into one another at the airport and shared their "destinations," each privately thought the other would get the job. "So much for projection," observes Pat. "What didn't occur to either one of us was that we both might be hired."

For Pat, her new life at G.S.O. is a dream come true. "Several years ago," she relates, "a friend of mine asked what I'd like to do more than anything else in the world. 'Work at G.S.O.,' I told her, but it all seemed too extraordinary. I submitted an application early in 1987 and then put the idea on the back burner. My application was filed, reactivated more than a year later, and here I am."

After joining A.A. in April 1966, Pat was attracted early to service work. "My sponsor took me to intergroup meetings and to conventions," she says. "I served in various group offices, worked at intergroup in Houston and became really active when I served as a G.S.R. in Northeast Texas. Then I was Northeast Texas Area D.C.M., delegate and area chairperson. Service work has given me a wonderful sense of participation in A.A. as a whole; and it has helped to keep me sober."

If Pat doesn't "talk Texan," it's probably because she was born and raised in New York and New Jersey. Alcohol was very much a part of the family scene, she remembers, "and I first resorted to it before junior high school. I now realize I was seeking a solution to my internal pain."

After graduating from Music and Art High School in Manhattan, Pat went on to earn a B.S. degree from the State University of New York at Buffalo; she later received a Master of Fine Arts degree from East Texas State University. She has taught art and English at every school level from elementary to college. And in the early 1970s, she helped to set up an alcoholism unit at Houston's St. Joseph's Hospital, where she served as a counselor. She also raised three daughters: Linda, Donna and Cynthia, whose year-old son, Timothy, is the apple of his grandma's eye.

At G.S.O. Pat says, "I have the incredible privilege of being able to use all the experience I've had in service work. And I am reminded every day that I don't have to do everything by myself. The staff members are fantastic, always ready to help me learn the ropes." The best part of her assignment on the Correctional Facilities desk, she notes, "is writing to the inmates one-on-one. It's a very personal experience. I love to communicate and I love A.A. – and G.S.O. makes it all come together. The challenge is there; it stretches me spiritually and I love it."

Says Richard B., "Pat and I are sort of the Bobbsey Twins of G.S.O., probably because we started work at the same time and are learning together. But the staff can tell us apart – by our accents. Unlike Pat, I speak real southern and get kidded unmercifully, all in good fun of course. When people come to my desk and say 'Howdy,' I teach them to talk right and say 'Hi, y'all!'"

Although he was born in Hillsdale, Michigan, and spent the first 12 years of his life in Montpelier, Ohio, Richard has lived longest in Missouri and Arkansas. After high school in Missouri, he served with the U.S.

Marine Corps and then went on to college. By the time he received a Bachelor of Journalism degree from the University of Missouri, he also had considerable experience with drinking. He went on to try his hand as a newspaper reporter and editor; and "even though my drinking escalated," he says, "I never lost a job, though the fact that my mother headed the newspaper I worked for may have had something to do with that." His drinking continued to escalate through a couple of marriages and, finally, in January 1976, he sobered up in A.A.

"My sponsor bumped and blasted me through the Steps," Richard says, "and another wonderful guy started hauling me around to prison meetings. He got me to speak and had me carry the message before I knew I had one."

In his first year of sobriety, Richard was secretary-treasurer of the Neosho (Missouri) Group. From there he went on to serve as G.S.R.; Western Missouri Area Institutions chairperson; D.C.M., District 13, Western Missouri Area; area treasurer, secretary, and Panel 35 delegate. He also has served on a number of alcoholism task forces and advisory boards.

Richard explains his dedication to service: "A.A. has always been more to me than a Fellowship or a recovery program. As I came to terms with the God of my understanding, I also came to believe that He wanted something from me in return for His grace and gift of sobriety."

