

FINAL REPORT
WESTERN CANADA REGIONAL FORUM
AUGUST 26-28, 2016
KAMLOOPS, B.C., CANADA

Dear A.A. Friends,

Please mark your calendar for the next Western Canada Regional Forum, which will take place in **Regina, Saskatchewan, June 8-10, 2018 at the Ramada Plaza Hotel.**

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

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INTRODUCTION

The 2016 Western Canada Regional Forum was held in Kamloops, B.C. Registration for the Forum was 280. This included 168 members attending their very first Forum—many were welcomed at the Forum Orientation on Friday evening. In addition, the Western Canada Regional Forum marked the 200th Regional Forum since its inception in 1975. Cake was served on Saturday afternoon during the break.



WORKSHOP REPORTS

7:00 – 8:15 p.m.

“Remote Communities: What Can We Do?” (Moderator: Tony L./Reporter: Carrie O’N.)
The workshop attendees discussed two topics in relation to remote communities. The first topic, “Ways to Communicate” was met with many suggestions from the group, such as:

- Be friendly with our friends;
- Communicate using our CPC/PI and Corrections tools;
- Use postal mail to communicate and mail literature;
- Send Grapevine subscriptions to remote areas, such as nursing stations, etc.;
- Use service literature for remote communities – drop it off in doctors’ offices, hospitals, etc.;
- Have your group adopt a member in a remote area and have a weekly telephone meeting.

The second topic regarding “Remote Communities: What Can We Do?” discussed retention. To this end, workshop attendees offered suggestions such as:

- Make contact in the remote communities. After contact via phone, follow up with a one-on-one visit; and
- Maintain contact through our friends in the professional community.

Finally, members noted that the two topics discussed in this workshop were interrelated. We cannot retain members if we do not communicate, but we cannot communicate if there is no one receiving A.A.’s message.

“Participation and Safety in A.A.” (Moderator: Becky P. / Reporter: Larry M.) The workshop group shared their experience and thoughts regarding how to keep A.A.s and meetings safe. Members agreed that A.A. is a safe place when we feel safe. In regard to safety, some thoughts were:

- We need to lead by example;
- We must be careful on how much we disclose to protect from abuse and identity theft;
- Meeting chair needs to be aware of possible safety issues;
- It is a good practice for groups to have a plan to deal with safety issues;
- Possible abuse of female members by male members is not the only safety issue – male members can also be abused — there are many different forms of abuse;
- Ganging up on people who are not wanted by a few members is not acceptable;
- Members must speak up about any abuse or incidents they see;
- We must be aware that our behavior gives newcomers an impression of A.A.;
- Safety means that we help each other, although we are not “bouncers;”
- A.A. can show us what love is; we need to step up and speak up;
- The best way to get unstuck is to seize the opportunity to mentor;
- We realize that there may be untrustworthy people in A.A., but we ask ourselves how trustworthy were we? Today, we are just alcoholics helping each other;
- We have a “right of participation” and we have a responsibility in how we participate;
- Sponsorship is important in any talk about safety – a sponsor can guide us in knowing what is and what is not appropriate behavior;
- Even gossip is a safety issue – social media can be a medium for safety issues and for privacy being violated.

“Corrections” (Moderator: Bob K./Reporter: Drew W.) The moderator opened the workshop by sharing his personal experience as an A.A. member and former Corrections chair for Area 79. He explained how Corrections Correspondence not only changes the lives of members inside the walls, but also enhances the sobriety of the members who carry the message. The first question discussed by the group was related to Corrections Correspondence with members on the inside. An overview of the Corrections Correspondence pamphlet was reviewed — how tos, guidelines, procedures, safety of outside members, and the benefits of correspondence service work were discussed. The sharing was overwhelmingly positive, as members felt it was one of the most gratifying experiences in their personal recovery.

The second topic of discussion was about getting literature into institutions. Members shared how beneficial our Grapevine and La Viña magazines are in carrying our message to the alcoholic who still suffers. A suggestion was made to order back issues (30 copies) of Grapevine to distribute to local corrections committees, committee chairs, and volunteers who take meetings into facilities. Donation gift subscriptions and donating used A.A. literature is another way to help. Finally, It was stressed that the experiences of A.A. volunteers does not have to match the experiences of people on the inside in order to do effective Twelve Step work in corrections.

8:30 – 9:45 p.m.

“Supporting Grapevine: From Your Story to Service” (Moderator: Ami B., A.A. Grapevine, Inc., Executive Editor/Publisher, Reporter: Leslie P.) The workshop opened with an introduction by EEP Ami B. and the following topics were discussed:

- Guidelines of a story;
- The Grapevine app;
- Editorial Calendar;
- How can members make suggestions to Grapevine?
- How to record your story;
- What would you write if you were going to write for the Grapevine?

Story guidelines are available on aa Grapevine.org. You can also call the Grapevine, and the office will send you a copy via U.S. mail.

The Grapevine app is out and is user friendly. Some of the features available on it are:

- The ability to access the magazine on your tablet or smartphone monthly;
- Download your issue for offline viewing;
- Archive past issues;
- Email favorite articles to friends.

The editorial calendar follows a schedule, such as Corrections topics/stories in the July issue. The full calendar is available within the magazine, as well as online. For those members who would like to make suggestions to the magazine, write the suggestions down and send them to the senior editor or to the directors of the Grapevine Board. It was noted, however, that there were changes made to the editorial calendar and this decision was not popular with many readers.

