

# BOX 4|5|9

News and Notes From the General Service Office of A.A.®

VOL. 36, NO. 6 / HOLIDAY ISSUE 1990

Dear A.A. Friends,

The Holiday Season gives us yet another opportunity to celebrate, reflect and renew the many blessings of sobriety and the Fellowship.

The traditional practice of exchanging gifts at this time of year is really what A.A.s do on a daily basis. And all we have ever been asked to do for all the blessings we have received is to carry this same message of hope and miraculous recovery on to another alcoholic.

All of us at the General Service Office give thanks for each of you and for the gift of sharing together throughout the year. Wishing all continuous sobriety and serenity in 1991,

John Janie Sarah  
Helen Lois Bob  
Eileen Susan Pat  
Gund M. Vicente Valerie Richard

With A.A. love,

## A.A. Loners Keep in Touch

Letters of gratitude for their sobriety come to the General Service Office from members in all corners of the world. Many of them are Loners who, like Kevin L. of Papua New Guinea, have no A.A. groups nearby. They stay sober mainly by corresponding with each other.

"Just before Christmas," Kevin writes, "I came into Mt. Hagen with my team of national carpenters from the 'bush,' where we are building schools. Despite a postal strike, the mail had come through—I was de-

lighted to find letters and greeting cards from other Loners and friends in A.A., along with the latest issue of *Box 4-5-9*.

"As I opened my copy, it struck me once again how deeply the people in this program really care about me and my sobriety. The realization filled me with a deep sense of gratitude that made my holiday season one of the happiest ever.

"I would like to return this A.A. love to all members in the Fellowship, wherever you may be—and especially to the friends who have continuously given me their support. I care, I really care about you and your sobriety. I am grateful to be one of you, and I thank you."

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## Reflections on Seattle 1990

In the aftermath of the Fellowship's 55th International Convention in Seattle last July, which drew 48 thousand A.A.s and Al-Anons, many members have shared their personal recollections of the event with the General Service Office. Some underscore the warmth and kinship in freedom from suffering they experienced; others describe their sense of spiritual well-being; all speak of experiencing an extraordinary rush of gratitude.

"For me," writes Jim A., a general service representative from Dana Point, California, "the Convention was a spike to my spiritual foundation. It all began humorously enough on the train enroute to Seattle, which was overflowing with happy, talkative A.A.s. I overheard a hostess explain to a drunken, somewhat befuddled sailor, 'Yes, *they're* everywhere. . . .' On that first, sunny day, as I wandered through the grass around the fountain in Seattle Center, I was reminded of the 'Peace and Love' festivals of the late 1960s and early '70s. Laughter, singing and sharing filled the air. Only, in the old days, the peace and love ran out with the booze.

"Even reality looked and smelled and tasted better than usual. While giving away stickers as mementos that I'd brought from home—to overseas visitors, A.A.s in wheelchairs, happy bikers, Loners and so many more—I experienced an enormous sense of release. It was not about *doing* anything, but about being a part of something much greater than myself."

For John N., of Cheshire, Connecticut, "carrying the message to the citizens of Seattle" held special meaning. "I talked to many people," he recalls, "including a woman who felt responsible for her husband's drinking, two men who wondered if A.A. would 'accept' them even though they were gay, and the bus driver who late one night admitted he drank to excess.

"I wonder just how many Seattlites were reached by our presence. Although we were anonymous in the true sense of Tradition Eleven, I felt for the first time that I did not have to hide my alcoholism and membership in A.A. By wearing my blue-and-white registration badge, I declared proudly that I was sober and my life was manageable."

John, a former district committee chairperson, adds that while he has been active in service, "it was Seattle and the Convention that awakened me to the need for one-to-one Twelfth-Stepping. I have resolved to make myself more available to the needs of my friends, fellow workers and the community than I have in the past. Thank you, A.A. for giving me a little more wisdom."

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## In Need of Gift Ideas?

A nice way to remember your home group this Holiday Season is with a gift subscription to *Box 4-5-9*. A bulk subscription (10 copies each of 6 issues) is a gift that will last all year. An order coupon is on page 6.

The response to the new *Daily Reflections* book includes many orders from A.A. members who plan to give our latest book to sponsees, sponsors and other A.A. friends. It is perfect for the holiday, A.A. anniversaries and other special occasions.

Other members find that *Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers* and "Pass It On," biographies of our co-founders, are books that are not in every A.A.'s library and would be most welcome. The same is true of *The Language of the Heart*, a book of Bill W.'s writings, published by the A.A. Grapevine. And, of course, for years, A.A. members have been solving gift-giving problems by sending friends a Grapevine subscription.

A.A. books may be ordered through the catalog and order form enclosed with this issue, or through your local intergroup or central office. Grapevine books and gift items are available by contacting the A.A. Grapevine: Box 1980, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163-1980.

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## New Literature Prices—January 1, 1991

The enclosed Literature Catalog reflects the new prices—effective January 1, 1991—that were approved by the A.A.W.S. Board at its August meeting. There will be increases on the prices of all books and booklets. Pamphlets, miscellaneous items, Spanish and foreign-language literature will remain at the 1990 level. However, the 20 percent sales discount will be eliminated.

Quantity discounts for bulk shipments will remain at 6, 12, 18 percent, depending on quantities ordered. Handling charges for charge orders will be a flat 6 percent of the total order.