Richard views his work at G.S.O. as an extension of service. "The C.P.C. assignment is a challenge," he says. "I am especially excited about the 1988 Conference Advisory Action calling for special outreach efforts directed to minorities, with emphasis on the black community. This can be done to a great extent, I believe, by utilizing our literature and by giving our traveling C.P.C. exhibit greater exposure." Smiling, he cautions, "Don't get me started. You know what they say - if you ask an alcoholic what time it is, you'll likely get a full explanation of how a watch works!"

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## 1990 International Convention Registration Information

Less than a year from now - in the fall of 1989 - your group will receive registration forms from G.S.O. for an historical occasion: A.A.'s 55th Anniversary International Convention, in Seattle, Washington, July 5-8, 1990. How all those 24-hour periods do add up - and how fast they can go by!

The Big Meetings and the Saturday evening entertainment will take place at Seattle's Kingdome Stadium.

Panels, workshops, alkathons, and the dance will be held at the Seattle Center and the New Washington State Trade and Convention Center; both are conveniently located. Contracts have been signed with all nearby hotels and motels, so that your rooms will be available at Convention Rates on a first-come, first-served basis. Facilities committed to our Convention will accept registrations for that weekend *only* if they receive the request through the General Service Office.

Let's get together in Seattle to celebrate, one-day-at-a-time, 55 years of recoveries in our beloved Fellowship.

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## Our Mailroom



## Looks A Lot Like Christmas!

In our August-September issue, *Box 4-5-9* ran articles on a number of subjects that concern A.A.s everywhere - anonymity, the Twelve Traditions, and the pros and cons of smokeless meetings - and asked readers to share their experiences. The response has been great, the views as varied as each individual A.A. Following are as many excerpts as space allows:

### *Anonymity*

"I live in a small town. The following incident occurred when I was struggling in and out of A.A., trapped in the World War III that precedes surrender: I entered my 'Wednesday store' for beer and sufficient groceries to 'hide' the beer purchase. Before I reached my primary destination, the cooler, Mr. X caught me at the meat counter. 'Are you going to the A.A. meeting tonight?' he boomed. When I said 'no,' he proceeded to lecture me, and the rest of the store, on the disease of alcoholism and how I'd better grow up. I don't know which angered me more - the public mortification or the inconvenience of having to go to my Thursday store for the beer! (Later

I learned that Mr. X's main concern was drumming up a big turnout for his 30th A.A. anniversary celebration that night.) Today, I thank my Higher Power for the two gifts Mr. X made possible – the lesson of forgiveness and the importance of exercising extreme care in protecting other members' anonymity."—*Anonymous in California*

"A.A. is a dynamic fellowship of alcoholics who are anonymous at the level of press, radio, film and TV, in accordance with Tradition Eleven. Membership requirements are specified in Tradition Three, which says we are members of A.A. if we say so. And the very name of the Fellowship describes its members. For me to belong to the group of alcoholics who stay anonymous in their attempts to stay sober and carry the message, it is imperative for me to maintain, to the best of my ability, the spiritual condition of Tradition Twelve."—*Anonymous*

"I won't forget how I broke my anonymity three years ago. Sober about a year, I was attending college at night. The professor's topic for discussion one evening was 'alcoholism,' and there were several observations from students about 'moral weakness' and 'lack of willpower.' Unable to contain myself, I announced that I was an alcoholic and would tell them all the nitty-gritty truth, which turned out to be my own edited qualification and a lecture on the disease concept of alcoholism. Afterward I felt like a fool. All that I'd heard about anonymity at A.A. meetings meant nothing in the face of my temper and intolerance of others' views. That class may not have learned anything, but I did: to guard against breaking my anonymity in anger again."—*Peter, S., New York, New York*

### **The Traditions**

"Your article asks, 'Are We Being True to Our Traditions?' Of course not. Throughout the 1970s and '80s, there has been a gradual chipping away, as we have become increasingly engrossed in what's happening outside A.A. We've lost sight of what's going on inside to a great extent. . . . I think the A.A. members on the 'front line' have done a heroic job trying to adjust to the enormous changes, but I am seeing burnout in members sober eight years and more."—*Annette F., Fresno, California*