Recording your audio Grapevine story with the Audio Project voicemail is similar to using voicemail—you can record as many times as you like before you are satisfied. The user has up to seven minutes to record. A Smartphone or a voice recorder can be used, though more people seem to use voice recorders. Information is available on the Website.

Finally, members shared many ideas regarding stories they could write for the Grapevine, such as: A high bottom drunk; internal gifts I’ve received; Twelve Step service; keeping your sobriety first; acceptance of our alcoholism; learning to live one day at a time; hope—living in the now; hope—personal experience; willingness; acceptance of a higher power; and old-timers’ stories, to name just a few.

“First Nations’ Members: Participation in A.A.” (Moderator: Jan M./Reporter: Keith A.) Workshop attendees chose two topics to discuss:

1. Engaging with members of First Nation communities and inclusivity.
2. What are we doing to retain First Nations members?

- In response to engaging with members of First Nation communities and inclusivity, members shared that A.A.s must challenge a misperception of many white people – that white people are not welcome on the reserves. It was offered that it would be helpful if white people overcame their fear of going to different communities. However,

it is important to be invited to start meetings and to ask what indigenous people want or need, as opposed to assuming what they want or need. All initiating members of A.A. meetings on the reserve (whether indigenous or not) must commit to the longevity of the commitment. Sponsorship is very important in engaging with members of First Nation communities, and is very helpful in promoting inclusivity. Finally, workshop members agreed that literature needs to be in a language that is understood.

- In response to the second topic, “What are we doing to retain First Nations’ members?” workshop members came up with several solutions, such as sponsorship, making sure we are respectful of all members of all cultures, being aware that for indigenous peoples, churches as meeting places may not be a good fit (many Native Fellowship centers are available for use), as well as being sensitive to the politics on different reserves that create issues.

Two other important points were made in this workshop: First, that “First Nations” was not an inclusive term — rather, “indigenous” is better used to cover First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples. Second, it would be helpful to remember that there is no “them” or “us” — we are working with other alcoholics.

SPECIAL NOTE FROM G.S.O.:

Our rigorous and comprehensive inventory of First Nations-translated A.A. literature continues, with our focus on Ojibway / Cree, and Inuktitut languages at present, and we will be enlisting the help of local groups and committees in taking actions to review and renew translations efforts, translation revisions, and the process of translation review.

We invite all interested folks who may be fluent in English and First Nations dialects and languages to participate in these important endeavors.

Folks interested in what is available and interested in helping us to move this project forward should contact: translationsandlicensing@aa.org



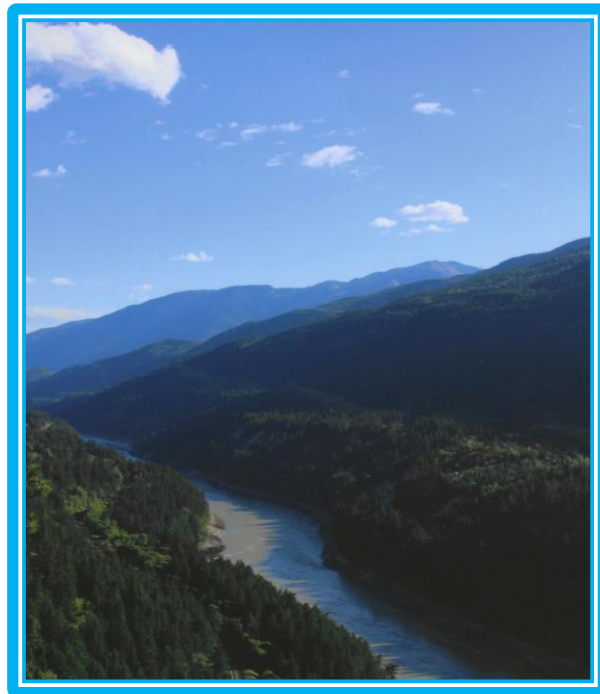
“A.A. and Mental Health” (Moderator: Michael H. / Reporter: Rio D.) Workshop attendees shared their responses to two questions about A.A. and those with mental health challenges: These two questions were:

1. *“Is there a need for a Mental Health pamphlet? If so, why?”*
2. *“How can we, in our groups, assist other alcoholics with mental health issues?”*

Workshop members agreed that there should be a mental health pamphlet for A.A. members. Members said that if the pamphlet was carefully and lovingly developed, it will raise awareness, carry the message, and improve our understanding of those in our Fellowship with a mental illness and those sponsoring those members. In addition, it would be a good tool for CPC, PI, and Treatment centers. Such a pamphlet will help those within our Fellowship and outside of it to identify and open a dialogue in this sensitive area. We aren’t doctors and we do not diagnose, so a pamphlet will be very helpful addressing any questions. Finally, members agreed that a pamphlet would be a very good tool to share our experience, strength, and hope.

Workshop attendees also shared their experience regarding the question, “How can we, in our groups, assist other alcoholics with mental health issues?” Members shared that it is most helpful if we be mindful of A.A.’s singleness of purpose, that we do not tell people to stop taking medication, as this is dangerous and possibly deadly, and we be mindful of the line in How It Works: “There are those, too, who suffer from grave emotional and mental disorders, but many of them do recover . . .”

Finally, a member, David K., shared that a very preliminary pamphlet development has discussed a compilation of stories by members with mental illness and those that sponsor those with mental illness in our Fellowship.



