

*In this
Holiday Season
Of Gratitude
and Spiritual Renewal,
Your Friends at G.S.O.
Wish You Peace and Sobriety
in the Coming Year.*



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■ Update for Confidential 2008-2009 A.A. Directories

Each January for many years G.S.O. has mailed group information sheets out to each of the 93 areas. The group information sheets provided a way for areas to review the status of groups throughout the districts in their areas and update the information in preparation for the coming year's confidential A.A. Directories. This year the entire process will change.

With the inception of the Fellowship New Vision (FNV) database it is no longer necessary for the annual group information sheet mailing. The database allows area record keepers to continuously update group information 24/7, making the information in the database online real-time and current.

In addition to the FNV database being online real-time, it also allows record keepers to prepare spreadsheets reflecting the groups in each district of their area and distribute the e-mail spreadsheet to D.C.M.s for updates. D.C.M.s can report changes directly to the record keepers who can make the changes in the database immediately.

Using the above process can eliminate the use of "snail mail" to send hardcopy updates/changes to G.S.O., having to allow 3-4 weeks for the updates to take place and another 2-3 weeks after that for welcome packages to be delivered to new G.S.R.s and D.C.M.s.

There are some areas that do not use the FNV database for their area records and for them a process will be put in place to assist them with updates for the 2008-2009 A.A. Directories. More information will be forwarded to those record keepers in the upcoming months. Hard copy updates must be received at G.S.O.'s Records department or postmarked no later than February 15, 2008.

Group information records for the 2008-2009 editions of the confidential US/Canada Directories will be retrieved

from the database on April 15, 2008. Information entered into the FNV database after that date will not be reflected in the upcoming Directories.

■ Holiday Gift Ideas

Simplify the holiday rush by remembering your A.A. friends, sponsors and sponsees with A.A. literature.

One item many may not be aware of is the boxed set of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 4th edition, and *Experience, Strength & Hope* (B-11; \$15), which contains the 56 stories dropped from the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd editions of the Big Book. These stories, which were unavailable for a time, are now together in this volume. The boxed set comes with a 16-page booklet on the history of the writing of the Big Book. *Experience, Strength and Hope*, as a single volume, is \$9.00 (B-20) and is also available in French.

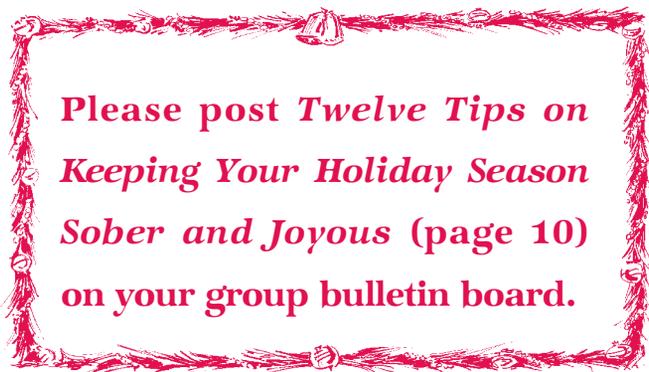
De las tinieblas hacia la luz (Out of the Darkness Into the Light) contains the 41 stories (in Spanish) from the 4th edition of the English *Alcoholics Anonymous*. (SB-21) \$4.60.

From the Grapevine, the facsimile of the co-founders Memorial Issue is a small but meaningful gift (MS-15, \$5.95/\$5.50 each for 5 or more).

Also from the Grapevine is the wall calendar, in English, Spanish and French (MS-08, \$8.50), with photographs and brief quotes selected from Grapevine articles. The quotes reflect the principles of A.A. but do not mention A.A. directly, so the calendar may be displayed anonymously. There is also a trilingual pocket planner from the Grapevine (MS-09, \$4.50).

For gifts that last all year: Subscriptions to *Box 4-5-9* (\$6 a year for 10 copies of each issue) and the A.A. Grapevine (\$20.00) have for years been popular gift ideas. For Spanish-speaking A.A.s there is *La Viña* (\$9.00).

For Grapevine and *La Viña* subscriptions check online at aagrapevine.org, or write to A.A. Grapevine, Grand Central Station, Box 1980, New York, NY 10163-1980. The other items can be ordered through your local intergroup or central office or from G.S.O. Shipping charges may apply.



Please post *Twelve Tips on Keeping Your Holiday Season Sober and Joyous* (page 10) on your group bulletin board.

■ A Trustee Emeritus Salutes the Fellowship He Has Long Served

Looking back across the half century and more he has had ties to A.A., Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee emeritus Michael Alexander says, “A.A. doesn’t stand still any more than humanity does. But even as it reflects changes in society as we know it today, substantively A.A. has stayed the same, adhering to the spirit of its Steps, Traditions and Concepts. Over the years the Fellowship has faced innumerable challenges—from anonymity breaks to an influx of court-mandated newcomers, many addicted to drugs other than alcohol, and more. A.A. is constantly evolving in response to the myriad needs of its members and the struggling alcoholics still out there.” Since his introduction to A.A. in the 1950s, Mike adds, “the membership has grown from barely 200,000 in 70 countries to nearly 2 million in 180 countries.”

