

# FINAL REPORT

## NORTHEAST REGIONAL FORUM

May 31 – June 2

Tarrytown, New York

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

Dear A.A. Friends,

Please mark your calendar for the next Northeast Regional Forum, which will take place in Framingham, MA on the weekend of June 4-6, 2021 at the Sheraton Framingham Hotel & Conference Center.

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# INTRODUCTION

The 2019 Northeast Regional Forum was held in Tarrytown, New York. Registration for the Forum was **439**. This included **198** members attending their very first Forum—many were welcomed at the Forum Orientation on Friday evening. In addition, the 2019 Northeast Regional Forum marked the **211th** Regional Forum since their inception in 1975.

# DELEGATE PRESENTATIONS

**Safety in A.A.—Jane E.**, Delegate Panel 69, Area 49 Southeast New York

In his writings on Tradition Twelve, Bill tells us that “humility, as expressed by anonymity, is the greatest safeguard that Alcoholics Anonymous can ever have.” Today, I’m going to share some of my own experiences and talk about the Traditions, which are essential to keeping us safe in (and out of) A.A.

The so-called thirteenth step is what comes to mind first for many when we speak of safety in A.A.

At my first home group, at four months sober, I was followed out to my car by a member I’ll call “Bob.” Bob told me that not everyone comes to A.A. to get sober. He said that I should watch out for the guys — especially him. I was shocked that anyone would come to A.A. for any other reason, and I told him so. I knew why I was coming to A.A., and it was to get sober. Period.

Bob and I became friends. For my first few years, he got me speaking commitments and drove me to them. We had a routine: he’d pick me up; I’d speak; we’d get something to eat; he’d proposition me; I’d say no and go into my apartment. Without Bob.

Mature women in my group had a lot to say about Bob and me. I assured them that my sponsor was aware of Bob. (She was.) My sponsor knew me and knew that I had no problem telling Bob “no.” Eventually, Bob seemed to understand and faded from my life, hurt. I felt safe with Bob, but I understand that for many who receive unwanted attention from others in A.A., their experiences have been quite different.

I’m not demonizing men in A.A. The most horrific thirteenth step I’ve heard was confided to me by a problem drinker who came to A.A. for help but is still drinking. The perpetrator was a woman.

Our pamphlet on sponsorship tells us that “it is best for men to sponsor men, women to sponsor women.” I do not believe this to always be the case. For my first ten years, the local people I most admired in service were men. Wanting to be a “good A.A.,” I talked to them but went without a service sponsor and continued to serve below the group level. This is dangerous! I eventually discarded the “men with the men” idea and got a service sponsor who happened to be a man.

Sharing in meetings can raise safety concerns. Sharing is an essential step in getting to know and support newcomers who cannot be expected to distinguish what is and is not appropriate to share from the floor. Many things are best shared one-on-one with a sponsor or spiritual advisor, in private. But we cannot expect new people to understand what is and is not appropriate. So we want to be kind and tolerant, and remember that some of us have problems other than alcohol that will take time to address.

Practically speaking, we cannot always, try as we might, “unhear” what newcomers say. We may not be able to look at them in quite the same way again. And so, I have taken newcomers aside after meetings when they’ve shared about explicit behaviors like “waking up next to strangers” and suggested that they save this for their sponsors.

It is important to consider how our shares might impact others. I am not alone in having to take a sponsee into the back room, away from the meeting, because a violent or sexually explicit share has triggered a trauma response in her. The Big Book makes note of disclosing our stories “in a general way,” and that serves well for sharing in A.A. meetings.

We need to think about whether A.A. is the right venue for certain issues that we’re sharing about at all. When I was seven years sober and eating in the middle of the night, I was incredibly ashamed and remorseful; I remember thinking, I did not get sober to feel like this. I shared once in my home group about it, but when I was dying inside two days later and wanted to share again, I realized it was time to go to another fellowship.

Tradition Five tells me that A.A. gets me sober. For problems other than alcoholism, I should go “outside” for help. I’m now in recovery from a sleeping disorder, an eating disorder and PTSD. I didn’t get help for these in A.A. But I was able to find help and do the needed work because A.A. and my higher power have kept me sober. I feel I now have full recovery in all areas of my life. I’m imperfect and healthy.

Calling the proper authorities does not break any Traditions. I attended an A.A. event where a ruckus started outside. It got scary fast. I did what I was taught in my first year: I went inside and got “the guys.” The situation kept escalating, so I held up my phone and yelled, “That’s it! I’m calling 911!” The perpetrator got in his truck and drove away, tires screeching.

In Tradition Three we learn that you’re a member of A.A. if you say you are. We do not kick anyone out of A.A., ever. However, there are times when a group may practice Tradition Four’s autonomy and ask a disruptive member to leave the group for the sake of group unity (Tradition One). We must never ask a member to leave because we simply do not like them (Tradition Twelve). In my home group, we just love a live drunk. Where better than in an A.A. meeting could a drunk be? If the drunk is disrupting the meeting, we take them outside or in the back to talk so the meeting can continue.

I love my home group. It is not the best group in A.A. To say it is the best group in A.A. is a break of Tradition One, because it’s disunifying to say my group is better than yours. It is the best group *for me*.

“Safety and A.A.: Our Common Welfare,” a service piece by G.S.O., can be found with reference number “SMF 209” on aa.org. The Traditions Checklist from the Grapevine is another of my favorite resources to maintain safety in A.A.

In closing, I remember that the Steps keep us from suicide, the Traditions keep us from homicide and the Concepts keep us from genocide. Our 36 principles are what keep us safe. Thank you for my life.

**Communication Is Our Greatest Challenge—Marjorie S.**, Delegate Panel 69, Area 60 Western Pennsylvania

I am extremely grateful to speak on “Communication Is Our Greatest Challenge” here today. This topic, from what I understand, actually originated from member suggestions at the 2017 Northeast Regional Forum, which was held in my hometown of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Before I address the subject at hand, I’d like to acknowledge that this is a very broad topic with far-reaching ramifications that can go in many different directions. Thinking this through, I thought I would try to approach this presentation through our upside-down triangle and explore how communication trickles up and down the triangle.

Let’s begin with the tiny point at the bottom. I am encouraged by the fact that the General Service Board participated in a communication audit, which was presented to the board in August 2018; however, it didn’t reach the Fellowship until much later. We need to find uniform means of getting information moving more quickly. Our board of trustees is of course made up of volunteers and we have a limited staff that is in direct line with our practice of cooperation, so communication can often take much longer than it would through standard outside business or nonprofit practices. Is more staff the answer? Is there a way to use A.A. volunteers to expedite some things? Relaying this information today, I have no real answer to these questions — but it is food for thought.

The audit was completed by an outside consultant, and I would like to touch on some of the things reflected in the audit. But please keep in mind there is much more in the audit than the time frame of this presentation allows me to discuss.

Some of the consultant’s objectives were to propose solutions for how A.A. can:

- Map the pathways for more efficient and profound connectivity between A.A.’s three boards (G.S.B., A.A.W.S. and A.A.G.V.). In my mind this is significantly important, as this issue has been discussed at at least one N.E.R.A.A.S.A., and recommendations about it have been made to the General Service Conference at least once. Yet here we are, several years later, and it seems the problem still exists. Again, I have no answer, and I am also cognizant of the fact that our trustees are volunteers who put in an inordinate amount of time working for our Fellowship and traveling to New York. Most also have other commitments, such as work and family.
- Develop best practices to unify overall messaging and more effectively manage content and communication. While this issue may seem important only at the general service level, the ramifications are indeed much larger. No matter how effective the General Service Office becomes in communicating with the Fellowship at large, it is all for naught if the recipients at the top of our inverted triangle have little or no point of reference about what they are receiving. While all of us service nerds sit here and sing to the choir about ways we can get more people involved in service, what I see is that many of the people who come to us have no frame of reference and no understanding of how our service structure operates. It seems I can spend an excessive amount of time teaching service sponsees the basics of the service structure that were taught to me by my sponsor. Today, perhaps many of us here can commit to better educating

our own sponsees; when we have discussion meetings focusing on sponsorship. Let's talk about the basics that a sponsor should be doing with a sponsee, including guiding them through our Twelve Traditions and our service structure. If people don't understand the service structure and how it effectively impacts our primary purpose, how could they ever develop an interest in service?

