

FINAL REPORT

SOUTHWEST REGIONAL FORUM

OCTOBER 20~22, 2017
SAN ANTONIO, TX

**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 Southwest Regional Forum, which will take place in Houston, Texas October 11-13, 2019 at the Sheraton North Houston at George Bush Intercontinental.

A.A. World Services, Inc.
c/o General Service Office
P.O. Box 459
Grand Central Station
New York, NY 10163
(212) 870-3120
Fax: (212) 870-3003
E-mail: regionalforums@aa.org
G.S.O.'s A.A. Website: www.aa.org

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INTRODUCTION

The 2017 Southwest Regional Forum was held in San Antonio, Texas. Registration for the Forum was **513**. This included **259** members attending their very first Forum—many were welcomed at the Forum Orientation on Friday evening. In addition, the Southwest Regional Forum marked the **205th** Regional Forum since their inception in 1975.

UNANSWERED ASK-IT BASKET QUESTIONS

1. **Who wrote appendix 2 in the Big Book, “Spiritual Experience?” It doesn’t seem to be Bill W.’s style? Also, Appendix II, I believe does not appear in the 1st Edition, 1st printing, but I think first appears in the 1st Edition, 2nd Printing. What prompted the writing of Appendix 2? P.S. Appendix 2 saved my life!**

*An interesting change in the Big Book was made to the text “spiritual experience” in the first printing of the First Edition, which was changed to “spiritual awakening” in the second printing, thus prompting the need for Appendix II, written by Bill. Therefore, Appendix II was indeed added to the **second printing** of the **first edition**, Big Book. What prompted the change?*

Bill explains this change in the second paragraph of the Appendix. He wrote, “Yet it is true that our first printing gave many readers the impression that these personality changes, or religious experiences, must be in the nature of sudden and spectacular upheavals. Happily for everyone, this conclusion is erroneous.” In other words, Bill’s intent in changing the wording was to offer a wider sense of identification to members regardless whether one’s spiritual growth is a sudden or a gradual experience.

Bill once toyed with the idea of reverting the text from “spiritual awakening” back to “spiritual experience.” The idea was quickly dismissed by the groups. To learn more of this story, the Archives has posted a brief audio recording by Bill W. available on the “Audio Archives” section of the “Archives and History” section of G.S.O.’s website, www.aa.org.

2. **Has the board deliberately kept groups and the conference out of substantive conversations and meaningful dialogue that would be helpful to AA as a whole? How did the office arrive at the decision to not inform the fellowship of their decision to break our traditions and file an injunction?**

[Answer provided by the General Manager, Greg Tobin.] First, thanks to the person who put forward the question(s) in the Ask-It Basket. I disagree with the premise of the question; nevertheless, the Board acted under its delegated authority (that is, delegated by the General Service Conference) in a necessarily timely manner and intends to inform the Conference fully and promptly, as soon as the legal issues are resolved. The Board cannot ignore the attorney-client privilege and mutual confidentiality agreed by both parties. Our Steps, Traditions and Concepts were and continue to be the principles upon which the body has made decisions, as well as their fiduciary responsibilities as trustees.

3. The web group emails on the Daily Quotes members break anonymity by not asking before sending these emails out. How can GSO (GV) help remind our members not to do group emails?

The A.A. Guidelines-Internet contain a section “Anonymity and Email” that suggests:

Electronic mail is a widely used and accepted method of communication. It is now used regularly as a service tool in A.A., but as with any service, we need to ensure the Fellowship’s Traditions are maintained while still receiving the most benefit from this form of communication.

When using email, it is necessary to consider the anonymity of the recipients of messages. Sending messages to multiple recipients that disclose the email addresses of everyone on the addressee list is a potential break of someone else’s anonymity. Therefore, it is a good idea to obtain a recipient’s explicit permission before using his or her email address for A.A. correspondence, especially if it is a workplace email address. When sending A.A. mail to multiple recipients who wish to remain anonymous, use can be made of the BCC (Blind Courtesy Copy) option available on most computers.

WORKSHOP REPORTS

7:00—9:00 p.m.

“Supporting Grapevine: From your Story to Service” (Moderator: Irene D., La Viña Editor/Reporter: Carol B.)

For 20 minutes, members told their story as if they were submitting it to the Grapevine for publishing. Then, 3 questions were discussed.

1. **What are some techniques used to help grow Grapevine subscriptions?**
 - a. One woman answered, “If people come to mind as I am reading the Grapevine, I send the article to them.”
 - b. Send the copies of the corrections issue to those who do corrections work.
 - c. Shares the love of Grapevine with others.
 - d. Another insures that his group has a Grapevine representative. If no one steps up, he gives the duties to the alternate GSR.
 - e. Districts sometimes subscribe to Grapevine and La Viña to put in doctors’ offices, firehouses, and high school counselors’ offices.
 - f. Grapevine and La Viña corrections work closely together. They buy subscriptions for institutions.
 - g. Supply copies of “Young and Sober” to high schools.
 - h. Brings subscriptions to senior citizen homes.
2. **How can we get the Grapevine to inmates?**
 - a. Use funds to buy subscriptions for the inmates and send to prison official.
 - b. Participate in the “Carry the Message” program.
 - c. Ask districts with excess funds buy subscriptions.
3. **How do we make the Fellowship aware of Grapevine books?**
 - a. Read from Grapevine books in meetings,
 - b. Take a display of books to conventions.
 - c. Bring your Grapevine books to meetings.

“G.S.O. Finances and the 7th Tradition” (Moderator: Robert Slotterback, G.S.O. Director of Finance/Reporter: Kenneth E.)

Session 1 and 2 reports are combined from the hour-long workshops that ran from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Robert Slotterback gave a short presentation on the history of contributions to A.A. as a whole, and how much of it comes from online donations. Contributions have trended upward since 2015. Online contributions are up from 2010 (1.38% to just over 8%). Some other points were: G.S.O. implementing an online database for more efficiency and ease for those making contributions. He also presented some statistics on the different types of contributions G.S.O. receives. This sparked a conversation to concentrate on how to get the word out that online contributions exist. There were a few members who didn’t know this was an option. There was extensive feedback from members suggesting that communication be added to G.S.R. kits, donation acknowledgements or even creating a QR code that can be added to the back of pamphlets, etc. It was acknowledged that the need to push this topic is valid since online donations require less manual processing.

“C.P.C.—Cooperation without Affiliation” (Moderator: Ian S./Reporter: Dave R.) 7:00 p.m. workshop

The moderator commented that he looked at some definitions of the term and saw that it is the responsibility of A.A.s, when working with entities, to not promote affiliation. Some examples of good cooperation with government agencies/treatment centers: Signing court cards, forming groups (or taking meetings) in institutions. One group member asked, “How do you balance “oversharing” and anonymity to foster understanding?” One workshop attendee suggested that, when cooperating with hospitals and institutions, we can change the language from, “What can I do for you?” to “This is what I can do for you” or “This is what A.A. does,” in order to avoid affiliation. Still another commented that it is “Easy to see the black and white examples of affiliation or not affiliation, but what about Intergroup? YPCAA? LBGTQ groups? So, we [group members] called G.S.O. and asked if they were part of A.A. G.S.O. answered, “Yes.”” Still another suggested that when forming an A.A. group in a hospital or institution, do not name it after that institution or hospital. It was commented that, sometimes, outside entities try to affiliate with A.A. One group member shared that when his group takes A.A. meetings into hospitals or institutions, a member will announce, “We are A.A. and have our own message to convey — we are not affiliated in any way with this treatment center.” Other members had questions and shared experience about whether or not putting out Al-Anon literature was affiliation or whether using the “red book” that is not published by A.A.W.S. was considered affiliation.