PRESENTATIONS

Reaching Out to the Elderly—Larry M., Delegate Panel 66, Area 78 Alberta/Northwest Territories

Greetings. My name is Larry M., and I am an alcoholic. I am blessed and humbled to be the Panel 66 Delegate for Area 78 Alberta/Northwest Territories. I thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts on the topic “Reaching Out to the Elderly.” For this discussion I will first define the elderly as octogenarians and older.

There is a great deal of discussion about Alcoholics Anonymous becoming more inclusive and less exclusive. With respect to the elderly, I wonder if there is an unintentional trend to be more exclusive than inclusive.

First there are the elderly who have been in our meeting rooms for many years. I have witnessed on numerous occasions that they sit in the meetings and are never asked to share or participate. It is sad whenever I hear members say that they are tired of hearing the same stories over and over, and that they should keep quiet so we can hear from others with something new to say. I believe that type of thinking is, along with other unkindly descriptors, highly exclusive. These elderly members deserve to be heard. They should not be excluded from giving back the gift they so readily received.

Then we have the elderly who enter the rooms of A.A. for the first time. They should be treated with the same respect and kindness we extend to the younger newcomers, but I have witnessed and heard they are often left to “fend for themselves.” Is this not practicing exclusivity?

And what about service involvement? To me, service plays a major part in one’s journey of recovery. Too many of the elderly were in service several years ago and feel they have done their part. They should be encouraged to stay active in service, and we should not exclude them from being valuable mentors to those new in service. I have seen some return to general service work years later and then have a feeling of, “Why did I ever quit?” Area 78 had a D.C.M. who was still active at the age of eighty-six, and at the end of the last rotation he said, “I retire from general service with deep regret.” But he just couldn’t leave; he organized his district’s roundup last summer.

And finally I want to mention the octogenarians who are the “secret and hidden” alcoholics in our extended care facilities and senior centers. Here is a brief account of an experience I had with such a group of often forgotten alcoholics.

In the small Alberta town where I live, there is a large aging population and two seniors’ housing projects—one of which is an assisted living complex. Having lived in this community for thirty-five years I know many of the elderly people who live in these centers. One day I received a telephone call from a friend who knew I was an A.A. member. She asked me if I could talk with her eighty-four-year-old mother. She suspected that her mother had a problem with alcohol and that she had been hiding for years, but it was now beginning to affect her quality of life.

I readily accepted the request and went to visit this person I had known for years. She has always called me “the young fella” and was pleased I had come to visit, but she was surprised when I revealed the reason for my visit. She thought that over the years she had hidden what she called “her little nips” but admitted that she was drinking more now that she had been placed in this home to live out her remaining the years. Over the next two hours we shared our drinking histories. I shared my experience in A.A. and she indicated no one had ever taken the time to talk to her about her drinking. When I started to discuss the Big Book, she abruptly put an end to the conversation and in her own blunt manner told me to come back at 2:00 p.m. the following day.

I left somewhat bewildered but did return the next day to find six people—some residents in the facility and some not, all between the ages of eighty-four and ninety-three—sitting around a table in the dining room waiting for my arrival. They were all eager to learn more about this book called *Alcoholics Anonymous*. You see, they were all part of a book club and decided that this would be the next book they read and discussed. Their discussion of the Big Book is still continuing months later. All have now stopped drinking. They do not like the idea of going to meetings because of mobility issues and because they feel they would be outcasts with the younger crowd. They feel more comfortable holding meetings with their own kind and in their own way. They have now engaged in reading and discussing other A.A. literature, like *A.A. Comes of Age*, *Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers*, *Pass It On*, and the *Grapevine*. These elderly men and women now have sobriety, but more importantly a new reason for living.

I hope we don't forget these octogenarians living in seniors' facilities who may wish to know more about our program of recovery—whether they are alcoholics or not. Are we as members of A.A. making sure that these people are not excluded from access to our program?

In closing, I know I have only briefly touched on this topic, but I do hope that from what little I have said I have given you something to think about in regards to reaching out to the elderly alcoholic and their friends. When we talk about inclusion versus exclusion, let's make sure we include the elderly in those discussions.

Thank you for listening.

Yours in Service,

Larry M.

Panel 66 Delegate, Area 78 Alberta/Northwest Territories

Actions for Inclusiveness—Ian R., Delegate Panel 66, Area 80 Manitoba

My name is Ian R. and I am an alcoholic. I am honored and privileged to serve as Panel 66 Delegate for Area 80 Manitoba. When I first thought about the principle of this topic, my mind fluttered with ideas around the actions needed in modern A.A. to serve the ever-changing, dynamic, complicated needs of our current membership, along with the need for growth in numbers and the Seventh Tradition to sustain us.

And then I realized it was much simpler than that. Firstly, when Bill wrote the Big Book he included the following line in the chapter “We Agnostics”: “To us, the Realm of Spirit is **broad, roomy**, all inclusive; never exclusive or forbidding to those who earnestly seek.” In writing this he made it clear (to me at least) that if the spirit world is all inclusive then my world needs to be as well. As a result, the actions we take in A.A.—as a fellowship, as groups, as group members, as sponsors, as Twelfth Stepper—need to remain consistent with that statement as well.

I often think of the great teachings of my miserable old sponsor. (I can call him that because he is in the big meeting in the sky and can’t defend himself.) We would often talk about the concept of anonymity—how a river of anonymity flows perfectly through all the Steps, from One to Twelve, into the Traditions, and then neatly in and through every Concept, perfectly aligning the thirty-six principles gifted to us in Alcoholics Anonymous. How this river flows like the circle around the triangle that so many of us use and recognize as a symbol of A.A. and which provides us with our three legacies of Recovery, Unity, and Service, equal on three sides. I am a visual person, and these two pictures gave me a clear understanding of the importance of this guiding spiritual principle. Afterward, I had this great philosophical vision of our whole program. My sponsor would say, “Anonymity, mind your own business, do what you say you’re going to do, and be where you say you’re going to be,” and then he would laugh jovially. Leaving me completely confused momentarily.