- Utilize social media, cross-platform content strategy and other interactive platforms to more deeply engage key audiences. Regarding this recommendation, G.S.O. has already opened a YouTube channel with a link to the Grapevine. This has the potential to be a great medium for those in the Fellowship, those searching for recovery from alcoholism and, most especially, for professionals who work with alcoholics. I believe there is much that can be done here, including audio stories that fall within the realm of attraction. The bigger problem as I see it, is that at the time of this writing there are only 3,000 subscribers to A.A.W.S. and less than 1,000 to the Grapevine. While our website should be directing folks to the YouTube channel to subscribe (as should the Grapevine's), another challenge is what we are doing: How many of us right here have subscribed? When we are at meetings, are we asking members to sign up and are we giving them the exact title, so that folks aren't signing up for channels not affiliated with A.A.? I know I was remiss until I wrote this presentation. Again, let's start here. Let's start a campaign to get our members to subscribe to these platforms. The intent is more subscribers to make our message accessible so the still-sick and suffering alcoholic can find us. Let's start today. How many of you can I count on to push the subscribe button right now?

Lastly, let us remember Bill Wilson's 1960 Grapevine article entitled "Freedom Under God: The Choice is Ours." In that article Wilson challenges us by stating, "A vast communications net now covers the earth, even to its remotest reaches. Granting all its huge public benefits." He goes on further to say, "Therefore nothing can matter more to the future welfare of AA *than the manner in which we use this colossus of communication*. Used unselfishly and well the results can surpass our present imagination." Bill never wanted us to be afraid; our Fellowship rails against the fear that kept us in individual darkness for so long. So again, I issue one last challenge: let us move forth into the future with humility and grace and figure out how to use all the available communication tools to increase the reach of our Fellowship, so that no alcohol ever need suffer.

### **Spirituality of Service—Chuck B., Delegate Panel 68, Area 50 Western New York**

I think that "Spirituality of Service" is an interesting topic for us — a group of people who, by our very nature, are selfish and self-centered to the extreme. To suggest to an alcoholic that service to others is a spiritual action that will solve *all* his problems is like telling a caterpillar that if it starts flying, its heavy fur coat will be transformed into gossamer wings and it will be able to fly like a butterfly and see the whole world that lies beyond its little backyard universe. The drunk or the bug will have the same response: "Nice idea, but that isn't going to happen."

We alcoholics suffer from a spiritual malady — an emptiness; a soul sickness created by an ego obsessed with itself, that appears to separate us from God, from others and from



ourselves. Having spent a lifetime avoiding the rigors of adulthood, shirking the responsibility associated with normal human development and resisting the help of others, we are plagued by the bedevils, consumed with terror, frustration, bewilderment and despair, and on our better days we are just restless, irritable and discontented.

The world is a too-loud place to the alcoholic. The internal noise is incessant and irrepressible. We have spent a lifetime seeking something external to stop the bombardment and bring us peace. Our twisted minds lead us to believe again and again that obtaining something, anything, outside ourselves — alcohol, a substance, food, cars, gambling, sex, anything external — will bring us serenity. Of course, through painful experience we come to find out that nothing could be further from the truth. The things we lust after sometimes bring us moments of pleasure, but none of them can ever give us enduring peace — so we lived in a place of perpetual disappointment created by our own warped view of what will make us happy.

We continue this cycle until we lose all hope of rescue from our pitiful and incomprehensible demoralization. We know that nothing — absolutely nothing — is more important to us than booze, and at our bottom even alcohol fails to give us the relief we so desperately desire.

We are at the turning point — either we stop drinking alcohol or we die an alcoholic death. Faced with this prospect we sink into inconsolable despair. Most of us in A.A. know that as the **gift of desperation**.

We become so beaten and beleaguered that we cannot muster the strength to restart the endless life cycle of excitement, depression and anxiety. In this deepest despair, if we are one of the lucky ones, we find ourselves standing at A.A.'s archway — the last stop on the path to a certain alcoholic death. It is here that we are faced with a decision: do we want what these A.A.s have and, if we do, are we ready to go to any lengths to get it?

The Twelve Steps are a program of action designed to show us precisely where and how to find a power greater than alcohol, a power that can show us what to do to quiet our obsessed ego and to get us off the merry-go-round and become useful, productive people. Bill Wilson tells us in the Big Book that A.A.'s program of recovery is simple, but not easy; a price has to be paid. He tells us the price is destruction of self-centeredness achieved by practicing the Twelve Steps as best as we can.

Through practicing the Steps an unexpected inner resource upon which we can rely is revealed to us. This resource (God as we understand Him) enables us to face and solve the problems we have created. By using the steps of the A.A. program, we become right-sized. We have a spiritual awakening — the awareness of others; and our thoughts, motives and desires turn happily from ourselves to them. We ask daily what we can do to help meet others' needs without thought of getting anything in return. But what a magnificent payoff there is!

My sobriety date is August 9, 1989, and I have had an uninterrupted period of service in A.A. from August 16, 1989, through today.

In A.A. we treasure the principle of anonymity. Why? Because it is the key to overcoming a life based on self. We are told that the spiritual substance of anonymity is sacrifice. Sacrifice,

in order to be real, must hurt, must cost, must empty ourselves. In A.A. we give up dominant concerns for self and replace them with service to the suffering alcoholic, inside or outside of the rooms.

We use the Steps to go to that place where our obsessed mind is silenced. In my experience, Steps One through Seven took me down to humility. From that place I was able, with the help of the Power, to identify and set straight the harms I had done (Steps Eight and Nine). I keep the path clean by asking the Power to take an inventory of my actions every day and guiding me throughout the day (Step Ten), and through prayer and meditation (Step Eleven) I seek to improve my conscious contact with God *as I understand Him*. I think that the silence in meditation is the point where real spirituality begins.

A modern saint laid out a path that begins with silence. It goes like this: the fruit of silence is prayer, the fruit of prayer is faith, the fruit of faith is love, the fruit of love is service, the fruit of service is peace.

Service consists of two components: carrying the message to the millions of alcoholics who do not know that Alcoholics Anonymous is here and the unconditional, selfless service inside our Fellowship at every level, which will give us a new and wonderful way of life, no matter what our present circumstances. Our experience is that through service we will finally know the peace we were seeking in the bottle. Yes — peace, my friends, is what we have sought from the very beginning.

**The Concepts: Our Guide to Service**—Jeff B., Delegate Panel 69, Area 44 Northern New Jersey

The symbol for our Fellowship is the triangle of Recovery, Unity and Service. It must have been amazing to be at the Kiel Auditorium in St. Louis on July 3, 1955, when this symbol was unfurled as a flag for the first time. During its unveiling, Dr. Bob, Bill W. and the pioneers of A.A. read a resolution that made the General Service Conference the permanent successor to the founders and the “voice of the group conscience of our entire Fellowship,” essentially turning over Alcoholics Anonymous to the Fellowship — to you and me. (*The A.A. Service Manual/Twelve Concepts for World Service*, page S103, Appendix B, 2018–2020 edition) If you didn’t know any of the Concepts before, you now know two of them: Concepts I and II.

When I think about this symbol for our Three Legacies of Recovery, Unity and Service, it reminds me that my triangle needs to be balanced and that I need to work all three sides in my recovery. For each side, we have 12 principles: Twelve Steps for Recovery, Twelve Traditions for Unity and Twelve Concepts for Service. Most alcoholics are very familiar with the Steps and know something of the Traditions, but they are unfamiliar with the Concepts. Why is that?