"So many problems result from not incorporating the Traditions into one's life, and not understanding that they are why A.A. works. Of course, according to Tradition Four we cannot force any group to read the Traditions at meetings. I attend five meetings a week, and I might hear the Traditions once. To me, this is a frightening trend. Newcomers learn little or nothing of them and many people seem so wrapped up in their own 'programs' that they could care less about A.A. as a whole. We could go the way of the Washingtonians or the Oxford Group if we continue to allow the Tradi-

tions to be disregarded."—*Karen B., San Mateo, California*

### **Smokeless Meetings**

"I am a nonsmoker, sober five years, who has never been particularly bothered by the smoke except when it becomes extreme or when I have a cold. But my husband used to tease that he always knew where I'd been, because I'd come home with my clothes and hair reeking of tobacco. Here in Grass Valley, we are placing increasing emphasis on good ventilation, to try to minimize the difficulties, and there are several nonsmoking meetings. But what really concerns me is the attitude of both smokers and nonsmokers. This issue generates a lot of anger and fear on both sides; it seems to me to be more damaging to our Fellowship, to us as individuals, and to our attractiveness to newcomers than the smoke itself. Somehow, if we can just muster the collective willingness to face the feelings, I am sure we shall see solutions to the actual difficulties. After all, 'it is a spiritual axiom that every time we are disturbed . . . there is something wrong with us.'"—*Scottie H., Chicago Park, California*

"Should my group vote to enforce a 'No Smoking' rule, I would certainly abide – by not attending. However, the majority must rule. We have voted on other issues, from hand-holding at meetings to serving decaffeinated coffee. In every instance, the final majority vote was well accepted by everyone."—*Ernest J., Lanham, Maryland*

"This actually happened: An A.A. member three weeks out of heart bypass surgery stated during announcements that smoke was deadly to his health, as was alcohol. At least 35 people at the meeting immediately fired up cigarettes. P.S.: The heart patient never came back. Must we always do our thing even at the expense of others? Isn't this part of why we are what we are, and why some of us experience great difficulty in recovery? It seems strange that one could give up drinking for 24 hours but could not give up smoking for one hour. Do we use the 'selfish program' as a tool to have our way? Can we, or will we, change?"—*Gene L., Munster, Indiana*

"As a two-pack-a-day smoker, I used to be full of self-righteous indignation about smokers' rights, and very vocal about them, too. A little further along in sobriety, I realized that nonsmokers have their rights also and favored sectioning off the meeting room into smoking and nonsmoking areas. Today, even though many smoking meetings are available, I attend mainly nonsmoking meetings, because they are where I choose to be. The point is to make A.A. available to everyone. I believe we need to put our egos and emotions aside and place principles above personalities."—*Jim G., Louisville, Colorado*

Do you have a view you would like to express? G.S.O. welcomes your letters – so let's hear from you.

## 1989 Regional Forums

Regional Forums strengthen the Fellowship's Three Legacies of Recovery, Unity, and Service, by providing an opportunity for A.A. group and area representatives, as well as individual A.A.s in a particular region to share experience, strength and hope with G.S.O. and Grapevine staff members, trustees and directors. Through exchanging ideas and information the common purpose of all A.A. service work is emphasized.

Mailings regarding each Regional Forum will be sent to G.S.R.s, area committee members, delegates, and central offices approximately two months ahead of time. In 1989, Forums will be held as follows:

- *East Central Region* – May 12-14: Holidome Conference Center, Ann Arbor, Michigan
- *Northeast Region* – June 2-4: Holiday Inn-Downtown, Portland, Maine
- *West Central Region* – August 4-6: Billings Sheraton, Billings, Montana
- *Southwest Region* – December 1-3: Wichita Airport Hilton, Wichita, Kansas

For additional information, please write: Regional Forum Coordinator, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163.

## P.I.

### The Anonymity Tradition: Should the Last Be First?

At a recent A.A. group meeting in the East an alteration in basic A.A. literature of major proportions was proposed by one of the members present. The suggestion caused quite a stir.