Mike served as a Class A trustee of the General Service Board from 1976-1985, then as trustee chair from 1988-1993. He is now retired from his position as a senior partner in the New York law firm of Smith, Steibel, Alexander and Saskor—established by A.A.’s nonalcoholic friend and mentor Bernard B. Smith, who died in 1970, six months before the death of A.A. co-founder Bill W.

“I joined the firm in 1952 as a young attorney out of Harvard,” Mike remembers. “No one among my family or friends was an alcoholic, and nothing I had absorbed in law school prepared me for my first encounter with A.A., but under the tutelage of Bernard Smith I quickly learned to respect it and its noble mission. A fine attorney, Bernard Smith was absorbed in Fellowship affairs and chaired the board of trustees from 1951 to 1956. He was very instrumental in establishing the General Service Conference in 1951, even though some of the trustees had expressed grave doubts about its feasibility.”

As Mike watched Bill and Bern struggle with the Conference Charter that would make the Conference a permanent fixture, he recalls sensing that he was “a witness to history and, perhaps in a small way, a participant in it.” The prodigious efforts of these two men, Mike notes, led to adoption of the Charter and the transfer of functions from the A.A. founders to the Conference in 1955, when the oldtimers turned the Three Legacies of Recovery, Unity and Service over to the Fellowship.

“It was a tremendous development,” says Mike. “The Charter provides a delicate and sensitive balance of interests among all the elements, allowing each to discharge responsibilities without interference from others. It also is a guard against impulsive and imprudent action in A.A. Each time the Charter prevents a dispute, induces tolerance or prompts restraint, it is observing democracy—democracy almost in the purest form.”

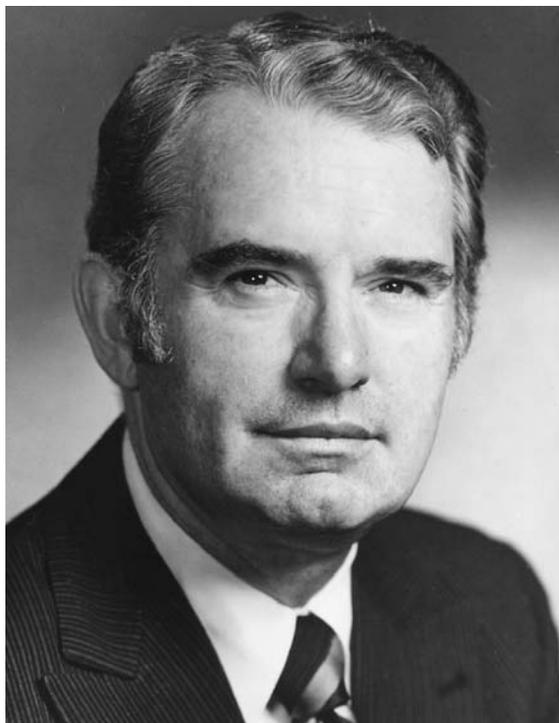
During the next 20 years, spanning the 1950s and ’60s, Mike came to know Bill and his wife, Lois, “and so many others who helped to shape the service structure of A.A.” He is quick to note, however, that “I did not relate to them as alcoholics. In my capacity as a legal adviser, I saw them as solid, sensible, knowledgeable business people.” Mike remembers that “working with Bill was a rewarding experience, not only because of his extraordinary vision but also because his early training in law provided a common ground for understanding. We forget sometimes that Bill completed the requirements for graduation from Brooklyn Law School in the 1920s—he just never got around to picking up his diploma.”

Mike has a special spot in his heart for Lois, who lived until 1988, some 17 years after Bill’s death. “It was my great privilege to be her friend and adviser,” he says. “Like Bill, Lois was a person of great magnitude. In my view, there would have been no A.A. but for her, at least not in the way we know it today.”

In his years as a trustee, Mike says, “there was no single activity other than sleep that engaged so much of my time as A.A. Actually I’ve been around A.A. so much and so long, I tend to forget that for me, a nonalcoholic trustee who seldom drinks alcoholic beverages, it’s okay to drink. Besides, I prefer coffee.” When Mike assumed the responsibilities of trustee chair in spring 1988, three years after rotating out as a trustee, his wife, Claire, was rather surprised, he says. “But then she attended an A.A. Forum with me. She met the people, heard the talks and was deeply

impressed by the good will and devotion to A.A. that prevailed. ‘Now I understand why you’re so committed to A.A.’ she told me.”

Contemplating the Fellowship’s history, Mike finds it “astounding to think of the progress we have made and



how much stability we have today. I think of us as being in a sailboat on a rough sea in the 1940s, when every gust of wind might have tipped us over; and now we're something like a large ocean liner that requires special equipment—the group conscience, or Advisory Actions, of the Conference—to help us change direction or make it to safe harbor. This takes effort and time and consensus, and sometimes we fret and fume because we aren't moving faster. But by the same token, it's hard to topple us. We're very stable."

Today, 14 years after rotating as trustee chair, Mike still goes to open A.A. meetings in Manhattan and on the east end of Long Island, still participates as a nonvoting member in meetings of the board of trustees, and shares his experience, strength and hope with new trustees every summer at the July meeting of the board. "I haven't left A.A.," he says with a smile. "It's a way of life."