Perhaps it’s because the essays for the Twelve Concepts are a little harder to read and understand, and because they are written in a more lawyerly fashion. Perhaps it’s because the Concepts include “for World Service” in their title and most A.A.s are interested in only their home groups and nothing beyond, especially not at the world level. For me, the Concepts have been my guideposts along the way to service work at all levels. We have only a short time to discuss these guideposts, so let me provide a brief overview of how I view our Third Legacy of Service.

Concepts I & II discuss the role of the General Service Conference as the voice of our Fellowship and as a replacement for the founders.

Concepts III, IV and V present “A.A.’s Bill of Rights”: the “Right of Decision,” the “Right of Participation” and the “Right of Appeal.”

Concepts VI, VII, VIII and XI introduce the General Service Board (the G.S.B.), the role of the trustees, the checks and balances between the G.S.B. and the Conference, our two service corporations (A.A. World Services, Inc. and A.A. Grapevine, Inc.) and the committee structure.

Concepts IX and X focus on good leadership in service to the Fellowship.

Concept XII represents the General Warranties of the Conference. Along with the Steps and the Traditions, these six Warranties are considered so important that they can only be changed by notifying all the groups in the world and having three-fourths of the groups agree to make the proposed change.

How do these Concepts relate to me in my daily A.A. life, you might ask? Let’s look at an example and I’ll show you how the Concepts apply as we go along. Suppose that your group is receiving a large influx of seniors. Many of the seniors say that they would have come in sooner but they didn’t know about A.A. The G.S.R. of your group takes this issue to the district meeting for discussion. The district public information (P.I.) chair says that the area has been discussing the creation of a P.S.A. for older alcoholics. What are the steps required to implement this idea?

First, your district’s G.S.R.s and the district P.I. chair prepare a recommendation that is first approved at the area P.I. Committee, then brought to the area committee and an area assembly for approval. The G.S.R.s, the district P.I. chair, the area P.I. Committee and the area committee are all participating in accord with Concept IV, the Right of Participation.

The area committee and the assembly take votes on this recommendation; each person voting has the Right of Decision under Concept III based on the information that has been presented to them.

Immediately after the vote, the person running the meeting — perhaps the area chair —asks for minority opinion from the nonprevailing side based on Concept V, the Right of Appeal, where the vote might be reconsidered and another vote taken.

If the item passes at the area level, your delegate will be asked to send that item to the Conference coordinator to be considered for the next General Service Conference (Concept I).

The Conference coordinator will send the item to the appropriate trustee’s committee, as described in Concept XI — probably the trustee’s Public Information Committee.

This committee will then decide whether to send this item to the Conference Public Information Committee for consideration at the next General Service Conference, as described in Concept II.

The Conference committees, like the Public Information Committee, meet during the Conference week to review all the final Conference agenda items for their committees. The committee members are assigned randomly from the 93 delegate areas in the United States and Canada. Each area elects their delegate in an election assembly where presumably the best candidate for the job is elected using the principles of good leadership as discussed in Concept IX.

If the Conference P.I. Committee decides to bring the creation of a P.S.A. for older alcoholics to the full Conference for a vote and this item passes with substantial unanimity, then an Advisory Action has been created and, as described in the current Conference Charter, a two-thirds vote of the Conference is binding upon the trustees of the General Service Board (Concepts VI and VII). (*The A.A. Service Manual/Twelve Concepts for World Service*, page S105, Appendix C, 2018–2020 edition)

The trustees of the General Service Board would then begin creating the P.S.A. for the older alcoholic, which could take a few years to implement. The P.S.A.s are managed and sold by the A.A.W.S. corporation, and so members of that body would be involved with its creation (Concept VIII). A progress report would be included on the agenda for the Conference P.I. Committee for next year's General Service Conference.

When completed, the P.S.A. would be available for purchase and sent to TV stations for inclusion in their public service announcements, and older alcoholics will get to hear about A.A. sooner.

Bill intended the Concepts to be both a set of practical guidelines and also a set of spiritual principles to guide us in our service work. We can see this in Concept XII, the General Warranties of the Conference:

“The General Service Conference shall observe the spirit of A.A. tradition, taking great care that the Conference never becomes the seat of perilous wealth or power; that sufficient operating funds, plus an ample reserve, be its prudent financial principle; that none of its Conference Members shall ever be placed in a position of unqualified authority over any of the others; that all important decisions be reached by discussion, vote, and whenever possible, by substantial unanimity; that no Conference action ever be personally punitive or an incitement to public controversy; that though the Conference may act for the service of Alcoholics Anonymous, it shall never perform any acts of government; and that, like the Society of Alcoholics Anonymous which it serves, the Conference will always remain democratic in thought and action.”

I want to thank the G.S.O. for allowing me to present on this topic, which is so near and dear to my heart.

# WORKSHOP REPORTS

7-7:55 p.m.

**“Supporting Grapevine: From your Story to Service”** Moderator: Albin Z., Publisher AA Grapevine / Reporter: Keven G.

The workshop began with sharing news at the AA Grapevine: What’s going on? Workshop members heard how gift certificates could be integral to Twelfth Step work, how the Grapevine’s 31 books were all available in eBook format and how the Grapevine was transitioning existing material on CDs to mp3 format. In addition, workshop members heard about the GV website redesign process and how month-by-month changes sought to be more of a service to those who rely on e-devices. The goal to produce an e-magazine was discussed. Participants also heard about the challenges encountered — and the proposed solution — with the current GV app.

The GV publisher also recapped a list of possible themes and shared the editorial calendar and how it was used. Members received guidelines to writing stories:

List of Dos:

- A. Surround stories with slogans, jargon, lessons, setbacks
- B. Traditions and Concept stories needed, also monthly topics, monthly departments
- C. Personalize with people, places, things, specific meetings — even keep a journal to collect ideas, anecdotes
- D. Keep it short and sweet. 300-800 words

List of Don’ts:

- E. Don’t submit immediately — sleep on it, edit, then send
- F. Avoid product names
- G. No memorials or obituaries

Rejected stories cannot be submitted to other publications.

Workshop members asked questions and received answers: “Can stories published at intergroup be submitted?” A: Yes, please update or tweak a little to better follow Grapevine guidelines and then submit.

“Is the GV app going away?” A: Yes — the AA Grapevine is evolving to an e-magazine and will have an updated website. Once moved to e-magazine, back issues will be available as published.

“Are A.A. stories still reviewed by 3 A.A.s?” A: Yes, as well as the audio stories.

“Are archived stories tagged?” A: Yes, and Grapevine has improved these tags.

“Are other areas planning a 75th year anniversary?” (Members also shared upcoming 75th Birthday Bash ideas) A: Yes. Grapevine is able and would be delighted to help you celebrate our 75th birthday.

Workshop members recapped Grapevine activities in their areas, described how they utilized a Grapevine book to support a Grapevine workshop and generated ideas for a book theme. A member reported two Grapevine celebrations coming up in Maryland, and

described area's (Area 31) radio show on Sundays that featured a Grapevine/La Viña connection.

The workshop then outlined the use of Grapevine in corrections work — 30 packs of back issues available for corrections work. This info can be forwarded to Grapevine for follow-up. In addition to using Grapevine in correctional facilities, committees for Accessibility/Special Needs will also find Grapevine useful in their service work. Homebound A.A.s benefit can greatly benefit from Our Meeting in Print. In addition, AA Grapevine magazine may be more accessible to those with shorter attention spans and varied reading levels.

