When is 'Breaking My Anonymity' NOT an Anonymity Break?

When you tell your story to a sick newcomer who has asked for A.A. help, is that an "anonymity break"? When you stand before A.A. Groups and say, "My name is Joe and I am an alcoholic," is that an anonymity break?

Groups ask...

"...about anonymity all the time, like this:

"On anniversaries we run in the penal publication the picture of the speaker, with his permission. Is it wrong to give recognition to these men who have only our interest at heart?" - Indiana.

"I got mail from an insurance company saying I could have lower rates as a non-drinker. How can I find out who broke my anonymity, and what should I do about it?" - Pennsylvania. TO PAGE 3

Dear Friends in A.A.,

Lois joins me in sending each of you our deepest affection at this Christmas time. As this is written, I try to envision myself communicating with you the world over, you who are in many lands and upon the seas.

As never before, Lois and I are reminded of the immense reach of our Fellowship, and with you, we offer thanks to Him who presides over all for the great and continuous miracle of sobriety which is ours to have, and to multiply.

This is the finest A.A. Christmas yet.

Ever yours,

Bill
A.A.'s in Nine Cities Man
Our Professional Exhibit

Many doctors, nurses, judges, welfare workers, school administrators, teachers, penologists, hospital officials and alcoholism clinic workers heard of A.A. or increased their understanding of it this year, and A.A. members in nine cities pitched in on this gigantic message-carrying job.

Twelve national groups of professional people asked G.S.O. in 1964 to set up our exhibit showing what A.A. is, where it is located, and how it works through local Groups.

ANONYMITY — FROM PAGE 1

We do not put "A.A." on envelopes sent through the mails. In material to be posted on A.A. bulletin boards, and printed A.A. programs which the general public might see, we omit last names and identifying titles of all members. Television shows and news photographs do not show A.A. members' faces. In news stories, we are identified by first name and last initial only.

3. We don't think it's a good idea to drum up business for A.A. with testimonials from celebrities.

Occasionally someone asks, "Don't big spectacular anonymity breaker's story, then say, "I'm not that bad." Others may not like the sober life or brand of A.A. exhibited by the anonymity-breaker. And, of course, if the anonymity-breaker later gets drunk, how does it make A.A. look?

Far more people in A.A. keep their anonymity than break it. Hundreds of thousands, both famous and obscure, work actively, unashamedly — and privately — in A.A.

4. Within A.A. itself we quit being ashamed of our illness, and freely exchange our full names.

We keep address books of A.A. names and telephone numbers, and we publish a confidential A.A. World Directory — all so we can keep in touch with, and help, each other.

5. In personal, private, face-to-face relationships with nonalcoholics we are not ashamed to say we are recovered, or recovering, alcoholics. Besides, this often helps carry the message to others.

This in no way violates our Tradition about public anonymity. When you tell the facts about yourself, privately, it's not an anonymity break.

Besides, passing on our experience, strength and hope to other alcoholics is too important to let any fear of discovery or stigma stand in our way. If Bill and Dr. Bob had said "People wouldn't understand," and hadn't passed the message on, where would we all be?

6. We do NOT hide our alcoholism in guilty secrecy out of fear and shame. That would actually strengthen even further the cruel stigma that unfortunately surrounds the victims of our illness.

We remain anonymous in public for two reasons: (1) our promise of privacy to the still-suffering alcoholic and his family, and (2) a spiritual reason, summed up in Tradition 12, or in the word humility.

7. With anonymity, we renounce personal prestige for our A.A. recovery and work, and place the emphasis on our principles — the Power that really heals us—not on our personal selves.

That's why Dr. Bob, discouraging plans for a massive A.A. memorial mausoleum, said, "I want to just get buried like anybody else." That's why Bill turned down the dream of his life, an L.L.D. degree from one of the world's mightiest, proudest universities. Those two men set the example for all of us.

