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NORTHEAST REGIONAL FORUM

MAY 29-31, 2015

ALBANY, NEW YORK

Dear A.A. Friends,

Please mark your calendar for the next Northeast Regional Forum, which will take place in Mars, Pennsylvania, June 2-4, 2017 at the DoubleTree by Hilton Pittsburgh Cranberry Hotel.

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INTRODUCTION

The 2015 Northeast Regional Forum was held in Albany, New York. Registration for the Forum was 408. This included 256 members attending their very first Forum—many were welcomed at the Forum Orientation on Friday evening. In addition, there were many Spanish-speaking members in attendance who received simultaneous translation throughout the weekend. This allowed the Spanish-speaking members the opportunity to communicate freely in their own native language. Sunday morning included a session for sharing from first-time forum attendees, followed by sharing from past trustees.

Everyone openly expressed gratitude and affection to Northeast Regional trustee Richard P. for being with us and chairing his first Forum as Regional Trustee with his characteristic enthusiasm and great love for A.A.

ASK-IT BASKET QUESTIONS

(Not answered onsite)

- Q. How can we stop the unauthorized use of the registered trademark A.A. which is being used by a non A.A. organizations in my district which says it has quote. . . “A.A. speakers” at their workshops?
- R. At one time, an effort was made to protect the circle and triangle symbol since it was a registered mark of Alcoholics Anonymous. However, the effort was given up in 1993 because of costly and lengthy litigation. It simply became too difficult to justify continuing the effort to protect the symbol. So A.A.W.S. no longer opposes the use of the circle and triangle symbol on medallions, jewelry, or other items. To avoid the suggestion of association or affiliation with outside goods and services, Alcoholics Anonymous has phased out the "official" use of the circle and triangle symbol on our literature, letterheads and other material from this office.
- Q. In the last several years many people have suggested that more than few groups are using the Power of the Purse to show their feelings of disconnect with G.S.O. Is anything being done to empower the groups again. Most groups don't even get the membership survey?
- R. The way that the groups can connect with G.S.O. and A.A. as a whole, is to actively participate in the Conference Structure and General Service. G.S.O.'s A.A. website www.aa.org has a section “For A.A. members” that opens to a page where you can find a link to “Getting Involved in General Service.” The membership survey was not designed to empower or connect the A.A. Groups, this can be done through General Service.
- Q. Has A.A. membership declined or stagnated?
- R. G.S.O. is not able to give a definitive answer to whether or not A.A. membership has stagnated or declined. Each year G.S.O. does update the service piece “Estimated Worldwide A.A. Individual and Group Membership” that includes estimates of membership from 1935 to the present. However, the information included is based on reports given by

groups listed with G.S.O. and does not represent an actual count of those who consider themselves A.A. members. The General Service Office does not keep membership records.

- Q. What happened to Grapevine Website—What’s on Your Mind? Or Old I Say Website?
R. The WOYM Forum was discontinued due to a combination of limited demand and Grapevine resources.
- Q. Grapevine gift subscription can be routed through a delegate to an Area committee and then to a facility for an inmate—what happens when that subscription expires?
R. The subscriber receives the majority of the series of renewal notices with the last going to the gift recipient.

WORKSHOP REPORTS

“Our Common Welfare – Who’s Responsible?” (Moderator: Pat L. / Reporter: Sue V.) The workshop attendees discussed the topic “Our Common Welfare – Who is Responsible?” Attendees acknowledged the relevance of gender issues and the importance of conscientious behavior. Some suggested not leaving a female member alone in a situation that increases her vulnerability. The group also discussed inappropriate behavior, such as disrespectful language. Foul language in rooms is hurtful to some, as it reminds some members of the “old days.” It was noted that we have a responsibility, as individuals, to address something we see that is not in keeping with maintaining the safety of the group. In addition, the group mentioned sponsorship, and underlined the importance of the information in the A.A. pamphlet “Questions and Answers on Sponsorship,” as well as the pamphlet: “The A.A. Group.”

Social media sites and the posting of photos were briefly discussed, and it was noted that posting pictures of medallions and celebrations could endanger the safety and anonymity of A.A. members. Regarding disruptiveness, aggressiveness, etc. during meetings: People may be asked not to return if their behavior continues. The chairperson of the meeting has responsibility to keep order and do his or her part to help maintain safety. The integrity of the A.A. program rests on each of us and a safe and productive meeting environment is essential. When the circumstance warrants it, there is nothing wrong with calling police. Also, group can consider contacting the manager of building and requesting that they take out restraining order(s). A written list of disruptive behavior posted and read at the meeting can help A.A.s avoid the behavior and let others know what behavior will not be tolerated. Being asked to leave a meeting is temporary – the member may return when he or she is willing/ready to behave appropriately.

“Singleness of Purpose” (Moderator: Anne F. / Reporter: Katherine D.) The workshop attendees discussed singleness of purpose in A.A. Group meetings and said that we can do only one thing well, as evidenced by the Washingtonian movement. Discussion included the importance of strong sponsorship, group conscience for meeting chair to follow, and showing tolerance of those who do not identify as alcoholics, but keeping the welfare of group members in mind. Some concerns and solutions shared were:

- Talk to newcomers before meeting, and teach them how it is done at an A.A. meeting and introduce them to other resources.

- Practice patience with those coming to A.A. from treatment centers or prisons. Make sure to adhere to singleness of purpose when we take meetings into these places. Some said that it is not true that a drug is a drug is a drug. A fruit is a fruit, but an apple does not equal an orange. Others thought that A.A. was getting “watered down” and voiced their concern that we need to be vigilant about what message we are carrying.
- The importance of hearing the A.A. message was reiterated—people need to hear A.A.’s message to keep away from a drink that day. Group attendees shared that neglecting our primary purpose affects A.A. as a whole, because people may assume it is okay to share that way at every meeting they attend thereafter.
- Members shared that people need to be taught, not chastised; patience and compassion are necessary. Remember, not all newcomers are non-alcoholic addicts. Emotional identification is crucial – not just information. We stay sober through identification.
- It was noted that singleness of purpose unites a group. Workshop attendees agreed that topic should be regularly revisited.

“The Spirit of Rotation in Service” (Moderator: Joseph McA. / Reporter: Don B.) The workshop attendees discussed the spirit of rotation in regard to A.A. service, and it was reported that the best statement on the spirit of rotation in service is found on page 28 of “The A.A. Group” pamphlet. Rotation is a real step forward into growth, humility, anonymity, and principles before personalities. It may be hard to leave a position, to find someone else to fill it, to let go, but it is essential for the well-being of ourselves, our groups, and A.A. as a whole. We have to step down before someone will step up. When we rotate on, we realize we’re just not that important. We set the example of rotation for others.

Members agreed on the importance of the Concept IV principle—everyone should be given the opportunity, the right, and the privilege to serve. We choose only qualified and willing people. Setting term limits or position guidelines keeps it simple, removes any stigma from rotating on, and can be applied even to treasurers, archivists, and corrections volunteers. A two-year term avoids burnout, promotes enthusiasm, and prevents both too much damage and too much personal accomplishment. One area has an “Alternates Month” when alternates learn to do the principal’s job. Committees need to welcome new people in rather than just shuffling positions among the same people. Rotation lets others receive the benefits of service, of involvement, of becoming a part of, while we receive rewards far more enduring than any recognition—the complete freedom to serve, as we are needed.

Some ideas offered by workshop members were to: Offer to work with the incoming person, to train and mentor them, perhaps with a rotation notebook or by going through a G.S.O. Workbook together—but then back off. Everyone qualified to stand for a position should do so—whether they want the position or not. In this manner, the group conscience will decide. Fresh blood brings new ideas and enthusiasm. When we say, “Yeah, but...” a good service sponsor says, “Yeah, get your butt out!”

“Sponsorship—Is a Service Sponsor a Requirement?” (Moderator: Ron M. / Reporter: Ann F.) The workshop moderator shared his story of experience, strength, and hope in sponsorship. He shared that he’s had several different kinds of sponsors over time. A few questions were posed. First, “Is a service sponsor necessary?” “How does it happen?” And, “Do we sponsor each other (also known as co-sponsorship)?” The workshop attendees suggested looking for a sponsor who has done the job that you are facing. The group also responded that

we do learn from our sponsees. We also may get to a point that we share on more equal ground (at a delegate level, for example). In addition, another question was posed: “How does one know if he or she is using a service sponsor appropriately?” In response, the group answered that a service sponsor will teach the Traditions, Concepts, and processes of the Third Legacy. The Twelve Concepts Illustrated is an easier way to understand the Concepts.