“C.P.C.—Cooperation without Affiliation” (Moderator: Ian S./Reporter: Barb J.) 8:00 p.m. workshop

The moderator shared a brief introduction about the topic and then commenced discussions about signing court slips. Some have made it clear that it is up to chair to decide if slips should be signed. Another shared that there is one group who provides stamps for signing slips. Another directs newcomers with slips to give the slips at end of meetings, and he/she keeps personal signatures off of slips. Another member shared that he was one of those who had slips signed. Stated that if he wasn’t ordered to get slips signed, he would not have found A.A. Others shared similar stories and one reminded all to be available to newcomers because, even though A.A. may not be wanted by newcomers now, they may change their mind down the road, and a positive experience with A.A. will help them come back. Another member shared that a committee from her group has meetings with professionals in the drug and alcohol court. The committee goes down to court and members go into a room with literature, introduce themselves, and have a one-hour conversation with the person in charge. One member shared that he signs slips and his group takes a meeting to treatment facility. Patients are told to go to meetings -- information meetings, open meetings. Content changes depending on who is running it. Another workshop member, Jose, works in a treatment facility. He indicated that he would talk with administration about a meeting that could be brought to the facility. Also--don’t talk to patients about meds. Hand out literature, but within facility guidelines. Do not deal with drugs, just A.A. Another workshop attendee shared that we need to extend our hand to people with slips because people are scared and A.A. needs to extend its hand to new people because they may stay. Another member shared that at a meeting held in a church, members invited the church’s clergy. The clergy then wanted to put the meetings in their bulletin. The A.A. member refused the request and said that we “need to explain Traditions in their words so they understand what the group can and cannot do.”

Another workshop attendee asked for suggestions on how to cooperate with a treatment center whose new director is not as friendly as the previous director. In addition, regarding cooperation with Al-Anon, some were conflicted on whether they should participate in Al-Anon events or promote them.

“G.S.O. and FNV” (Moderator/Reporter: Karen Hale, Senior Manager Administrative Services)

Session 1 and 2 reports are combined from the hour-long workshops that ran from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Topics covered in the workshop were:

- FNV Home Page
- Accessing and Using FNV Material
- New Sign On Procedures
- District Change Functions
- Alternate Search Options
- Multiple Position Search Feature.

There were numerous questions about the group status codes and what each meant. Additional questions were posed about how to inactivate groups. Karen explained the entire process and provided information on how the G.S.O. records department handles requests to inactivate a group. There was a specific question about how to re-list groups currently in an inactive district to an active district. Karen explained the D.C.M.’s role in reaching out to those groups and once info is received, how to submit that info to the G.S.O. for processing. There were several additional lines of questions concerning moving groups to a different area, G.S.R. and D.C.M. kit deliveries and what mailings a group should expect.

“Twelve Step Efforts to the Underserved” (Moderator: Norma A./Reporter: Jeannie S.) 7:00 p.m. workshop

Who are the underserved?

1. Answer: Those lacking accessibility, people in remote areas, those who have a physical illness or disability, are aged, cannot drive, are incarcerated or institutionalized, have language barriers, those with different lifestyles and cultures, and chronic relapsers.
2. How can we let groups know about those with accessibility issues and meet them? Take meetings to nursing homes and those who are homebound. Ask, “Can we modify facilities?” Add volunteers for prisons/jails. Be mindful of the huge group of people with accessibility issues. Use the Bridging the Gap model to develop a plan to reach these people. Know the accessibility checklist.

How can we help?

3. Answer: Provide literature, large print, help reading, illustrated, Braille, CDs, ASL, Spanish interpreters. We must look past the differences and help the newcomer identify. They are alcoholics and they belong.
4. How are we seeking equality? We welcome ALL; not gathering in cliques; make all aware of the Traditions Checklist; draw people in; ignore personal discomfort to help others; and unite as a total Fellowship to reach others rather than depending on individual sponsorship. Finally, seek solutions and make good group conscience decisions, be aware, and strive for unity.

“Twelve-Step Efforts to the Underserved” (Moderator: Norma A./Reporter: Bella LB.) 8:00 p.m. workshop

The underserved population are those who experience a lack of accessibility. Those in treatment, those with a different lifestyle, culture, etc. What can we do about serving them better? In response, members shared that we can become familiar with our literature, pamphlets, CDs, and get past our personal opinions. New people are looking for a reason to leave -- Tradition One focuses on this.

Two Questions were posed to the workshop members:

- 1. Literature of G.S.O./Global literacy: Is the literature in our home group addressing the needs of ALL?**
- 2. What about people in nursing homes? How can members serve all of our Fellowship?**

In response to Question One, many answers were offered:

- Replenish the literature rack, make sure it has something for everyone.
- Adopt a rack movement.
- Delegate should be notified of outdated literature.
- Make the several shelves of audio available to members.
- Audio and listening stations should be in a home group, as well as newcomer packets.
- The above should be offered in different translations.

In response to Question Two, “What about people in nursing homes? How can members serve all of our Fellowship?” Members shared that we should be sure to:

- Use sponsorship.
- Shake hands with all.
- Build accessible areas for the wheelchair-bound and make sure they are comfortable.
- Take phone numbers from the handicapped or disabled, and then call and utilize their knowledge.
- Reach out to the LGBTQ community.
- Get involved at the regional level and allow rotation of service.
- Bring a meeting into a nursing home.

“Tradition Ten—The A.A. Groups Oppose No One” (Moderator: Erica C./Reporter: Jackalyn R.) 7:00 p.m. workshop

The meeting opened with a reading of the long form of Tradition 10 and remarks by Erica C. The group focused on two questions from the A.A. Grapevine’s Traditions Checklist.

- Are there industries, positions, or professions that our groups criticize?
- Do I ever give the impression that A.A. has an opinion on outside issues?

The workshop group also discussed how the principle of anonymity underpins this Tradition by making it less likely that people link A.A. members’ outside opinions to A.A. as a whole. Participants discussed the importance of not wearing uniforms, insignia, or political attire to meetings; they also discussed the importance of sharing in a general way with regard to religion and to take special care not to disparage any religious denominations. General practice is to not make announcements in the meeting about non A.A. events or issues. When confronted with controversy or hostility, one-member practices the “3 s’s”: Shut up, Step Back, and Smile! Studying the Traditions carefully, sponsorship, and having thorough group discussions about Tradition 10 provide solutions to many group problems related to this Tradition.

“Tradition Ten — The A.A. Groups Oppose No One” (Moderator: Erica C./Reporter: Stacey S.) 8:00 p.m. workshop

The meeting opened with a reading of the long form of Tradition 10 and remarks by Erica C. The group focused on two questions from the A.A. Grapevine’s Traditions checklist.

- Are there industries, positions, or professions that our groups criticize?
- Do I ever give the impression that A.A. has an opinion on outside issues?

The workshop attendees also discussed how the principle of anonymity underpins this Tradition by making it less likely that people link A.A. members’ outside opinions to A.A. as a whole. Also discussed was how to do P.I./C.P.C. work without having others think that A.A. is affiliating by hosting and setting up a booth. Those with experience shared that merely setting up a booth at a major civic gathering does not constitute either affiliation or public anonymity breaks. It is important for A.A. members, sponsors, spouses, friends, members of A.A. and the general public to know what A.A. is and what A.A. isn’t. Members shared that it was important to keep outside issues out of the “meeting before the meeting” and sponsorship relationships, as well as the A.A. meeting itself. Study of the Traditions and setting an example are the most productive ways to live by these principles.

“From Your Story to Service” (Moderator: Irene D./Reporter: Mari G.)

Spanish Workshop (English Translation)

Irene D. and Carlos translated the workshop from Spanish to English. Each workshop attendee shared a part of their story to publish in La Viña. Linda shared the title “One Day At A Time,” Alice shared her experience, and Mari shared how her life is now useful and happy in A.A. Kevin shared, in English, about “my first meeting.” Irene suggested that receiving one’s first medallion was a good theme. Jonathon shared a theme of “service.” Members began a discussion about what the future would be like.

Questions were also posed:

1. Is it possible to receive voluntary contributions for the magazine? (Answer = That is a decision of the General Service Conference)
2. Why isn’t the magazine bilingual? (Answer= It would be very expensive)
3. Why is La Viña separate from the Grapevine? (Answer = The two magazines have a separate budget).
4. Who started La Viña? (It was published within the Grapevine as a trial run until the Conference determined that publishing La Viña was an important service tool.)

In addition, members discussed the need and made suggestions for ways to increase La Viña subscriptions.

FULL FORUM PRESENTATION/WORKSHOP

Anonymity and the Internet—Dave H., Delegate Panel 66, Area 66 Northwest Texas

With today's ever-changing social media being literally in everyone's hand, anonymity is the primary challenge for A.A. at this moment. I find it amusing that an alcoholic in his or her cups, one who has lost everything (house, employment, and family), can still manage to hold on to his or her cell phone with that last defining death grip. That way, when they do get sober, he or she can fulfill the desire to let the world know that they are back and working towards sobriety. I won't spend time today explaining why they do it, but rather what our guidelines say about anonymity in regard to today's social media and the Internet. As I have been taking reports back to groups over the last two years, the topic of anonymity comes up over and over again. I will tell you that if you call these people out they will retaliate. However, I feel if it is presented in an educational workshop or via a forum, they tend to not be as defensive. Let's take a moment and watch the video from Terry Bedient on why we need to remain anonymous.