For the good of A.A. as a whole, then, and for every alcoholic in it (or on his way to it), don't you think we need to keep thinking deeply and spiritually about anonymity for a long time to come?
GRAPEVINE GOODIES

December

An aid to Emotional Sobriety; The Silent Sponsor; In the Place for Drunks; Rosemary spoke at the Rally; Christmas Illumination; Distaff Definitions; Lone-Some Road; Sorting Out the World; Geographic Sobriety; On Closed Meetings; My Name is Not Jane; Ten New Years; and Simple Amends; On Making Complicated Symbol of a Fresh Start; Senile Sobriety; New Laboratory Findings on Alcoholism; Graphic Sobriety; On Closed Meetings; Rosemary Spoke at the Rally; Christmas Silent Sponsor; In the Place for Drunks; A.A. in Florida Road Prisons.

January

Problems Other than Alcohol, by Bill; After Sobriety, a Psychiatrist; Important New Laboratory Findings on Alcoholism; Symbol of a Fresh Start; Senile Sobriety; The Treasurer's Report; On Making Simple Amendments; On Making Complicated Amendments; Holiday Cheer—a la Mocha; My Name is Not Jane; Ten New Years; and A.A. in Florida Road Prisons.

SPECIAL GIFTS TO G.S.O.

OCTOBER 1964

ILLINOIS: Chicago – 1964 Chicago Area and Suburban Illinois Intergroup • • • • • • • $500.00 MICHIGAN: Ypsilanti – Central Michigan Intergroup Area Council: $ 18.42 PENNSYLVANIA: Cooksburg – Cook Forest Conference • • • • • $333.00 VERMONT: Windsor – Roundup • • • • • $223.42 VIRGINIA: Blackstone Retreat; $ 100.00 NOTE: All contributions received through December 31, 1964, will be shown in 1965 Directory.

A FIFTH OF WHAT?

"The seventh of this month I'll be sober four years. I counted my money so long in half pints I still can't get used to asking for a quart, not a fifth, of milk."

—R.S., Jennings, La.

ANOTHER NEW OLDTIMER

"I have a grandmother living in Maine who joined A.A. at 86. Since she was 12 years old she had drunk old cider and straight alcohol split and smoked three packs of cigarettes a day."

—Al W., Chicago, Ill.

PRAYERS AT MEETINGS

"A Briton in the U.S.A. was ribbed for closing the meeting with the Serenity Prayer. 'What the heck,' said a local, 'We don't need it twice.'"

"A Canadian in Britain stirred a great buzz by using the Lord's Prayer. Said a local bloke, 'I'm blowed if I came here to have my soul saved.'"

"Perhaps we shouldn't rib visitors. If the chairman would explain local customs, it might help. Local customs are an 'approved lubricant,' and their breach an unnecessary bit of grit in the works."

—Bill G., Glasgow

* * *

"Our Group grows each year. The most wonderful thing in my recovery has been to watch new ones come in like I was—afraid, sick, bewildered, desperate. "Then as dry weeks pass they blossom like spring flowers. A spark of humor comes back, finally there's an occasional laugh, their eyes get brighter and finally there is hope instead of that dreadful shadow of fear."

"Their dress is better; they take pride in being clean and tidy; and self-respect is restored. Jobs come along, families are reunited and happy. Then comes the great day when they chair a meeting and really feel a part of A.A. for the first time. These are the things that make it all worthwhile."

"Kindest regards to you all away up there from all of us down at the bottom of the world. We're on top, though, when it comes to happiness and peace of mind, Cheerie." — George B., Lower Hutt, New Zealand.

HER GOLDEN JUBILEE

"She is 80 years old, weighs 80 pounds and works 80 hours a week," said the Cleveland Plain Dealer recently in an editorial salute to Sister Mary Ignatia, observing her golden jubilee as a member of the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine. Now at Rosary Hall, St. Vincent Charity Hospital, Cleveland, she has 12th-stepped over 10,000 alcoholics.