I’d like to share a little about me and my beginnings in A.A. I want to preface this by my understanding for the need and maintenance of our singleness of purpose in principle, thought, and action. When I came into the rooms, I was what the Twelve and Twelve describes as “a strange alcoholic.” A guy with a weird twist, if you know what I mean. I owe my gratitude in action to all of you and the many members of Alcoholics Anonymous that came before us for clearly understanding me way better than I understood myself; my typical alcoholic defiance and terminal uniqueness, my alcoholic ego always attempting to separate me from all of you at all cost. The severe emptiness and lack of understanding of the disease of alcoholism that had been killing me mentally, physically, and emotionally as a child, and then physically to the point of many close-call death experiences and stints in jail.

The responsibility declaration that reads, “*I am Responsible. When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there. And for that: I am responsible*” has grounded me many times—as I reach my hand out to those need, when I do service in my area, and most importantly when I consider the millions that have yet to find A.A. I ask myself often, “What if those that carried me through my early days of Alcoholics Anonymous didn’t interpret this statement the way I have defined it today? What if they had not explained it to me the way they did? Where would I be?” *My ongoing hope is that A.A. shall never become rigid or dogmatic, but shall always be patient and abiding to the principles of love and tolerance, so as to ensure everyone is included and welcome.*

In my experience, it was that patience, unconditional love, and extreme tolerance that ensured my understanding, created my belief system, and allowed me to work in action in Alcoholics Anonymous doing the very thing we are all here for, which is our Twelfth Step. I try to carry the message of Alcoholics Anonymous everywhere in my life. My old sponsor used to say, "Ian, your life is just one big Twelfth Step call," and today I connect with what he meant. In 1946, Bill wrote a Grapevine article that said, "So long as there is the slightest interest in sobriety, the most unmoral, the most anti-social, the most critical alcoholic may gather about him a few kindred spirits and announce to us that a new Alcoholics Anonymous Group has been formed. Anti-God, anti-medicine, anti-our Recovery Program, even anti-each other—these rampant individuals are still an AA Group if they think so!"

Bill's statement spoke inclusiveness in action to me. He knew me! Crazy, I was all of those things, and look: Here I am now with all of you. We have been gifted the most beautiful, brilliant spiritual program of action. Both the action of inclusion and the word action are spiritual to me. I always ask myself one simple question: "What would the best member of A.A. do?" This question stops me in my tracks and establishes the principles in my everyday life, both in and out of A.A. It transforms my thoughts into spiritual actions. I was taught that everything we do in A.A. is spiritual. It takes me back to the history of our founders and first one hundred sober members, and the trials and tribulations they faced. The many events that needed to occur for A.A. members to be fortunate enough to be handed this beloved program. The wisdom of Bob in directing us to not mess up a good thing. The daily Steps necessary to remain in a state of surrender and the work to live in humility one day at time.

I have learned that we are a service organization. We have a primary purpose and a common solution. There is "A" solution. On page 63 of the Big Book Bill says, "We had a new Employer. Being all powerful, He provided what we needed, if we kept close to Him and performed His work well. Established on such a footing we became less and less interested in ourselves, our little plans and designs. More and more we became interested in seeing what we could contribute to life." *Our program of recovery affords us peace of mind and the inclusiveness to share with one another. It's in that action of sharing that I began to care about all of you, about my family once again, about society and life. It's the action of giving back, with the help of a Higher Power of my understanding that I truly began to love unconditionally. Identification becomes a guide to open doors and minds alike, a principle which indeed saved my life. I remember the moment like it was yesterday. I was about sixty days sober, trying to make sense of what had just happened over the last twenty years—a period of drinking and using, failed relationships, family that had no interest in me, losing my child, my home, my career as doctor, seven arrests in the U.S., and living on the street. And then I met my beautiful sponsor. He was twice my age, but his story was mine.*

I identified with him, and for once in my life I felt included. He shared with me. His actions became my actions. We started reading together. I started seeing my life clearly in the Big Book and eventually, after many sets of Steps, living in unity with my fellows, and serving everyone in my life, seeing my life through the Book and eventually reading that my life could be guided by our principles. I belonged and I was included.

Bill wrote in a 1965 Grapevine article the following words: "Newcomers are approaching AA at the rate of tens of thousands yearly. They represent almost every belief and attitude

imaginable. We have atheists and agnostics. We have people of nearly every race, culture and religion. In AA, we are supposed to be bound together in kinship of a common suffering. Consequently, the full individual liberty to practice any creed or principle or therapy whatever should be the first consideration for all of us. Let us not, therefore, pressure anyone with our individual or even our collective views. Let us instead accord each other the respect and love that is due to every human being as he tries to make his way towards the light. Let us always try to be inclusive rather than exclusive; let us remember that each alcoholic among us is a member of AA, so long as he or she so declares.”

Thank you for my life, thank you for my sobriety.

God bless and keep you. Until then . . .

Yours always in love and service,

Ian R.