The workshop attendees overwhelmingly agreed that service sponsors are necessary. This is especially true as we get more involved in general service. Members shared: We learn and grow in our recovery through service. We need to find sponsors who know the Service Manual and Concepts. We reach out to someone who has gone before us (i.e. down the triangle).

“Grapevine: The Grapevine Rep and More—Bringing our Message of Hope to Alcoholics” (Moderator: Ami B., A.A. Grapevine, Inc., Executive Editor/Publisher/ Reporter: Michelle S.) The workshop attendees discussed the role of the A.A. Grapevine Magazine in A.A. Four questions were presented and discussed:

1. “Carry the Message” project in relation to those behind the walls — if you don’t read it, how can you share it with others? The group was led in a discussion about the funds and letters in this project and how the process works in regard to sending letters to the delegates in order to distribute within their area. The digital aspect of the subscription was also discussed, along with the use of gift certificates and how they can be used as a tool to share A.A.’s message.
2. Advisory Actions about G.V.R.s. The group discussed actions between 1962 and 1988 regarding delegates as G.V.R.s. A question was posed: Why did the information stop (along with the responsibility)? It was noted that 1989 was the highest year for Grapevine circulation. It was agreed that G.V.R.s need to more visible and their work talked about more at the grass roots level within the groups, districts, and areas. Among other ways, workshops, “Grapefests” and skits at conventions are some effective ways at getting the message out and increasing visibility.
3. Shared experience on workshops was presented to the group, such as writing, recording workshops, and other tools on the aagrapevine.org website. The website contains guidelines for writing and recording stories. In addition, some groups have put together plays and made PowerPoint presentations for history workshops.
4. Record your story – The Audio Project. What can A.A.s do above and beyond recordings already in existence was discussed. Methods of recording and how to go about the recording were shared. In addition, it was noted that the entire *Language of the Heart* is available on audio.

“Carrying the A.A. Message through Corrections Correspondence Service (CCS)” (Moderator: Patricia F./Reporter: Alicia S.) Workshop attendees were asked, “How can anonymity be safeguarded when participating in this program?” Potential safety issues were discussed. Attendees noted that prison staff reads letters going in and out of prisons. A suggestion was made to use the home group P.O. Box or a private P.O. Box, as full names and addresses must be used when applying to participate in C.C.S. Members reminded each other that C.C.S. is a commitment to write letters and share experience, strength, and hope. It is not a “pen pal” service. Letters are meant to show how to practice the A.A. way of life – sober.

Another question asked was: What are some ways to stimulate interest in this service at all levels? In response, members suggested that A.A.s could:

- Hand out pamphlets provided at this workshop to home groups and districts, as well as bring the information to Institution meetings;
- Design a flyer to spark interest;
- Create presentations to be given at workshops, conventions, etc.;
- Share by word of mouth – “what this letter meant to me.” Explain how participating in this service has enriched your sobriety;
- Place brochures in group literature racks. These brochures are free for the asking by contacting G.S.O.
- Remind people that anyone can participate—past jail time is not necessary.
- Hold an event with a dynamic speaker and invite law enforcement agencies (sheriffs, police, judges, parole agents) to educate them about the service.

“Anonymity and Social Networks” (Moderator: Michelle P. / Reporter: Ann F.) Group members discussed the role of social media in A.A. In particular, two questions were posed. First, what are we missing out on by not connecting with social media—are anonymity and social media incompatible? Attendees shared that it is important for A.A., as a whole, to have a presence on social media sites, as long as it’s within our principles. However, some dissenting opinions pointed out that A.A. already has a web page, therefore, there is no need for a Facebook page. It was agreed that concerns and considerations must be investigated.

The second question posed was: How do we reach out when we see anonymity breaks on social media sites such as Facebook? Attendees shared that many A.A.s use private messaging to address those who break the principle of anonymity. Distribution of and encouraging the use of the pamphlet “Understanding Anonymity” was offered as another solution. It was agreed that we need a clear understanding of public anonymity and what constitutes a break in anonymity. Those in question can refer to “A.A. Guidelines-Internet.” Also, it was noted that a clearer understanding of the difference between affiliation and cooperation would be helpful. Further education is needed, and members agreed that we must be careful and have a good understanding of the “A.A. Guidelines.” In addition, we need to keep communicating about the topic at areas, districts, and conferences.

“Let’s be Friendly with Our Friends” (Moderator: Heidi D. / Reporter: Theresa N.) Two questions were shared with workshop attendees regarding cooperation with doctors, social workers, judges, etc. The first question discussed was: “How can A.A.s support each other in doing more effective C.P.C. work with a variety of professionals?” Workshop participants shared a variety of ideas and experiences:

- Ask individual people or areas for their experience, strength, and help. “What worked for you?” is a good question.
- We can show trustworthiness to professionals by being persistent, consistent, and when applicable, follow their rules (i.e. in prison and treatment centers). Through this, we will build strong and healthy relationships;
- Use the resources in the Fellowship; ask doctors within A.A. how to relate to doctors outside of A.A.;
- Use a personal touch: communicate one-on-one, and make eye contact;
- Committees often meet for discussion and planning before working at a booth;
- Put on workshops to educate the Fellowship on how to effectively do C.P.C. work;

- Be clear about what A.A. is and is not. We have a spiritual solution. If asked, acknowledge that A.A. is not the only avenue to recovery;
- C.P.C. committees often meet during off hours to attract new volunteers. Consider meeting on a Saturday a.m. instead of a Thursday p.m.— this will get a whole different crowd;
- Talk about your C.P.C. work to others in and out of A.A. and share about the many opportunities to serve.

The second question posed to workshop participants was, “Who are our friends?” In response, members shared many examples of people and places. Police, lawyers, judges, D.U.I. courts, high school principals, ministers, priests, clergy, social workers, therapists, medical professionals. In short, everyone who might interact with drunks—even libraries, counseling centers, welcome centers, prisons, and hospitals. Again, workshop attendees shared that one-on-one direct contact with professionals is best. When we practice the principles in all our affairs, we become a power of example to professionals.

“Twelve Traditions' Importance in Service” (Moderator: Lester G. / Reporter: Jeff B.) The following points were made among workshop participants in regard to the topic “Twelve Traditions' Importance in Service”:

1. The Traditions are essential for our service work.
2. When doing service work in A.A., like Treatment or C.P.C., one should learn the Traditions first.
3. It is important to understand that groups are autonomous even when they are doing something that adversely affects A.A. as a whole.
4. All of the Traditions are important for service, but Tradition Two (in regard to group conscience) and Tradition Twelve (principles before personalities) are very important.
5. Traditions can be applied in all our affairs. They become more important as we move down in the triangle and increase our level of service.
6. The Traditions are not just important for service. Sometimes described as “the rules of the road” and the “backbone of our sobriety.”
7. The concepts that were to become A.A.'s Traditions can be seen in the Forward of the first edition of the Big Book. They are important, both within our group and for service outside the group. They are also important, for A.A. as a whole, to keep us from going the way of the Washingtonians.
8. The Traditions allow us to know what A.A. is and what it is not, as well as to be able to explain that way of doing service.
9. Going through the Traditions Checklist can help with our humility about doing service.
10. It is difficult to uphold the Traditions if you are not following them as an area or a district. You can't pick which Traditions you will uphold. All Twelve need to be embraced.
11. Knowing the history of A.A. and the where the Traditions come from is important.

“Spanish Workshop: Our Common Welfare—Who's Responsible?” (Moderator: Maria E. / Reporter: Stephanie L.) Workshop members discussed the topic: “Our Common Welfare—Who's Responsible?” In particular, the group raised the topics of foul language and threatening behavior. Whose responsibility is it to tell them that this behavior isn't acceptable? In response, attendees agreed that we are all responsible for the safety of the group. Tradition One states that our common welfare must come first. When people are very disruptive, we can ask for keys and call the police—we cooperate with the law. Each group can write guidelines to share in the group's opening (the group conscience decision).