Recommended was that Tradition Twelve, also known as the anonymity tradition, be moved from the bottom of the list to the top to become, from here on, Tradition One.

This came about because one of the subjects approached during this particular meeting was ways to revitalize the Fellowship's internal awareness of the importance of anonymity to the success and continued growth of A.A. If anonymity is of prime importance to the well-being of the Fellowship (and it is), this member argued that the anonymity tradition should not be the last of the Twelve Traditions but the first.

To be sure, from that distant time when the first

basic A.A. literature appeared in print it has been only natural that more than a few members of the Fellowship have found words and phrases they believed should be changed. Maybe even whole sentences deleted or entire paragraphs removed or repositioned.

Considering, in fact, how widely these days the meaning and purpose of anonymity seem to be misunderstood by the general membership this appeared to be a suggestion of great merit indeed. In essence, this new logic almost shouted, are not "alcohol" and "anonymity" equally the root words of the name of the Fellowship? Thus isn't it only natural and right, since "alcohol" is the subject and main thrust of the first of the Twelve Steps, that "anonymity" should be the subject and main thrust of the first of the Twelve Traditions?

A few days after that meeting a report of this proposal was brought to the attention of the trustees' P.I. subcommittee on anonymity. Here a most enlightening discussion took place. Out of it came the realization that Tradition Twelve, the anonymity tradition, was twelfth and last because that's precisely where it ought to be.

One reason advanced was that in the minds of most beginners – even in the minds of many members with several years sobriety and certainly among most people outside the program – the word "anonymity" denotes "shame" or "fear" and to practice anonymity is to hide. This indeed is the impression inspired by the word "anonymity" when its reasons, especially as they pertain to members of A.A., are not most carefully explained.

The committee realized that if raw, bare, unexplained anonymity were the subject of the First Tradition it might not invite readers to explore the other eleven on which the anonymity tradition is based. It might turn them away and thus deny them, possibly forever, one of the great true treasures of sobriety in A.A.

However, the really compelling argument is that it is in Traditions One through Eleven that the *reasons* for A.A. anonymity are slowly and simply spelled out. So that now when A.A. members arrive at Tradition Twelve, they are fully aware of the lessons to be learned *by* – plus the comfort and calm and other benefits that come *from* – the practice of anonymity.

No one argues, the committee was reminded, that *Step* Twelve which begins "having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps" (meaning the earlier eleven) is out of place as number twelve and should be Step One. Similarly, the lessons, aims and benefits described in Traditions One through Eleven are summarized and, for the first time, brought to fruition in Tradition Twelve, which reads "anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities."

Was there anything wrong in questioning and then devoting serious discussion to the present position of the anonymity tradition? Absolutely not! It was a most



provocative idea. To the questioners and others it even strengthened the reason for placing the anonymity tradition twelfth and last. Which is so often the case with any suggestion, large or small, for a revision in basic A.A. literature.

Sound as any correction may seem at the time, what serious consideration of it usually reveals is this: the material as it stands has been so carefully conceived and cultivated that it is exactly where it ought to be in relation to what's ahead of it or behind it.

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## C.P.C.

### Update on Initiative to Reach Minority Alcoholics

Work continues on many fronts within the Fellowship as the result of 1985 and 1988 General Service Conference Advisory Actions regarding A.A.'s initiatives in carrying its message to minorities. The 1988 Action, which endorsed and reemphasized the 1985 Advisory Action, placed emphasis on the black community.

This was the focus of the trustees' Committee on Cooperation With the Professional Community at their July meeting. After a discussion, it was recommended that a subcommittee from the trustees' C.P.C. Committee meet with a subcommittee from the trustees' P.I. Committee in compliance with Conference suggestions to see how the Fellowship may improve ways of carrying the message into the black community. One of the salient features of the discussion was the lack of shared knowledge and experience.

Among the first efforts that the trustees' committee considered was to see whether there might be national conventions and conferences of black professionals where we might display our Professional Exhibit.