**“Fostering Participation in A.A: Who’s Not in the Room?”** Moderator/Reporter: Nisaa A.

This workshop was conducted in an open sharing format. Questions were considered and experience regarding the topic was shared among members, such as: “Do we welcome everyone?” Members shared their experience, and one member said, “Our group surrounds the new person at the meeting and then invites them to stick around.” Also, “Are we reaching out to all who want it and what more can we do?” One member said, “I have a privilege and I can leverage that to help someone else.” Another said, “Can’t pretend I know what it’s like for a woman . . .” Another shared that “a group of men and women” didn’t seem factual. At another point in the workshop, someone made the comment that, there are “lots of white people in my area, but [our meeting] recently got three Spanish speakers. Working with them to get literature.”

Finally, another noted, “I work with Bridging the Gap and often they pair gay with gay, black with black, and it seems to work. I’ve learned a lot — pronouns, etc. It’s been uncomfortable but I’ve grown.”

Another thought discussed among workshop participants was, “What is a courageous conversation we are not having about inclusion in A.A.?”: In response, some stated that “our groups are black, but the G.S.B. and the service officers are not.” Another stated, “because of my disability, I thought I was different, but I’m just another alcoholic.” Another shared, “Differences cause controversy. Mentioning drugs is not for A.A. We should be able to talk about these things.”

Other questions and comments were: “Can we use a podcast or social media?”; “What are ways we can outreach?”; “If we can’t offer friendship and fellowship, there is something wrong. We need to use the Traditions as a shield, not a sword”; “People go to extremes with newcomers and inundate them or ignore them. This kind of rigidity scares people away.”

Another workshop member shared, “As someone who is non-binary, my existence is not controversial, it just is. Something I’ve seen groups do is change “men and women” to “people” in the Preamble.” Someone else commented, “I was not kicked out for talking about drugs. I did the Steps and realized I was an alcoholic and it saved my life. Maybe we need to have a tough conversation about the “sit down and shut up” people.” Finally, a member noted, “I need to watch my side conversations, it’s respectful and considerate.”

**“Making Service Work Appealing”** Moderator: Barb C. / Reporter: Carrie C.

After sharing the purpose of the workshop to those present, the moderator provided her initial experience with general service. She also shared an anecdote about her doctor, who told her that she didn't have to be concerned about her because of all those she treated, the ones who had become involved in general service stayed sober.

In this workshop, the first topic/question concerned sponsorship and service sponsorship. It was mentioned that service sponsorship is “buried” in the pamphlet about sponsorship. Many thought that a standalone pamphlet would be good or perhaps considered for inclusion in the Service Manual. It was shared that “general service is akin to ham and cheese on rye bread (ham = service, cheese = unity, bread = recovery/Steps).” The activities of GSRs should be supported financially, since service is indirect Step work.

The second question involved a discussion about how to encourage involvement beyond being a GSR and how to keep general service attractive. In response, workshop members shared that we could “extend a hand to the new GSR just as we would a new member to our group — and do the same at all levels (district, area, etc.)” Members noted that we could also incorporate the Three Legacies in our sharing. Another shared that fellowship is not sitting around drinking Red Bull until 3am — it's taking a road trip to an event with friends who are engaged in real world discussions. When speaking of recovery and the importance of service, use the three-legged stool as an analogy. Also, the group proposed asking a GSR, “What do you want to learn in the following year at our district meeting?” Finally, members pointed out, “We are not a glum lot — we are fun! So, engage and express the fun.”

**“Today's World—Demonstrating Integrity, Anonymity and Service”** Moderator: Ken D./ Reporter: Caroline N.

Workshop participants discussed two questions put forward by members at the beginning of the session:

**Question 1: Regarding anonymity on social media, in particular Facebook, what is the difference between posting about one's sobriety and posting about being a member of A.A.?**

In response, members shared their experience about posts on personal pages, secret groups and public groups, giving examples of both positive and negative experiences. Many agreed that we can maintain our own integrity and anonymity, but it's more challenging when it comes to others. There were differences of opinion about what constitutes real vs. implied membership in A.A. (e.g. posting “10 years” vs. a photo of a 10-year coin vs. “I'm sober 10 years thanks to a 12-step program” vs. “I'm sober 10 years thanks to A.A.”) A question posed, “When we post about our sobriety, are we positioning ourselves as the face of A.A.?” A member shared about the usefulness of moderators or admins in Facebook groups that must approve posts before they go live to screen for anonymity breaks. An A.A. member questioned what is truly secret in the digital world and noted that “Even with strict privacy settings, it is easy for another person to take a screenshot or repost.” Members discussed how anonymity might be broken by association. For example, if one's Facebook friends are posting publicly about being members of A.A. or posting photos or videos from an A.A. conference, others might become suspicious (perhaps even in the workplace). In addition, if one follows Instagram accounts of people who are open about being members of A.A., does it imply membership for the followers? One workshop member shared his/her experience as an HR

manager, using online searches to look into candidates' backgrounds and drawing conclusions based on social media activity. A member shared her experience about a vague post she made about not drinking which led to an old friend reaching out for help, thus presenting a 12th Step opportunity. The group discussed A.A. resources — Conference-approved literature and other A.A. service literature. For example: (P-47) "Understanding Anonymity" and A.A. Guidelines – Internet.

**Question 2: We're not punitive, but when we see other members breaking Traditions online or out in the world, what is the best way to approach them?**

Members shared various examples of witnessing Tradition breaks online and in other media. Many agreed that there is less gray area with press, radio, TV, and films than with social media. Many also agreed that good sponsorship; going through both the Steps and Traditions with a sponsor; holding Traditions workshops; having one-on-one conversations and referring directly to A.A. literature can help educate others about the importance of the Traditions, particularly anonymity. Members offered ideas on how to approach members who break Traditions, such as asking what their motives are. The "Understanding Anonymity" pamphlet provides a spot-check inventory — is the post about the message or the messenger: Am I helping someone or simply shouting from the rooftops? Are actions in conflict with humility?

A workshop member suggested asking questions to prompt discussion — don't make an accusation but address directly and immediately by sending a private message (i.e. "I really appreciate your enthusiasm, or congratulations. However, have you considered our 11th and 12th Traditions?") We must remember that members who violate Traditions may not be aware they are doing so. A past delegate shared experience dealing with anonymity breaks in their area before the time of social media, such as in a newspaper, and said that it's best to use those instances as teaching moments, and as an opportunity to inform and educate the Fellowship.

PI subcommittees have explored the use of social media for A.A. and the conclusion was that while there was enormous potential for benefit, there was also potential for risk.

Digital media changes rapidly, so using service material (like Guidelines) may be preferable to Conference-approved literature, due to the ease of making changes to it. Is it time for A.A. to create a Guideline specifically on social media? Propose an agenda item! A member pointed out that the Traditions were hammered out through trial and error and we will likely learn about best practices with social media through trial and error, too. Finally, a member shared how, in their opinion, the only true punishment for those who break Traditions is the bottle.

**"Implementing Office 365 and SharePoint for Your Area"** Moderator/Reporter: Jeff B.

*Note: The notes for the two workshops on "Implementing Office 365 and SharePoint for Your Area" are combined.*

In the two sessions, Jeff B., Area 44, Panel 69 Delegate described the implementation of SharePoint and Microsoft office to all the Trusted servants in Area 44. The presentation described how, the Share 44 implementation, as it is called, can be used to store documents and provide access to the online versions of the basic Microsoft application like Word, PowerPoint and Excel. The presentation further reviewed how the Share 44 implementation could be used at all levels of Area service including Officers, Area committees, Districts and their associated GSRs. The rationale for developing this system and a number of the issues



that had to be resolved were also discussed. The presentation concluded with a live demonstration of using Share 44, followed by a Question & Answer session.

**“Circles of Love & Service”** Moderator: Cathy B. / Reporter: Dan S.

This workshop followed the format of a roundtable discussion with the participation of trustees, directors and G.S.O & Grapevine staff. Three questions were presented, and answers and comments were shared:

**Question 1: What continues to inspire you about A.A. around the world?**

In the 180 countries our message cuts across politics. “When I walk into a meeting in Mongolia, the message is the same.” We are taken back to the early days of A.A. development — A.A. spirit in the face of adversity and country to country sponsorship.