In regard to predators—both male and female—who take advantage of unsuspecting members: It was suggested that this topic be discussed with the group so that group members know how it can and will be dealt with (obtain group conscience). In this way, there are no surprises. In some groups, the offending members were asked not to come back until they became willing to change. Remember, we have no control over others, but we have to put the well-being of the group first. One member used to think, “We don’t call the police,” but now knows they can. Sponsor told him “we are going to do it with love.”

One attendee shared about a drunk in a meeting who was told to leave by the chair. Members told chair, that he could not do that – because the man was drunk. However, the person was not just drunk, he was disruptive. Therefore, the disruptive drunk had to leave. In other instances, the common welfare of a group was compromised when a member, working two jobs, fell asleep during meetings. Was this a problem? No. However, his snoring became disruptive, so the group asked him to move to the back of the room for the good of the group. In another situation, a member was cursing a lot. The member was asked to change the choice of words for the good of the group – common welfare. People do not have to be drunk to behave disruptively. In another instance, money had been stolen, and police were called.

Other ideas were to select group leaders with a lot of care. Newcomers are sometimes elected to positions with getting any guidelines. If members come drunk, ask them to sit down and listen unless really struggling with something he or she has to share. A.A., is the best place to be if you have a drinking problem. However, it is up to the chair to guide sharing back to the theme – or close the meeting if the group decides. One group agreed to take newcomers aside to explain why they take that kind of action.

It was noted that if a group does not have Step meetings, members might not know how to recover. Step meetings are important—A.A. members must know how to recover and what to do. Of course, sponsorship is always important, as well.

Finally, if someone disturbs the common welfare of the group, don’t be afraid to say something, but say it with love for the common welfare of the group. A final suggestion was shared: before meeting begins, start with a prayer to invite God into the meeting. The group must survive for the message of Alcoholics Anonymous to reach alcoholics who would like to stay sober.

“La Viña: The La Viña Rep and More—Bringing Our Message of Hope to Alcoholics” (Moderator: Irene D., La Viña Editor) The workshop moderator invited participants to share about how to bring the message of hope to alcoholics through La Viña. A summary of the sharing that ensued follows:

1. In order to carry the message through La Viña, Spanish-speaking groups need to have La Viña representatives (R.L.V.s) who can carry information to/from the groups. It all boils down to responsibility, carrying the message those who need it. But in order to do that, I need to be well-informed. Everything begins with me.
2. The best ways of supporting La Viña are buying subscriptions and bringing the magazine to treatment centers. We are also encouraged to submit our stories. It is good when people who are familiar with A.A. principles share their experience through their stories.

3. There is information for R.L.V.s at Esquina del R.L.V. (R.L.V.'s corner). R.L.V.s can work at the group and district levels. Part of their responsibility is to explain what the editorial process is about.
4. There are good examples of working with La Viña and carrying the message in Spanish in the Pacific Region. Spanish-speaking members there have helped translation committees.
5. The magazine helps in the sharing of experience from different areas. Groups may be geographically apart, but the area helps them come together.
6. Spanish-speaking members were encouraged to attend the 2015 International Convention. Registration materials are available in Spanish.

Records Management for Registrars (Moderator: Karen H.) The workshop began with introductions of Karen H. and area registrars and continued, in the first part, with a presentation consisting of step-by-step demonstrations of the newly added features of FNV (Fellowship New Vision) database. These features consisted of: which search engines to use for verification of USPS approved addresses and; the new multi-category search tool; mass district change feature; and the group and position change notification feature. Also reviewed were the New Group process and the importance (and benefits) of searching not just by group name, but also by city and state. Also discussed were why certain processes can only be done by G.S.O. records staff — methods and accompanying paperwork for processes were illustrated. Workshop attendees also reviewed why it is important to provide comments in the personal record when personal information is changed. Finally, attendees were introduced to the new pre-dated group status, why it was created, and why it is not visible to all area registrars.

In the second part of the workshop, attendees participated in a question and answer session. Discussed were the length of time involved in directory preparation; importance of accurately entering number of members and group history date on a new group form; why mailing addresses of G.S.R.s are needed; how to electronically send a district's group information to the D.C.M.; how to join the Registrars Google Group; what a Registrar Mentor is; history of address verification and why it was added to the database (cost of returned mail); why group meeting information is not found on aa.org; and the future of printed regional directories. At the workshop's conclusion, attendees participated in registrar-to-registrar sharing, discussing ideas regarding record processing.

PRESENTATIONS

How Do We Carry the A.A. Message Using Our Principle of Anonymity?—Craig W., Delegate Panel 65, Area 11 Connecticut

Anonymity is underestimated in both the grief it can cause when we stray away from its guidance and also the power it can have when we adhere to it. Anonymity is sacrifice, common welfare, protection, and our public information policy all in one. Bill W.'s last message to Alcoholics Anonymous concerned the "Concept of Anonymity." This was not just in the context of what we need to help us stay alive; he was also quoted as saying this for the reason A.A. has grown.

It is my belief and experience that we A.A.s are our own worst enemies. Like a bad bacteria, we seek to destroy, defy, and say it needs to change rather than accept, embrace, and honor why it works. We surely have proven that point when we look at our Fourth Step, but this is much bigger than personal recovery, much as the Traditions are. When working in the A.A. community we talk a lot about why other members should not do such-and-such a thing due to Tradition Blank. We need to show the way, lay out the foundation of what we do and why we do it, and allow others to participate and feel the joy of carrying the A.A. message using our principle of anonymity.

To me, the Traditions are about action, not dictation; about leadership and example, not government and policy. I can remember the first time I went to a major area event and the P.I. chair at the time was sharing about what he was doing to carry the A.A. message. He mentioned that A.A. *does* have a Public Information policy, and that it is written right in Tradition Eleven. That example overwhelmingly sent me into research mode, and inspired me to do more and learn more. Without more information, the best I knew about anonymity as a result of when we had a Tradition meeting at my home group was whether or not to share with someone at my job that I was in A.A. I learned later that was a privacy issue, not an anonymity issue. There is a much bigger world than me out there.

We as alcoholics can be so afraid to cooperate with the public, and we can be so secretive that we miss opportunities to be helpful. I quickly learned that when at the level of press, radio, film, and Internet, we are to maintain 100 percent anonymity. I also quickly learned that when we are in public representing A.A., for example speaking at a high school, we use our first name only. There is a difference in the way we conduct ourselves in the public and in the media. I remember hearing about an area in our region in the late eighties/early nineties doing a live A.A. meeting on a world news station. All the faces were blocked out and no last names were used. At first I was a little nervous that this might be borderline unacceptable, but I quickly saw that this is a better way to carry the message of what A.A. is and is not.

Interesting enough, years later I had the opportunity as alternate delegate working with our area P.I. chair to do a thirty-minute news interview. Only my first name was used and my face was blocked out. Let me add that I do think it is important to be fully informed before taking these responsibilities on. Some scoffers said "Well, we knew it was you—we could tell it was you, Craig." My clear response to that was "That's because we are not anonymous with our own members, so naturally you knew it was me." There are some words to watch when dealing with

these principles: *media*, *public*, *privacy*, *confidentiality*. All these have different meanings and guide us to operate in different ways.

If you want to keep your A.A. membership private then P.I. might not be the committee for you. However, there is a way to carry the message of A.A. without breaking your anonymity, as Traditions Eleven and Twelve are not about you; they are about A.A. as a whole. This kind of work gives us a broad and direct opportunity to help the alcoholic who still suffers. Our principle of anonymity protects the Fellowship and the individual from falling into the pitfall of notoriety, fame, ego, and self-appointed leadership. It also moves us to be sacrificial and other-centered. For me, Tradition Eleven is very clear on a practical approach to working with the public, and Tradition Twelve offers a very spiritual guideline of how to always hold the individual, the group, and the service committee accountable in their spirit of sacrifice.

We must sacrifice to gain the rewards of the spiritual, we must sacrifice to be free from alcoholism, and we must sacrifice to stay alive and function effectively. We have many myths in A.A. about putting the A.A. name on billboards, newspapers, and shopping carts. It is again my experience that when we do use the name of A.A., and not the individual, we have a very successful Public Information committee. It is when we as individuals try to speak for A.A. and come down with the severe illness known as self-appointed leadership that we suffer.

