

## Unity: Are We Living Up to Our Legacy?

"A good meeting gets my head on straight again, but lately my group's meetings have left me feeling spiritually bereft," Terry L., of New York City told us recently. "The Steps are almost never mentioned," she adds. "Instead, I'm hearing talk of therapy, relationships, weight loss—things that have little to do with shared experience, strength and hope." Speaking of her four years of continuous sobriety, she adds, "I know of my own progress and see how my whole way of thinking is different now. But there's no longer a sense of growing along spiritual lines or any reference to our basic program. I hear less and less talk of relying on a Power greater than ourselves and more emphasis on self-reliance."

From New Preston, Connecticut, comes this message from Mildred P. "I drove a certain distance one night to attend a meeting and was looking forward to it. It had just started when I got there and, after about a quarter of an hour, I began to doubt that I was in the right place. There was talk of P.T.A. meetings, stopping smoking, feeling insecure at work, but not one word about alcohol or recovery through our program. The talk went on and never did get around to the kind of sharing that connects life experience to the Steps, so I left. I've had twenty-two years of sobriety so I could let go of my resentment. But there was a time when missing the spiritual 'fix' I've grown to expect from meetings would have been quite disturbing."

Rex M., of Jackson, Michigan, who celebrated twenty-eight years in A.A. on December 1, and who, at 80, says he doesn't "go much to A.A. meetings these days," tells us that he did go recently and "I didn't enjoy it. I felt uncomfortable." Why? The meeting's speaker, Rex says, used "the worst, filthy language—I don't mean cuss words we're all used to—but language way beyond *anyone's* bounds of politeness. When a woman asked him if he'd mind toning down his language, he told her off in another string of filthy words," Rex says. Rex tells us he doesn't plan to attend another meeting for a while.

Are these isolated complaints? Rare instances of sour grapes? Unfortunately, they are not. In fact, they seem to be cropping up in many segments of our Fellowship. Oldtimers have gone underground; there's a sense that

we're losing some of our conviction regarding our primary purpose; that the special quality of our A.A. meetings is deteriorating; that individual needs are seen as more pressing than the good of the whole; that some A.A.s are breaking their anonymity at a public level. So we're asking ourselves: are these expressions of concern, even alarm, typical reflections of stresses and strains that any living organization undergoes during changing times? Or do they reflect a genuine erosion of our collective and individual understanding of A.A.'s Traditions and Steps?—an erosion so seemingly pervasive that it appears to be undermining our Fellowship's foundation, its primary purpose, its unity.

Are we losing that all-important element of A.A. unity that our co-founder, Bill W., stressed over and over? Are we individual A.A.s forgetting one of our most important legacies: *Our common welfare comes first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity?* Put another way, are we losing our grasp of what Bill called the "sacrificial character of our life together" (*A.A. Comes of Age*, p. 97) by putting our individual needs above the common good?

Realistically, the times *are* changing; they always do. Every thriving association worthy of that description wishes, and must, adapt to change, aiming for flexibility



This old caboose, in the backyard of railroad buff and former delegate Jim D., is the meeting place of the Dryden Group's Sunday night meeting in Harford, New York.

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about things that can be let go of, but resistant to what could destroy its most valuable ideals. No one understood this better than Bill, who frequently talked of A.A.'s early trials and errors, of how the challenges themselves became a vehicle for learning, and how those experiences eventually were filtered through the group conscience to become our Twelve Traditions. In discussing changes and challenges Bill ceaselessly spoke of tolerance, always emphasizing the spirit, rather than the letter of the law. But Bill placed A.A. unity above all else; without it the Fellowship falls apart.