**Question 2: How can we continue to be an example to other countries?**

It was noted that, to some, Latin American women are not seen as fellow sufferers. However, some Middle Eastern Countries have special hot lines and meetings for women.

**Question 3: What bold idea or project would you like to see either here or abroad?**

We are to communicate broadly and in-depth our responsibility to keep the message consistent around the world. We can use social media while maintaining our Traditions and how do we maintain unity when members may become silenced and rigid.

**8:05 — 9pm**

**“From Your Story to Service”** Moderator/Reporter: Irene D. *Spanish Workshop (English Translation):*

This workshop discussion (in Spanish) focused on many questions pertinent to La Viña and its audience. The following is an English translation.

1. **How can we promote La Viña at the Spanish level and motivate members to subscribe?** One member shared that they do not have a La Viña committee in their area — this is a problem when trying to increase subscriptions. Motivating members to subscribe to La Viña can be done with representatives of the groups, area, and districts. Also, we should explain what La Viña does. We can also raffle off subscriptions to those who wish to read their stories — and others’ stories — in the magazine. In this manner, we can motivate members to buy subscriptions — reading their stories is a powerful motivator. Furthermore, each group can also buy one subscription of La Viña and donate it to their district — and the district can give each subscription to a prison.
2. **How can we motivate Spanish-speaking A.A. members to write their stories?** At different A.A. events, we can invite members to participate in writing stories for La Viña. Let members know that they can write anonymously, if they wish. They can also make an audio recording and send it via email.
3. **La Viña currently intends to improve and simplify the subscription-buying process on the website.** A new webpage, was translated so Spanish to simplify

purchase of subscriptions or literature. Renewing subscriptions via email is also possible.

4. **What type of themes can we write about in La Viña?** Among the many themes to write about, La Viña is looking for stories about A.A. behind the bars.

Other questions posed within the workshop were: “What is La Vina’s deficit, and how many subscriptions must we obtain in order to overcome this deficit?” and “Can we purchase magazines to help with service in our communities?”

**“Fostering Participation in A.A.: Who’s Not in the Room?”** Moderator: Nisaa A. / Reporter: Barb J.

A.A. members who took part in this workshop responded to three questions about fostering participation in A.A. and discussing ways to make A.A. available for those who may want or need A.A.:

1. Our Third Tradition — Do we welcome everyone?
2. Are we reaching out to all who want it? What more can we do?
3. What is a courageous conversation we are **not** having about inclusion in A.A.?

In addition to these questions, workshop members also asked, “How do we get people to stay and participate?” Some members shared that they outreach to meetings that aren’t represented. They also stressed the importance of communicating that there is a service structure. Others stressed the importance of “making it fun!” Another member shared that they introduce themselves as “I’m just an alcoholic . . . not a “and a” — I am inclusive in this way because I keep it simple.” Another point shared by members was that there are lots of people who are mandated to attend meetings. Focusing on attraction and not promotion, the question was asked, “What am I doing to make this attractive?” Members shared that they were doing 12-Step calls and were working to show how attractive A.A. is. Another member shared that if a member shared that a group was making him or her feel excluded, the member could ask and receive help approaching the group.

**“Making Service Work Appealing”** Moderator: Barb A. / Reporter: Carrie C.

After providing the purpose of the workshop to those present, Barb provided her initial experience with general service. She also shared what her doctor said: That she didn’t have to be concerned for her because, of those patients she had treated, those involved in general service did not drink again and stayed sober.

The first topic/question in this workshop was “How can we encourage people to stay involved?” In response, members said to “Keep it exciting and fun” and “Sponsors should [propel] people into service.” Members also advised addressing the issue of burnout (districts have become too large to manage effectively) so DCs can better serve their groups. Others said, “Identify the “Service Animal” within our group; provide specific easy tasks that are clear and identify (i.e. drop flyers off, take pamphlets to [fill in the blank], etc.); utilize past delegates to avoid “dingleberries”; and avoid alphabet soup.”

The second topic/question addressed in this workshop was about “Service Sponsorship and Empowerment”: Members considered looking at the “loss of voice of GSRs to DCMs vs.

Delegate to DCMs.” For instance, DCMs aren’t as available to GSRs because they are busy tending to delegate. The group provided the preparation for service: 1. Recovery (Steps), 2. Unity = Service (Concepts). Workshop members agreed that we can’t skip the process. Also discussed was the “general service structure vs. intergroup: General service gives impression of superiority over other service opportunities, but sponsorship/mentoring is paramount in general service — it provides for real life skills.” Members shared that these same questions are very often about why “you” didn’t return but people rarely take action on that “reason.”

**“Today’s World—Demonstrating Integrity, Anonymity and Service”** Moderator: Ken D. / Reporter: Carolyn N.

Workshop participants discussed two questions, put forward by members at the beginning of the session:

**Question 1: How can we do our part to dispel the stigma of alcoholism while maintaining personal anonymity on social media?**

A member shared confusion about the principles of anonymity and social media, asking what is helpful and what is harmful? Workshop members agreed that there are both productive and destructive ways to use social media. Another member shared that when they see a celebrity post about sobriety, they are grateful for the inspiration and how it humanizes public figures. One workshop participant shared that when we post about sobriety at all on social media, we are engaging in attention-getting behavior and seeking recognition and praise. Another member asked, “How we can say we’re seeking humility when we contradict ourselves by being self-promoting on social media?” Many agreed that it is not our job as individuals to teach the world about A.A. and alcoholism, but instead to practice attraction rather than promotion and leave the work of informing the public and dispelling stigma to PI and CPC committees. A member asked what newcomers might think if they see others posting about sobriety, which may be a turn-off or give a bad example. A discussion followed about “real or perceived” anonymity breaks, posts that actually break anonymity vs. those that imply affiliation or membership with A.A. It was noted that some A.A. members meet at a special meeting for their profession (police officers, attorneys) to further guard anonymity — is their anonymity even more important to protect than the rest of us? Members agreed that sponsorship is helpful, as is direct communication with those who violate Traditions, attempting to educate newcomers, and leading by example. A member asked how our trusted servants can be better examples (i.e. GSRs, delegates and trustees who post in secret groups).

Another workshop participant shared how others can break our anonymity, including Facebook itself as a corporation with algorithms. They shared that Facebook owns the information of its members, cautioning workshop members not to fool ourselves about how much control we have over our content, even with strict privacy settings. The member said that Facebook’s business model is to glean personal information and sell it. Data privacy is a false sense of security. Another member shared how it’s a personal decision to post or not to post, that we can only police ourselves. While there are extremes, we don’t have opinions on outside issues (remember Tradition 10 in addition to Traditions 11 and 12).

**Question 2: As a member of A.A., how do I demonstrate integrity, anonymity, and service in how I live my life? How do we take these three principles and practice them in all our affairs on a daily basis?**

Members shared the importance of aligning our lives with the principles of A.A., which entails deflating ego and taking out self-centeredness. Being in service is a good demonstration of practicing these three principles. A member read from Tradition One about the spiritual significance of anonymity and commented on how we must seek integrity and humility, though perhaps we'll never fully attain it. We may fail daily, but we must remember that our actions speak for themselves. By living the principles, we demonstrate the life-changing effects of this program and we don't have to get on a soapbox.

Other members shared how they demonstrate integrity in their lives: Don't lie, cheat, manipulate; come early/stay late; use literature to express ideas rather than own opinions; do service work; encourage others to do the same by inviting them to a district meeting or getting a commitment. Finally, a member shared about the importance of leading by example (for example, sponsoring others through Steps/Traditions). Living this life is the key to be made whole again — it's a healing balm. We can encourage others to continue in service as we pass it on.