Let's begin our discussion with, what does the long form of our Traditions say about anonymity? One part that stands out in Tradition Eleven is:

Our relations with the general public should be characterized by personal anonymity. We think A.A. ought to avoid sensational advertising. Our names and pictures as A.A. members ought not be broadcast, filmed, or publicly printed. Our public relations should be guided by the principle of attraction rather than promotion. There is never need to praise ourselves. We feel it better to let our friends recommend us.

I have had persons in a district meeting say to me, "I post my chip so others can know it is possible to get three months or a year." I share with them what my sponsor said to me: "If you post your A.A. anniversary on Facebook or even open the door with the comment *10 years ago today I began a new journey*, you open the door for someone else to break your anonymity." He also states it is ego-based to look for the *atta boy* comments and slaps on the back. This should be saved for birthday night at your home group. I do see where he states that this is ego-driven—just a little subtler than other invasions of the ego. I had corrected an old-timer with 32 years of sobriety and was told to put my presentation where...I don't have to finish that comment.

Tradition Twelve tells us that anonymity is a spiritual substance and sacrifice, and that anonymity is real humility. If this is so, why would I need to tweet, Facebook, Snapchat or post to whatever medium I choose to talk about my sobriety? My sobriety and spirituality are private and personal. Today I don't have to shout to the world, "Look at me."

So, when we have these discussions, many A.A. members will say, "Oh yeah, show me where it says that." So how many of you have ever looked at or read the service material MG-18? It

is a piece entitled "A.A. Guidelines on the Internet." It spells out "recommendations" for maintaining anonymity on social media. After all, our program is a stream of recommendations. Here is an excerpt from MG-18:

GUARDING ANONYMITY ONLINE

Modern communication in A.A. is flowing from one alcoholic to another in ways that are high-tech, relatively open-ended and evolving quickly. Protecting anonymity is a major concern for members, who are accessing the Internet in ever-growing numbers. When we use digital media, we are responsible for our own anonymity and for protecting that of others. When we post, text, or blog, we should consider whether we are publishing at the public level. When we break our anonymity in these forums, we may inadvertently break the anonymity of others. For more information on anonymity online see the pamphlet "Understanding Anonymity" and the October 2010 issue of AA Grapevine on Anonymity on the Internet.

It also mentions that we should not post "A.A. jargon." This opens the door for others to comment and break anonymity. The specific guideline is that you not show your face, offer your full name or identify yourself as a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. Facebook is filled with full-face pics of persons with their chip in hand saying, *I made it (this many) years*. I read one where a woman posted her one-year celebration and a friend of her family commented, *I did not know you were going through that*.

One of the myths of Facebook is that private groups are private. I looked up "friends of Bill W." on Facebook and I found face pics of all its members. I didn't have to look far to find pictures taken inside of A.A. clubs with members' full faces.

The problem with this is that when you take a picture on your cell phone it records metadata of location. So, if I look up "the Serenity Club in Midland" on Facebook I can see all the pictures taken at that location. And let's not forget about those who check in to A.A. meetings or locations, because Facebook will show you who else checked in there. You may not worry about your own personal anonymity but as the video stated we must remember our tradition of anonymity when we post online. It's not just for our own anonymity but also for those who wish to try our way of life. I know if I thought people could expose me as an alcoholic when I first came in to A.A. I would have never stepped into that clubhouse 10 years ago.

I am very grateful for the life that A.A. has guided me to rebuild, with its recommendations thus saving me. I want A.A. to be a constant and available safe place for drunks to come find help.

“Anonymity and the Internet” (Moderator: Yolanda F./Reporter: Maggie B.)

In the Full Forum Workshop: “Anonymity and the Internet,” a video, “Why Anonymity,” featuring Class A trustees, was presented, as well as information on helpful A.A. literature such as MG-18, A.A. Guidelines on the Internet. The focus of the presentation was anonymity on social media and how it could be compromised. Examples such as posts with Facebook check-ins mentioning A.A. directly or using “A.A. jargon,” posting images of chips, and pictures with or featuring A.A. Steps were provided. Consequences such as job loss, fear from newcomers about their own anonymity, and potential damage to the public perception of A.A. were considered.

It was generally agreed that we must understand that social media is not usually private. It is our responsibility, as A.A. members, to educate others and ourselves through sponsorship and loving conversations about anonymity, “How It Works,” and why it is important.

The video and literature are available at A.A.org, the presentation is available at the Area 66 website: Nwta66.org under “Documents.”

PRESENTATIONS

Technology in A.A: Communication for Our Present (The Future Is Now!)

—Keith D., Delegate Panel 67, Area 65 Northeast Texas

Now about tech. Many of us needed an overhauling there. But above all, we tried to be sensible on this question. It's so easy to get way off the track. Here we find social media accounts running to extremes—absurd extremes, perhaps. One set of voices cry that the Internet is a tool of our social nature, a base necessity of communication. Then we have the voices who cry for tech and more tech; who bewail the uses of pen and paper; who think that most of the troubles of the race are traceable to fear of technology. They think we do not have enough of it, or that it isn't the right kind. They see its significance everywhere. One school would allow man no Kindle version of the Big Book in their meetings and the other would have us all on meeting on Google Hangouts. We want to stay out of this controversy. We do not want to be the arbiter of anyone's tech conduct. We all have tech problems. We'd hardly be human if we didn't. What can we do about them?

If you want the rest of that, you can read it on the on the “Technology in AA Forum” (tiaa-forum.org). I highly recommend you check out the TIAA forum to participate or just to listen to the ongoing conversation. I made up that little rewrite of Big Book pages 68 to 69 one day just for fun, but in all reality, one would think that the use of technology, regardless of the wide array of new communication tools out there, would be less complicated and something we were less afraid of talking about then . . . well, sex. Yet, opinions do run to extremes, that's for sure.

Back before I had taken all Twelve Steps in order, with a sponsor that I didn't fire, a man who would go on to become delegate was trying to help me by emphasizing the importance of working with others. I am a web developer by trade and a computer nerd for fun, and I've always found computers easier to communicate with than people, so I made some offhand comment about how “I would be happy to work with others, as long as I can do it on a computer and not actually have to talk to them.” No surprise, I did not stay sober that time, or the next time, or the next, or the next. After several dozen more sobriety dates, one day I found myself in possession of the greatest gift we can be given—absolute hopelessness. I asked a man to sponsor me and he went on to save my life. He did that in basically two ways: he regularly and consistently told me that if I was not willing to do what he asked me to do then I could go find another sponsor, and he emphasized the importance of working with others as he was working with me from the very beginning. Now, because I find myself practicing a spiritual way of life based on working with others, I find myself in this interesting predicament of trying to be a leader in A.A. I am a person with a lot of experience in using technology, which I integrate it into every aspect of my life, and now as an area delegate I get to share my experience with you. Wow. God sure knows what he's doing; I just had to learn to put the spiritual before the material!

This is not a Tradition Eleven talk, but because Tradition Eleven has been and continues to be the rationalization we seem to use to justify not making progress, I have to spend a little time trying to dislodge us from this position we have dug into so well. How is it that Tradition Eleven has become more important than Tradition One? Bill repeatedly says, “Unity is our

greatest asset”—not the Steps, not the meetings, not the other eleven Traditions or the Concepts. Unity.

With Tradition Eleven, we have gotten into this habit of changing the wording from “press, radio, TV, and film” to “press, radio, TV, film, and the Internet.” Ten years ago, I agreed that the Internet was just one more public media. I’m not sure why I agreed to it, because I was wrong even then. Even 10 years ago, when that statement was truer than it is today, to say that the Internet was public media was inaccurate. The Internet was and is a new form of mass communication that can be public or private, depending on the use. But it’s easy just to say that the Internet is evil . . . I mean public. I agree that we need to be prudent, but prudent means to be slow and methodical in our progress; so, let’s stop calling our fear or lack of understanding prudence. We say, “If Bill were here, he would have agreed that the Internet is public media.” I used to agree with that statement as well, but I have changed my mind. If Bill were here, he would probably be so obnoxious that we’d all be unfriending him on Facebook!

