

About AA

Nonalcoholic Trustees Enhance A.A.'s Ties With the Professional Community

As A.A.'s newest Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee, psychiatrist John Nelson Chappel, M.D., of Reno, Nevada, an authority in the treatment of chemical dependency, joins a company of distinguished individuals who have helped A.A. hew to its founders' original vision of self-support and singleness of purpose. They have been especially effective in carrying the A.A. message of friendship and cooperation to their fellow professionals the world over.

Writing in *A.A. Comes of Age*, co-founder Bill W. warmly pays tribute to the nonalcoholic trustees. "Theirs has been the wisdom that has caused our affairs to make financial sense," he says, "and frequently, in times of heated debate, they have headed off the rash decisions that we volatile alcoholics would surely have made."

Just who are these men and women who over the years have given freely of their time, expertise and concern? Why did we need them in the beginning? Why do we need them now?

Back in 1938, when the Alcoholic Foundation (now the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous, Inc.) was formed, it was suggested that the board consist of both nonalcoholic (Class A) and alcoholic (Class B) trustees, with the former holding a majority of one. This arrangement, some members and mentors felt, would keep the purse strings firmly in the hands of the nonalcoholics.

During a discussion of this point, Bill writes, a rising young New York attorney, John Wood, "blandly asked us to define an alcoholic, and then a nonalcoholic. We came up with the



*John Nelson Chappel,
M.D.*

definition that the alcoholic was a sick person who couldn't drink at all. The nonalcoholic, we surmised, was a perfectly well man who could drink if he wanted to! This made no sense at all; and Mr. Wood, still puzzled, finally stopped trying to describe an alcoholic in legal terms. Giving up the idea of a formalized charter, he suggested that we write a simple trust agreement and sign it."

The first board consisted of five trustees. The nonalcoholic members were Willard ("Uncle Dick") Richardson, a trusted associate of John D. Rockefeller, Sr.; his friend and "advertising man" Frank Amos; and Bill's brother-in-law, Dr. Leonard Strong, Jr. The alcoholic trustees were A.A. co-founder Dr. Bob S. and a New York A.A. "Our New Yorker soon got drunk," Bill recounts, "but this possibility had been foreseen—drunkenness on the part of an alcoholic trustee meant immediate resignation. Another alcoholic was named in his place and we proceeded to business."

That scenario occurred just three years after Bill and Dr. Bob had their celebrated first meeting in Akron. There were no "oldtimers"—an A.A. with even four or five years of continuous sobriety under his belt was unknown. Most members were barely dry. Helping each other to keep the bottle corked was the tall order of the day, and dealing with matters pertaining to foundations, trusteeships and organizational procedures was heady, overwhelming stuff.

Thus, the nonalcoholic trustees were greatly needed in the early days to keep the new Fellowship afloat. And they are still needed. Today A.A. has oldtimers with years of sobriety and service behind them; but, as the alcoholic trustees themselves are first to point out, they are, like everybody else in A.A., "sober one day at a time."

Through the years, our Class A trustees have acted as unique guardians of Tradition Eleven, which states in part that "we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, films, radio and TV." Experience has shown that, for A.A.s, being in the public eye is hazardous to our personal sobriety—and to our collective survival if we break our anonymity at the public level, then get drunk. Yet "A.A. had to be publicized somehow," as Bill said, "so we resorted to the idea that it would be far better to let our friends do this for us"—our nonalcoholic trustees among them. They can face the camera head on or use their last names without threat to themselves or the Fellowship. In the process, they reach many a suffering alcoholic with the A.A. message, along with the professionals who treat them.

From matters of philosophy and organization to public informa-

tion and international outreach, the work of the Class A trustees touches on every aspect of A.A. service. Essentially, they fill a special "sponsorship" role. Just as A.A. sponsors share their experience, strength and hope in recovery with newcomers, so have our nonalcoholic trustees shared their various areas of expertise with the Fellowship as a whole. In fact, it is probable that A.A. as we know it today would not have existed without them.

Certainly, personal aggrandizement has hardly been a motivating factor. In fact, many of the early nonalcoholic trustees elected to help A.A. at a time when much of the public and the press dubiously viewed Bill and Dr. Bob as "reformed tipplers" or "elbow benders" who "used Bible-thumping methods to help lift drunkards onto the water wagon, many straight from the gutter." In most quarters, A.A. trusteeship was regarded as less than prestigious.

Some of the early Class A trustees—such as Jack Alexander, Fulton Oursler, Leonard Harrison and Bernard Smith—shared much with us out of their special fields of literature, social service, finance and law respectively. Their example was followed by trustees of more recent vintage, such as financier-philanthropist "Archie" Roosevelt, medicine's "Dr. Jack" Norris and scholar Milton Maxwell, Ph.D., a dedicated chronicler of A.A. history.