**“Circles of Love and Service”—Roundtable Discussions with Trustees, Directors and G.S.O. & Grapevine** Moderator: Julia D. / Reporter: John D.

This roundtable discussion featured Archive staff and included participation by trustees, directors and G.S.O. and Grapevine staff. The moderator first asked all in the room to briefly describe, in one to two minutes, their own most meaningful (or humorous) service experience.

Next, the moderator asked Michelle Mirza (Archives Director) and Mark E. (Trustees Archives Committee) three questions: The first question: “What first inspired you about A.A. history and Archives?” was answered by both. The next question, “What continues to inspire you?” Both shared about the passion for teachable moments to learn more about A.A. Finally, the third question, “What bold idea or project would you like to see related to Archives?” was answered with “Digitizing more materials and prioritizing items.”

Michelle and Mark also shared about how the new website will be used to share more archives items. For instance, there will be larger historical page with keeping copyright laws in mind. They mentioned that business records are kept off site along with Bill's recordings. Michelle shared that she is asked to research many items regarding past concerns. She also discussed her collection scope and what is done with items not viable. In addition, she is digitizing documents for searchable content. Additional questions were asked such as, “Is there a copy of the first pamphlet on Sponsorship?” and “How would the items such as the manuscript be dealt with?” Finally, it was shared that G.S.O. Archives does not put a value on any items. And what is a favorite item of Archives staff? The film of the co-founders and their wives at Stepping Stones. Finally, the new Archives checklist was presented for use by local archivists.

# FULL FORUM PRESENTATION

**Today's World — Demonstrating Integrity, Anonymity and Service—**Don B., Delegate  
Panel 68, Area 29 Maryland

Let's start by giving a big round of applause to our northeast regional delegates for some great presentations this morning! I'm an alcoholic named Don B. who is grateful and privileged to serve as the Panel 68 delegate from Area 29, Maryland. I am a member of the Strangely Insane group of Alcoholics Anonymous, which meets at seven a.m. in Northeast Baltimore every Monday, Wednesday and Friday. I'd like to thank Sandra and the rest of our trusted servants and special workers at G.S.O. for the loving invitation to present here today. This morning's workshop is on the 69th General Service Conference Presentation topic, "Today's World — Demonstrating Integrity, Anonymity and Service."

In many ways, today's world is very different from the era in which Alcoholics Anonymous was birthed in 1935. Social, scientific and technological changes; the rapid explosion of digital communications; the dramatic rise of social media; and the very real potential for any bit of information to go viral have revolutionized the way our society interacts today. Yet the disease of alcoholism hasn't changed one iota. Eighty-four years after Dr. Bob recognized that Bill W. was a man with a real answer to his alcoholic dilemma, the A.A. prescription for a diagnosis of powerlessness over alcohol remains the same: a spiritual awakening.

Maintaining the integrity of the A.A. message of recovery, unity and service is of paramount importance in today's world. The cornerstone of integrity is honesty, so integrity necessarily must start at the individual, personal level. Those who practice the Twelve Steps of recovery as our way of life have received the gift of an awakened spirit, and thus are the most properly equipped to carry the life-giving A.A. message of hope to those who still suffer. Demonstrating our personal integrity in all our affairs becomes the force that attracts others to seek our solution and, ultimately, to find their own conception of a power that brings alcoholics back from the gates of insanity or death and into a life of sane and happy usefulness. As long as we maintain our unity, stick to our primary purpose and refrain from the temptation to become all things to all people, we may continue to be the most successful remedy for alcoholism that the world has ever known. If, however, we deviate too far from the path blazed by our predecessors, the penalty will be sure and swift — we will sicken and many, maybe all of us, will be doomed to an alcoholic death. The path we must continue to follow is that of all three of our Legacies — Steps, Traditions and Concepts — and we who are here in this room today are among the relative few who have answered the call to pass these Legacies on to the world.

This is not to say that we should discourage those who might appear different or think they are somehow dissimilar, unique or special cases. Nearly every one of us felt that way when we first encountered A.A. As long as a person has a problem with alcohol and a desire to stop drinking, we should welcome that individual with open arms. Our job, after all, is to be at the place where we may be of maximum helpfulness to others. Whether this takes the form of sponsorship, active group membership, meeting attendance, Twelfth Step calls, hospital or correctional institution commitments, answering services, web development, public information, cooperation with professionals, home group or committee or intergroup or general service work, it all contributes to our primary purpose of carrying the A.A. message to the

alcoholic who still suffers. Remember the bottom line: We carry the message so we stay sober, and also to express our *gratitude* for the gift of sobriety. In this age of misinformation and fake news, it is vital that we provide a clear explanation of what A.A. is and what it is not to potential members, newcomers, family members, professionals and the public in general. It is our responsibility as sober members of A.A. to demonstrate our unity in a clear, understandable and consistent manner.

Despite more than eight decades of experience, it still seems almost mystical how our insistence upon personal anonymity at the public level is the factor that most legitimizes our efforts in the eyes of the world. Great things are accomplished when recovered alcoholics work together in unity for the common good without regard for personal recognition or acclaim. Now more than ever, A.A. might be viewed as an anomaly in today's world, an organization that still demonstrates the benefits of our spiritual principles rather than proclaiming the virtues of our individual members. We need to rise to the challenge of staying true to these principles while welcoming those with a myriad of other issues besides a drinking problem into our fold. In a world plagued by political hyperbole, social polarization and a "look at me!" mentality, the changed lives, restored relationships and reunited families of sober A.A. members remain our premier testimonials by offering the world some of its most refreshing and increasingly uncommon expressions of even temperament and self-restraint. Are you the best version of the Big Book and the "Twelve and Twelve" that someone will see today?

Nothing, however, better demonstrates the psychic change administered by the A.A. recovery program than our Third Legacy of Service. That such daily prodigies of unselfish actions can be offered so cheerfully, without any outside financial support or compensation, and with an attitude of respect, gratitude and a genuine desire to be helpful, remains the most visible and convincing evidence that A.A. still changes lives. Service is indeed our real purpose. We may start in our home group and with our sponsor, but ultimately we will need and want to practice love and service in every area of our lives. *The A.A. Service Manual* and our *Twelve Concepts for World Service* are the guides that can keep us on track in our service efforts. When these spiritual tools are combined with the daily practice of our first two Legacies, they can be woven into a single unbroken spiritual tapestry of 42 spiritual principles — Steps, Traditions, Concepts and Warranties — that provide solutions to any situation that life might bring. And the effect is not just arithmetic — 12 plus 12 plus 12 plus 6 equals 42 — no, it is *exponential*: 12 times 12 times 12 times 6, or 10,368 solutions in our spiritual toolbox! Are you the best version of *all three* of our Legacies that someone will see today?

Although it indeed might be accurate to characterize Alcoholics Anonymous as an anomaly in today's world, we can never afford to become an anachronism. As Bill W. wrote in July 1960, "Individually and collectively, structurally and spiritually, we shall ever need to build for the future. We are still laying down the foundation on which all coming generations of AAs will have to stand, perhaps for centuries." We must constantly seek out new and innovative ways to utilize modern technology to help carry the A.A. message, while never neglecting the power of one alcoholic sharing experience, strength and hope with anyone, anywhere, who reaches out for help. Let us each demonstrate our personal integrity, anonymity and service in the only time that really exists: today. If we avoid controversy and outside issues, maintain our unity and singleness of purpose, follow all three of our Legacies and keep seeking spiritual development, then Alcoholics Anonymous will continue to be relevant and effective in today's world. There will always be new challenges and opportunities to which we can apply our

spiritual solution of Steps, Traditions and Concepts. It has become our turn today to do so. In the February 1961 Grapevine, Bill wrote, “We have to grow or else deteriorate. ... Change we must; we cannot stand still.”