Panel 66 Delegate, Area 80 Manitoba

The Future of Alcoholics Anonymous: The New Challenges Facing Our Fellowship—

Christopher S., Delegate Panel 65, Area 91 Saskatchewan

I chose the term “challenge” in my presentation title simply because it is synonymous with a “call to” or “summons to” action. Throughout my presentation I will list just a few of the challenges we as a fellowship need to acknowledge and begin to remedy. Thankfully that process is already underway, at least for the most part. These are the challenges that I feel called to or summoned to take action on as a member of A.A. and I hope that you will, too.

First and foremost: We are not growing as a fellowship and the membership we do have is not representative of the population as a whole. Membership numbers are flat and have been for quite a while. We are also overrepresented in the white, middle-aged male category. When I take a look at some of the changes that have occurred in the way human beings do things, it makes sense why this might be happening and where at least part of the solution lies. We have come to a point in time where, on average, human knowledge is doubling every eighteen months. Rapid changes in knowledge lead to rapid changes in technology, and this of course alters how we communicate. In addition, the way we search for and process information has changed as well. People, businesses, and organizations have had to adapt, and A.A. has been no exception. We have done our best to keep up with what is going on around us; however, we have come to a point where we need to start taking a look at, and dealing with, some of those challenges that have come out of this rapid evolution of human knowledge and technology.

This technological shift has affected absolutely every facet of our lives and has resulted in changes to the way we do just about everything. When asked how we found out the answer to something, we now say we “Googled it” or we “YouTubed it.” Similarly, only a few decades ago we “Encyclopedia Britannica’d it” or, failing that, we “Public Library’d it.” Another shift in this behavior has been the increase in social media searches. People who are on Facebook often tend to search for information there, too. So if people are searching for things on Google or on social media, we need to make an effort to have a presence there. We need to be a part of the search results so that when they look for a solution to their drinking problem and want to reach out for help, we need to ensure the hand of A.A. is there. Popular search engines and social media platforms allow us an opportunity to reach an unprecedented audience, and if we can provide the right message through a P.S.A., they will reach out.

Now I often hear, “We need to have face-to-face contact, that’s how this program works.” I agree with that wholeheartedly, but in order to get potential members face-to-face with another alcoholic they need to know that we exist, that we can help, and how to get a hold of us. Technology affords us that opportunity—provided we do not hold ourselves back out of fear or ignorance. Yes, we have anonymity issues on social media as a result of technology, but we also have no clear voice on social media explaining what we are, what we do, and what we do not do. There will always be those who search for A.A. in the phone book after watching a P.S.A. on television. There are many, many more, however, who are not going to use a phone book or watch television. They also need to know we are there if they need us. Thankfully we are taking steps towards these changes with our comprehensive media plan. With the Traditions as our guide, we are beginning to explore these new avenues for reaching out to the alcoholic who still suffers.

Another possible reason for our stagnant membership levels is the rigidity with which we “uphold” our singleness of purpose. I have seen how quickly we can tell someone who is dually addicted or not sure if they are an alcoholic that they might be in the wrong place. We decide for them before the miracle happens, robbing them of the chance to decide for themselves. Who are we to decide what should be up to them and their higher power? Yes, the only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking, and if they do not want to stop drinking they might not be ready for us. However, if we twist this Tradition to state the *only means* of membership is to be a “pure alcoholic,” we will force away members who might need of us. Thankfully I am hearing more and more conversations about singleness of purpose and how we need to embrace those with multiple addictions the same way we embrace the pure alcoholic.

We also have a participation problem in A.A. A diminishing number of groups are participating in the Seventh Tradition, placing us in a rather precarious financial position. Cost-saving measures have worked up to a certain point; however, unless revenue through contributions begins to increase, we will have to look at other alternatives, such as decreased services or literature price increases. That being said, the solution seems to be quite clear. Almost 60 percent of groups do not participate in the Seventh Tradition, so if we can find a way to encourage at least some of those groups to start, we would be well on our way. We don’t have a money problem, we have a *participation* problem, and thankfully technology has made it even easier for individuals and groups to start participating.

Rather than mailing in a check for your annual birthday contribution, one can contribute online using a credit card or Visa debit card. The only additional fee is the exchange to U.S. funds. In fact, you can make regular reoccurring contributions as well to G.S.O. So we members need to make sure we are contributing what we can, keeping in mind the spiritual significance of the contribution. We also need to make sure our groups are aware of the spiritual significance of moving money forward to all service entities once their bills have been paid and their prudent reserve is met. If you belong to a group that does not distribute its money forward, ask the members why they don’t; if you are not happy with the answer then I recommend you contribute money forward on your own behalf.

Now, there is no reason to be alarmed; that certainly was not the intent of my presentation today. In fact, I personally feel we are at one of the most exciting and pivotal times in our fellowship's history. Not since our inception have we had such an opportunity to help our fellowship grow and continue to reach the alcoholics who still suffer. If we rise to meet these challenges, we will grow and become stronger as a result. We can say we were there at that important time and we did our part to make sure A.A. would stay around for those who need it. So rather than hide from these difficult conversations about technology or social media or singleness of purpose or that dirty little word "money," we need to start having them, and having them often. We can do this.

Sponsorship—Jennifer K., Delegate Panel 65, Area 79 B.C./Yukon Territory

Hi everyone. My name is Jennifer and I am an alcoholic privileged to serve as the Panel 65 Delegate for Area 79 British Columbia/Yukon. Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to share on what I believe to be the heart of A.A.: sponsorship.

As written in the pamphlet on sponsorship: "In A.A. sponsor and sponsored meet as equals. Essentially the process of sponsorship is this: An alcoholic who has made some progress in the recovery program shares that experience on a continuous, individual basis with another alcoholic who is attempting to attain or maintain sobriety through A.A."