At the National Medical Association, a professional organization for black physicians, Steve W., C.P.C. chairperson for Southern California, conducted a survey asking how A.A. is doing in getting its message to the black community. We were, therefore, able to get some solid feedback on some of the questions which are pertinent to this initiative. There are some interesting general observations that can be shared.

On three of the four questions asked on the survey, black professionals gave A.A. high marks. Those ques-

tions were whether or not A.A. groups were available in the neighborhoods of their clients; whether they referred clients who have alcohol problems to A.A.; and whether A.A. is effective as a referral source for their clients.

There was a much different result from the question "Do you feel A.A. literature is adequate for the black community?" Only half of the respondents in the survey felt that A.A. literature was adequate.

C.P.C. committee members and G.S.O. staff members have attended conferences and seminars addressing how other self-help groups are doing in the black community and conferences sponsored by black professional organizations this fall to learn more of the issues involved in special initiatives in the black community. It is hoped that these types of activities will increase our awareness of special needs.

However, an ever-increasing amount of sharing from local, district, intergroup and area C.P.C. committees is needed about what is going on in the area of cooperation with professionals in reaching the suffering alcoholic in the black community. Success in carrying the A.A. message to minorities may well depend on work at the local level. Does your C.P.C. committee have any experience to share with the Fellowship? Through reports to the trustees' and Conference C.P.C. Committees and future articles in *Box 4-5-9*, we will try to share with you the experience shared with us by C.P.C. committees across the United States and Canada.

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## Treatment Facilities

### Film Project Update

Progress on the Treatment Facility film project has made major strides in the past two months. Filmmakers Crommie & Crommie, who also did our films "Young People and A.A." and "It Sure Beats Sitting in a Cell," have been selected from the five bids submitted to make the three minutes of sample footage which will be ready for review by the 1989 General Service Conference.

The chairperson of the trustees' Committee on Treatment Facilities appointed a subcommittee to ascertain what format might best convey the message of A.A. to patients and personnel in treatment facilities.

Since the Conference Advisory Action wants this film to be appropriate for use by other related committees,

and as an additional tool for our Twelfth Step work, the subcommittee recommended that the film be based on the A.A. Preamble. A narrator's voice will be heard, but no actors will be used. The subcommittee felt that, although showing nonalcoholic actors' faces is in keeping with our tradition of anonymity, it might be misleading. Both previous films done by Crommie & Crommie have followed this format with great success.

The topics being emphasized in the film are: The Sixth, Seventh, Eighth and Twelfth Traditions, the importance of home groups and getting a temporary contact. The film will also stress what A.A. is and is not.

A service piece to help answer any questions about the film was also discussed by the subcommittee, and will be discussed further at our next meeting.

## T.F. Newsletter

The first copy of the Treatment Facilities Newsletter was mailed in May to treatment facilities committee chairpersons, delegates, alternate delegates and trustees. We have asked for input from the Fellowship regarding their work in treatment facilities, but up to now none has been forthcoming. The newsletter's existence is contingent on sharing from A.A.s involved in treatment facilities service.

If you have any sharing on problem solving or new methods for carrying the A.A. message into treatment facilities, please let us know. Sometimes, what may seem trivial to you might be the answer that some other treatment facilities committee has been looking for.

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## Correctional Facilities

### 'Much Time and Little Money'

The saying ". . . A.A. in action calls for the sacrifice of much time and little money,"\* certainly is true where correctional facilities work is concerned. How are local correctional facilities committees funded? How do they accumulate literature for inside meetings? We have received some wonderful sharing on this topic, although we still need your input:

\**Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, p. 141.

- The Western Michigan Correctional Facilities Committee writes that groups donate Big Books and Twelve and Twelves through their G.S.R.s, and the books are distributed on the inside by meeting chairpersons. Many members donate books on their own. The group name and city is written on each flyleaf, and from this a wonderful thing happened – inmates started writing to the C.F. coordinator, who took the letters to share with the groups.