So, let’s the turn the corner, shall we? Can we stop saying “The Internet, especially that darned social media, is evil,” and instead start saying “Let’s see how technology is going to make A.A. more effective.” I believe the use of technology in my A.A. circles is actually increasing our adherence to Tradition One and unity. If we don’t know something then the first step should be that we be willing to state that we have a lack of understanding instead of making stuff up. Some of our recent attempts to solve some technology problems in A.A. seem to have actually made things worse because we are propagating misinformation. Next—and this is what I find to be most helpful—let’s consider what the real-world counterpart is for every online interaction. For example, would this action be right for me if this virtual living room were my actual living room, or a group, or a street corner, or a billboard? Finally, we should admit that these are, for the most part, not new problems at all—these are the same old problems, compounded by the fact that we don’t know how the technology works. Or to continue quoting from the book with which I started this talk, “In other words, we treat tech as we would any other problem.”

You think this is difficult to navigate now? Wait until we have telepathy headsets for communicating or true immersive virtual reality for meetings. Please, do not misunderstand me; I still think that most of the time my guys need to have a hard copy of our basic text at Big Book meetings, and I still make my guys use the voice thingy on their phones to tell me what’s really going on. But how many more people can I work with every day if I can use text messages to communicate while I’m tied up at a family gathering? Or imagine how we could reduce the cost of our book if it was only available in digital format. If everyone in the world had the ability to receive digital literature, then something like that could be possible. These things are coming—it’s not *if*, it’s *when*. Yes, we will make mistakes, but since when was making mistakes a bad thing for A.A.? “We grow by our willingness to face and rectify errors and convert them into assets.”

So, let’s use it! Let’s make some mistakes together! Learn from them together. What an exciting present we live in! Thank you for allowing me to serve, and thank you for my life.

Working With Non-English Speaking Groups and Members—Ron C., *Delegate Panel 67, Area 67 Southeast Texas*

In the Grapevine article “Language of the Heart,” Bill Wilson worried about how the A.A. experience would translate into other languages so that the program could survive in other countries. “Could we communicate overseas? Could AA transcend the barriers of race, language, religion, culture and wars?” Bill and Lois were wonderfully surprised that the answer was yes. But the Language of the Heart is not the end-all cure-all for our cross-communication. The heart-to-heart communication requires that both sides of the language gap be open to new things, and patience is also required because some details may require more expressive explanations. Finally, a great deal of trust is essential, as some things may not clearly translate but we have to trust that we all want what is best for the Fellowship.

I got my first experience in working with a non-English-speaking alcoholic when I was two years sober. He had come to a morning meeting looking for answers about his drinking. He found my sponsor. After they met for a while my sponsor introduced us to each other. “Ron, this is Duc [not his real name], your new sponsoee. Duc, this is Ron [my real name], your new sponsor.” After meeting Duc I soon discovered that he was Vietnamese and spoke little to no English. We were able to make ourselves understand each other through a great deal of hand signs and playacting. We immediately set up a date and time to meet every week and I proceeded to gather together tools to help carry the message. Luckily there was a Vietnamese Big Book available from our local intergroup. So, at our next meeting we proceeded to read the Big Book, alternating between Vietnamese and English. Whenever Duc had a question he would point it out in the Vietnamese Big Book and I would cross-reference it in the English Big Book, and through signs, pantomime, and other passages in the Big Book I would try to convey the answer.

We used this procedure on a weekly basis for about three months, which is when family and friends reared their ugly heads. His family didn’t think that he needed to go to A.A. anymore since he hadn’t had a drink in three months. They figured he was cured. His friends resurfaced after not having anything to do with him for the past two-and-a-half months. He started hanging out with them again in the same old bars and he stopped attending meetings. Eventually, Duc disappeared, and I saw him once more after he had relapsed. But he still wasn’t ready or open to completely give himself to the fellowship of A.A. But I learned a lot from that experience. First, that the program of A.A. can be communicated from one alcoholic to another in spite of the language, racial, and cultural differences. Second, that the God of our understanding does not have to be of Judeo-Christian origin. Duc and I had an interesting conversation about Step Three since he had been raised Buddhist.

Another experience I had in working with non-English-speaking alcoholics happened when I was a district committee member. The district for which I was the D.C.M., District 51, had an underserved Asian community. One of the Asian members of our fellowship presented our district with this fact and a plan to start an Asian meeting within the district. The district then purchased literature, helped them find a place to meet, and helped with flyers to get the word out about the new meeting. I, along with other members of the district, attended the initial meetings to provide support. The weekly meeting did very well at first and was an English-speaking Big Book study meeting, with frequent crosstalk and interpretation in the form of questions and answers in various Asian languages. The general outline of the Steps and the program of A.A. were communicated very well. The non-English-speaking members had

difficulties understanding sponsorship. I don't know if it was because the English-speaking members could not convey the importance of sponsorship or if the Asian members could not relate to being sponsored by someone who didn't speak their language. The meeting grew, but primarily due to the popularity among non-Asian members. The initial meeting was 90 percent Asian and in less than nine months the meeting was 90 percent non-Asian. Eventually, after about a year and a half the format changed to a traditional English-speaking meeting.

The final experience I would like to share happened last year. In Area 67 we have an annual Gratitude Dinner that is coordinated by the alternate delegate and hosted by various districts that volunteer for the responsibility. Last year as alternate delegate I worked with one of our Spanish districts to host the Gratitude Dinner. Our Spanish districts in Area 67 are linguistic districts and overlay our English districts. District 66 overlays District 51 (my home district) and District 52. I often claim that I am going to leave District 51 and move to District 66 due to the enthusiasm and dedication District 66 shows. District 51 told me in no uncertain terms, "Ron, don't let the *Service Manual* hit you in the butt as you leave." The Host Committee from District 66, along with a translator and I, started meeting monthly to plan the Gratitude Dinner. The members of the Host Committee had a great deal of experience in hosting an anniversary celebration within the district but had never attended an Area 67 Gratitude Dinner.

After our second meeting the translator was unable to attend for the next few months and I was unable to get a replacement translator on short notice. So, for the next few meetings we worked together with my very limited Spanish and a Google translation app on my cell phone. The meeting was held in Spanish and a limited translation was done for me, as I was the only English speaker in the room. This procedure worked but a lot of the little details could not be communicated. For example, we had a very difficult time in choosing how to serve the food. In my experience with the Gratitude Dinner, a buffet with numerous lines is the fastest way to serve more than 300 people. The Host Committee felt that having servers would be the best way to serve people. I was worried that trying to serve without ovens, the food would not be hot when it came time to eat. The Host Committee assured me that they could do it. There were also other items that we never did get resolved—meaning I didn't understand exactly what was going to happen at the Gratitude Dinner. The Host Committee just kept telling me "Ron, no problema, tenemos esto [no problem, we got it]." So, I had to trust that everything would be exactly like it was supposed to be and of course it was. The Gratitude Dinner was a huge success. District 66 did a tremendous job and I learned an important lesson about trusting others.

So in conclusion, when communicating across different languages, patience is a key ingredient. Keep the languages simple, and concentrate on nouns and verbs. No idioms and no sayings. The meanings don't translate easily in either direction. Do not get caught up in the literal translations. Speak from the heart, share your experience, and understanding on both sides will happen.

Our Common Welfare: Safety in A.A.—Ben B., Delegate Panel 67, Area 57 Oklahoma

On October 10, 2012, while attending SWAARSA in Corpus Christi, Texas, I was fortunate to meet Olga from Waco, Texas, and we struck up a friendship—a friendship we both still cherish today. In getting to know Olga I learned that she was involved in preparing a series of workshops in her area entitled “Safety in A.A.” This workshop project had come about due to problems in her area that were relevant to that subject matter.

I was sympathetic and half listened as my new friend described those problem topics, but only half interested because the problems, I believed, did not apply to my area—Area 57, Oklahoma. Well, that was then and this is now. Here we are at the Regional Forum in San Antonio in 2017 and I am being coached by Olga for an upcoming workshop that’s scheduled for later this year in two of the eight districts that make up Area 57; our workshop is on “Our Common Welfare: Safety in A.A.”

Here are some of the topics we will broach:

- Borrowing money within the Fellowship
- Sexual harassment
- Theft of group funds
- Selling goods for personal gain
- Offering investment schemes
- Sexual predators
- Pressuring members to join a particular group (religious or otherwise)
- Disrupting meetings/profanity
- Breaks in anonymity
- Exposure in social media

Do any of these sound familiar to the talk of problems that is making the rounds anywhere in your area? Are there safety issues in any of your meetings? These and other related problems are on the rise nationally. It’s not so much that A.A. is more unsafe than ever; it’s more like the *world* is more unsafe than ever and therefore so is A.A., because the Fellowship is a microcosm of the world in which it exists.