For me sponsorship is so much more. It is about learning to have an honest, true relationship with another human being. You see, by the end of my drinking alcohol had become my best friend, and I didn't realize it had taken away everything I truly cared about: my health, my self-esteem, and my self-worth, which lead to all of my relations.

I didn't trust anyone, including myself. Through sharing time with my sponsor, I was able to begin a journey of self-discovery, learning to believe in myself and at the same time coming to trust another human being.

My sponsor then said that sobriety is an inside job and working the Steps and living them would lead to the solution. So she guided me through the Steps, sharing her own experience with each one. We then moved on to the Traditions, since she believed they were equally important. We read and studied the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* and the Grapevine's "Traditions Checklist." The principles found in the Steps enabled me to rediscover and get right with God, figure out who I am, clean up my past, and become useful to others. The principles found in our Traditions are teaching me how to work and play well with others, both inside and outside of A.A. I learned how important unity is to the survival of a group and how my actions have the power to affect any group that I'm in, whether that's my family, my job, my friends, or my A.A. group.

That loving sponsor also introduced me to general service. We studied *The A.A. Service Manual* and the Grapevine's "Concepts Checklist." In doing so I was introduced to twelve more principles that are teaching me about trust, responsibility, and accountability. She also taught me that "Service is gratitude made visible." I have been blessed with a sponsor who walked beside me. I ended up going to district meetings after her suggestion I become alternate G.S.R. for my group, and she took on the position as literature chair. She provided

me with the literature I needed to do a particular position and she took time to go through it with me so I could understand. When I was events chair she also volunteered to be on the committee. Through her actions she showed me that the basis of all sponsorship is to lead by example. She then suggested I get a service sponsor who had more experience in participating in general service. That suggestion in itself was so big, showing me that she truly wanted the best for me.

Reaching out again and asking someone to be my service sponsor was scary because of my old thinking of fear of rejection. Again, I have been truly blessed with a service sponsor who has been by my side throughout my service journey, teaching me so many important practices, giving me encouragement, and energizing me to do the best job possible.

As a result, I have not only stayed sober but have found a way of living far better than I have ever known. My service sponsor helps me see how my alcoholic thinking is blocking my serenity. Most of my self-induced pain is still learning how to be true to myself when dealing with inner feelings concerning how I relate with people. Guess what? I still blow it and I don't handle situations effectively! All I know today is that as I keep trying to be the best person I can be by working the program, I don't go there as often and I don't stay there as long.

The pamphlet on sponsorship reminds us: "The service sponsor should keep in mind that all members will not have the desire or qualifications to move beyond certain levels and, thus, the service sponsor might help find tasks appropriate to individuals' skills and interests. Whatever level of service one performs, all are toward the same end—sharing the overall responsibilities of Alcoholics Anonymous."

A service sponsor is not meant to have all the answers, but to share their experience, strength, and hope—and then ask for help from their service sponsor when needed. So it doesn't surprise me that when an issue arises in A.A., whether big or small, one of the solutions I continually hear is sponsorship.

At the end of Concept IX, it states: "Every sponsor is necessarily a leader. The stakes are about as big as they could be. A human life and usually the happiness of a whole family hang in the balance. What the sponsor does and says, how well he estimates the reaction of his prospects, how well he times and makes his presentation, how well he handles criticisms, and how well he leads his prospect on by personal spiritual example—these qualities of leadership can make all the difference, often the difference between life and death." And that is why I believe sponsorship is the heart of A.A.

PAST TRUSTEES' SHARING

Jack F., Western Canada Regional Trustee, 1984-1988

I made my last and most successful visit to Alcoholics Anonymous in 1965 — 51 years ago. Finally, the rest of the world was lost to me. I had a wife and a baby. I said to the baby, “I can’t do this to you anymore. I’ll have to move on.” Then, I had a thought. I had been to Alcoholics Anonymous before and it didn’t fail me. I just ran from it when the first opportunity came. So I got a guy named Henry on the phone. I said, “Henry, will you come get me and take me to a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous?” That was 51 years ago. And he came. He’s still active. He’s **93** years old and I think he’s sober **63** years. In those days, you got someone and he would say, “I’m your sponsor” — right off the bat. And off we went. Henry is still my sponsor. Back then, he had me go into service right from the start and I didn’t dare say no. I couldn’t afford to go out and get drunk again. Henry would shoot me, sure as hell. So, I did what I was told: I got involved and I was lucky enough to become a delegate.

I belong to the Participation Group in Vancouver, it is a really good group. I’ve never stopped being active in A.A., just like Henry. Our group is getting stronger, and we are achieving those things we wanted — the group is happy about this, because there is nothing like the reward of seeing someone’s life change right in front of you — watching them grow and watching what is happening in their lives. Being a bystander can be really exciting.

In hindsight, looking at my life, it’s been extraordinary; I’ve done many things outside of A.A., too. Eventually, I even became a successful businessman. I had to get the checks endorsed, sometimes. That was my history. Then my wife became artistic, and she became successful. After all these years, I’m happy and I’m still trying to do what I can in Alcoholics Anonymous. We are not finished yet. Nor will we be, until we get everyone pulling on the rope at the same time. There are lots of people who have more than one issue when they come into Alcoholics Anonymous, but they are just as entitled to be with us as we are ourselves. Marvelous things happen when they come to our group and they blend in. Now, I can sit and watch magic happening in their lives. And why are they successful? Because they bit the whole package when they came in here. That’s what happened to me, though I didn’t believe it would.