I recently had an experience in the classroom at the college I attend, when I was asked a personal question during a social work group project. The question was, do you do volunteer work? There were a few other questions, and then the biggie: What organization do you do volunteer work for? It became very clear to me at this time that I was not at the level of press, radio, and film, and I was not speaking on behalf of A.A., so I was totally willing to be honest and felt qualified to share my experience. I knew this would be a great P.I. opportunity, so I told the professor and the class that I do volunteer work for Alcoholics Anonymous. During the rest of that semester I had the unique experience of describing the service structure, the principles, and what we do and do not do to a large room of prospective professionals, as well as a current professional in the field.

In my experience we should not be afraid to carry the message, nor should we be ashamed to be an alcoholic; we need to always consider the common welfare when disclosing our membership, and to never break our anonymity at the level of press, radio, and film. To understand *public* does not necessarily mean we understand *media*. A.A. Traditions, in my experience, bring a whole perspective of how we work with each other and the world about us, and not an idea of how they work in our home lives. It has been my clear-cut experience that when we are guided by the principle of anonymity to carry the message, rather than use the anonymity hammer of justice to those members who are wrong, we are examples, leaders, and we cultivate participation and inherently show our members how to be a part of—thereby leading to less rebellion and less defiance, and ultimately more unity.

If you are a statistic person or a trend person, it is not hard to see that we are on a severe downslope when it comes to the importance of anonymity. I wholeheartedly believe that before we can address this downslope we need to first understand what anonymity really is, what it really means, and where to use it as a guide of carrying the message, rather than a controlling leash to burden and confuse the A.A. member.

Our Common Welfare—Who's Responsible?—Jim W., Delegate Panel 65, Area 49
Southeast New York

The issue of our common welfare in A.A. has been around the Fellowship since its very beginning. Early on, we dealt mainly with the disruptive drunk who showed up at our doors and how to make them feel welcome, while also making our other attendees feel comfortable and willing to hear the A.A. message. At times we would be able to take them aside in a corner and try to calm them down; other times they needed to be escorted out of the meeting. In each instance, however, it was group members' responsibility to carry this out in accordance with our First Tradition: "Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity."

In an article entitled "Disruptive Members at A.A. Meetings" from the Fall 2010 issue of *Box 4-5-9*, the following defined a disruptive and/or threatening member as "one whose actions intimidate or frighten newcomers so that they cannot hear the A.A. message." Said definition really applies to everyone who attends a meeting seeking to hear the A.A. message, not just the newcomer. For me, "disruptive and/or threatening" carries a broad spectrum in terms of our behavior, from being drunk to abusive language to suggestive dress to criminal behavior, to name a few. In each instance, group members have a responsibility to their attendees to address such behavior. In another article in the same issue of *Box 4-5-9*, entitled "A.A. and the Law," the following passage is referenced: "While we share in a spirit of trust, both at meetings and individually with sponsors and friends, A.A. members are subject to the same laws as every other person. Our communications are not privileged in the legal sense nor do we have any special protection status under local, state, or federal statutes. A.A. membership does not grant immunity from local laws and being at an A.A. meeting does not put anyone beyond the jurisdiction of law enforcement officers."

"Carrying our message and abiding by our Traditions is, essentially, an internal affair—we can't expect others to be guided by them in the same way that we are. Yet, A.A. is not a world unto itself."

"As those familiar with carrying the message into treatment or correctional facilities can attest, A.A. members doing such service are held to the standards those institutions expect; similarly, A.A. meetings and groups pay rent and must adhere to the conditions established by their landlords."

There are other issues related to our common welfare we need to touch upon that are no less equally important, namely consideration for those with disabilities; the non-English-speaking alcoholic who comes to your meeting; the handling of a group, district, or area's money; and our Eleventh and Twelfth Traditions concerning anonymity.

Briefly, in terms of the first two, do your area or county meeting books reflect meeting places that are handicap accessible and/or contain handicap facilities? Are you also able to direct/point out to non-English-speaking members whether or not there are meetings nearby available to them in their language, or do you have a group member who can speak to them in their language as a means of making them feel more comfortable/welcome? How comfortable are you with those responsible for handling your finances?

Lastly, on the subject of anonymity, many of us have experienced anonymity breaks more frequently today with the advent of new social media technologies than ever before. The A.A. service piece SM F-197, entitled “Anonymity Online,” addresses many of these concerns. You can write the General Service Office and request a copy of this piece, or you can download it online at www.aa.org.

I thank you for the opportunity to be of service.

Service: You Can Pretend to Care—George K., Delegate Panel 65, Area 60, Western Pennsylvania

When I first showed up and you folks took me in, I just hung around the fringes of A.A. After six months, I acquired my current sobriety date of September 20, 2002, and for reasons I still cannot explain, I decided to make some changes. I gave up my self-appointed service position of A.A. critic and writer/editor of the Revised Big Book of *Alcoholics Anonymous*. I gave up my vision of—up there in lights—“coauthored by Bill W., Dr. Bob, and George.”

Another change I made: I got a sponsor. Almost immediately, this man was named Corrections coordinator for Area 60. He brought me along as his alternate. In addition to instructing me on the Steps and Traditions, we began to travel around western Pennsylvania, talking with districts about their Corrections committees. We tried to help with problems such as starting committees, difficult wardens, and apathy. I started to see how A.A. reached out to help the struggling alcoholic.

My sponsor also had me show up at district meetings. I was encouraged to stand up and try to be of service. I chaired our local C.P.C./P.I. committee, and I served as G.S.R., D.C.M., and treasurer. There was no shortage of opportunities to carry our message.

I showed up at my first local conference. It was our Area 60 Getaway Weekend. It was there that I started to learn of the structure of A.A., about our upside-down triangle. I will never forget the message of a presenter. She was speaking about the role of the G.S.R. She said filling that role was just like recovery; you had to work for it. You could not just sit back like a potted plant and wait for information. You had to seek it out.

Another fact I learned at Getaway was that no one person had any real authority in A.A. No one governed; no one could tell another member what to do. I did not understand how this democratic anarchy could function to educate, inform, and preserve A.A., but I was willing to believe that it could work.

I had the opportunity to travel a lot. I showed up at meetings in New Hampshire and Massachusetts. A meeting on Martha’s Vineyard will never be forgotten. I walked in the doors of A.A. in North Carolina and San Francisco—the message was the same. While the accents of alcoholics were different, it was the same Big Book, the same Steps and Traditions, the same path to recovery. These meetings were living proof that somehow this democratic anarchy worked.

I also kept showing up at area meetings. At first, I served as an alternate coordinator for C.P.C./P.I. and for Treatment/Special Needs. I was asked to help out along the way. When I

expressed doubts about being able to perform a task, I was told, “You’ve been around for a while. You can do it. And we are here to help you out.”

I started to see the challenges facing our beloved Fellowship in this ever-changing world. How is anonymity preserved in the explosion that is the Internet? How do we carry the message to alcoholics with special needs? How do we keep our newcomers safe? To address these issues, work in general service is necessary.

I have made many friends over the years. One of them had a young teenage son that needed help. I realized then the importance of preserving the purity of our message for future generations. I knew that our message had to be protected.

If all of this seems to be a bit of a jumble, that is because it seemed like a jumble to me at the time. I had to show up and be a part of service for a while before these ideas began to coalesce, to come together. I now understand this about service: We are all a part of a miraculous fellowship that has the potential to save thousands and thousands of lives. For that to occur, our history and purity of message must be rigorously protected and preserved. We must humbly accept that our A.A. Unity comes first, or many of us shall surely die. We must educate and inform our members, so that A.A. can address new issues in our rapidly changing world.

I’d like to offer one more thought. We have all heard this type of sharing many times: “I love A.A.,” or “Everything positive in my life, I owe to Alcoholics Anonymous,” or “A.A. saved my life.” I believe these things, and they are certainly true in my life.

When I hear these words, I think, “To whom much has been given, much is to be expected.” These are the people who should consider general service. When I was confused or uncertain as to whether or not I should stand and offer to be of service, my sponsor would grin and ask, “If not you, who? If not now, when?” Finally, if you hear someone ask, “Why should I raise my hand? Why should I serve?” I offer one simple answer: You can pretend to care. You can’t pretend to show up.

How to Involve Members in Service—Mary Lou Q., Delegate Panel 64, Area 28 Maine

How to involve members in service?

The easy answer would be “Put them in the car,” or “If you’re going alone, you’re doing it wrong!” Two statements of wisdom from fellow alcoholics.