- The C.F. representative from District 26, Massachusetts, shares that at the district meeting and at the Boston Central Service Office, a request was made for money to purchase literature, books and films for the correctional facilities in the area. So far about \$200.00 has been gathered, and once in a while someone in the area has donated Big Books for the inmates.

- Again from Michigan, Upper Peninsula; the District 18 D.C.M. asked at an intergroup meeting if any groups would be interested in doing "Group Twelfth Step Work" by contributing money to buy literature for the facilities in the area. The intergroup reps went back to their home groups and, within two weeks, the representatives had received checks to buy over a case of portable soft-cover Big Books. Prisoners are encouraged to take the Big Books with them when they are released.

- The Winners Group in Jacksonville, Florida, through a group conscience decision, has groups adopting and sponsoring prison groups. The outside A.A.s buy literature and contribute back issues of Grapevines, which they purchase in lots from the Grapevine Office in New York. The group takes a meeting into the prison several times a week, as well as taking some of the prisoners to an outside meeting – a way of carrying the Twelfth Step message to other groups. Also, inmates in several of the institutions have found ways (with the blessing of the facility) to raise funds for their own group literature.

- A member of the Second Chance Group, at the Washington (state) Twin Rivers Correctional Facility, shared that group members like to feel as self-supporting as possible, and they try to raise funds from their own pockets to buy literature. However, they are grateful for donations from outside groups because that helps them feel the love and fellowship of other A.A. members. They are always amazed and grateful that members on the outside are so generous with their time, money and love. They also find sponsors through the outside groups and the A.A.s coming in bring news of A.A. around the world. Members of the inside A.A. group provide withdrawal slips to prisoners who choose to put money in the basket and they explain that the money is used for literature that has not been provided through outside groups. In this way, they can begin to feel that they are becoming self-supporting and can begin to use the Traditions as well as the Steps in their own lives.

## 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** Go to church. Any church.



**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.

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

Flip up this end of page for December, January and February events.

# BOX 4|5|9 BULLETIN BOARD

Items and Ideas on Area Gatherings for A.A.s — Via G.S.O.

HOLIDAYS 1988

## Calendar of Events

### December

- 2-3 — *Sikeston, Missouri*. Eighth Five Corners Conv. Write: Ch., 205 N. Jackson, Kennett, MO 63857
- 2-4 — *Hollywood, Florida*. Southeast Regional Forum. Write: Coordinator, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163
- 2-4 — *Charlotte, North Carolina*. Fourth Annual "Fundamental Festival." Write: Ch., Box 668927, Charlotte, NC 28266
- 2-4 — *Del Rio, Texas*. Border Conf. Write: Ch., Box 395, Del Rio, TX 78840
- 16-18 — *Seoul, Korea*. National Christmas Roundup. Write: Ch., Morning Calm Intergroup, Box 154, 121st Evac. Hosp., A.P.O., San Francisco, CA 96301
- 31-Jan. 1 — *Minneapolis, Minnesota*. Alkathon '89. Write: Ch., Box 19194, Minneapolis, MN 55419
- 31-Jan 1 — *Deer Park, New York*. Alkathon. Write: Ch., Box 155, Deer Park, NY 11729

### January

- 6-8 — *Dodge City, Kansas*. Southwest Kansas Conf. Write: Ch., 1601 Wooden Road, Dodge City, KS 67801
- 6-8 — *Clarksburg, West Virginia*. Jackson's Mill Round-Up. Write: Ch., Box 825, Clarksburg, WV 26301
- 6-8 — *Brownsville, Texas*. 15th Annual Lower Rio Grande Valley Jamboree. Write: Ch., Box 5453, Brownsville, TX 78520
- 13-15 — *Sacramento, California*. Young People's Conf. Write: Ch., Box 13953, Sacramento, CA 95833
- 13-15 — *Midland, Texas*. 19th Mid-Winter Conf. Write: Ch., Box 5751, Midland, TX 79704
- 20-22 — *Harvey, Illinois*. Seventh ISCYPAA Conf. Write: Ch., Box 42620, Evergreen Park, IL 60642
- 20-22 — *Biloxi, Mississippi*. Eighth Gulf Coast Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 1502, Gulfport, MS 39502
- 20-22 — *Hilton Head Island, South Carolina*. Ninth Mid-Winter Conf. Write: Ch., Box 6256, Hilton Head Island, SC 29938
- 26-29 — *Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada*. 15th Winter Conf. Write: Ch., Box 236, St. James P.O., Winnipeg, MB R3J 3R4
- 27-28 — *Blytheville, Arkansas*. 32nd Coon Supper. Write: Ch., Box 675, Blytheville, AK 72316
- 27-29 — *Syracuse, New York*. Second Annual