In 1993 Mike said "farewell" to the Conference with a grateful heart. "Gratitude draws me into kinship with every man, woman and child who has ever been a member of A.A.," he said. "Each of them is part of the fabric of fellowship that is the essence of A.A. It is said that a butterfly fluttering its wings in Beijing may, by that action, initiate currents that will ultimately affect the weather of New York. So it is that the word or deed of any A.A. member may, if persuasive or appealing, initiate currents that affect the Fellowship. The process for publishing the Big Book in Swahili, for example, started with a comment made at an A.A. Regional Forum in Maryland.

"The reverse is surely true: Without a doubt, A.A. in time shapes the character of those whose lives it touches. I am a different person because of A.A. and, I believe, a better one.... I salute Alcoholics Anonymous for all it does for humanity, and for what it does spiritually for its members and for friends like me."

■ After the Smoke Cleared A Meeting Place Regained

When a thankful, recovering alcoholic and a floundering group get together, a miracle can happen that has life-affirming consequences.

A case in point is the story of Butch G., of Olympia, Washington. Nine years ago he received a DUI, rounding out the number he had received since his early teens to a dozen. Ordered yet again into treatment, he had a counselor who also was a member of A.A.: "She reached inside me and totally dismantled a brick wall that had taken me 40 years to build. And she demanded that I go to A.A." This time, he recalls, "something different happened to me. The hand of A.A. reached out, and I reached back. I asked someone to be my sponsor. He, along with others, helped to take me through the Twelve Steps of recovery."

Some five years later, in 2003, Butch moved to "the top

of a mountain where I live on a beautiful lake in the woods." One night, he says, "I went to the McCleary Group meeting, the closest one around. It was held in the back of a little school, and there were four people sitting around a table, with years of sobriety ranging from 30 years down to two of us at 5. Beatty, the oldtimer in the group, said that 25 years earlier the meeting had been held in a church down the street. There was always a full house, he remembered, with as many as 50 people on hand. But then the church asked the group to leave because of a problem with smoking, and ever since the meeting had been bouncing around town."

Six months after Butch joined the unsettled little group, a letter arrived. "It said," he recounts, "that the school would be under construction, starting in two weeks. My fellow members were discouraged and ready to let go of the group altogether, so I did something I was afraid to do: I told them, 'Don't worry, I will find a new place.'

"Still afraid, I had a conversation with my Higher Power. I asked for help. Then I went back to the little church where the meeting was held in the old days and approached the pastor. I told him about our situation, he told me about the old problem, and we agreed that maybe we could try again on a trial basis." That happened four years ago, Butch relates. "I started opening the meeting, making the coffee and setting up the chairs and tables, and, one by one, others joined in. The McCleary Group was finally home, and so was I."

Then, says Butch, "more people began showing up from all over the county. Once a month or so someone still comes in and says, 'I got sober here some 25 years ago.' One night a fellow came in saying that he was here when the group lost its space in the church, and it broke his heart. He shared that he had all but stopped going to meetings. Well, he started showing up again at the McCleary Group, and we became friends. Gil passed away two years ago, but he'd lived a long life. He was sober, and his heart was at peace."

And Butch? "In the Big Book," he muses, "it says that 'most of us have been unwilling to admit we were real alcoholics' [p. 30]. When I hit my bottom, I was broken in every area. A.A. gently, slowly removed the garbage from my spirit—the hate, the resentment—and then began to heal my heart with real love, real respect and real trust."

■ Arkansas Group Gets a New Lease on A.A. Life

Something of a miracle happened this past summer in Greenbrier, Arkansas, which sits about 40 miles northwest of Little Rock. As so often happens in A.A., it began with one suffering alcoholic reaching out for help.

In late June the pastor of a local Greenbrier church—John Farthing, Ph.D., known as Brother John—received a

call from a parishioner who, with her husband and young children, had recently joined the church. "I'm an alcoholic," she said. "I can't stop drinking, and I'm afraid it will hurt my family and destroy my life." Says Bro. John: "I told her, 'You've come to the right place. We're here for people in distress. We're here for you.'"

Bro. John immediately called the Arkansas Central Service Office for help in locating a nearby A.A. group and was referred to the General Service Office in New York. As he made inquiries, Bro. John had an idea: "Although there is an A.A. group in Conway, about 12 miles away," he e-mailed G.S.O., "there is nothing in this area, so we are interested in offering our facilities as a meeting site for a local A.A. group. Can you help us?"

Responding, G.S.O. staff member Mary Clare L., then the correspondent for the Southwest U.S. region, said, "You actually do have a small A.A. meeting right in town. It has been meeting in the curtained-off area at the back of a local barbecue restaurant. The group has had difficulty growing because it is in a public setting." She added, "I phoned a member of the group and gave her your contact information. She will take it to her meeting tomorrow for a group conscience and then may be calling you."

Says that member, Rhonda J., general service representative of the Greenbrier Group: "Looking back, I think we all were amazed. At the time, the group had outgrown its restaurant quarters—10 or 12 of us were packed in like sardines. Every time we thought we'd found a home, either it turned out to be too expensive or else the offer fell through. I know I prayed about this. Then I decided that if God wanted our group to grow, He would provide a way."