Looking toward the future—*i.e.*, our present—he wrote: “Clearly, our first duty to A.A.’s future is to maintain in full strength what we now have. Only the most vigilant caretaking can assure this. Never should we be lulled into complacent self-satisfaction by the wide acclaim and success that are everywhere ours. This is the subtle temptation which could render us stagnant today, perchance disintegrate us tomorrow. We have always rallied to meet and transcend failure and crisis. Problems have been our stimulants. How well, though, shall we be able to meet the problems of success?” (*As Bill Sees It*, p. 207)

How vigilant *are* we? Have we been lulled into “complacent self-satisfaction”? How well *are* we meeting “the problems of success”? Ironically, the rich mix of our ever-growing membership points both to the power of A.A.’s attraction *and* to that perceived pull from within against unity which so many are experiencing. “There’s been an explosion of new members,” Terry says, in describing the groups she attends. “At most meetings I go to, the majority of people attending are newcomers who don’t yet have a grasp of the program.”

Have we become lax about our primary purpose? “Listen, we’re a living, dynamic Fellowship, in a living, dynamic society,” Tommy H., former Eastern Canada regional trustee, says: “If I go to a meeting and I’ve got a problem with my father, my boss—all those things we’ve *always* discussed—unless I scrutinize those problems through my experience with my fundamental alcoholism and the Twelve Steps of recovery, I’m renegeing on the Fellowship’s primary purpose.” The changing times have certainly put a new face on membership,

he explains—one-third of whom are presently under age thirty-one, “and forty-six percent of them come into A.A. with problems of alcohol and other drugs. As long as we continue with our basic attitude being that alcohol is our primary concern—fine. And as long as we apply our Traditions realistically in light of our membership as it exists today, I’m not worried,” Tommy says.

*Oldtimers.* What’s happened to them? Have they been driven away by group discussions that seem to them to be less and less A.A. oriented? Or have they themselves lost their sense of responsibility toward the whole of A.A.? “Oldtimers seem to go to oldtimers’ meetings,” Terry says. “A few of them came to my group and when they did, you could really hear program and it was great. But after a while they stayed away. I heard one say: ‘I’m not getting anything out of this, I won’t come anymore.’ And I can understand why they leave. A.A. is *not* therapy, it’s a life-saving program, a healing. To turn things around, I think oldtimers have to stick around and the chairman should make it clear that we should stick with the A.A. literature and follow the A.A. format.”

*Anonymity breaks.* Each new member of A.A. needs time to fully grasp why Bill said of anonymity, “In my belief, the entire future of our Fellowship, hangs upon this vital principle.” (*A.A. Comes of Age*, p. 131) No one better understood that spirit, Bill wrote, than the nationally-prominent, show business Texas lady, whose manager couldn’t understand why she wouldn’t tell the world that she had joined A.A. “It would make terrific publicity,” the manager said. “Temporarily,” she replied. “A.A. can’t be run like show business,” she said. “A.A. saved my life and my career. Therefore the future welfare of Alcoholics Anonymous is more important to me than any publicity that I could get as an A.A. member.” (*ibid*, p. 135)

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## Just ‘Being There’ Can Carry the A.A. Message

A.A. member David R., who serves as a pastoral counselor in Cochabamba, Bolivia, shares an experience that brought home an important truth: Just being there for an alcoholic can carry the message more powerfully than words.

“Recently,” David writes, “one of our A.A.s, whom I’ll call Raul, had a slip and got into a fight with a bottle-wielding fellow who blinded him in one eye. During Raul’s convalescence, I visited him at home and found him very down. I was at a loss for words and mainly sat there quietly. Soon another A.A. friend came by who also had lost the sight of an eye, so I left the

two of them alone to share their common experience.”

Some weeks later, David says, “I met Raul at a meeting. He thanked me profusely for the visit—and I was surprised, because I felt I hadn’t done anything. Only later did I realize that the spoken message wasn’t too important. The real message was conveyed simply by my presence at his bedside.”

Upon reflection, David adds, “I feel sure the Higher Power sent that friend to help Raul through his deep depression. The man has gotten along nicely with one eye for a number of years, and the results of his shared experience are beautiful to see. It’s A.A. sharing at another level.