Thank you for my life. My sources for today’s presentation include *Alcoholics Anonymous*, fourth edition; *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*; *The A.A. Service Manual/Twelve Concepts for World Service*, 2018–2020 edition; *The Language of the Heart*; audio recordings from the 2017 Maryland State Convention; and N.E.R.A.A.S.A. 2019 presentations by Ken T. from Area 45, LouAnn D. from Area 11, and Hank K. from Area 50.

I’d like to conclude this presentation with one final thought. Always remember Rule #62: Don’t take yourself too seriously!

# PAST TRUSTEES SHARING

**Rich P.**, Northeast Regional Trustee, 2015-2019

This is my first event as a past Northeast regional trustee. People keep asking how I feel, and I don't really feel anything yet, to tell you the truth. This is what I've always said: My name is Rich and I'm an alcoholic who happens to be a trustee. I never stopped being an alcoholic.

When I was on the committee for Special Needs and Accessibilities, I talked to a lot of people to learn about it. They said, "There is no special class of alcoholic." They didn't want to be talked to like they had special needs. I've learned so much being a trustee and I served with great people and it was a privilege serving the Northeast.

This board going forward is a great board with great people on it. A.A. doesn't need saving. People do. We may disagree on a lot of things, but the one thing we have in common and don't disagree on is our purpose: To carry the message to the drunk who still suffers. And to find them and at least let them know that we exist. There are 36 million alcoholics in North America — not all of them belong in A.A., but some of them don't even know we exist. We need to push that envelope, so at least they can see us and then they can make a decision.

Maybe this is the size A.A. supposed to be. But maybe it's not — I don't know. But I do think people should have the opportunity to be allowed to see the gift that so many of us have. So, I'll leave you with this. If you can think of ways to reach the drunk who is still suffering, push that envelope and push it hard, because there are a lot of people out there — alcoholism is still a number one killer.

**John K.**, General Service Trustee, 2001-2005

I had the opportunity to be on the board when we came out with the Fourth Edition. I was on that committee and it was an incredible experience. If we do have a Fifth Edition, I expect others will have that opportunity. We discussed policy issues, like the posthumous identity of our founders. Though it sounds kind of obscure, it's those discussions that kind of help us define what we think A.A. is and what we want it to be. We also came out with some new pamphlets and other stuff. It's true that we should focus on policy issues — they are of great import. But sometimes, as a great architect said, "sometimes God lives in the details." And if you don't believe that, go to a Traditions meeting sometime and listen to people talk about where the commas are.

It's been ten years since I've been on the General Service Board. I've looked back and reflected on some things. Maybe I can share three observations — not the least is that old Pogo statement. He said, "Having lost sight of our objective we've redoubled our efforts." I think sometimes we agree on an objective; we get down to work and then we get so involved that we lose sight of it. Here are a few quick lessons on it: Choose your battles. We can't all fight every battle. Let someone else carry the water from time to time. If you feel strongly about something, by all means, fight for it. But if you have something to say about absolutely everything, pretty soon nobody will listen to whatever you have to say about anything. I learned that from a Class A trustee Bob Miller, an Episcopal bishop down in Mississippi. He was a great southern gentleman with lots of wisdom. He saw us Class Bs go at it until we



were exhausted. We then turned to him, not because we sought his advice but because we were tired. We said, "What do you think?" He said, "Yeah, I can see why that would be important to you folks, but frankly it's not a ditch I care to die in." So, you have to decide what ditch you'd like to die in, because you can't take them all on.

As a second point, there shouldn't be, in my mind, any surprises or emergencies in A.A. when it comes to policy issues. There are emergencies — somebody picking up a drink is certainly an emergency. But on an institutional level, we make our biggest mistakes when something has to be done immediately without proper discussion or when somebody springs a surprise on us. I got sober with a guy and we were both sober a couple of months. We got off a subway in New York and we headed to a meeting. I asked, genuinely, "How do you feel?" and he said, "Wait until I share at the meeting, you'll hear." And I thought, "I don't think it's supposed to work that way." One of my first meetings as a director of A.A.W.S. was a surprise. There had been an emergency in a Central American country and suddenly somebody wanted us to do something and they sprung it on us — it wasn't on the agenda. And I don't think we made a good decision. I know these things are difficult. I also know I used to go to a garage to get my car inspected and they used to have a sign that said, "We don't have time to do things right, we only have time to do things twice." I think that's an important thing to remember in A.A. No billboarding or grandstanding or corporate bullying or that sort of thing.

Third and finally, I'll leave you with this thought: We sometimes think of the Traditions — and maybe even the Concepts — as agreements, almost like legal contracts or treaties or pacts between nations. I suggest that maybe it's the wrong way to view them. They are commitments. Commitments to an ideal. Part of an ongoing conversation about how those things are applied at any given time. If they are like agreements or treaties, then the only way to settle a disagreement is by suing or by going to war. And we can't afford to do that. We have got to have an ongoing conversation with these things. I've heard a lot in this forum today about requirements and regulations and drugs and so forth, but I think we need to focus on unity. An A.A. historian once said that A.A. doesn't just tolerate diversity, we rejoice in it. We can talk about unity, but we don't get anywhere if we want uniformity. One practical way of doing that is going back to the groups.

I wonder how many people are really familiar with the long form of the Third Tradition. The short form says, "The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking." But the long form contains this sentence: "Nor ought A.A. membership ever depend on money or conformity." That's a good discussion topic. What is meant by that sentence is very, very much a part of our Tradition. Finally, I always liked the title of Nell Wing's book. She was the first archivist and a friend of Bill and Lois and I had the pleasure of driving her up and back to Stepping Stones a few times. Her book is titled "Grateful To Have Been There." And I am grateful to have been there. Thank you.

**John Q.**, Trustee-at-Large/U.S., 1989-1993

This is probably my 30th forum, give or take. I know we are in good hands when I hear your questions, your comments and your sharing. In here, what we're all about is reaching out to the alcoholic out there who doesn't know we are here. That's it. Everything else is detail.

I was at the workshop last night where there was a lot of discussion about if we are reaching everyone, and we are not. We have a lot of work to do. I want to tell you one regional forum

story. it's my favorite regional forum story. In 1991, I was in Bethesda, Maryland. The Russians had just withdrawn from most of the Eastern Bloc countries. A.A. was just coming above ground in all these countries. I was privileged to have gone over there a few times and met the people that were coming out. Their service structures were blossoming. So, at the forum, I was giving my report about all the work that was going on in A.A. — including translations of our books. At the time, there were about five different versions coming out. At the end of my presentation, a gentleman from Africa, who happened to be a student at one of the universities in Washington, D.C. asked a question from the mike: "Why don't we have a Big Book in Swahili?" And I said, "I don't know."

As a result of that question, I met with the staff member on international assignment and we met with the young man who asked the question. The staff member said that there was an attempt to translate the Big Book into Swahili, but the translation was not a good one, so it was shelved. I said, "I think it is time to resurrect the project." A year-and-a-half later or so, we had a Big Book in Swahili. And it was all a result of one question asked at a regional forum.

I'm going to say to you what another trustee said to me: That one day, one of you, or maybe more than one of you, will be privileged to serve the Fellowship at the General Board Service level. I am sober a little over forty-one years, now. I still need to go to meetings, be with people like you, as much as I did when I first walked in. I thank you for keeping all the doors open.

**Bob W.**, Trustee-at-Large/U.S., 2013-2017

The work that the General Service Board and the General Service Office does really trickle up through the Fellowship, finding newcomers. The report from the trustee-at-large/U.S. put me right back into the rooms of the 15 or so countries I visited when I was trustee-at-large. It brought me back to the work that we do on the international level and made me think about the time I attended a General Service Conference in Ukraine. I think they were celebrating 27 years of A.A. and I took a picture of the literature they had — there were about four books. We are so fortunate to have so many books and pamphlets. One of the main things that came from their General Service Conference was that they were debating over the translation of the Twelve Concepts in the short form. Not the essays — just the Twelve Concepts themselves and they were arguing over one word. I thought, Wow, A.A. is the same here as it is back in the United States. We fight about the same things! So, I talked to one of their international delegates about compromise and about how I learned it in service.