After hearing about the offer from the church, the group directed Rhonda and another member, Kaye H., to meet with Bro. John to consider such factors as rent, time availability, insurance needs and space considerations. One bump in the road: At the restaurant the group was holding open meetings Monday and Wednesday evenings and book-study meetings Saturday mornings. For the church, Bro. John said, Mondays and Saturdays were no problem, but because of conflicting church activities, the Wednesday night meetings would have to be shifted to Thursdays. "At that meeting," recalls Bro. John, "I was touched by the authenticity and seriousness of purpose I've experienced every time I've had occasion to interact with folks from A.A."

Rhonda and Kaye returned to the group to explain the terms of the offer and to take a group conscience; in turn, Bro. John conferred with key leaders of his church. Rhonda reports that "the group engaged in in-depth discussion. A few members expressed some reluctance about moving to a church, fearing there might be 'religious overtones.' But in the end their fears were put to rest. In mid-August the group voted to accept the church's offer, effective September 1st."

And the alcoholic who was the catalyst for this serendipitous happening? Today a member of the Greenbrier Group, she is sponsored by Rhonda, who

reports, "She is doing wonderfully and is a blessing to me."

Like Rhonda, Bro. John is "delighted" with the new arrangement. "I am happy to have the Greenbrier Group meet in our church," he says. "We are ready to support these good people in every way possible."

■ 2008 Regional and Local Forums

Regional Forums strengthen the Fellowship's Three Legacies of Recovery, Unity and Service by providing an opportunity for A.A. group and area representatives, as well as any interested individual A.A.s in a particular region, to share experience, strength and hope with representatives of the General Service Board and G.S.O. and Grapevine staff members.

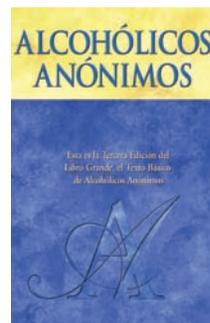
Local Forums (like the Special Forums they are replacing) are designed for remote, sparsely populated or urban areas and are for A.A. members who do not have access to Regional Forums. G.S.O. will not coordinate or fund these weekend long events, but is available to share experience in planning them.

These weekend sharing sessions enhance and widen communication, and help spark new ideas in better carrying the message through service work.

Mailings regarding each Regional Forum will be sent to G.S.R.s, area committee members, delegates, and central offices and intergroups approximately four months ahead of time. On-line registration is also available. In 2008 Regional Forums are planned as follows:

- *Western Canada*—February 22-24: Ramada Plaza & Convention Center, Abbotsford, British Columbia
- *Eastern Canada*—June 20-22: Howard Johnson Hotel, Truro, Nova Scotia
- *Pacific*—August 29-31: Doubletree Hotel—Spokane City Center, Spokane, Washington
- *Southeast*—November 21-23: Crowne Plaza Knoxville, Knoxville, Tennessee

■ Coming Early Next Year



Alcohólicos Anónimos, the Spanish Big Book, 3rd edition will be available in January 2008. It will be in four formats: hard cover, softcover, portable and large print. More details and an order form will be in *Box 4-5-9*, Feb./Mar., 2008.

■ You Can Teach an Old Dog New Tricks

Part of the pleasure of Twelfth Stepping is understanding that, like a stone skimmed into a pond, it can ripple out buoyantly in the most surprising ways. This is what happened to Cookie S., a longtime member of the Potpourri Group in Manhattan.

“Some years ago,” Cookie relates, “a young fellow named Tyrone would appear every so often at our meetings. He’d come a few times and sit there listening to the speakers, with a hand on the ruff of his seeing-eye dog, a golden retriever I think he called BeeGee. Then without a word he’d vanish, only to return a few weeks later and do the same thing—in-out, in-out, in-out.”

The members of the group became concerned. Each time Tyrone showed up, Cookie says, “several of us would ask, ‘What can we do for you?’ ‘Can we help you?’ ” Finally, Tyrone opened up. “Every day around 5 o’clock,” he explained, “BeeGee was used to our getting off the bus near here and heading for my favorite bar. So when I started coming to this A.A. meeting, he did what he’d been doing right along—he turned to the bar instead. Once there I couldn’t seem to help it. I got caught up in the talk and did the walk, meaning, I’d hoist a few and be off to the races again.”

Says Cookie: “Some 22 years ago when I started coming to A.A., I played the blame game, too, and dreamed up all sorts of excuses to avoid facing the First Step—that I was ‘powerless over alcohol’ and my life ‘had become unmanageable.’ So Tyrone’s story didn’t seem at all strange or unusual to me. But I was determined to ‘go to any lengths’ to help this newcomer, just as people in the Fellowship had helped me. From them I learned never to argue with alcoholics. Just help them find a solution, one day at a time.”

After conferring, Cookie and other members of the Potpourri Group arranged to meet Tyrone and BeeGee at the bus stop and accompany them to the meeting place. After a few such turns of this improbable escort service, BeeGee—and more importantly, his master—got the message and soon were coming regularly on their own.

“Our meeting room was air-conditioned, and we had coffee and lots of cookies,” recalls Cookie. “So BeeGee was very happy. We always held a special seat open for Tyrone. That way he and BeeGee knew just where to go.” About a year after Tyrone sobered up, she adds, “he would come to Intergroup and answer the phones. I’d sit beside him and look up appropriate meetings for him to recommend to the callers. It helped him and, for sure, it did wonders for me.”