“Today Raul is sober and dealing well with his loss, thanks to the way of the Twelve Steps. I see this as a kind of death followed by rebirth. It is amazing how often we are privileged to see this happen in our own lives and in the lives of those we touch at A.A. meetings.”

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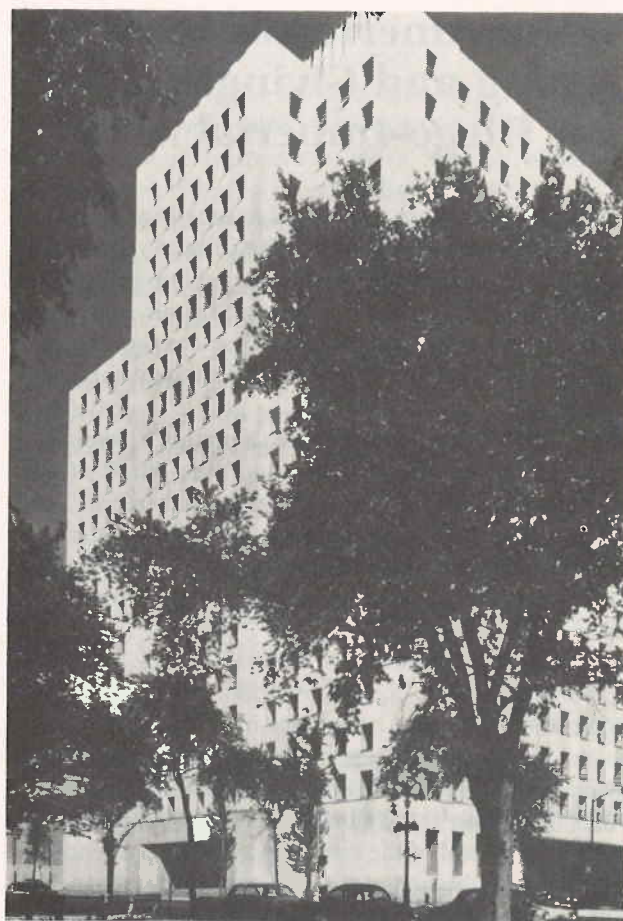
## General Service Office Prepares to Move Uptown Early in 1992

After 20 years at its present location in midtown Manhattan, the General Service Office is on the move. Early in 1992, the entire A.A. World Services and Grapevine operations will relocate to new quarters overlooking the Hudson River at 475 Riverside Drive, at 120th Street.

“In our present facility,” says G.S.O.’s general manager, Wayne P., “we are sprawled over five floors. This move will allow us to put all A.A.W.S. and Grapevine operations on just one-and-a-half contiguous floors that provide more usable space than we have now—and at roughly half the rent.”

The 30-year-old 19-story structure, sheathed in Alabama limestone, is run on a nonprofit basis, with the rent divided proportionately among the tenants. The eclectic grouping includes organizations ranging from the Academy of Political Science, Beirut University College to the Foundation for American/Chinese Cultural Exchange. Other tenants are the World Council of Churches and the Federation of Jewish Men’s Clubs, along with a variety of other not-for-profit organizations.

Wayne points out that “the new offices are in the heart of Columbia University, just a few miles north of the theater district. We’re close to the action and excitement of midtown, yet removed from its frenetic hustle and bustle. The surrounding neighborhood is generally peaceful and serene. Accessibility is easy by bus, subway and car; parking is not a problem and the building is fully accessible to handicapped persons.”



A.A. visitors will enjoy not only the unobstructed view of the Hudson River but the amenities the building offers. The basement cafeteria, and the slightly pricier buffet dining room on the main floor, are open to all, as is the gift shop, which carries reasonably priced items from around the world. Also of interest is the oak-paneled Treasure Room, which houses visiting art exhibits throughout the year.