I love the history of our Fellowship, so what I have to offer on this topic is my experience and enthusiasm with and for service. When I first came to A.A., I would constantly hear that to keep this sobriety I had to give it away or pass it on. It was how Bill W. stayed sober. I wanted desperately to belong somewhere, and I needed to be needed. At my first meeting I was encouraged, by a poke in the ribs, to raise my hand when they asked for help cleaning up after the meeting ended. Coming into contact with one other A.A. member by bringing ashtrays to the kitchen to be cleaned was barely within my skill set, as I was a shaking wreck of an individual. Being teased about doing a good job, I was asked if I did windows as well, and that put me in the clouds—people needed me, and I could be there for them and me. Going back to a crumby,

empty apartment was not something I looked forward to, but being at meetings with something to do helped keep me off the pity pot, kept me sober, and helped me learn how to build relationships and trust in others—one person at a time!

When we would pile into a car to go on a commitment—which at three months I had no clue about—it was always a wonderful, intensely emotional journey, with meetings on the way to and from. I also got a chance to ask questions that I could not ask in a room full of people. I'd sometimes be pulled out of the hat to speak, and I had no idea what came out of my mouth; but what I found out later was that something in my heart called gratitude came out. Asking for help, and being asked to help, kept me sober, and I started to enjoy the Fellowship, no longer feeling like the ugly duckling or someone on the outside looking in. It seemed that I had been feeling that way all my life, so it was a tremendous change for me.

My first decision after getting sober that firmly planted me on a road of service was picking a home group—not an easy thing for a drunk who tended to avoid commitments at all costs. It was pointed out to me, lovingly, that I was still thinking as a drunk. Once I had a home group that I attended faithfully (and where I did whatever job I was asked to do), I got a sponsor and became involved in more than just meetings. The door was opened and loving hands welcomed me to a splendid banquet of service riches! All I had to do was reach out in return and grab a hand to increase a chain of loving service. It has been said that every new job in service that you undertake widens your circle of friendship, fellowship, and growth opportunities.

I believe that every member struggles with the fear of being inadequate to complete the tasks that are taken on; I know I always do. However, I have found that the wonderful support I have always received—that love that I didn't have for myself—and the confidence in me that I didn't have originally, has always been there and allowed me to bloom. It has given me the opportunity to give back and away only a small portion of what I have received through the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. It is a priceless gift! That love and confidence that came through others was not only from them showing me the way by their actions, but by their invitation to me to walk *beside* them in service.

As a member already in service, I encourage you to lovingly invite other members to join you in your services. Share the rewards and your enthusiasm with others. Encourage them to reach beyond their comfort zone with the assurance that the support of the Fellowship is right there with them.

Sometimes it only takes an encouraging word or two—like, “You'll make a great delegate”—when a member has just begun a service journey; or a call for help to touch another and help them move from that dark corner table with crackers and water to the main banquet loaded with rich appetizers, entrees, side dishes, and desserts. They can start with anything and begin to increase their appetite for more. We can use some of those alcoholic characteristics to our advantage! A desire for more.

I have been on a rich service diet for some time now, and I can't imagine going without it. However, during my time in the program, I have learned that a steady diet of service without the basic recovery food groups can lead to a nutritional imbalance. Service cannot replace recovery, and recovery needs service—two of our Legacies. When we bring together Recovery and Service with our program's Unity we have a circle of love and fellowship, and we form a triangle

built on the stable legs of sobriety that we call our Three Legacies. As a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, please reach out your hand to another, hold on tight, and enjoy the ride of a lifetime!

Freedom to Grow: A.A.'s Warranties—Amy C., Delegate Panel 65, Area 13 Washington D.C.

Good morning. My name is Amy C., and I'm an alcoholic. My sobriety date is May 28, 2002, and I am the Panel 65 Delegate from Area 13, Washington DC. I am grateful for the opportunity to share with you today on the topic: "Freedom to Grow: A.A.'s Warranties."

Toward the end of his essay on the General Warranties of the Conference in Concept Twelve, Bill W. writes, "Freedom under God to grow in His likeness and image will ever be the quest of the Alcoholics Anonymous. May our General Service Conference be always seen as a chief symbol of this cherished liberty." This is a beautiful idea, but I wonder if many A.A.s actually do regard the Conference as the central emblem of our program's unique and treasured promise: the freedom at last to think of someone else first. Most of us probably have not thought much about it, but it's definitely worth taking a look.

This unlikely freedom to seek God's will instead of our own is first introduced through a decision we can and do make, however irresolutely, way back in Step Three. There, in desperation, we surrendered and confronted the bitter enslavement of our alcoholism, as described in our Third Step prayer: "Relieve me of the bondage of Self, that I may better do Thy will."

But before I could recognize myself as the real jailor in my life, and that my compulsive alcohol consumption was a symptom of deeper "causes and conditions," I first had to gain enough freedom in A.A. to see that, as Bill W. put it, "freedom to choose badly was not, after all, a very real freedom." Indeed, in my difficult first years of sobriety, I did everything wrong *except* drink, and was always cheerfully encouraged to "Keep coming back!"

In an early look at the critical need for group unity, Bill W. wrote in 1947, "Alcoholics Anonymous has no 'musts' . . . We do suggest, but we don't discipline. Instead compliance or noncompliance with any principle of A.A. is a matter for the conscience of the individual."

And like the individual member, we afford every A.A. group the right to be wrong—having faith that this freedom to choose badly will eventually yield wise decision-making through an informed group conscience process. As our Second Tradition lays out, we have "but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience." Bill had unwavering confidence that, "the collective conscience of the group will, given time, almost surely demonstrate its perfect dependability."

In 1951, the first General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous was held as an experimental, representative, Fellowship-wide group conscience, to link the trustees to the movement they served. Up until that time, this connection had been made only by Dr. Bob, who had died the year before, and by Bill W. In 1955, the Twentieth Anniversary Convention authorized the General Service Conference to act for Alcoholics Anonymous as the permanent successor to our co-founders. In describing the authority delegated to the Conference by the Fellowship, Bill is clear that "the Warranties . . . guarantee that the Conference itself will conform to A.A.'s Twelve Traditions . . . that it can serve A.A. only." And our Warranties state:

“That in all its proceedings, the General Service Conference shall observe the spirit of the A.A. Tradition, taking great care that the Conference never becomes the seat of perilous wealth or power; that sufficient operating funds, plus an ample reserve, be its prudent financial principle; that none of the Conference members shall ever be placed in a position of unqualified authority over any of the others; that all important decisions be reached by discussion, vote and, whenever possible, by substantial unanimity; that no Conference action ever be personally punitive or an incitement to public controversy; that though the Conference may act in the service of Alcoholics Anonymous and may traditionally direct its World Services, it shall never enact laws or regulations binding on A.A. as a whole or upon any member thereof, nor shall it perform any such acts of government; and that, like the Society of Alcoholics Anonymous which it serves, the Conference itself will always remain democratic in thought and action.”

There isn't time in this short talk to directly address each of these beautiful Warranties specifically. However, even calling them “warranties” indicates that they guarantee each A.A. member a miraculous freedom. In his essay on the Twelfth Concept, Bill writes that, “all of [these warranties] are counsels of *prudence*. . . . the wisdom of taking forethought for the future based on the lessons of the past. They are the sum of our protection against needless errors and against our very natural human temptations to wealth, power, [and] prestige.”

Keeping these temptations in mind, as well as the warning against inciting public controversy, I hear many concerns about and within our Fellowship today: concerns that our membership is no longer growing; that in the age of digital communication “the immense spiritual significance” of anonymity is often dismissed with a shrug; that singleness of purpose is disregarded as arrogance or exclusivity; and that the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous are not safe or law-abiding.

I think all of these are important concerns for us to reflect on and to discuss within our groups, intergroups, districts, and areas, as well as during the Conference week in New York. It would be irresponsible and unrealistic not to consider these issues prudently, issues that if left unaddressed will no doubt affect alcoholics who might have been helped in A.A.

Yet I also believe that we can go forward without too much hand-wringing or “viewing with alarm for the good of [A.A.]” We can be confident that if we heed our Warranties, they guide the Conference spiritually and practically—showing both how it should function and what its function should be. The ongoing challenge of maintaining a responsible spirituality within our rapidly changing world is significant, but I'm confident that A.A. principles in action cannot be easily blown aside. In 1960 Bill published an essay in our Grapevine magazine entitled “Freedom Under God: The Choice is Ours,” in which he wrote: “[T]he future would . . . lack its full use and meaning did it not bring us fresh problems and even acute perils—problems and perils through which we can grow into true greatness of action and spirit.”