- Mid-Winter Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 871, Syracuse, NY 13205
- 27-29 — *Winston Salem, North Carolina*. 22nd Annual Tar Heel Mid Winter Conf. Write: Ch., Box 18412, Raleigh, NC 27619
- 27-29 — *Nanaimo, British Columbia, Canada*. 21st Rally. Write: Ch., 779 Townsite Road., Nanaimo, BC V9S 1L6
- 27-29 — *Kindersley, Saskatchewan, Canada*. 18th Annual Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 94, Kindersley, SK, S0L 1S0
- 28-29 — *Olean, New York*. 17th Annual Day of Sharing. Write: Ch., Box 946, Olean, NY 14760
- 28-29 — *Midway, British Columbia, Canada*. 15th Serenity Group Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 158, Midway, BC V0H 1M0
- 28-Feb. 4 — *San Diego, California*. Fourth Annual Cruise w/o Booze. Write: Ch., Box 9183, Tulsa, OK 74157-0183

### February

- 3-5 — *Edmonton, Alberta, Canada*. Edmonton Winter Round-Up. Write: Ch., 272 Southridge, Edmonton, AB T6H 4M9
- 10-12 — *Greeley, Colorado*. Greeley Stampede. Write: Ch., Box 595, Greeley, CO 80632
- 10-12 — *Bellevue, Washington*. Winter Holidays '89. Write: Ch. (PSYPC), Box 3791, Bellevue, WA 98004
- 10-12 — *Ngaruawahia, New Zealand*. 26th Nat. Conv. Write: Conv. Sec., Box 54, Ngaruawahia, New Zealand
- 16-19 — *Kansas City, Missouri*. NAAWC. Write: Ch., NAAWC, Box 13245, Shawnee Mission, KS 66212
- 17-19 — *Cocoa Beach, Florida*. Florida Mid-

## Closed Meeting Topics From the Grapevine

For more detailed suggestions, see the pages noted.

*December* (page 33): Sponsorship; "Clearing the Holiday Hurdles"; welcoming beginners; conscious contact.

*January* (page 30): "Crossing the Threshold"; Is A.A. changing?; of love and lust.

- winter Conf. Write: Ch., 2000 Commerce Drive, Melbourne, FL 32904
- 17-19 — *Sacramento, California*. 12th Spring Fling. Write: Ch., Box 19548, Sacramento, CA 95819-0548
- 17-19 — *Ft. Mitchell, Kentucky*. 38th Conv. Write: Ch., Box 423, Covington, KY 41011
- 17-19 — *El Paso, Texas*. Jamboree. Write: Sec., Box 3115, El Paso, TX 79923
- 17-19 — *Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada*. 22nd Round-Up. Write: Ch., Box 8878, Saskatoon, SK S7K 6S7
- 17-19 — *Toronto, Ontario, Canada*. Second Annual GHYPLC. Write: Ch., 41 Keele St., Toronto, ON M6P 2J8
- 17-19 — *Memphis, Tennessee*. Tenn. Conf. of Young People; Write: Ch., Box 11156, Memphis, TN 38111-0156

## Planning a February, March or April Event?

Please send your information on February, March or April events, two days or more, in time to reach G.S.O. by *December 10*, the calendar deadline for the February/March 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) \_\_\_\_\_