According to G.S.O. services director Tom J., “the offices will be constructed to maximize use of space, increase productivity and efficiency, and allow for flexibility. The office files, instead of being on the far side of the building or on another floor as they are now, will be easily accessible to staff members. It is expected to greatly enhance our ability to serve the Fellowship and to continue fulfilling our primary purpose: to carry the A.A. message to suffering alcoholics everywhere.”

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## Regional Forum Date Change

The new dates for the West Central Regional Forum are August 2–4, 1991, at the Holiday Inn Central, Omaha, Nebraska. This Forum was previously announced for July 12–14. Please adjust your calendars accordingly.

## Native Americans Are Getting and Giving Help in San Diego-Imperial Area

Four years ago, there were no A.A. meetings for Native North Americans on any of the half-dozen reservations dotting the San Diego-Imperial Area in southern California. Today six autonomous groups are alive and well on five of the reservations. How they came to be, says past-delegate Larry N., "is the work of many hands and hearts.

"In 1987, the General Service Conference's emphasis on providing special literature and other kinds of help for Native Americans got some of us galvanized," says Larry. "First, we formed an ad hoc arm of the area assembly to investigate how we might effectively connect with the Native American population both on and off the reservations.

"Next, district committee member Scott S. and members of the ad hoc committee met several times with Doug and Diane W., a Native American couple living on the Rincon Reservation. After struggling for years to reach out to their community, with no tangible success other than their own sobriety, they were discouraged. Initially skeptical of the visiting A.A.s' 'good intentions,' they soon brightened at the realization that our people could be counted on absolutely for the long-needed support."

The ad hoc committee further identified several issues and courses of action:

1. Encourage support of the A.A. Traditions, primarily through emphasis on sponsorship. Be aware that A.A. meetings on local reservations have failed in the past, possibly because of implied affiliation with government-supported agencies.
2. Understand that groups on reservations should be started and run autonomously by Native American members living on the reservation.
3. Maintain total credibility and responsibility, especially in view of the pervasive confusion and lack of trust. When a commitment is made, it should be kept.
4. Recommend an increase in the C.P.C. committee's presentations about A.A. (what we do and don't do) to local tribal councils, treatment and correctional facilities' staff, court personnel, and other professionals.
5. Facilitate meetings starting up in new locations and build a list of A.A. volunteers willing to act as sponsors.

Even in the beginning, Larry says, "the ad hoc committee meetings were well attended. Those first meetings on the Rincon Reservation were inspirational and exciting; and the group became immediately self-supporting through its own contributions. By September 1988, word of its success had traveled, and a second

group was started on the neighboring La Jolla Reservation. Within several months, two more reservations—Manzanita and Barona—followed suit, then two more. There's still much to be done, but we're finally on our way, thanks to the efforts of many dedicated A.A.s."

Describing her own experience in recovery and service, Della K., a Native American member of the Rincon Group, says she spent her first year in A.A. "sitting in the back of the room." She "arrived late, left early, and was afraid to speak up." Gradually, she overcame her shyness and began to share. When the group elected her secretary she made a commitment to attend every meeting for a full year. "There were many nights when my only companion was the coffee pot," she remembers. "Then one person came, and another and another. Soon we had enough members for me to rotate out of office."

Sunny V., another Native American member of the Rincon Group, lives off the reservation. She says that going to meetings on the reservation has brought "greater identification and spiritual meaning" to her recovery in A.A. For her, alcoholism is a family illness. "My late grandmother joined A.A. in the 1950s," she explains, "and she died a sober woman. She taught me that for every ill known to mankind, there's something the Creator has ready to heal you. She told me, 'If you step in poison oak, you'll see that the Creator has placed a vine with medicinal properties nearby. If a rattlesnake bites, look around and you'll see a healing kind of cactus not far away.' I know now that the same holds true for the disease of alcoholism. When I needed help, A.A. was there for me, to help me heal."

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## Canadian A.A.s Cross Seven Language Barriers To Carry the Message

In Canada's cold and rugged Northwest Territory, which spans more than a million square miles, carrying the A.A. message to the area's Native North Americans is difficult at best. The challenge has been compounded by the dearth of A.A. literature available in the seven different languages these often isolated people speak.