A safety card has been issued as a suggested tool for groups to use as is or to modify within the format of your group’s meeting. This card—actually there are two of them—can be found on the aa.org website, via the first bullet point under the “What’s New” tab.

It is obvious that there are safety concerns and questions out there. I have to ask though, are we confusing safety with security—my need to be comfortable, my demand that the group make me comfortable and secure? Is this something that we have been taught by treatment centers? Our members have been coming to us fully cleaned up, sobered up and informed up, and we have gotten unfamiliar with drunks as a result. So is it our own desire to fluff up the edges of A.A. and be more like a treatment center?

Safety in the Public View . . .

But on to another aspect of safety: the public face. After looking at media coverage people are asking, is it safe to go to A.A. or to send my loved one there? / might think this is a foolish question, but then I thought about what an effect this public issue has on all of us, especially our newcomers. Our co-founder Bill Wilson says that we could not have made the progress

with which we have been blessed without the good opinion of our friends. I wonder if the recent media attention is bad enough to damage the past 80 or so years of work. Let's be friendly with our friends, indeed.

Adverse publicity is one aspect of this perception—possibly the biggest threat to the enjoyment of the good name we've had in the past. That is perhaps why this topic is especially important now. We liked it a lot when we were listed proudly as winners of this and that, but when we break the moral codes we also take a very public black eye. "Members behaving badly" is broadcast widely across the media, and we ourselves are not shy about our presence in the media, any media.

Are we organizationally flawed? Bill thought so, but he built our flaws into our Traditions, as part of our higher spiritual principle, with some business principles to attend to so that the bills got paid.

- We accept all people, regardless of their background, providing that they have a problem with alcohol or say that they have a desire to stop drinking. This is our strength—but it is also our vulnerability. You are a member if you say so.

- We are a group, or many groups, whose membership is composed, at our best, of people who suffer from alcoholism. It is our strength—but it is also our vulnerability. The doorway is wide.

- We alcoholics suffer from a spiritual malady. It is our deepest strength—but it is also our deepest vulnerability. We are a selfish and self-centered people—our highest spiritual value is to care for another human being. Our base values are to "get mine" first.

You all already know this. You can add to my partial list of human-being problems from your own experiences. Our membership is open to all who wish to recover from alcoholism.

Tradition Three—you either believe in it or you do not. It's a principle, and it doesn't change with circumstances. Is our unity stronger because of our diversity?

From page 140 of the "Twelve and Twelve," concerning Tradition Three:

"We were resolved to admit nobody to A.A. but that hypothetical class of people we termed 'pure alcoholics. Except for their guzzling, and the unfortunate results thereof, they could have no other complications. So, beggars, tramps, asylum inmates, prisoners, queers, plain crackpots, and fallen women were definitely out."

As A.A. members and as A.A. groups, we have chosen the highest form of freedom by not limiting our message to one class of person. We have chosen the highest amount of individual liberty within our groups by making the groups autonomous and responsible to their own authority, and we even offer them the right to be wrong. We have no A.A. police.

Who is going to deal with the chronic Thirteenth Stepper or other predator, if not the members themselves? We are taught and told to practice love and tolerance and respect. We have chosen to live among the sick and the mentally ill. We have chosen this because they are us, and because it is what has been asked of us. I was taught that when I surrender, I hand in my weapons, and go over and sit down, awaiting instructions. My instructions have been clear. I am to work with others, and to be a home group member to the best of my ability. So, how do I do that?

Sponsorship and Commitment

I do not believe we are supposed to save everyone, regardless of the great pressure to do so. I think that we are afraid to have principles that are unpopular.

Chapter two of the Big Book says that respect for others' opinions and tolerance of their shortcomings makes us more useful. I want my loved ones to find something that is pure and good here in A.A. That's a lot to expect, but this program offers everyone the opportunity to change—nothing less. It is personal change that lets me become a safer person.

Leadership Is it time for us to begin talking to each other about A.A. issues so that we can be more cohesive and less separate in developing our conscience? If we don't talk together about issues as we work within A.A. and if we encourage secrecy, we are part of an ongoing problem. We don't know who we are electing, because we don't know what they think, what they stand for or what they do after they are given our trust. Leadership functions at our lowest level, but the vibrations of either good or bad leadership are felt at our highest group level.

We Are a Program of Redemption. The Stories Abound.

The most ferocious killers in the Hells Angels or in the mafia turn into chaplains, fathers, husbands. The most selfish and ego-centered among us work in detox, prisons and missions.

The energy of drug runners becomes the energy to fuel Twelfth Stepping, at least when it comes from an alcoholic who is armed with the facts about himself.

The young among us want to find a place for their more noble desires. They yearn for meaning and challenge. Does the program change them, or do they change the program? The faithless become faithful. We get new teeth. We go to school. People make amends and become whole. People do their Step work and find freedom from the bondage of self by freely helping others.

We take people where they are, as they are when they get here, and it is our job to help them find what their God would have them be. The darkness that lives in the unrecovered alcoholic is about selfishness, self-centeredness and fear.

Your serotonin level will only carry you so far. The power of love transforms lives, yes, but we all have examples of people we have loved who do not change and do not live; love is only a partial answer.

If it were simple, we would have a book that had one page, with printing on each side. One side would say, "Stop drinking." The other side would say, "Love." But it isn't as simple as that.

Conclusion

You cannot create safety in A.A. without taking the alcoholic out of the group.

And yet: is it possible for A.A. to be safer from the behavior of A.A. members—its own life's blood? The only solutions I have come to are responsible groups that do their work well and sponsorship, all acting under the guidance of a loving God.

We keep working with others and we do it well, because the lives of others, my own life, the lives of our grandchildren and those to come, whose future problems I cannot imagine, depend upon it.

Three Legacies—Denise T., Delegate Panel 66, Area 68 Southwest Texas

What are these Three Legacies? For us in Alcoholics Anonymous, they are the spiritual principles of Recovery, Unity and Service passed on to us from our co-founders Bill W. and Dr. Bob: Recovery through our Twelve Steps, Unity through our Twelve Traditions, and Service guided by the first two legacies and our Two Concepts. Through these 36 principles, our Three Legacies continue to give life to one generation of alcoholics and then the next—not only here in the United States and Canada, but all across the world.

Our first Legacy is Recovery. As Bill W. notes in the foreword to the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*: “A.A.’s Twelve Steps are a group of principles, spiritual in nature, which, if practiced as a way of life, can expel the obsession to drink and enable the sufferer to become happily and usefully whole.” This is a promise that includes not only a way to “stop drinking,” but also a brand-new way to “start experiencing living.” I was transformed from a life of sub-existing on a treadmill of obsession for drinking that included the four hideous horsemen of terror, bewilderment, frustration and despair, to my current life of happiness and usefulness. I was prepared for the next two Legacies as they are described in Step Twelve in the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*: “We are problem people who have found a way up and out, and who wish to share our knowledge of that way with all who can use it. For it is only by accepting and solving our problems that we can begin to get right with ourselves and with the world about us.” I am grateful for your willingness to share your personal experience, strength and hope with me so that I would have the courage to honestly face myself and become willing to help others to do the same.

Our second Legacy is Unity. As Bill W. goes on to state in the foreword of the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*: “A.A.’s Twelve Traditions apply to the life of the Fellowship itself. They outline the means by which A.A. maintains its unity and relates itself to the world about it, the way it lives and grows.” The Traditions grew out of the problems we experienced as our society, which Bill W. described as “large numbers of erstwhile erratic alcoholics,” moved through our “fearsome and exciting adolescent period.” Bill W. was concerned about our ability to continue to successfully meet and work together. Out of these early experiences of trying to do so came the conviction that “we had to unify our Fellowship or we were going to pass off the scene.” I am grateful for the patience, love and tolerance you showed me by working together to keep those doors open each and every time I walked in, even before I was ready to sit all the way down.