Today, some 17 years later, Cookie reports, “I understand that Tyrone plays the organ, or piano, for a church in Harlem. He has become a solid member of the community. As for me, being a part of his early recovery was a heartwarming adventure in living sober.”

And BeeGee? Last we heard, he was guiding some drunk to that big A.A. meeting in the sky. The one where they hand out cookies.

■ Voices of A.A. History



The listening post recently installed in the reception area of the General Service Office in New York offers visitors six short talks from A.A.’s history. There are digital audio clips of Bill W., Dr. Bob, and Ebby T. from the 1940s, ‘50s, and ‘60s. They range in length from 90 seconds to just under five minutes. More recordings will be added over time, and they will be rotated periodically.

P.I./C.P.C.

■ Committees Share Ways to Reach Alcoholics and the Professionals Who Help Them

Service committees across the U.S. and Canada share their successes (and failures too) with each other through the General Service Office. Their collective experience has proved to be good for A.A. unity and for the alcoholics who need our help. Following are reports from some area committees on Public Information and Cooperation With the Professional Community, which in some areas are merged:

Connecticut. From Danbury Greg R., immediate past cochair of the District 9 C.P.C. committee reports that members, working with health-care professionals at a local hospital, have developed a way for A.A.s to visit alcoholic patients as official volunteers. The way it works: Individual A.A. members go through an orientation process to officially become hospital volunteers—one that grounds them, among other things, in the privacy rules of the hospital.

Before being visited by an A.A. member, a patient is asked to sign a consent form. The consenting patient’s health-care representative then contacts a hospital liaison responsible for coordinating A.A. activities. Within a day

or two an assigned A.A. volunteer, armed with a copy of the Big Book and a local meeting schedule, makes an initial Twelfth Step call.

“Over the past three years, and thanks to the cooperation of professionals at the hospital, we have experienced great success with this system,” Greg reports. “Also, what started primarily as a C.P.C. service has evolved into a combined commitment of all our service committees—including P.I., Special Needs, and Corrections & Treatment. The program has expanded to utilize volunteers in the inpatient psychiatry unit, as well as establishing a weekly A.A. meeting for patients and staff alike. And as the program continues to evolve and grow, the doctors and hospital liaisons will be working on a way to use A.A. volunteers in the emergency room.

“To me, this success proves that the old-fashioned hospital Twelfth Step call can exist in today’s complex health-care system. It has the potential to exist all over simply because A.A. members everywhere are committed to carrying the message to the still-suffering alcoholics they have yet to meet.”

New York. Sally Ann C., immediate past Western New York P.I. chair, now Area secretary, reports that for last summer’s two-week-long annual Erie County Fair, held on the sprawling Hamburg Fairgrounds just south of Buffalo, “we had 44 A.A. volunteers from groups in surrounding areas, with two at a time working three four-hour shifts a day.” Flying a blue-and-white A.A. banner, the booth carried A.A. literature, including the pamphlets “Is A.A. for You?” and “Young People and A.A.,” meeting lists, and more.

Sally Ann, who has volunteered at the fair for three years running, says that reactions to the booth were mixed: “Some just glanced at the banner and the A.A.s sitting there, others gave a sidewise glance and hurried by; and many of those who stopped to chat or ask for literature almost invariably said it was for a cousin or brother or friend—rarely, if ever, for themselves. What’s exciting is that we never know if what we offer will touch them, or plant the seed that tells them millions of alcoholics have found sober, happy lives in A.A., and so can they.”

Florida. In the Sarasota area, the familiar words “IS ALCOHOL A PROBLEM? CALL ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS TO GET INFORMATION OR A MEETING SCHEDULE . . .,” followed by the local intergroup phone number, are appearing on four billboards. Says David S., chairman of Sarasota’s combined P.I./C.P.C. committee (District 4, Area 15): “The idea germinated a little over a year ago, after a fellow member saw a message about A.A. on a billboard in Louisiana. First we consulted G.S.O.’s Public Information Workbook, which says that ‘cards and signs [about A.A.] have been placed in telephone offices, police stations, sheriffs’ offices, hospitals. . . . Signs may be in the form of car cards (in buses or subway trains) or of road signs.’ Upon further investigation, we found that over the years billboards have been used to carry the A.A. message in some places in the U.S. and Canada.”

With interest mounting, Dave says, we found that in A.A. we had individuals with the expertise to get the job done. A proposal to the entity that owned the billboards in our area was drafted—and six months later a contract between A.A. and the sign company was sealed. The cost: \$1,600 in total for four billboards, for one year’s time; we were able to pay for them with District funds. The billboards went up just after July 4th, and our committee is happy that we’ve unearthed a reliable tool to carry the message.”

Michigan. Bill D., past cochair of the Detroit area P.I. committee in Southeast Michigan, is presently the editor of the online *PI-CPC News Exchange*, which he explains in each issue “is for the exclusive use of A.A. members [in the U.S./Canada] who wish to exchange information about P.I. and C.P.C. work.” Initially published in 2002 as the *CPC News Exchange*, this labor of love has found homes so far in Alaska, Iowa and now Michigan. First it was edited by Judy R., of the Alaska area C.P.C. committee, who without a road map took on the task of gathering, editing and distributing the newsletter. Commented Judy in the June 2003 issue, just before turning her service job over to Iowa C.P.C. chair Sarah H.: “We don’t do deadlines here. We publish when we have six pages of articles.”