Sources for this talk not credited above include:

- *Alcoholics Anonymous* (The Big Book) (AAWS, Inc.)
- *A.A. Comes of Age* (AAWS, Inc.)
- *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* (AAWS, Inc.)
- From Bill W.'s Grapevine writings in *Language of the Heart* (AAGV, Inc.):
 - “Tradition One,” December 1947
 - “Tradition Two,” January 1948
 - “The Antidote for Fear: Prudence, Trust, and Faith,” November 1959
 - “What Is Freedom In AA?” May 1960

Primary Purpose—Vicky S., Delegate Panel 65, Area 47 Central New York

In Alcoholics Anonymous, our primary purpose as individuals is to stay sober and carry the Fellowship's message to other alcoholics. Tradition Five states that each A.A. group ought to be a spiritual entity having but one primary purpose—that of carrying its message to the alcoholic who still suffers. So I ask, what is the message that I need to carry? What does it mean that each group has “but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the still suffering alcoholic”? What is the message that we are to carry?

As stated in *As Bill Sees It*, “Recovery, Unity, Service—these are the Three Legacies given to the whole membership of A.A. by its founders and their fellow oldtimers. When this heritage was announced, at the St. Louis Convention in 1955, celebrating A.A.'s 20th birthday, Doctor Bob was already gone. But Bill W. spoke for him and the other pioneers, as well as for himself, in turning over to all of us the responsibility for A.A.'s continuation and growth.”* In the 1930s, Dr. Silkworth was tending to alcoholic patients, and he witnessed the miraculous return to health of a patient he had deemed a medically hopeless case.

The patient's recovery from alcoholism happened when the doctor shared his personal experience, strength, and hope with another alcoholic. This patient's life, almost destroyed by a severe case of alcoholism, was miraculously transformed when he surrendered and admitted that he was powerless over alcohol, he started seeking God's help and guidance, and sharing his experience with another. There is a solution from alcoholism, and its message is to surrender to a power greater than one self, clean house, and serve others. Personal recovery and spiritual growth is accomplished when we work and apply the Twelve Steps in our lives every day.

The first word in the First Step is “We,” not “I.” United we stand against the power of alcoholism. It is described as cunning, baffling, and powerful; it will take a man down to the gates of hell if not arrested by total abstinence and union with other alcoholics in selfless action. All it takes is uniting with other members to start a group, and taking responsibility for A.A.'s growth and continuation as it has been passed on to all of us by our founders. It is through our group conscience that a loving God can express Himself. We join together to seek God for His wisdom, strength, and power, so that we can do His will to help another alcoholic. We carry out His will by giving of our own time and resources to pass on what has been so freely given to us. Bill wrote that in doing Twelfth Step work no personal sacrifice is too great to help with the preservation of the fellowship. The unity, the effectiveness, and even the survival of A.A. will always depend upon our continued willingness to give up some of our personal ambitions and desires for the common safety and welfare. Just as sacrifice means survival for the individual alcoholic, so does sacrifice mean unity and survival for the group and for A.A.'s entire Fellowship.** There is this miraculous force formed by the unity in A.A., and it is from our compelling love for our fellows and for our principles.

Our Twelfth Step—to carry the message—is the basic service that the A.A. Fellowship gives; this is our principle aim and the main reason for our existence. Therefore, A.A. is more than a set of principles; it is a society of alcoholics in action. We must carry the message, else we ourselves can wither and those who haven't been given the truth may die.*** Service for A.A. is anything that will help us reach a still-suffering alcoholic—ranging all the way from one-on-one Twelfth Step work over a cup of coffee to A.A.'s General Service Office for national and international action.

Our Third Legacy of Service is *any* service, and that includes intergroup offices, setting up meeting places, and cooperation with hospitals, professionals, and the public by using many forms of communication, like pamphlets, books and positive exposure. Voluntarily supporting all of these activities from within our Fellowship is not to be forgotten as another vital service. All of these services are vital to the growth of A.A., whether they are performed by individuals, groups, areas, or A.A. as a whole.

Our founders have passed on the importance of this to us saying that, “Our primary purpose is to carry the message to the still-suffering alcoholic. A.A. is more than a set of principles; it is a society of alcoholics in action. We must carry the message, else we ourselves can wither and those who haven't been given the truth may die.”**** Faith without works is dead.

* *As Bill Sees It*, p. 13

** *AA Comes of Age*, pp. 287–288

*** *The A.A. Service Manual*, p. S1

**** “AA’s Legacy of Service,” 1969 AAWS, Inc. Pamphlet

PAST TRUSTEES’ SHARING

George D., past Regional Trustee, 1978-1982

I was a delegate forty years ago, then I was trustee from 1978 to 1982, and then I worked as general manager at G.S.O. from 1992 to 1999. I had my last drink 53 years ago, but I came to A.A. 60 years ago and never left. I didn’t always come sober, but I was always there. Before my sponsor died, we would talk about what Alcoholics Anonymous was like — way back then. Recently, I talked to a dear friend I’ve known for 50 years, an Episcopalian minister. We talked about what A.A. was like 50 years ago. And it doesn’t correspond to what I hear from a lot of people about what A.A. was like 25 and 30 years ago. I’m talking about this because, at this Forum, we talked about how A.A. is becoming older and does not appear to be growing. But we didn’t spend any time talking about *why*. There are a lot of whys, and we clearly wouldn’t agree on all the whys. My own feeling is this: That the three predecessors I knew as general managers have all the left the job talking about their fear of rigidity and dogmatism setting into Alcoholics Anonymous.

That takes me back 60 years, when I came to A.A. Nobody told me what I had to do, what I had to believe, or how I should interpret the Steps. It was not ‘what you should do’ but ‘this is what we did.’ There was no dogmatism and there was no telling people ‘this is what you have to do to stay sober.’ I don’t recall my sponsor ever giving me a piece of direct advice. He would talk, hour after hour, about an impending decision I had, and help me reach the decision. He tried very hard not to tell me what the decision should be.

I know some people in the professional community; I have a place in San Francisco that I rent to the head of Alcoholism and Addiction at Kaiser Hospital in California. I asked her about the perception of A.A. among the professional community. She said, “Well, I know A.A. is a spiritual program, not a religious one, and I know it’s not a cult, but there is an increasing perception among my colleagues and with my patients that it is. I have to work very hard to persuade them that A.A. is not a religious cult.” Her patients resist going to A.A. because they think it’s a cult.

And we haven't talked about that. We haven't talked about it at the General Service Conference or at Forums. Other people would disagree with this and say that we're not being dogmatic enough; we are not being rigid enough. We have to go back to basics. Well, I think that going back to basics is great. I like to go back to basics. But I've got a big problem. Whose basics do we go back to?

In California, where I got sober, we were very big on the Big Book. We talked about it all the time. Then I started going to New York on business trips and they didn't talk about the Big Book much at all over there. I talked to the old-timers, guys and gals that who went back to the 1930s and 1940s, and they said, "Oh, well, we don't need the Big Book, we go to meetings, we talk to people. Besides, we knew the guys that wrote it. They didn't know that much!" The basics depend on where you got sober, what group you belonged to, who your sponsor was. But basics are simple: You immerse yourself in Alcoholics Anonymous and you learn the program as best you can. As Bill W. said, when he talked to the American Psychiatric Society in 1949: "Alcoholics Anonymous is not a religious organization; there is no dogma. The one theological proposition is a "Power greater than one's self." Even this concept is forced on no one. The newcomer merely immerses himself in our Society and tries the program as best he can. Left alone, he will surely report the gradual onset of a transforming experience, call it what he may." And to me, *that* is very basic. Thank you.

John Q., past Trustee-at-large/U.S. 1989-1993

I want to share two stories about what happened when I was trustee-at-large. One was in Munich, Germany, when the International Literature Fund was born. I was part of that process and I want to tell you how it happened. And then I want to you about what happened at a Forum in 1991.