Our third Legacy is Service. In Bill W.’s essay titled “A.A.’s Legacy of Service,” he writes, in part: “an A.A. service is anything whatever that helps us to reach a fellow sufferer—ranging all the way from the Twelfth Step call itself . . . to A.A.’s General Service Office for national and international action.” Our Twelve Concepts for World Service are described as “a record for the ‘why’ of our service structure so that we may be able to draw on the highly valuable experience of the past and that the lessons of that experience can never be forgotten or lost.” Concept I declares that the A.A. groups today hold ultimate responsibility and final authority for our world services, but Concept II delegates this authority to the Conference as the means to manage A.A.’s service affairs. Concepts III through XI empower us with certain rights so that all voices can be heard, and they describe the balance and duties between the Conference and the General Service Board with emphasis on good leadership and best committees. Concept XII consists of Article 12 of the Conference Charter and contains our six General Warranties, which embody the spiritual principles by which our Conference functions.

These Warranties of Article 12 are cast in stone as much as the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions are, in that any change to them would require written consent of three-quarters of all the registered groups in the world. The stringency of this requirement ties right back to the strength that we empower the individual A.A. groups. Bill wanted to ensure that, although the groups delegate to the Conference, the Conference would always remain democratic in action and spirit as it acts for the service of Alcoholics Anonymous.

I am grateful to have been able to serve as your delegate to the General Service Conference these past two years. My experience was that the spirit Bill W. hoped for as expressed in these Concepts and especially the Warranties was alive and well. Personally, experiencing the committee process at work through the Conference, including the liberty of allowing floor actions as well, I saw firsthand how the Conference was able to fulfill its obligation to the A.A. groups.

From the Recovery brought about by the Steps, which helped me identify that the problem was with self and that the solution was getting out of self, to the Traditions, which remind me of our responsibility to consider the welfare of A.A. as a whole before our personal wishes and that if we place principles before personalities, our great blessings may never spoil us, we have the means of remaining willing and the instrument in which to continue on with our Legacy of Service to ensure Alcoholics Anonymous will be here for those yet to come—both here at home and across all borders.

Anonymity: Our Spiritual Foundation—Erica C., Delegate Panel 67, Area 10 Colorado

The first time I met with my first sponsor to begin Step work, I arrived fifteen minutes early at the restaurant where we had agreed to meet. I showed up with my brand-new, hot-off-the-press fourth edition Big Book complete with blue and yellow dust jacket. After I ordered my coffee, I placed the book on the edge of the table so that the waitstaff and other customers might see what a sorry state I was in. *Poor little Erica, condemned to a life in Alcoholics Anonymous!*

When my sponsor arrived, she took a look at the book, looked at me, and told me I needed to put a new cover on it—one that would conceal its title when I was out in public. Conveniently, the dust jacket is sheer white on the inside—I turned it inside out and wrapped my book in it while my new sponsor explained how anonymity was the spiritual foundation of all of our principles in A.A. She said I had no right to break my anonymity as an A.A. member before I had had any experience in recovery to demonstrate A.A. principles to others. Moreover, I never had the right to break another member's anonymity, including hers, which I had broken by implication when I showed off my Big Book to all of the patrons in the restaurant. Then she asked me to read the essays on Traditions Eleven and Twelve with a laser focus on the principle of humility and self-sacrifice.

As clueless as I had been that morning, I read those two essays in the evening and felt deeply that humility and self-sacrifice—the abandonment of personal distinction inside or outside of the Fellowship as a function of my experience as an alcoholic—were practices that I sorely lacked. I was keenly aware of my desperate need for a personality change sufficient to bring about recovery from alcoholism. And through the guidance of this sponsor and our literature,

I learned that one way to assure that I am practicing a genuine humility is to maintain my personal anonymity as an A.A. member at the public level, to be rigorous about practicing the principle of anonymity within the Fellowship, and to continually avoid personal distinction within A.A.

It is easy to think of anonymity simply as a matter of confidentiality. Our anonymity promise assures newcomers they can join the Fellowship without exposure to public ridicule or the stigma associated with alcoholism. There is, however, another dimension of anonymity—the spirit of the principle itself. The spirit of anonymity focuses less on confidentiality and more on humility and self-sacrifice. This can be much trickier because of its subtlety and its demand that we each, as A.A. members, constantly examine our motives in the way that we relate to one another.

As our Big Book says, one way that we help each other is by disclosing our shortcomings, so that others might identify with us and therefore reflect on their own practices. So in the interest of disclosure, I will share a few ways that I have acted outside of the spirit of anonymity as an A.A. member.

First, I once shared a sobriety anniversary with my friends on Facebook. Because my post was private, this act did not break the letter of anonymity. However, because my motive in posting the anniversary was a desire for praise and accolades for this milestone, I did break the spirit of anonymity.

Second, I have put A.A. members on a pedestal and sought prestige by associating with people whom I deemed important in the Fellowship. Again, this has nothing to do with confidentiality, but it reflects a lack of humility on my part as I seek to place others above myself or myself above others.

Third, I have told someone that I was in A.A. to elicit interest, intrigue, or sympathy. Because this was a personal disclosure, I did not break anonymity at the public level. However, my motives were not selfless, as I was seeking personal distinction as a function of my membership in A.A.

Fourth, I have discussed my work and professional life with A.A. members to seem special. Again, this was a subtle attempt to set myself apart from my fellow A.A. members—to obtain special distinction within A.A. One of the advisory actions from the 67th General Service Conference is to add more discussion about the spirit of anonymity, humility, and self-sacrifice to the pamphlet “Understanding Anonymity.” Although the letter of anonymity is simple—we do not disclose our membership in A.A. at the public level—the humility and self-sacrifice involved in the spirit of anonymity provide potential for a lifetime of continuous spiritual growth, both for our individual members and for the Fellowship as a whole.

PAST TRUSTEES SHARING

Howard L., *Southeast Regional Trustee (past, 2005-2009)*

When I went to Conference as a delegate in '92, one of the things I was told was: "Don't worry, Alcoholics Anonymous is too big for one person to screw it up." I took that to heart. But when I rotated two years later, I rotated with the idea that we really have a fragile hold on a God-given gift. That, in spite of what I've been told, one or two people **can** screw it up. During my two years as delegate, we had some interesting challenges. I say this to illustrate how we have had issues before that were dealt with — and we have not suffered consequences.

In 2005, when I was on the General Service Board, we had a lot of challenges. And we had a lot of hard times and things didn't go as well as we would have liked. I remember that I was standing out in front of the hotel with a friend of mine and we were rehashing what we both had become aware of when we were delegates —that this thing was really more fragile than we would like to think. We would like to think that nothing can destroy Alcoholics Anonymous. And maybe nothing can, but people can, and typically it is us. And so, we both made a commitment — we said we would hate to overhear a conversation that goes, "I wish that bunch called Alcoholics Anonymous were still around because there is people who need help. I hear they had a pretty good deal going, I wonder what happened to them." We made the commitment that that wasn't going to happen on our watch.

The only "weapon" that we had at the time was that we were two people on the Board who said, "The principles say this, and we are not going to do anything any differently." We weathered the storms that came from that. I won't say we solved all the problems and big issues, but the certain issue was resolved because we, along with some other people, had said, "No, the principles say we are going to do this and we are going to do this."

Now, over those 6 years that I was trustee, we had a minor reorganization of the amount of time that a trustee served, and we reduced the terms that the chair of the Board served. Now, that is very minor, but we did it as the General Service Conference. The General Service Board didn't do it. As a matter of fact, the General Service Board opposed it. But the Conference seemed to think otherwise and we made that change.

If we, as a Fellowship, do the same thing that we have done in the past, I suspect that we will be here ten years from now. But there are other things, serious things, and it is time to look at what is best for Alcoholics Anonymous.

There was once a fellow who looked at our structure that we have now and said, "This is not the best structure that we can have now." And his concern is that we say it's the bottom of the triangle, but I think we have it upside down. A lot of people think it is really the top, but whatever place you put the point, is not really in good contact and relations with the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous anymore.

This guy was worried that the top (bottom) was running things too much their way and leaving the Fellowship out. He had a lot of proposals and thoughts. He suggested maybe it was time for an alcoholic chair for the Board, he also suggested that perhaps we cut down a third of the

number of Class As that we have. He thought maybe it was time to elect more people from the Fellowship, and he suggested that maybe we fill some of those slots that we were cutting back on with a class of trustee that would be elected because of their professional background — but come from the Fellowship rather than come from nominations on the Board. But that guy got summarily shut down—the status quo remained. Maybe its time to think about, “Is it time to change? Are we really doing the absolute best that we can in service to Alcoholics Anonymous?” I don’t think this was original to Bill W., but he quoted it more than once: “Sometimes the good is the enemy of the best.” Maybe right now what we are doing is good, and maybe we think it is good enough. But is it the best that we can do for Alcoholics Anonymous in our stated mission of being available to alcoholics (not anyone else) who want to recover from alcoholism?