Sarah took over, publishing the newsletter on a quarterly basis for two years, and, after a hiatus, Bill succeeded her about a year ago. “Most of all it was fun, and I stayed sober,” Sarah recalls. Since then she has compiled a list of nearly a hundred “Suggested Project Ideas,” compiled from issues of the *News Exchange*, which are available to any and all service committees for the asking.

Bill recently contacted G.S.O. to say that he has had “trouble getting through to all the people on my e-mail list, possibly because of a lot of spam blocking.” He notes that his personal e-mail address “has to be recognized and accepted by P.I. and C.P.C. committee recipients in order for them to receive the *News Exchange* (picochair@aa-semi.org).” At present Bill is “looking for someone to take over the newsletter in the spirit of rotation. If any of you are looking for a unique and wonderful way to expand your service horizons, this would be perfect for you.”

Corrections

■ A.A. Scales the Highest Walls— ‘All for the Price of a Stamp’

“I first got involved in the Corrections Correspondence Service [CCS] when I resided in a ‘gated community’ on the West Coast. An A.A. member helped me feel a part of A.A. on the outside, even though I was incarcerated. Then, when I was paroled, I became a member on the outside

writing in. The men I correspond with enrich my sobriety, encourage me and help me stay sober one day at a time. All for the price of a stamp.”

Sharing his experience as both an inside and outside CCS correspondent, Tony W. suggests that “many A.A. members are unaware of this vital service” at the General Service Office through which outside A.A.s correspond with fellow members in jails and prisons. “Or else,” he says, “some A.A.s feel they can’t relate to a prisoner because they never went to prison. Well, our particular circumstances may have been different, but our feelings were the same.” In order to protect their anonymity, he notes, “some CCS correspondents use their group’s, or intergroup’s, post office box instead of their home address. And usually you are corresponding with someone who is imprisoned far away.”

Tony is one of a growing list of A.A.s who have volunteered for the CCS program. Last year they corresponded with 2,059 members (male, 1,534; female, 525) in jails and prisons across the U.S. and Canada. Additionally, G.S.O. receives between 100 to 150 letters a month from inmates asking to participate in the program. The Corrections Desk tries to fill these requests as quickly as possible, mainly through the A.A. network of area, district and local C.F. committees, but still there is a waiting list, especially for male inmates.

Says volunteer CCS correspondent David W.: “Over the years I have had the privilege of working with about the same ratio of incarcerated men as I do with men on the outside, and I have found that the results on both sides of the fence are about equal. Many come and, unfortunately, fewer stay, but in the end those who trudge the road to page 164 of the Big Book and finish their Step work are, without exception, set free in spirit. In the end, I feel, that is all that matters. The language of the heart knows no boundaries.”

David notes that through CCS “I’ve not only had the honor of working with these men—discussing our Big Book, hearing their Fourth Steps and watching them get sober—but also of seeing more than a few walk out of those gates never to return, becoming sober, happy and free members of society. I do not believe one can put a price on that. It recalls to mind what I once heard a woman at a meeting say: ‘Every time I put a quarter into the meter of sobriety, I get back ten dollars.’ Truer words have never been said.”

Correspondent Tim L. admits that at first he was reluctant to become a CCS correspondent because “the only time I was ever in a courtroom was for my divorce.” Then, he says, “I realized that these alcoholic inmates have turned to A.A. and G.S.O. to provide them with someone they can trust and communicate with who will not judge them and have only their best interest at heart.”

One new CCS correspondent reported that he had sent letters to two alcoholic inmates but never heard back; he was concerned that he might have said the wrong thing. Writing back, Gayle S. R., who currently has the Corrections assignment, pointed out that “some of the inmates who write to this office have literacy problems; and a number of them may be overwhelmed at the prospect of actually writing to an outsider once they get that first letter.” However, she assured him, “I don’t think there is anything you could say from the heart that could possibly be wrong. Most outside correspondents who have the best luck are those who keep trying and don’t take the results personally. It’s not that much different from sharing with any newcomer at a meeting—some are ready for the message and some are not.”

Gayle further explained that “there are times when inmates receive their mail late or not at all: Some, for instance, are moved around within a facility without warning, and the facility may not forward the mail to



THE ALAMO, established in 1718, is located in the heart of downtown San Antonio, Texas. Make this one of your stops when attending A.A.’s International Convention, celebrating 75 years of A.A., July 1-4, 2010.

them, even within that same complex. In these cases, you may at least get your letter back with an 'unable to forward' sticker on it. Other facilities may withhold mail as a form of discipline, so it may be delayed in reaching the inmate." Bearing out these words, outside correspondent Bill S. writes, "One inmate who never wrote for at least a year, finally did. He said I had worn him down. I was the only person writing, besides his mother. Over time he really flowered and worked a good A.A. program."

Paul T. notes that "most of the inmates I've contacted had to write to me maybe a dozen times before they became a success story." He says that "it's by inmates asking me questions that I learn the most about A.A. and what I need to do to have a healthy sobriety for myself. I definitely have far better sobriety because I took the time to write to someone I did not know anything about, other than that he had a drinking problem."