Back in the late '80s, we had something called "the challenge of the Seventh Tradition." It was an attempt, on the part of the General Service Board, to make the Seventh Tradition a common topic of discussion at groups. Letters and documents were sent out and the Fellowship responded. One year, the contributions increased by 30% over the previous year. So, since we try to balance that bottom line and keep it as close to zero as possible, we lowered literature prices. Unfortunately, the following year, contributions went back to their previous levels. I came on the Board in 1989 and we were looking at significant deficits in those later years. It prompted us to look at every single line item with a microscope. One item was foreign literature assistance, and it was a pretty substantial amount. Now, that year, we were going to the World Service Meeting in Munich, Germany. Mike Alexander had just become Chairman of the Board, and he asked us to ask the other world service delegates why they were not helping with the cost of translating literature. I had to ask the question, and it was awkward, but I spoke from the heart. When I was done, the delegate from Australia said, "John, we just assumed the U.S./Canada wanted to pay for it all along. We'd like to help." The delegate from New Zealand said, "Why don't we start a fund?" And that's how it started — with communication and love of A.A. around the world.

Second, I'd like to share what happened at a Forum I was at, in 1991, in Bethesda, Maryland. During that time in history there was a lot of activity in Alcoholics Anonymous in Eastern Europe, and the Berlin wall had recently come down. I was reporting on this activity, as well as activity in Africa. Afterwards, there was a question and answer session. A fellow was there from Kenya.

He got up and said, “Why don’t we have a Big Book in Swahili?” I answered that I did not know, but that I would find out. After the presentation, a staff member told me that an attempt was made to translate the Big Book into Swahili, but it was a terrible translation, so it was shelved. You see, we check the translations to make sure the message of Alcoholics Anonymous is intact. I said, “I think it is time to resurrect the project,” In one year, the Big Book in Swahili was published. I take no responsibility for that, I was only a facilitator in the process—my point is that that happened as a result of a question at a Regional Forum.

The last thing I want to talk about took place in 1971. That year, I was dying. I was yellow, I was bleeding, and I went to a doctor. He examined me and put me in the hospital and said, “You can never drink again.” I was devastated. I was 29 years old and I had been drinking my entire life. How could I not drink? The doctor never told me about A.A. He did not say, “John, go to a place called Alcoholics Anonymous,” he just said, “John, you can’t ever drink again.” For three years, I did not drink. I was scared into dryness, but I never got to hear the Steps, I never knew any of this stuff, so it was inevitable I would drink again. I did, and nearly drank myself to death. So, it was fortunate you found me on Dec. 1, 1977. But I thought about that doctor over the years. How many of us have gotten the same answer and advice? ‘Don’t drink!’— But not a word about A.A. This week, thousands of alcoholics are going to see doctors for their drinking problem, and they will *not* be told to come and see us. The doctors are unaware about who we are and what we do. There are alcoholics who will die because they will never find these rooms. Today’s reading in Daily Reflections talks about what our real job is—to show those out there that there is a way in here.

The population in the U.S. is approximately 330 million. How many of those 330 million are alcoholic? Estimates say, 10% That’s 33 million. Let’s say 5%. That’s 16 million. How about 1%? 3 million. Know what A.A. membership in the United States is? About 1.3 million. There is a gap, isn’t there? I’m not saying we’re the only game in town, but I know what works best for me, and what may work best for other people—if they are given a chance. I think we do a great job inside the rooms of A.A.—once the newcomer is there, but we need to do more to get them into the room. I ask each of you to take the A.A. pamphlet: “A.A. as a Resource for the Healthcare Professional” with you the next time you visit your doctor. Feel free to talk about why you don’t drink. It is not an anonymity break. Tell your doctor you are sober because of the program of Alcoholics Anonymous, and ask if he or she would like to learn a little more about A.A. If the doctor wants to keep you as a patient, he (or she) is going to say yes. Ask your group members to do it. Ask your districts. Think of the domino effect. Think of all the people we go to see before we come in here. I’m not concerned about percentages and numbers. I’m concerned that people are dying because they don’t know we are here. And we can all do something about it.

David E., past General Service Trustee, 2001-2005

I was a delegate on Panel 41, and then I was asked to serve as a director on the Grapevine Board. Following that, I became a general service trustee and I served on the Grapevine board for four years. In my early years, I came in and I went to the central office and I read every piece of A.A. literature that there was. After about six months of sobriety, I had read everything, including The A.A. Service Manual. I was just one of those crazy people... When I came into Alcoholics Anonymous I had been homeless on the beach. I was 6’1” and I weighed 158 pounds, I had long hair down to the middle of my back, I had a scraggly beard that had never been trimmed and it had crumbs in it from whatever I’d found to eat from the trash. My fingers were

yellow with nicotine stains from chain-smoking unfiltered cigarettes. I'm sure I stank of sweat, urine, and other bodily fluids. But I came to Alcoholics Anonymous and my life was resurrected. I ended up going to a meeting. I got sober on December 23, 1982. So, that's Christmas Eve-eve. Who gets sober on Christmas Eve-eve? I think it just shows that when the time is right, we get struck sober, or we end up getting sober, I'm not exactly sure how that happens, but I was ready and I came to A.A. I've been sober from that day. I went to that meeting and someone made an announcement about an alkathon the next day. I heard there was going to be food. And I said, "That's where I am going." That began my journey in A.A. I got elected to service; I became a delegate, then a trustee. I remember, my first year as delegate, our regional trustee took us on a walking tour of New York. As we were walking down the street, we saw some guy lying in a doorway with his coat as his pillow and a brown paper bag bottle under his arm. The trustee turned to me and said, "You see that guy there?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Potential future trustee!" And that's how they probably saw me when I came in—a guy in rags, with urine-stained dungarees, smelling like a bum—and here I am today with a coat and jacket talking to you. But there's no difference. I just happened to have served in certain positions, held certain titles, as all of you had certain positions and had certain titles. There are jobs to be done in Alcoholics Anonymous that need people to do them, and it doesn't matter who does them, it just matters that they are done.

I was thinking about my home group, and it's not really a home group, it's a meeting. It doesn't have a G.S.R., it doesn't have an intergroup rep, doesn't have much literature and there are no reports to the group about finances. When I came to that meeting and began to attend on a regular basis, I asked, "who's the treasurer?" and somebody said, "Well, so-and-so gets the money." And I asked, "Where does the money go?" They answered, "Well, we collect the money, buy cookies, and we pay the rest of it to the church." I thought, "Hmm." I moved here from the Pacific region, and I didn't want to be one of those people who comes in and says, "You're doing it all wrong...if you did it *this* way you'd find a much greater spiritual fulfillment." So I just accepted whatever it was that people were doing, and over time, I thought, I'm going to keep asking for a treasurer's report. I still haven't gotten one. I benefit from carrying the message, and I decided to announce this Regional Forum at every meeting. No one from that meeting is here, but I think we must stay active. This is a society of action and a program of action. Action is the keyword. NERASSA 2016 will be in Springfield, Massachusetts, and hosted by Area 31, Western Massachusetts. It's the 25th anniversary of NERASSA, and I hope that we will see you all there. It's such a privilege to be of service to A.A., and there is no way I could pay back what has been so freely given to me by those who were here when I walked in the doors, and I want to be sure that this is here when for the next person who stumbles in the door of Alcoholics Anonymous and needs our help.

John K., past General Service Trustee 2001- 2005

I drank, I got drunk, I fell down, I threw up all over my shoes, and as soon as I could, I did it all over again. I came to Alcoholics Anonymous and now I don't that anymore. Then I was a trustee, and now I'm not. And every two years I come out here and try to think of something profound to say. I've been rotated off for ten years, now, so I'm running out of material, folks! But that's never stopped me.

I'd like to share a story about something that happened shortly after Bill died. A man in Ireland wrote Lois and expressed his gratitude for his recovery in A.A. and asked her if he might have

some small personal item of Bill's, as it would mean a lot to him. In a moment of weakness—I'm interpreting here—Lois agreed, and sent him a tiepin. It's one of those things that go behind the tie and attach to each of the collars. A few months later, she got another letter, thanking her again for the personal memento, and the man added that they had had a fellow around their group who had not been able to get sober. The man wrote that they held Bill's tiepin to his forehead, and—Lois would be gratified to know—now the man had been sober for two weeks!

To Lois' credit, she wrote back and, boy, did she ream him out. She said (paraphrase), "That's not because of the tiepin! That's because of the spiritual recovery program—the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous." Because that's what it is, and that is what Lois was saying in the early 1970s. We need to remember that, always.

