

About AA

The A.A. Grapevine: A.A.'s Meeting in Print

In the spring of 1944, just nine years after the beginning of A.A., a small group of sober alcoholics living in and around New York City decided to start an A.A. magazine. Their goal was to provide news to members hungry for more information about the A.A. Fellowship and program of recovery. The first issue was published in June 1944 as a large-format newsletter. The name on the masthead — meant to suggest an informal but powerful way to communicate — was simply *The Grapevine*, written against a tableau of grapes, leaves, and tendrils. Those early issues covered the creation of new meetings (at a time when each new group was a major victory), discussed meeting formats and twelfth stepping strategies, and featured letters from A.A.s in the armed services. In the fourth issue, the magazine printed this description of itself under the masthead: “A Monthly Journal devoted to those seeking further knowledge on the problem of alcoholism, in the hope that it may prove a unifying bond to all alcoholics everywhere. Individual opinions expressed here are not, necessarily, those of A.A. as a whole.”

The Grapevine did in fact appeal to “alcoholics everywhere,” and the magazine found an immediate and enthusiastic readership — not just in New York but around the country and around the world. Within a year the subscription base had jumped from 165 to 2,000. In 1948, the Grapevine changed to a magazine format, and today it offers four-color covers and 64 pages of text. Every month, it reaches more than 110,000 subscribers in the U.S., Canada, and 80 countries around the world — as well as thousands more through an interactive Web site (www.aagrapevine.org). *La Viña*, the bimonthly Spanish magazine, was started in 1996 in response to many requests from Spanish-speaking A.A.s.

The Grapevine is entirely self-supporting through the sale of its magazine and related materials such as anthologies, tapes, and CDs culled from Grapevine articles. By charter, none of the contributions sent to A.A.'s General Service Office can contribute to the Grapevine's coffers.

Now known as the international monthly journal of Alcoholics Anonymous, the magazine celebrated its 60th anniversary in June 2004 with a special issue and the inauguration of an online digital archive, which contains every article and letter published from the first issue through the present. In this rich treasury of A.A.'s past and present, readers can search for experience and information on virtually any aspect of Alcoholics Anonymous. In addition to stories of alcoholics, they will find articles by many nonalcoholics — both the early friends of A.A., without whom the Fellowship might never have survived, and professionals of later years who have helped A.A. change and develop and have used it as a valuable resource in their work.

The Grapevine's Heritage

A.A.'s co-founder Bill W. set forth some of the guiding principles of the magazine in 1945, in a letter to the lawyer working on its incorporation. Bill stressed the Grapevine's independence and suggested the following: that the Grapevine should be the voice of A.A. as a whole; that the trustees of the Grapevine should be able to suggest and advise — but not command; that no individual or single group should ever dominate the magazine; and that the Grapevine should print articles expressing the widest differences of opinion on all A.A. topics. The principles that Bill saw as the guiding spirit of the Grapevine — autonomy, diversity, and singleness of purpose — continue to be central today.

From the beginning, the Grapevine's history ran parallel to that of A.A. as a whole. The early years of A.A. were times of trial and error, and as the Fellowship changed, struggled, and grew, the magazine allowed A.A.s in one area to see how individuals and groups were staying sober and solving problems in other parts of the country. Today, the Grapevine reaches an A.A. population that is dramatically different from the membership of the early 1940s. There are many more young people; the number of women has increased dramatically; more minority and language groups are represented throughout A.A.; and a number of newcomers come to A.A. through rehabs and treatment centers. These changes point to a need for better communication among different segments of the A.A. community, and that's just what readers find in the Grapevine.

An Open Meeting, Always in Session

The Grapevine is many things to its readers: a source of inspiration and insight, a resource with solutions to practical problems, and a library of principles filtered through individual perspectives. For professionals, the Grapevine is an open A.A. meeting, and it's always in session. Its heart and soul is the sharing of A.A. members on “what we used to be like, what happened, and what



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we are like now.” Most articles cover the same range of topics found in a typical meeting — “war stories” of the drinking days; the struggle with, and acceptance of, alcoholism; the importance of meetings, sponsorship, and service; staying sober through bad times and good; gratitude; and insight into working A.A.’s Twelve Steps and understanding the Twelve Traditions.

The editors try to make every issue a solid A.A. resource. Some of the features to be found in current issues include individual experience every month on one of the Twelve Steps or Traditions; departments like Old-Timers Corner, Youth Enjoying Sobriety, Along Spiritual Lines, Online A.A., and Beginners Meeting; coverage of the many facets of A.A. service, from making coffee to being a delegate to A.A.’s annual General Service Conference; articles on A.A. history and reprints of significant articles by the co-founders or by nonalcoholics like Dr. William Silkworth who helped shape A.A. in the early days; news of current A.A. events; letters from readers; and jokes and cartoons.