Sometimes the tables are turned, and an inmate Twelfth Steps his outside correspondent in the most unexpected and heartwarming way. This is what happened to Kris W.: "The guy I am writing to now and I have developed a pretty honest, caring relationship over the years. I have written him about such things as my mom's dementia and how hard it is to care for her, and he writes about real life in a prison, no holds barred."

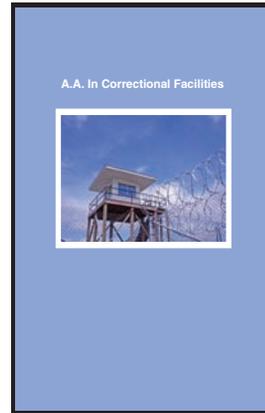
Last May, Kris shares, "I was not feeling very loving toward my mom and felt bad that I wasn't 'properly' loving her. So, out of the blue, just before Mother's Day, comes a card addressed to 'Kris's mom' at my address. It was from Tony, and he said in that card all the loving things I just couldn't say right then to my mom, and with the flowers I bought, that card made her Mother's Day. She especially liked it because, she said, she had never gotten any mail from someone in prison before!

"So it's true that the solution is simple, the solution is spiritual, and it has nothing to do with the problem. By writing to an inmate, my 'mom problem' was solved. So, if you're like me and resist taking your own inventory, write to the CCS desk and ask to be put in touch with an inmate

who wants to write to a sober A.A. member. No telling what can happen!"

NOTE: G.S.O. generally has a waiting list of male A.A. members in prison who need outside A.A.s to write to them. For the moment, there are enough female volunteers. For further information contact the Corrections desk at G.S.O. or e-mail (corrections@aa.org).

■ A.A. Video for Correctional Facilities Professionals



A.A. has been a presence in the prison system for decades and is credited with helping inmates get sober and remain sober once they are released. According to many reports, a huge portion of the country's prison population can trace its trouble with the law to the abuse of alcohol and drugs. To explain to prison authorities how A.A. can be a resource, a new DVD has been produced by A.A.'s General

Service Office. Entitled "A.A. in Correctional Facilities," it features several professionals in the corrections field (non-A.A. members) discussing their personal experience and the value of A.A. meetings being made available in correctional facilities and sharing their experience with Alcoholics Anonymous. The DVD is designed for use in training programs for corrections personnel at all levels. It can also be of use to probation officers, lawyers, judges, and others interested in how A.A. can help in the prison system. The DVD is available from G.S.O. for \$8 (DV-02).

box
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Twelve Tips on Keeping Your Holiday Season Sober and Joyous

Holiday parties without liquid spirits may still seem a dreary prospect to new A.A.s. But many of us have enjoyed the happiest holidays of our lives sober—an idea we would never have dreamed of, wanted, or believed possible when drinking. Here are some tips for having an all-round ball without a drop of alcohol.



1 Line up extra A.A. activities for the holiday season. Arrange to take newcomers to meetings, answer the phones at a clubhouse or central office, speak, help with dishes, or visit the alcoholic ward at a hospital.



2 Be host to A.A. friends, especially newcomers. If you don't have a place where you can throw a formal party, take one person to a diner and spring for the coffee.



3 Keep your A.A. telephone list with you all the time. If a drinking urge or panic comes—postpone everything else until you've called an A.A.



4 Find out about the special holiday parties, meetings, or other celebrations

given by groups in your area, and go. If you're timid, take someone newer than you are.



5 Skip any drinking occasion you are nervous about. Remember how clever you were at excuses when drinking? Now put the talent to good use. No office party is as important as saving your life.



6 If you have to go to a drinking party and can't take an A.A. with you, keep some candy handy.



7 Don't think you have to stay late. Plan in advance an "important date" you have to keep.



8 Worship in your own way.



9 Don't sit around brooding. Catch up on those books, museums, walks, and letters.



10 Don't start now getting worked up about all those holiday temptations. Remember—"one day at a time."



11 Enjoy the true beauty of holiday love and joy. Maybe you cannot give material gifts—but this year, you can give love.



12 "Having had a . . ." No need to spell out the Twelfth Step here, since you already know it.

Calendar of Events

Events listed here are presented solely as a service to readers, not as an endorsement by the General Service Office. For any additional information, please use the addresses provided.