The picture is changing, thanks to some determined A.A.s in the Yellowknife area. At the Western Canada Regional Forum last May, relates district committee member Bob P., "Finding ways to surmount the language barriers was a recurring theme. During a meeting held at the close of the Forum, we decided to gather all known Native American translations of A.A. literature, confirm their accuracy, and build a file that's easily accessible to A.A. members. Toward this end, we have formed a translation committee that works hand-in-

glove with A.A.'s General Service Office."

A.A.s throughout the Northwest Territory have been encouraged to send copies of any and all translations—either written or on audio cassettes—to the new committee, Bob reports. Each translation is labeled in English, specifying the title of the A.A. book, pamphlet or other literature as well as the name of the Native American language it is written or spoken in.

Looking ahead, Bob says, "When the time seems right—for instance, when the Steps, Traditions and Preamble and perhaps the first part of Chapter Five of the Big Book are in distribution—we hope to expand our store of A.A. literature translations for the thousands of alcoholic Native Americans here who need our help."

The Yellowknife Area Translation Committee welcomes input. Write to Regional Forums Desk at G.S.O.

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## Our Friend, Jan W.

On November 2nd, as the Colorado Area was gathering for their election assembly, Jan W. (Southwest U.S. regional trustee) and her husband Louis, were en route to join these A.A. friends. Outside of Farmington, New Mexico, a two-car accident took Jan's life and seriously injured Louis.

The shocking news spread to the Colorado Assembly, on to G.S.O., the region she served and passed rapidly throughout the U.S. and Canadian network of friends. As Jan's friends bowed in grief, in the typical A.A. way, they began to share quietly about the enriching legacy of love she brought to everything she did. Jan gave us a unique and enthusiastic dedication throughout her years of sobriety and service.

As she had since her election as trustee in April 1987, Jan had been in New York the previous weekend and participated in the October board meetings, making this tragedy even more difficult for her friends on the General Service Board and among the G.S.O. staff.

Michael Alexander and Wayne P., General Service Board chairperson and G.S.O. general manager, respectively, joined Jan's family and friends for the funeral services in Midland, Texas on November 6th. Among those many friends were Ruth J., past Pacific U.S. regional trustee, and John King, Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee.

In the many remembrances expressing this huge loss were some from A.A. members who had struggled with past sadnesses. One member shared these thoughts of unknown origin:

"Her diminished size is in me, not in her;  
and, just at the moment when someone at my side says,  
'There, she's gone,' others' eyes are watching her coming  
and other voices are ready to take up the glad shout,  
'There she comes!'"

## New From G.S.O.

- 1990/91 A.A. Directories: Canadian (MD-2); Western U.S. (MD-3); Eastern U.S. (MD-4) \$1.35 each.
- "Tiempo Para Empezar a Vivir," Spanish version of the pamphlet "Time to Start Living," (SS-77) 50¢.
- 1990 Final Conference Report, in Spanish, *Informe Final de la Conferencia* (SS-32) \$2.00. The Conference Report is also available in French, write: Le Service des Publications Francaises des A.A. du Quebec, 230, Henri-Bourassa Blvd., East, Suite 100, Montreal, Quebec, Canada H3L 1B8.
- "A.A. Membership Survey" summarizes the findings of the 1989 membership in the U.S. and Canada. (P-48) 15¢.
- Pocket-folder for A.A. pamphlets, useful for health fairs, exhibits, P.I. and C.P.C. work, now available in pack of 20 for \$10.00 (M-54)

**Note:** Foreign-language literature is now included on page 12 of the Winter 1991 Literature Catalog.

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## Toronto Area Finds Our Traditions are the Solution

The New Anchor Group in Scarborough, Ontario, Canada, is the first group in the area to hold weekly meetings on the Twelve Traditions—and they are catching on.