How Professionals Use the Grapevine

The Grapevine has been helpful to professionals in any number of ways. First of all, personal stories provide a picture of the Fellowship in action. Here are practical problems — wanting to drink, going through a divorce, losing a job, dealing with the death of a child — and practical solutions: meetings, sponsorship, slogans, Steps, and Traditions. Here also are plenty of stories in which the gratitude and joy of life predominate — stories of going back to school; finding a spiritual path (conventional or unconventional); traveling to Switzerland or Istanbul or the Antarctic; making amends to a parent, partner, or child; starting A.A. meetings in a new place; or conquering a lifelong fear. The Grapevine shows how the A.A. program works, not in theory but in practice, which makes the magazine an effective tool for working with recovering alcoholics who find themselves confronted with all the tough choices of day-to-day living.

For professionals who encounter more active alcoholics than sober ones, the Grapevine can be especially helpful. As one counselor put it: “By exposing myself to the stories of well alcoholics — knowing what it was like, what happened, and what it is like with them now — I’m far more understanding and knowledgeable when it comes to providing guidance.” Another is better able to help clients because “reading the Grapevine enables me to participate vicariously in the A.A. experience.”

The Grapevine serves as a connection with A.A. worldwide, offering a window onto the diversity of the Fellowship. The magazine is not the product of one voice or one point of view; it’s a collection of individual voices, each one speaking out of his or her personal A.A. experience. Just as in a meeting, Grapevine writers are free to express what they have found to be true in their own lives. For shaky beginners who resist the Fellowship because they feel “different,” Grapevine articles offer the assurance that in A.A. meetings they will find sober alcoholics with any conceivable heritage, belief, or lifestyle.

Because Grapevine writers are young and old, newcomers and oldtimers, men and women of all backgrounds from around the country and around the world, the magazine offers a way to experience A.A. beyond the horizons of hometown locales and regional perceptions. Seeking to embody the most comprehensive view of the A.A. Fellowship, the editors have published articles by a

heavy-metal rocker, a retired teacher, an atheist with a “spiritual viewpoint,” a Russian divorcee, a newly sober surgeon, a biker and ex-convict, a Wall Street executive, a priest in the Phillipines, a woman musician with AIDS, an “online octogenarian,” and an Aboriginal Australian. As one A.A. put it, “I live in a small town, and for me the Grapevine is a terrific way to find out about the larger A.A. world.”

Professionals can also use the Grapevine to stay current on happenings in the Fellowship or to get insight into how A.A. works. Recent issues, for example, covered the founding of A.A. among the native people of China and Morocco, and an interview with a former prison administrator and Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee on the effectiveness of A.A. in prisons. Other special features published in the last several years include coverage of the development of A.A. online, a discussion of “Should we go easy on the ‘God Stuff?’,” articles on our singleness of purpose, and a report on the 65th Anniversary International Convention in Minneapolis. History articles include a department called “What We Were Like,” which looks back to A.A.’s early and sometimes bumpy path.

Finally, professionals find that the Grapevine examines, through special sections of personal stories, such important topics as alcoholism and the family, A.A. and treatment facilities, women in A.A., alcoholism and mental illness, A.A. in prison, A.A.’s singleness of purpose, young people coping with life changes in sobriety, and how oldtimers can reach out to a new generation of members.

An Unexpected Dividend

For some professionals, the benefits aren’t only job related. An unexpected dividend for one physician has been “the ability to get in touch with my feelings about alcoholics and also to stimulate my personal growth. I’ve discovered that there’s a lot to be gained by trying to incorporate the Twelve Steps of A.A. into my own life. Recently I’ve realized that by reading the stories of alcoholics who have literally gotten their lives back in A.A., I’ve been able to make contact with my own spiritual self.”

Look for the C.P.C. Booth

If your organization is holding a large conference or convention, chances are you will see a booth noticeable for A.A.’s distinctive blue-and-white colors and tended by members of a local A.A. committee on Cooperation With the Professional Community. Do visit — and pick up literature gratis that may be of help to you in helping the suffering alcoholic.

For some 50-odd years, A.A. has loaned portable exhibits of A.A. literature to introduce our program of recovery from alcoholism to professionals at their conferences and conventions. These contain A.A. Conference-approved pamphlets, books, booklets and archival information. If your organization is interested in having an A.A. presentation or exhibit at one of your professional gatherings, please write: C.P.C. Desk, General Service Office, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163; fax (212) 870-3033; or e-mail cpc@aa.org.

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