The only charge I have, from my Higher Power, is this: There are drunks out there who suffer from alcoholism, who want to recover, and you do that better than anyone else. Why don’t you stick to your guns?”

The guy who had the radical plan? That was Bill W. in 1961 and 1960 with his proposal to reorganize the Board: He thought that we didn’t meet any more success than others, and that we have come full circle since then, so maybe it is time for change and a proposal to come again — in a non-confrontational manner. Maybe it is time to see if what we are doing is the best that we can do?

Conley B., *Southwest Regional Trustee* (past, 2007-2011)

I think all of our problems have started with and continue with Bill. He was at the center of every controversy we ever had. He was at the center of the first Big Book controversy. He and Hank went off and produced the Big Book of A.A.

Thank God, Bill visited Dr. Bob in 1950, on his death bed. Bill showed up at his house on a Sunday. In 1950 they had accepted the Traditions. Dr. Bob gave his last public address to Alcoholics Anonymous in which he summed the whole thing up to nothing more than “love and service.” In November, Bill went to see Dr. Bob for the last time. He said to Bill, let’s do this deal called a Conference and let’s leave it up to the Fellowship to make a decision. He signed off on Sunday, Bill already had the documents ready to go, they shipped them out. On Thursday, Dr. Bob died. Inches and moments from our Fellowship being protected.

When the Conference started, there was a delegate, Bob T., from Mississippi, panel 2. He was a federal judge and headed a subcommittee that looked at this issue of incorporation of our Fellowship to protect the Fellowship’s name. At the end of that, this federal judge delivered an epiphany so moving that Bill was so impressed that he kept it, and recorded it for the benefit of posterity. You can read in A.A. Comes of Age. This is a spiritual entity and it is more important than having the congressional incorporation protection that we maybe could have had.

Let’s fast forward a little to 1955, Bill brings out the Second Edition of the Big Book at St. Louis. That was the only time the Board and the Conference met outside of New York in some other location. And the mistake that Bill made was that he thought that renewed the copyright of the First Edition of the Big Book. It did not.

Bill was busy, at the time, writing much of our literature. For whatever reason, it never got copyrighted, it was in the public domain. Shortly after that, the copyright on the Big Book expired. A few years down the road, no one knew. The copyright on the Big Book expired on the Second Edition, too.

At about the same time, there was a fellow named John S. from Ohio, who was alarmed for the good of A.A. at the price that first editions were being sold. And he thought every A.A. should have a 1st edition Big Book facsimile. A reproduction, so people could read it and assess the changes as the program had developed. He wrote to the General Service Office and requested it. His request was responded to: "There is no expressed need." But John was a real alcoholic, and he didn't take no for an answer. He hired a copyright lawyer to go over to the library of Congress and research it. He was the first individual, but it took until 1983 to realize that there was no copyright on the 1st edition of the Big Book. And by golly, he was going to go out and start production them. And he contacted a publisher and contracted with him to make the books. The publisher called the offices and their response was: "If you do that, we'll sue you." The publisher told John, and John said, "I have the proofright here, it is in the public domain." And the lawyer said, I don't care, I don't have the resources to be tied up in litigation and incur those kinds of expenses.

So, John is still a real alcoholic. He goes out and gets about seven friends and they were going to publish their own book and start to print out flyers that were going to be ready for the 1985 convention. At which point, somebody at the office went, "I think we got a call about something like this, I think we'd better double check this." They found out that the first and second edition had already expired and no one knew it. And it started a great panic in the office. We are ruined! At the time, we had a trustee who had become assistant general manager and he was also an attorney, and so he filed "cease and desist" orders. And what happened was we entered into a lawsuit with one who said, "We are not going to stop."

In 1992, the Conference created an adhoc committee on chips and medallions. They had to address this issue because the Fellowship was no longer able to get the coins they wanted for their birthday, 'cause they no longer could use the circle and triangle. I got drawn from a hat to go on this committee because no one wanted to be on it. We discovered that the 8th General Service Conference had decided that coins and medallions are something that ought to be left to the group and individual to decide. So, we did not tell them they couldn't produce.

We have trustees and a general manager in the offices that have the best interests of A.A. at heart, but they are going to make mistakes. Our Third Concept says that we need to have charity for occasional mistakes. I don't think we need to throw the baby out with the bathwater, but I think there needs to be a discussion. A censorship, if that occurs, is not a firing. It is a form of making a policy. Thank you.

Gary K., Southwest Regional Trustee (past, 2003-2007)

There are just a few things I want to comment on. One of them is archives. This probably began when Nell Wing boxed up the first contents of a trashcan or wherever she found them, some dinghy, old onion skin manuscripts and papers – archives. Over the years, we have gone from a content-driven archive to an artifact-driven archive, and I've viewed this with alarm for a long, long time. I've complained about it and said everything you could possibly say. My running buddy, Dave, and I used to joke about it during spring assembly. We'd run

out and get a piece of cotton off of a cottonwood, put it in an old wore out baby jar, and then come into the assembly and say, "Look! We've found Bill W.'s navel lint!!" And we probably could have gotten some bids right there. We've gotten so ridiculous with this stuff. The artifacts are what they are, but I think most of us, from a spiritual standpoint, are interested in the content of those artifacts. Not the artifacts themselves. I am human like anyone else, I like to smell that musty old crap and hang on to it, and if I'm really moved I might lick it, or something. But I have to tell you, that is just not much of a deal. People have asked all kinds of questions this weekend, and no matter how you phrase the question, it's not going to get answered. It's kind of like a contest: "I think I can ask the question better!" So, we are left with our own personal reflections and feelings on this stuff. As a past trustee, personally I am appalled at the decision but I think I am more appalled at the process that we got to this point.

But here is what I am trying to convey: I think as long as we continue down this dangerous course for A.A. of acquiring artifacts versus the content of those artifacts, it is not going to be the end of the road for lawsuits, it is going to be the beginning. And I cannot, in good conscience, support that effort. I know somebody out there is going to collect this stuff. There are people in this room, right now, who have massive collections of A.A. memorabilia. And good for them! But my fundamental question comes down to: should G.S.O., A.A.W.S., and the General Service Board be involved in that kind of collection? My feeling is no.

I want to tell a little story. It is not much of a story, but I like the way I tell it. It takes place at my first Forum -- a long time ago. In a land far, far away. I got involved in a cutthroat game of poker on a Saturday after all the festivities were over with.

I was with a lot of Scandinavian Minnesotans. Those people might be can kill your butt in poker, and I was a brand-new, green, wet behind-the-ears G.S.R. It was my first Forum, and I was very impressed with what I saw as well as very disappointed with what I saw. But the whole point of this is it is the people you meet on the trail. And you get to develop relationships with the people that last beyond any reasonable amount of time. So, after I got clipped, one of the guys that was playing cards with us was a D.C.M. from northern Minnesota. His name was Olie.

My son's name is Olie, and you don't forget things like that. Anyway, 9 or 10 years go by. We were hosting night watch at my house, or my home group was, that was when we take a shift at night and the calls run through our line. I get this call from this guy in Duluth Minnesota, he said, "My name is Kris, and I am in Duluth, Minnesota. I said, well, we go to any lengths, but Duluth seems kind of far. Why don't you tell me about yourself? He had actually called the Duluth intergroup, but had gotten rerouted. He had been trying to get someone out to his house, but they wouldn't come. And the reason they wouldn't come is he had AIDS. Now this is back in the time when they thought if you looked at someone with AIDS you would probably catch it. So, I listen to his story, and I said, well I don't know anyone in Duluth, but I do know a guy in Minnesota. I'm going to give him a call. I will see if I can get this facilitated. So, I looked up old rosters and stuff and found Olie B. and called him up. I said, "You probably don't remember me, Olie, but I was at the Forum you chaired." He said, "Absolutely I do. I took all your money!" I said, "That's the same guy." So, I explained my dilemma, my problem, and when I told him that this guy had AIDS, there was just silence on the other end of the phone. And he asked me the most important question you can ask, when you are doing this kind of work. He said, "Are you satisfied that he is a real alcoholic?" And I said, "Based on what I

have heard, I believe he is.” And we had talked for about an hour. Olie said, that is all I need to know. He said, I am in Marshall, Minnesota, which is clear across the state, but we will load up the car and go see this cat.”