I’ve been to every one of these Western Canada Regional Forums and it’s been terrific to watch them grow. I got another four or five years, so I’ll come back to see you. God bless you all.

Tom K., Western Canada Regional Trustee, 2004-2008

I am really glad those who are new to sobriety are here, that they stepped out of their comfort zone. I firmly believe that none of us are here by accident — there is a reason why each of us is here, and that a power greater than ourselves has got us to this point and will continue to walk beside us and guide us from here, as we go forward. My sobriety date is November 14, 1983. That isn't the date of my last drink and I'm not sure what that day was — today it's not important to me. November 14th is the day that I entered a treatment center in Regina, Saskatchewan, so that day is my sobriety date. It was a Monday, and that evening, as was the custom in that center, they would take all of us “clients” out to a local meeting somewhere in the city of Regina. So, on Monday night, off we trooped. There are a few reasons that I will never forget that meeting. One was because when I walked into that meeting (and that wasn't the first meeting room of Alcoholics Anonymous that I ever walked into), after having made that decision to be open to some help, and to be open to some other ideas about where my life had brought me, I walked through those doors and into that sea of faces in there, with the cigarette smoke and the laughter and the chatter, I felt, for the very first time in my life — without alcohol — that I was okay just as I was. You see, from my earliest recollections and memories, I knew there was something different about me. And I would have said, “wrong,” not different. But for the very first time, I knew there wasn't something *wrong* with me — there was a reason for all of the things that had happened in my life, but most importantly, there was hope. And I knew that you people had an answer. Every time I've walked into a meeting room of A.A., I have felt that.

The second reason why I remember that meeting so well, was because it was a ten-year birthday that night, and I happened to know the young lady sitting at the head table, sober and celebrating her ten-year birthday. I knew her. She and I had grown up 10 or 15 miles apart, and we were about the same age. And there she was, taking this ten-year cake. This weekend I was introduced to her, and she's here, representing her group, and that is the first time that I've had a chance to meet her since that meeting night, November 14, 1983. She is still here and still active. How does that happen?

I'd like to say that when I came to A.A. I dove right in and started to do all those things that were suggested, right away. But that wouldn't be truthful. I was sober almost three years. I went to meetings, but didn't get a home group. The very first service function I ever attended was a Regional Forum held in Regina, Saskatchewan in 1986.

I just happened to be at work late one afternoon — later than I normally would have. I was wandering through the office. One of my colleagues, also in A.A., was also there later than usual. He noticed me, and said, “Tom, what are you doing this weekend? There is a Regional Forum in Regina and I am on the organizing committee. We could sure use your help.” If he'd had said, “It would be good for you,” or “You should go,” I doubt I would have gone. But, when he said that they needed my help, well, that was different. I thought, “Well, I'm not doing anything this weekend, I guess I can help out.” So I went with them. I met a whole bunch of local people who eventually became the nucleus of a growing circle of fellowship, for me, in Alcoholics Anonymous. I don't remember anything that was said. But I remember the head table. I remember that there was sharing and I remember the spirit of that room. For me, the sense, depth, and magnitude of what I belonged to changed, about 180 degrees. That was my first step out of my comfort zone. A few months later, by sheer coincidence, I got a phone

call from a fellow A.A. that I hadn't met yet, who was the catalyst for starting a group in my hometown. So, I now had a group. And thanks to a Higher Power, and the principles of A.A., that group will be thirty years old in January of 2017. This member had a background in general service so he sponsored us into general service and A.A. right off the bat. He still lives in town and still is a member of my home group.

This weekend, the importance of being grateful was mentioned. This fall, during selection time, I encourage all of you to not shortchange yourself. Take the opportunity to ask yourself, "Am I willing?" and "Do I have the time?" These questions are very simple.

But so many of us, in today's world, are very busy doing many things, but maybe some of those things may not be that important. You might be able to set aside what you think is keeping you too busy, and create some space in which you might be able to serve Alcoholics Anonymous. Put your hand up. I heard a phrase that I like: "It is not the qualified that are chosen — but the chosen that become qualified." The things that would prevent me from stepping forward come from fear. The fear of being found out, the fear of being not enough, and so on.

Encouragement is important. I wouldn't be standing here today if it weren't for the encouragement I was given, early on. I remember that there was a GSR who was discussing a gratitude meeting. She turned to me and said, "Would you like to join the gratitude committee?" With all earnestness, she said, "You'd be good on that committee." And for some unknown reason, I believed what she said. For the first time, I had the sense that I would be good on that committee. Thank God for those people, those people who invite us and encourage us, because we come here with such misconceptions and distorted perceptions of reality; of what we are capable of and what we have to offer. Continue to encourage and invite the people around you to come into your circle. Service is not something extra that we do when we have extra time, service is recovery and we recover through service. I am so grateful for all the people that my Higher Power has put in my path — and continues to put in my path.

You people gave me the opportunity to serve as your general service trustee from 2004 to 2008. For those who will be standing for positions this fall, remember, if you are not entrusted with the position – it isn't about winning or losing, it is about serving. You have a responsibility to yourself and to A.A. to do what it is that you are meant to be doing until the next opportunity arises. If you watch, with a willingness to serve, then you will find what you are supposed to be doing, exactly when you need to be doing it, and you can rest assured that's the way it works.