Let me read you something that a presenter at the International Convention in Toronto said 50 years ago. It was Bill. He said, "Newcomers are approaching A.A. at the rate of tens of thousands yearly. They represent nearly every belief and attitude imaginable. We have atheists and agnostics. We have people of many races, cultures and religions. We of A.A. are supposed to be bound together in a kinship of a common suffering. Hence, there must be full individual liberty to believe in any creed or principle or treatment. Surely, these are liberties to be always remembered by us. Therefore, let us never pressure anyone with our individual or even with our collective views. Instead, let us accord to each other that respect and love which is truly due to every human being as he tries to make his way toward the light. Let us always try to be inclusive rather than exclusive." I share these two little stories because I think there may be a human tendency, or an innate tendency, to impress upon this wondrous and spiritual program, this nonreligious program, a lot of the rituals and talismanic things, and the orthodoxy we are accustomed to, and we have to remember that we are not here to do those things because they make us comfortable in carrying our message to the still-suffering alcoholic, we are here make the still-suffering alcoholic comfortable as he comes to us.

John K., past Northeast Regional Trustee, 2007-2011

My sobriety date is St. Patrick's Day, 1985. I have a friend at home who says he knows that A.A. works because he knows an Irishman who got sober on St. Patrick's Day.

When I first got sober, the two guys who were shepherding me around told me that, as a salesman, if anyone asked me to go out at night, I should tell them I was sick. Then I should go to my room and lock the door. That day, the sales manager wanted me to go out so that we could talk about the future. I told him, "I'm very sorry, but I am very sick. I won't be able to go." That sales manager turned his car over that evening, and was killed. I was not in that car because I was at a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous. I think we all got sober just in time. But there have been indicators all weekend about people we are not reaching. They are the ones who are looking for it, and some topics don't seem to have anything to do with a person dying from alcoholism.

I sponsor a fellow out in Ukraine. He is doing a wonderful job there of bringing Alcoholism Anonymous to them — he's translating the Big Book. Ukraine has 25 years in A.A. It has 45 million people as a population, and it's got 1,250 members of A.A. He's coming here to the International Convention — for me, it's a privilege to work with someone who gives so much of himself.

When I was new in sobriety, my daughter borrowed my car and had an accident. Today, I have 10 children and 22 grandchildren. But with 10 children—you get to know the police officers in town. They came by and said, “Would you like to go over to the accident scene?” I got to the accident scene, and my daughter was still in the car, it was a mess. Fortunately, nobody was hurt. But my sponsor said, “When are you going to go to see how your daughter is doing?” I said, “I don’t know.” And he said, “Well, go now.” I was mad, especially getting told what to do. She came out of the car and came at me with the biggest hug I’ve ever had. And I forgot about cars and money and material things and I realized what spirituality really is, because I was here, in A.A.

I was privileged to serve as a trustee. One of the privileges I have had is in getting to know Phyllis H., General Manager of G.S.O. She has done an outstanding job for Alcoholics Anonymous. Thank you for those who came to hear us old codgers, who are “rusty” servants and who come to see you.

J. Gary L., past Northeast Regional Trustee, 2011-2015

My current position is “immediate past has-been.” Now that I’ve rotated off, I think my hair is actually growing back. My mail carrier did come to the house and asked if everyone inside was okay, because the mail had stopped. If I integrate four years of service into 5 minutes up here on the dais, that’s about 75 seconds per year.

It was my honor to present the keynote address at the most recent General Service Conference. In it, I listed a number of challenges that I felt A.A. was facing today, challenges such as maintaining our singleness of purpose, social media, diversity of our membership (in general), our trusted servants (in particular), the stagnation about the size of our membership, the technological divide that threatens to polarize our Fellowship, and several other things. I left it to the treasurer to talk about the challenges of our Seventh Tradition. But the one thing that I did not talk about at that time, which has actually been talked about, off and on, this weekend, is the disconnect between our service structure and our Fellowship, in general.

Corner the typical member of a home group and ask them to explain what a G.S.R. is, or what they do. Ask them who their G.S.R. is, or if they even have one. Ask them those same questions about their D.C.M. or their delegate. If you are tempted to assume that the home groups of those D.C.M.s or delegates or even trustees certainly understand the structure, let me share that, not too long ago (while I was still serving as trustee), during a business meeting of my home group, the group chair turned to me and asked me to make the final decision on a particular matter. I asked her, “Why in the world should that be my decision?” She said, “Well, you are in charge of A.A., right?” A member who I had not seen for a little while asked me if I was still president of A.A. So, it’s *not* well understood. Ask the typical member how he or she would explain the General Service Conference to a newcomer. Or what the phrase “Conference-approved” means on some of our literature and why it doesn’t appear on all of our literature. Ask what recommendations the Conference made this year, or any year, for that matter. Ask them if there are any issues on their mind that they feel the Conference ought to give some attention to, and how they might go about helping to make that happen. After you’ve done all that, ask yourself, “Does any of that really matter? Does the ordinary member need to be aware of all that stuff?” But before you answer, I invite you to reread the passage on page S20 of the current A.A. Service

Manual. It is entitled, “Why Do We Need a Conference?” I think you will agree that all of this stuff does matter. Then ask, “Who is responsible for this lack of awareness?” The answer is, as we’ve heard this weekend, “All of us.” How would the ordinary member possibly know about G.S.R.s, D.C.M.s, delegates, trustees, the Conference, and what the burning issues are these days, unless we inform them? How many of you have heard reports from your trusted servants that sounded like, “I went to the convention, and had a good time.” We joke that G.S.R. stands for Give Some Report—but that’s not a report. We joke that D.C.M. stands for Don’t Call Me.

We have three legacies: Recovery, Unity, and Service. Recovery is the foundation of our movement, that’s why it’s always at the base of the triangle in our circle and triangle symbol. But that triangle is equilateral, thus making Unity and Service of equal importance to Recovery. Repairing the disconnect between our service structure and the Fellowship is a crucial step in reinforcing both of those other two legacies. Your General Service Board and your two corporate boards are concerned with these breaks in our lines of communication, but they can’t solve the problem alone. They need your thoughts, your creativity, your energy, and most importantly, your action. Take what you’ve learned this weekend and talk about it with your friends, your sponsees, and your sponsor. Get folks excited about this world of service inside our Fellowship. Tell them what’s going on, and get them engaged. If you think service is important and exciting, tell your face. Let folks see your enthusiasm. Help make sure our triangle is balanced and strong, and that a healthy, focused, strong program is waiting for the newcomer who walks through the doors. Will these actions win you any popularity contests? Probably not. You may even be met with some resistance, or even hostility. Many members do not care about A.A. beyond their home group, but be courageous. If you believe that these issues are important, be honest and open with your beliefs. I’m reminded of words that have been attributed to Mother Teresa: “Honesty and transparency make you vulnerable. Be honest and transparent anyway.”

“CLOSING REMARKS”

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

It is said that 18 million people in the U.S. and Canada suffer from a life-threatening problem. Just not drinking is not the solution. The solution is spiritual growth and application of the Twelve Steps in all aspects of our lives. We don't need to convince a drunk to get help; the booze takes care of that. We don't need to convince the world that A.A. works; a couple million family members, children, and employers, spouses, and partners know that. 180 countries around the world know that. All we have to do is show up for a meeting, get a sponsor, and the higher power will take care of the rest. Today, every successful mutual help meeting around the world is modeled after your Twelve Steps. No one ever has ever provided the kind of support you provide to each other for a common problem. We cannot be complacent about technology if we believe God wants us to be relevant in the 21st Century. But if we are going to buddy up with a laptop, iPod or a television, we cannot be complacent about the risk of isolation. Speaking of complacency, how much sober time is represented at this forum? 1,000 years? 3,000 years? All one day at a time.

One characteristic of alcoholics is to relax. I have a loquacious friend who writes a lot. He's not a bullet guy. He writes in paragraphs and pages, but he sent me a text: "My son Jake had 24 years. Drank, drove. Wrong way on the freeway. Head on. Other person badly hurt. Broken heart."

Each of us has an obligation to those who are not here yet. To those who so desperately need to hear the message of A.A., we need to keep the doors open. We have an obligation to the newcomer to make sure the message stays strong and clear. Those most capable of gratitude are those who emerge from the darkness of alcoholism into the light of sobriety. With deep gratitude we celebrate 80 years of A.A. and of carrying the message throughout the world. We are grateful for a power greater than ourselves, for the indefinable magic of one alcoholic talking to another alcoholic. Thank you for the privilege to serve you.