Maybe hospitals and doctors who are reluctant to take alcoholic patients would like to hear of her experience. Maybe A.A.'s who say "Only an alcoholic can help another alcoholic" would like to know that Sr. Ignatia is not an alcoholic (read Pages 7, 8, 14, 19, 20, 67, 134 and 178 in A.A. COMES OF AGE). And maybe lots of us would like to write her in gratitude.

TWO BULLY 'BULLETIN' IDEAS

"Here's my A.A. Christmas Card list, and a dollar for each name. Please send the "Exchange Bulletin" for a year to those people. Everybody likes the A.A. News it brings us."

—F.C., Texas.

"Several months ago the Group decided to subscribe to the Bulletin for each regular member, and each was to pass it on to another. We used to have the Group copy on the table, but no one took the time to read it, and no one knew anything of A.A. outside of Arizona. It has worked out beautifully. We now give a year's subscription to each new Chairman we elect every three months."

—J.B., Arizona.
WIESBADEN, GERMANY—"It's great to watch A.A. history being made and to participate in it. At the 12th European Roundup the German Groups decided to set up their own central service office soon. Frank and Prue (England) were here; A. A. Denny (New York); Dr. Jim and Martha (Atlanta); Rolf (Berlin); Harry (Bad Reichenhall); and Spanish allies representing 13 Spanish Groups arrived at the train station speaking no German but rushing around shouting "A. A." to find their greeter! Thanks to all of you at G.S.O. for all you did...I envy you the positions of trust you hold within the Fellowship."—George G.

VICTORIA, B.C., CANADA—(The following letter was addressed to one of the G.S.O. Staff.) "As you are the honored princess of the White Waters I am going to tell you a story bordering on the fantastic. The Penelakut Indian Group started in June, now has 32 sober members. They went to the Ahousat Reservation, where 212 came to a meeting, 103 joined. A Catholic priest wants me to travel Northwest to start Groups. Two nuns have gone North with pamphlets and a Big Book...Maybe the Indians will fall to my lot and I did not object, but when I had to be out of town, the very few members simply stopped showing up for meetings. I would like your advice."—Viv I.

CADELL, SOUTH AUSTRALIA—"We received the literature and the Directory, thank you. Now we are waiting for the tapes to come by surface mail. Must be lady tapes, always late!"—Aleck.

MIAMI, FLA.—"We have started classes on the '12 Concepts of Service,' Attendance is growing. Both old and new members are really interested. Seven Groups were represented last night."—Evelyn S.

SEOUL, KOREA—"The pamphlet 'This is A.A.' is being translated for us by a Korean minister for our small Group of Korean A.A.'s (97 members!)."

Ed. note—That pamphlet is also now available in Zulu.

CANELARIA DE LA FRONTERA, EL SALVADOR—"Before I arrived I wrote my brother that I wanted him to have ready two alcoholics who wanted to quit drinking. Exactly my first night there my surprise was immense when I saw not two, but ten poor devils. They didn't know that here in our program we love more the still sick alcoholic than the one already in the program. For four wonderful days I was not able to sleep because of the great emotion."—Abel.

FOR INSTITUTIONS
"The Grapevine" has some old back issues they'll happily send to Groups in institutions if you ask for them. Also—the old edition of the Big Book, "Alcoholics Anonymous," is available for institutions at three for $5.00.

'TIME' WELL DONE
"Even though I'm still in prison I have peace of mind and plenty to look forward to on my release. My wife says if all I've got out of three years here is sobriety, she reckons it's time well spent.

"We are the only prison Group in New Zealand to send inside members to outside meetings without any escort from prison officers, just outside A.A. members. These fellows really use up A.A. literature. Could you possibly send over some to replace our diminishing stock? At present I am unable to offer any financial aid to you in exchange, but in another year I can, so if you can put my account aside until then..."—G.W., New Plymouth, N.Z.