For 23 years, the nonalcoholic trustees continued to outnumber the alcoholics by a majority of one. Then, in 1961, when the Fellowship felt it had the experience to chart its own course, the ratio changed dramatically. The board was reorganized to include 7 Class A and 14 Class B trustees. (The custom of electing a nonalcoholic trustee to serve as chairperson of the General Service Board remained unaltered.)

This realignment has in no way diminished the contributions of nonalcoholic trustees to A.A. life. If anything, their influence grows. People like former trustee W.J. ("Jim") Estelle, Jr., who served from 1977-1986, affected A.A.'s entire approach to carrying the message into correctional facilities. And trustee emeritus Gordon Patrick, who served as chairman of the board from 1975 to 1988, helped A.A. to define its role in the U.S.-Canada's fast-growing employee assistance programs.

The Class A members of the board today are a vital, exciting group. Chairman Michael Alexander is a New York City attorney who follows in the footsteps of his admired colleague and A.A. predecessor Bernard Smith. Then there are respected New York investment counselor Robert P. Morse; sociologists Joan K. Jackson, Ph.D., of Bethany, Connecticut, with expertise in alcoholism and human behavior, and Arkansan John E. King, with his vast experience in local, state and national social work programs; and Amos E. Reed, of Salem, Oregon, who has spearheaded innovative correctional facilities programs across the U.S. Finally, there are two nonalcoholic trustees representing the field of medicine: Dr. Chappel and Canada's John Hartley Smith, M.D., a specialist in occupational medicine and public health.

A.A.s everywhere are grateful to our Class A trustees; more than that, we marvel at their dedication, patience and ability to identify with us alcoholics. Nearly every one of them has personally echoed, in one form or another, the sentiments expressed by Bern Smith when he retired as chairman of the General Service Board in 1956:

"It struck me, as a nonalcoholic, that A.A. was a way of life for me, and for countless others like me who had never sought escape in a bottle . . . The still-drinking alcohol . . . has no monopoly on unhappiness or on the feeling that life lacks purpose and fulfillment. In all the years since my first meeting with Bill . . . I have never lost my initial awareness that A.A. is more than a Fellowship for recovering alcoholics, that it is indeed a way of life for all who have lost their way in a troubled world."

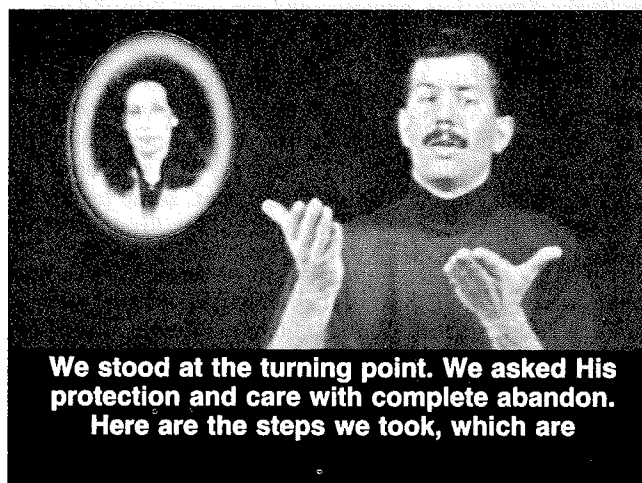
What's New in A.A. Literature

In the past year, as the result of A.A. General Service Conference Advisory Actions, the General Service Office has published some new literature to better serve alcoholics who may have special needs.

The pamphlet "A.A. for the Native North American" is addressed to and contains stories by Native American A.A. members. 25¢

"A.A. and the Gay/Lesbian Alcoholic" is a recovery pamphlet which contains excerpts from the experiences of gay and lesbian alcoholics who are sober in A.A. 25¢

Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, co-founder Bill W.'s essays on A.A.'s Steps and Traditions, has been available for some time in hard-cover and in a smaller, pocket-size gift edition. Now it is available in a soft-cover edition, which will meet the needs of inmate A.A.s, who are not permitted to have hard-cover books. \$2.50



Chapter 5 ("How It Works") of the Big Book in American Sign Language is a 1/2" VHS cassette signed for the hearing-impaired A.A. member. \$20. (22% discount applies)

Coming soon—*Alcoholics Anonymous*, A.A.'s basic text which is known as the Big Book, will be available in a large-type edition, to better serve the needs of the older or visually-impaired alcoholic.

All available from: General Service Office, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163.

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