What a privilege to watch A.A. grow throughout the world.

This weekend, as I was sitting in this forum, I thought about where my experience in service started. It started when I was in a locked psychiatric ward about a month before I got sober. In that locked ward, in that facility, there were A.A. meetings. And those A.A. meetings happened because of the work of these board servants. Though many seeds could have been planted prior, each meeting in that ward was just one more seed — like another cog in the wheel that brought Alcoholics Anonymous to me.

So, I continued on and I was an alternate G.S.R., G.S.R., alternate D.C.M., D.C.M., area chair and alternate delegate, delegate, and eventually I went on to be a trustee. All of those positions were great and wonderful, but, for me, I think the main thing was that it kept me connected to Alcoholics Anonymous. I was 23 years old when I got sober. Sometimes it was hard to identify and not compare. Perhaps, for me, if I wasn't connected to that level of service

I would have said, I'm just too busy for a meeting. Perhaps my career was getting better, and I didn't want to go to a meeting, but I had a responsibility to go lead a district meeting as a D.C.M. or whatever it was that I was doing. Over the last few years, after rotation, I've found balance. It's a privilege to reflect upon my time and it was a privilege to serve the G.S.B. and I'm happy to be here with all of you.

### **J. Gary L.,** Northeast Regional Trustee, 2011-2015

Recently, I've had a number of conversations about some of the challenges that A.A. is facing today, such as what's being discussed in the rooms, a seeming disrespect for the Traditions, an apparent ignorance of the Concepts and so on. In fact, the topic even came up in one of the workshops last night. In each of these conversations, someone will offer the view that the root of many of these problems seems to be poor sponsorship — or a total lack of sponsorship.

This morning, I thought I would invest my time with you by sharing some views on sponsorship that I've heard in these rooms over the years and that has been helpful to me, both as a sponsor and a sponsee. First of all, how many of you have a sponsor? Wait, if you don't use your sponsor, you don't have a sponsor. So, how many of you have a sponsor? Does that person know they are your sponsor? Remember the "ism" in alcoholism can stand for "I sponsor myself." Sponsorship is not show business; it is lineage. And by that, I mean that it's not just a merit badge for either the sponsor or the sponsee. This is a hand-me-down program, and sponsorship is how the program is passed on. We say a good sponsor comforts the disturbed and disturbs the complacent. But it is not about making sure your feelings are not hurt. Good sponsors frequently have to be tough sponsors, and tough sponsorship is about saving your life and placing you in a position to help save the life of the next person.

A tough sponsor is a mentor, sometimes a tormentor. Tough sponsors say things like, "I don't care if you are happy, I care if you are useful. If you are useful, you will be happy." They say things like, "Some people can get sober without A.A. You're not one of them." A tough sponsor will tell you when you sound like a little motorboat: but-but-but-but-but. A tough sponsor will leave you with the impression that Step One is: "Shut up and get in the car." A tough sponsor will recognize when you are on an ego trip: And they will tell you to come in out of the spotlight of the spirit. When you are whiny, a tough sponsor will tell you, "What's the matter, Gary? Is God not doing your will today?" A tough sponsor will ask a struggling sponsor with five years: "Do you really have five years, or do you have your first year five times?" A tough sponsor will change their answering machine message to: "It's not about you, Gary." And if you tell your sponsor, "I have finally arrived, I have never spoken before a group this large before," a tough sponsor will say, "Don't worry. By the time you are done, it will be down to the size you are used to." A tough sponsor will tell a resistant sponsee, "Look, you don't need to bother with the Steps or joining a homegroup or getting into service or any of that stuff. You can do all those things when you come back."

Remember, there is a difference between having a sponsor and being "sponsor-able." I'm not sure how this little vignette fits in, but it's always been helpful to me. It goes like this: I told my sponsor, "You know, I think I'm ready to sponsor someone myself." And he said, "No, you're not." And then someone actually asked me to sponsor them, and when I told my sponsor and he said, "Now you are." The harshest statement I've heard regarding tough sponsorship and hurt feelings regarding the newcomer is this: "You baby them, you bury them." But the best I've heard regarding tough sponsorship and hurt feelings is this: "As your sponsor, I will let

you stumble around, bumping into walls, banging into trees and tripping over yourself, but when I see you headed toward the edge of the cliff, I'm going to pull you back by your belt buckle, and if you happen to get a little wedgie in the process, that's too darn bad." Thank you for allowing me to share.

# CLOSING REMARKS

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

I am Michele Grinberg, Class A trustee, General Service Board chair. I'm a Class A — amateur. I'm here because I love you all, I love A.A., and I love what A.A. does — it saves lives. I do the best I can to practice all the principles of A.A.

I've had a wonderful time this weekend. You've gotten me excited — several times — with your sharing and your ideas. You've probably seen me typing away — I'm taking notes. I will be reading them on the plane, as is my usual protocol. Thank you to all of you and thank you to all of you in the room: The new members and the longtimers who shared in the halls and from the podium. That's why I'm here — I'm here to listen. It's a privilege. Your thoughtfulness and the depth of your questions and comments were terrific. I hope next time you can again get someone else in that car or on that subway with you and bring them here. The new people are always a pleasure.

As I've said, I see my job at these regional forums to be a good listener. So, at each forum, an unofficial theme emerges. For me, at this one, it was “be loving” — be loving in groups, in service, and especially to those who are new to A.A. or who are maybe putting their toe in the water.

Of course, there is a challenge with that: How do we try to break through the current barriers so that people will risk coming through our doors to find the loving help that *is* available? That is your challenge, and I look forward to hearing about your efforts to break through those barriers.

Here are a few of the many good things I heard this weekend:

- Be loving and tolerant, especially with newcomers who overshare, and with those with other issues. I heard that said many different ways and I appreciate it.
- Recognize the spiritual aspects of service and the spiritual principle of anonymity — it's what legitimizes us in the world. And, I would add: Now more than ever. More than in 1939, I think. Think about how all of the personal stuff of everyone is out there. We are kind of losing what the principle of anonymity means unless we focus on it and study it. I heard so many things that caused me to want to go back and do some more reading.
- As part of personal integrity, welcome with open arms anyone who has a desire to stop drinking.
- Communicating is our great challenge, no question about it. But what I heard that I love was: “We must each own our own part in it.”
- I also heard a willingness to experiment in the new digital world, but let's remember to do it with humility and grace. And again, none of these are my words, this is what I heard.
- When approaching those who breach the principles behind anonymity, let's do it with education. For example, give them a copy of *AA Comes of Age*.

- From a workshop, a member shared about a very diverse group he belonged to in the Northeast. He called it, without a trace of irony, “the best show on earth.”
- I heard a share that struck me (and we’ve got to keep talking about this) — it was about inclusiveness: “If I see a lack, I have a responsibility to do something about it.”

So, in processing all of these comments this weekend, I came away with some questions for all of us to consider:

- A. What more can each of us do to communicate that A.A. is welcoming to all who want us? Or to those who don’t know they want us?
- B. How can we communicate better with each other?
- C. Do we need to do something about a contemporary English translation of our program of recovery?
- D. How can we encourage more folks of all ages and backgrounds into our service structure?

As Bill W. wrote, “Honesty with ourselves and others gets us sober, but it is tolerance that keeps us that way.” Listening to you, I know A.A. is full of passionate, smart, tolerant, diverse, and loving people who will work hard, do service, and keep the hand of A.A. out there. I look forward to your solutions on ensuring that the hand of A.A. is extended to anyone who reaches towards you. And I challenge you to assure inclusion into our service structure.

So, thank you for a wonderful weekend! I hope some of you caught the service bug, and we will see you in Detroit.