January 2008

- 4-6—*St. Jerome, Quebec, Canada.* 32nd St-Jerome Closed Conf. Write: Ch., 2960 Blvd. St. Joseph, Apt #5, Lachine, QC H8S 2P4
- 11-13—*Dodge City, Kansas.* 38th Southwest Conf. Write: Ch., 835 Wichita Dr., Ulysses, KS 67880
- 17-20—*Raleigh, North Carolina.* 41st Tar Heel Mid-Winter Conf. Write: Ch., Box 18412, Raleigh, NC 27619; nconference@nc.rr.com
- 18-20—*Cocoa Beach, Florida.* Big Book Workshop Weekend. Write: Ch., 3822 Oyster Ct. Orlando, FL 32812-7652
- 18-20—*Boise, Idaho.* WACYPAA XI. Write: Ch., Box 4231, Boise, ID 83716; www.wacypaa11.org
- 18-20—*Mahnomen, Minnesota.* Wild Rice Round-up. Write: Ch., Box 203, Mahnomen, MN 56557
- 18-20—*College Station, Texas.* 2008 SETA Conv. Write: Ch., Box 3381, Bryan, TX 77805
- 25-27—*Redding, California.* Shasta Winterfest Conf. Write: Ch., Box 494927, Redding, CA 96049-4927; shastawinterfest08@yahoo.com
- 25-27—*Lafayette, Louisiana.* A Journey Through the Big Book. Write: Ch., 115 West Bayou Shore, Lafayette, LA 70508
- 25-27—*Columbus, Ohio.* 4th New Years of Acceptance Conf. Write: Ch., Box 588, Brice, OH 43109; www.newyearofacceptance.com
- 25-27—*Hilton Head Island, South Carolina.* Hilton Head Mid-winter Conf. Write: Ch., Box 6256, Hilton Head, SC 29938; www.hiltonheadmidwinterconference.com
- 25-27—*Puerto Vallarta, Jalisco, Mexico.* 6th Sobriety Under The Sun English Conf. Info: www.aapvconvention.com
- 31-3—*Cocoa Beach, Florida.* Spacecoast Round-up. Write: Ch., 720 E. New Haven, #3, Melbourne, FL 32901

February

- 1-3—*Burbank, California.* 33rd San Fernando Valley Conv. Write: Ch., Box 573413, Tarzana, CA 91357-3413; www.sfvaaconvention.org
- 1-3—*San Angelo, Texas.* XXIV Reunión Zona Norte de Texas. Inf. Com. Org. Box 5704, San Angelo, TX 76903
- 1-3—*Ostend, Belgium.* 2008 North Sea Conv. Write: Ch., Avenue des Tilleuls 13/4, B-4802 Verviers, Belgium; northseaconvention@yahoo.com
- 8-10—*Bowling Green, Kentucky.* 57th Kentucky State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 497, Bowling Green, KY 42102-0497; kyhost08@yahoo.com
- 8-10—*Syracuse, New York.* 21st Salt City Mid-Winter Round-up. Write: Ch., Box 367, Syracuse, NY 13209; scmwrw@yahoo.com
- 9-10—*Kovalam - Beach, Trivandrum, Kerala, India.* Third International Conv. Write: Ch., TC No 50/733, Karamana P.O., Kalady, Trivandrum-696 002, Kerala, India.
- 14-15—*Portland, Oregon.* 44th International Women's Conf. Write: Ch., Box 767, Oregon City, OR 97045; www.intlwomensconf.org
- 15-17—*North Little Rock, Arkansas.* 28th Winter Holiday Conv. Write: Ch., Box 26135, Little Rock, AR 72221; winterholiday08@swbell.net
- 15-17—*Virginia Beach, Virginia.* 32nd Oceanfront Conf. Write: Ch., Box 66173, Virginia Beach, VA 23466-6173
- 21-24—*Pattaya, Thailand.* 13th Thailand Round-up. Write: Ch., Box 1551, Nana Post Office, Bangkok, Thailand 10112; www.aathailand.org
- 22-23—*Sikeston, Missouri.* 27th Five Corners Conv. Write: Ch., Box 158, Sikeston, MO 63801

- 22-23—*Kalispell, Montana.* Dist. 91 Into Action Weekend. Write: Ch., Box 1935, Whitefish, MT 59937
- 22-24—*Abbotsford, British Columbia.* Western Canada Regional Forum. Write: Forum Coord., Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163; Regionalforums@aa.org
- 29-2—*Ormond Beach, Florida.* 21st Jekyll Island Unity Weekend. Write: Ch., 34 Glen Falls Dr., Ormond Beach, FL 32174; www.jekyllislandaa.com
- 29-2—*Fargo, North Dakota.* 2008 West Central Regional Service Conf. Write: Ch., Box 2444, Fargo, ND 58108-2444; www.aanorthdakota.org

March

- 7-9—*Lisle, Illinois.* 2008 NIA Spring Conf. Write: Ch., Box 41, Naperville, IL 60566-0041; www.aa-nia-dist40.org
- 14-16—*Evansville, Indiana.* 55th Indiana State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 546, Indianapolis, IN 46206
- 14-16—*Toronto, Ontario, Canada.* Ontario Regional Conf. Write: Ch., 71 Old Kingston Rd., Suite 191, Ajax, ON L1T 3A6; www.aatoronto.org
- 28-30—*Newport, Rhode Island.* 2008 Rhode Island Conv. Write: Ch., Box 9342, Providence, RI 02813; conventionresistrar@rhodeisland-aa.org
- 28-30—*Williamsburg, Virginia.* Serenity Weekend. Write: Ch., Box 832, Midlothian, VA 23113

Planning a Future Event?

To be included in the Box 4-5-9 Calendar, information must be received at G.S.O. three months prior to the event. We list events of two or more days.

For your convenience and ours—please type or print the information to be listed on the Bulletin Board page, and mail to us:

Date of event: from _____ to _____, 20 _____

Name of event: _____

Place (city, state or prov.): _____

For information, write: (exact mailing address) _____

Contact phone # (for office use only): _____

Cut along dotted line, and post this page on your group's bulletin board