And so, they did. They went and saw the man, hooked him up with a guy to go through the Twelve Steps, and the last call I got was from Kris, and he said, “I want to thank you for helping to get this done because my parents have just left the room, and they were my last amends.” He died shortly after that. It was one of the most heart-breaking and heart-wrenching things I have ever had to go through in sobriety. But, had it not been for a car full of people coming by my house, and being instructed to get in the car, as well as being told, “You don’t need to know where we are going but you’d probably better pack a bag, we are going to be there for a couple of days.” Had I objected and claimed a full social calendar, I would have missed the opportunity. I haven’t missed a Regional Forum in the Southwest region since 1989. But that is how we meet, so we can expand the geography of this great country of ours. And so, we can hook someone up with someone else. So, if there is no one other compelling reason to come to this, it is to build and foster these relationships.

Don M., General Service Trustee (past, 2009-2013)

I drank to quell the conflicts within myself. My brain goes 150 miles an hour. If I take a few drinks and have a shot of gin and tonic, it slows to about 100, I have a spiritual experience, and I feel peaceful. For five minutes. And then I chase it with another one.

I am still learning things in the service structure. I want to thank everyone for helping me to overcome my conduct unbecoming of a secure person -- I am still guilty of conduct unbecoming to a secure person. As far as I can tell, I am always going to have problems.

One of the things I love about A.A. is the Concepts. I have one comment about all that has happened here: “Everything is working as it should.” The right of the decision is about the people we trust deciding what they should decide on and what they shouldn’t. Concept Five, which is our right of appeal and petition, is our right to inform people that we have made these decisions. And the best analogy I have for that is this: I was younger than everyone else -- I graduated from high school early. My dad said he was going to give me discretion about when to come in, even though I was younger than everyone else. Now the first time I used it, my dad said, “That was a very bad use of discretion, son. You’re grounded!”

There are a couple of things that strike me; if you drive all the risk out of everything, you will be left with no reward. How many people thought it was really risky to get sober? Remember, at one point, we looked at the very thing that was going to save our life as risky – our risk assessment is not that good! I am frequently wrong and I get to be grateful about that. Open-mindedness starts right here. Emerson has a quote, “the unexamined life is not worth living.” I would suggest that the *unlived life is not worth examining*. When we serve, what we are asked to do is assume a position of risk-taking for all of A.A. -- and sometimes we are going to make mistakes. I think making mistakes helps us learn.

I have another quote, it is from Mike Tyson: “Everyone has plan until they get hit in the face.” And I have been hit enough and I know my plan doesn’t always work. My job is that I know my agenda doesn’t mean more than anyone else’s agenda. And since I have been playing in this service structure, I realize now that my agenda should be the **start** of a conversation, not

its desired end. If I am chairing a meeting, and everyone's agenda is on the table, we can get a common agenda. Also, collecting a group conscience is not an event. It is a process, and democracy is unbelievably messy. I like to know the answer before I ask the question in class. One of the reasons I tell people to focus on the Concepts is because, for me, I am in a Fellowship with a whole bunch of people who show up here powerless. My skills in dealing with power suck. And you guys have taught me how, if I rub up against you I will get a little better with that, a little better, a little better and still a little better each time. Power struggles and conflict are inevitable. What is not inevitable is how we deal with them. We have tools here to deal with them — like love and understanding and the willingness to be wrong and the willingness to be right. How often do we talk about the willingness to be right and speak up?

We get to the place we want to be and need to be, and it may not always be what we want, but it will be right. We are the future of A.A. My job as a delegate was to be your human contribution to conflict resolution at the national level.

Thank you, once again, for allowing me to outgrow and deal with my conduct unbecoming a secure person.

CLOSING REMARKS

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

I see my job here as mainly to listen and to learn. I was very privileged to serve as a Class A trustee for six years before I rotated, and now I'm back as chair. You might think there isn't a learning curve to now being Board chair – but there is a *huge* learning curve. I'm learning, I'm listening, and I thank you. I especially want to thank the past trustees for sharing from their hearts based on their experiences. I love the history of A.A. I love when they start teaching me about the history of A.A.

So, I want to thank you for inviting the General Services Board, Greg Tobin, the Grapevine Board, A.A.W.S., and the staff and me for allowing us to be here this weekend, I will try to share what is going on, how we spend your dollars, and how we listen to you.

I want to thank Karen and Jonathon and their host committee for the absolute tremendous job they have done. If you have never served on a host committee or a conference committee, I really encourage you to do so. It's a great learning experience — and you build a lot of camaraderie as well. And, of course, Ivelisse and Jocelyn who make this all go so smoothly, you wouldn't think this was hard to do and it is. My final 'thank you' is for all of your comments. I love listening to you. Yes, sometimes you ask difficult questions. Yes, sometimes we are bringing a whole lot of emotion, but we would be so boring and we'd be a glum lot if we didn't. So, I get it. I'm here to listen and learn.

So, I listen and I try to decide what the theme is for the weekend. And I believe the theme this weekend was about 'communication.' In particular we seem to talk a lot about what is communication and how are we communicating with each other in this digital age in which we now live. You know when we are in this room; we are talking to each other. Some of us do it better than others, but we are all trying to do it well. A.A. is about sharing stories, and isn't that how it started in the beginning? With Bill sharing his story? I believe sharing stories is who and what A.A. is. Sharing stories with alcoholics is what we do and what we do best. But now the question is, "How do we continue to share the stories about A.A. so that people who need A.A. can learn about A.A. in this new world in which we are living?"

How many people, in this room, own at least one smart device or Pad? Almost everyone in this room, across age, gender, cultural background! We are all carrying these devices. I first learned about this in the 60s, when Marshall McLuhan talked about how "the medium is the message" and here we are, we are all attached to our digital devices. So how are we going to properly communicate the A.A. message? And how are we not to communicate the A.A. message. That effort continues — we have a lot more work to do.

Someone said, "When you speak across that language barrier, patience is required." And I would admit, based on this weekend, sometimes even when we speak the same language, patience is required!

Regarding communication within groups — I heard a lot about this in the workshops: Each group is autonomous. Therefore, each group must handle its own safety concerns. I heard

some very interesting discussion about the issue of outside issues being discussed right outside the door of meetings, or maybe even in meetings — but not during meeting time. Nevertheless, if you are talking about outside issues, might you send someone away who doesn't agree with you on those outside issues? What a danger that is — we have a history going back to the Washingtonians about that. How do we synchronize digital communications with our Three Legacies?

Anonymity is a personal choice — when we keep it and when we break it. How is someone supposed to find A.A. if we aren't willing to disclose that we are in A.A. to someone who we decided needs to know about it?

But, I think it is also well understood that you don't have any right to break my anonymity in my program and I don't have any right to break your anonymity. And, in this digital age, when we post, and it has first and last names and it has pictures, what are we doing? I don't know, I don't know the answers, I don't think anyone in this room knows the answers, but boy am I glad we are talking about it. Because we won't get to an answer until we develop a group conscience and we won't develop a group conscience until we are fully informed. So please, keep talking about these things.

At this Forum, we heard a good self-checking question, especially useful for social media posts, such as when we post things on Facebook. The question to ask ourselves is this: "What is my motivation?" Is it my pride? or am I sharing out of a basis of humility and self-sacrifice?"

I heard lots of great information at the workshops, and from the sense I got from the groups, I think you all did too. I really enjoyed hearing about Records from Karen and Finance from Bob. That was a trial idea for us, so if you liked it, too, please fill out a form and let us know.

Now, I'm left with the question of what do we do to break down the boundaries? How do we reach those who we know are suffering? Those who can do more than just survive and be well? Those who can thrive?

I heard lots of gratitude this morning. Thank you to those who are here for the first time. It was mentioned that next time you can bring someone else who hasn't been to a Forum with you — that is how we give it away, right?

On Friday night, I started my participation in your Forum by referencing the theme for the 2018 General Service Conference: "A.A. — A Solution For All Generations." For me, this topic has two meanings. One is tolerance for all alcoholics who seek the A.A. solution. In "As Bill Sees It," Bill wrote, "Honesty with ourselves and others gets us sober, but it's tolerance that keeps us that way." The other meaning in the Conference theme is that A.A. is timeless and can be a solution for all generations now and to come. It is up to all of us who care about A.A. to keep it strong for future generations. Listening to you, I have no doubt that A.A. is full of passionate, smart people who will work hard, do service, and keep the hand of A.A. out there.