"Last year," says general service representative Bob C., "our group decided to change our Big Book Tuesday discussion meeting to a Traditions meeting. There was a general feeling that we were getting away from what A.A. is all about and that a regular Traditions meeting would set us back on course. Now we have three meetings each Tuesday night in separate rooms—beginners, Step and Traditions."

The group further decided to start each Traditions meeting with a reading of a "preamble" distilled from writings in *A.A. Comes of Age* (mainly from pp. 96-97). It states: "The Traditions are the distilled experience of our past and we rely on them to carry us in unity through the challenges and dangers the future might bring.

"The Traditions ask each of us to lay aside pride and resentment. They ask for personal as well as group sacrifice. They ask us to never use the A.A. name in any quest for personal power, distinction or money. They ask that every individual, every group in every area set aside all desires, ambitions and untoward actions that could bring serious divisions among us or lose for us the confidence of the world at large."

Member Pat O'B., a founder of the 11-year-old New Anchor Group, remembers that from the beginning, the group has been conscious of the importance of general

service. "The Traditions were adopted by A.A.'s First International Convention, in Cleveland in 1950," he relates, "and I was fortunate in having a mentor who made me realize that they are as necessary to the survival of the group as the Steps are to our personal recovery."

Pat notes that the appropriate chapter from *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* is read at each meeting, with members taking a turn if they so wish. "Most members bring along their own copies of the book," he notes, "but if they should forget, or if there's anyone else minus a book, that's okay. Our group has purchased 20 additional copies we keep on hand."

Pat explains that "one Tradition is discussed each week; when we finish Tradition Twelve, we start over again. And before each discussion period ensues, we recite the Responsibility Declaration: 'When anyone, anywhere reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there, and for that, I am responsible.'"

Response to the weekly Traditions meeting has been "slow but steady," Pat reports, "and we've had some positive feedback. One chap who's been coming for the past four or five months told me that he has found the Traditions useful during his home group's business meetings. When some fellow members asked where he had come up with such good ideas, he told them to come to our Traditions meetings and they'd find out."

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## New Mexico Group Struggles Within Small Community

A group in rural New Mexico is leaning on A.A.'s collective experience to fulfill its primary purpose and, at the same time, to protect the anonymity of its members.

The Grateful Alcoholics Group, in El Valle, is respond-

ing to what secretary Claudia ("Casey") D. characterizes as a "desperate" need for help. "In this remote area settled by the Spaniards in the 1500s," she writes, "the population is probably under 700. It is fantastically beautiful, picturesque and historic, but remote and poor. The twin traditions of faith and spirituality are strong. So too is the tradition of alcoholism."

The fledgling group has received encouragement and help, Casey says, "both from oldtimers belonging to an A.A. group more than 30 miles away and from the central office in Santa Fe, 55 miles north of us. And a local priest, Father Bill, has given us unfailing support, assistance, and a wonderful room for our A.A. meetings. Additionally, others have started Al-Anon and Alateen meetings, and he is helping with those."

Starting the new group has not been "a smooth and easy process," Casey notes, "and it has given me more than an inkling of what the early days of A.A. were like. My gratitude and admiration for our co-founders, Bill W. and Dr. Bob, have taken quantum leaps."

The half-dozen or so regular members of the Grateful Alcoholics Group are grappling with some specific issues that Casey believes were the "cause of the 'death' of a meeting that started here several years ago. Anonymity was broken, gossip ran rampant, and quarrels broke out at meetings that were impossible to control." For more generations than anyone can count, she explains, "alcoholism has been considered a normal part of life, and many people can't comprehend the need for A.A. When a member of their family or community joins the Fellowship, they may joke, mock or actively interfere. Sometimes they even get violent.

"Consequently, we elected to hold closed meetings in order to protect our anonymity and prevent disruption. But this raised a serious question: How can we help others know we're available for help without threat to ourselves, our group and our anonymity?"

Part of the answer, Casey says, "lies in familiarizing the community about A.A. The more people know, the

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