JoAnn L., trustee-at-large/Canada, 2007-2011

The western region is a small region, but it is mighty. In this region, we are well represented and well served. I listen to the first-timers and I think, "This is the future of Alcoholics Anonymous." I was elected as trustee-at-large/Canada in 2007 and I served until 2011. Prior to that, I was a Panel 52 delegate from Manitoba.

When I came here, my story was what it was like, what happened, and what I was wearing (I stole that story from another woman alcoholic. I asked her if I could have it and she said I could). I came to A.A. with no voice; I didn't think anything I had to say was important. When I came to A.A. I didn't benefit from the sponsorship that was offered to me because I didn't take anyone up on it. I came to meetings off and on for five years and I got a couple of one-year medallions because I didn't drink for one year a couple of times. Not because I actually did anything. My group could have burnt down and I would have just gone to another group. That's how much passion I had for A.A.

In July 1984, something changed. And when I met my sponsor, who is now 87, she handed me a plate and said, "JoAnn, we are going to do the 12 Steps together and we are going to change your life. With these 12 Steps you are going to learn how to put some things on your plate that you've worked for and that you deserve. It's up to you: Either accept crumbs, or build a really, really big strawberry shortcake. And then I want you to learn how to eat it, one piece at a time." She taught me how to be a woman in A.A. She taught me how to be a different woman when I went to my job. She taught me how to be different woman when I got into a relationship with someone else. With her help, I learned that the feet that I stood on were really strong.

I didn't know that I would need all those tools when I went to the General Service Board, I didn't know I would need all those tools when I actually stood up to my group, as a GSR, and said, you know, I don't really agree with what we are doing as a group. I think we should be doing it differently. Where did I get that courage? Where did I get that strength? I got that here. And did it mean that my group agreed with me every time? They didn't. (Unfortunately.) But I learned that I could stand up and say, "I don't think that's right." And it didn't really matter about the results — that was the important thing.

When I was elected to trustee-at-large/Canada, it was a Wednesday. Some people didn't know when elections were held. Well, I did. The phone didn't ring and didn't ring and didn't ring. I thought, Well, that's okay. I just wish our delegate would phone me so I could get on with my day. Then I was called. There were other delegates in the room and I could hear them celebrating. I was told to pack my bags, because I was going to be the new trustee-at-large/Canada. I immediately called my sponsor and I said, "Dorothy, you won't believe it! I've just been elected trustee-at-large!" She went, "[Gasp!] JoAnn, didn't we do good!"

My first trip was to go to Mongolia, and I've been to Lithuania, and I've been to two World Service Meetings, one in New York and one in Mexico City. I was in Guatemala at the Central America Convention. I did many of the same things that my fellows were doing, but there are always those people that you meet that make such a difference and who mean so much. For instance, when I was in Greece, at one of their conventions, I met a woman while I was doing a sponsorship workshop. This woman had been burnt from head to toe. We talked for a while,

afterwards. A few months later, I was invited to Paris to attend the 50th anniversary of A.A. in Paris. I had a nice translator and gave a talk at the dinner. A woman came toward me after the dinner. It was the same woman from the sponsorship workshop in Greece. She asked if I remembered her, and then we sat down and she told me her story. In the past, she had tried a few times to sober up. Her father was an ambassador. She told me that she was always shaming her family because she couldn't sober up. She told that she was so ashamed that she had set herself on fire. I met this wonderful woman, again, at the International Convention in Atlanta. Close your eyes and think: Is there is one story, one nugget, that you can take home and share to tell people that there is hope — that there is a place where alcoholics can share this amazing experience together? My sobriety and my family mean everything to me. I wouldn't have them if it weren't for Alcoholics Anonymous.

CLOSING REMARKS

Terry Bedient, Class A (nonalcoholic) General Service Board Chairperson

I am Terry Bedient — just another amateur who loves what A.A. can do for the alcoholic. I am not alcoholic but I truly believe that I have been infected with the A.A. bug in British Columbia. A while ago, I went to the memorial of an A.A. named Marty. At the group, there was a young man in the corner, and for some reason, after the meeting, I chatted with him outside in the vestibule. I asked why he didn't share. Pretty obnoxious of me, I guess, but that is what I asked. He said, "Well, I am not an alcoholic, so I won't share. I'm traveling, and I cannot find an NA meeting. I knew if I came here, I could stay clean for one more day." Never underestimate the power that A.A. has in your society and your communities. As it turned out, he did have an alcohol problem that he wasn't aware of. I don't know if he came back, but I know that the love that the group showed him would welcome him back.

Someone once said, "I am not afraid of failure, I am afraid of succeeding in something that doesn't matter." A.A., to me, matters. It matters to the alcoholic. It matters to the friends, families, parents, and children of 2 million other alcoholics in 180 countries throughout the world.

At the International Convention in Atlanta, it was a privilege to be able to share the Serenity Prayer with 56,000 other people. It was powerful to share it, here, with 280. But it has no less meaning or power when said in the basement of a church during a first meeting. To me, it seems that most of the questions and much of the sharing this weekend was about participation and how to more effectively carry the message. Well, that happens to be the focus of the General Service Board's strategic plan. So, I would like to think the Board is right in step and following the leadership of you here in British Columbia. The spirit of love and tolerance has been profound this weekend. It has been a privilege for the trustees, the directors, and the staff to join you in the celebration of the 200th Regional Forum.

For those who are restless, irritable, and discontent, drinking is not the answer. And not drinking is not the answer. The solution is the application of the spiritual principles of Alcoholics Anonymous in all parts of our lives. Thank you for welcoming us here.