The reasons for these increases is, of course, based on economic conditions: U.S. Postal System and United Parcel are planning substantial increases in 1991, and manufacturing and paper prices are ever increasing.

## A.A.s Everywhere Share Holiday Joy in Sobriety —The 'Best Gift of All'

For many A.A.s, especially those closest in time to their last drink, "any holiday can be trying," points out the article in the December 1947 issue of the A.A. Grapevine. "The Yuletide, with its extended period of fun and frolic, starting before Christmas and carrying on through New Year's, can be the hardest."

Signed simply, "T.D.Y.," the article notes that "perhaps the most dangerous moment comes at the instant when a good friend is gently trying to persuade us, 'Just one won't hurt you.' He's proud we joined A.A. and stopped drinking . . . but he doesn't quite understand why 'just one' during this season of celebration will hurt us."

"The Yuletide poses a choice—we can take the short view or the long one, the dim view or the bright one. We can be worried and miserable, or relaxed and happy. Or to put it bluntly, we can get drunk or we can stay sober."

Every day of the holiday season is still only 24-hours long, the writer reminds us. "Eight of those hours can be disposed of easily by taking the doctor's advice about sleeping. So that leaves only 16 hours to worry about at a time, and no one who knows anything about horse trading would trade 16 hours for a lifetime of sobriety. Furthermore, a good share of those 16 hours can be filled with A.A. friends and A.A. talk and A.A. thoughts."

"But time is not the only consideration. Santa Claus, it has often been said, comes only once a year for most people. Must we not admit that he has been coming every day for however many days we have been sober, after all those years of being drunk, physically or mentally? What better gift could one give an alcoholic than sobriety?"

Judging from the bright-colored cards that yearly flood the General Service Office, thousands of members everywhere would agree with the writer that the holidays bring us "a warm reminder of all the good we have received and now can pass on to others, and that where we once had little to give, we now have much."

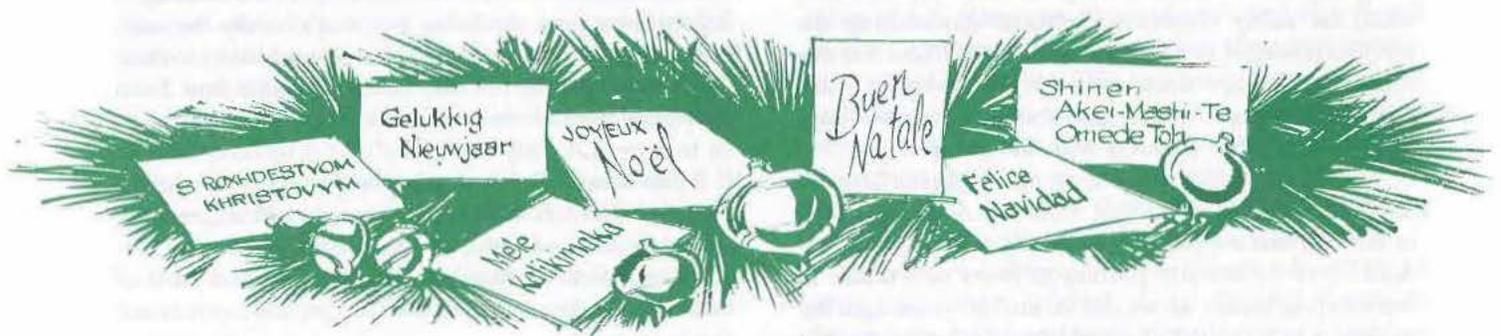
Small, large, elaborate and home-made plain, and depicting everything from glowing Chanukah candles to haloed madonnas, snow-dusted green wreaths and hot-pink and orange tropical flowers, the greetings arrive from many lands, in many tongues. As in the past, they hail from as near as Canada and the Carolinas; from as far as Sweden, South Africa, India, Cambodia, Latin America and the Philippines.

"May God's loving grace wrap around all of you," writes a member in Massachusetts. "If only all the hands that reach could touch," says a Wichita, Kansas A.A., while from Rome, Italy, arrive wishes for a *Buen Natale*; and from Osaka, Japan, New Year's greetings: "*Shinen Akei-Mashi-Te Omede-Toh*." The Illinois Tribes update their warming message of the past—"May Christmas bring Friends to your Fireside, Peace to your Pathway, and Good Health throughout the New Year." And the staff of Uruguay's General Service Office extends best wishes for many happy 24 hours' recovery in A.A. ("*. . . muy felices 24 horas mientras avanza vuestra recuperacion*").

What makes this holiday so special is that, for the first time, fledgling groups in Bulgaria, Cuba, Romania and the Soviet Union are closing the A.A. circle of good will, gratitude and love that crosses Eastern Europe and spans the world.

"*S Roxhedstvom Khristovym*," reads the simple card from a newcomer in Moscow. From Bucharest, written in English, comes a "heartfelt thank you for extending the hand of A.A. to suffering alcoholics everywhere." And, adds a bilingual member in Havana, Cuba, "*Felices Pascuas—Happy Holidays*," and thank you for my sobriety, the best gift of all!"

In holiday cards sent to G.S.O., many members observe the spirit of the Anonymity Tradition by signing only their first names and last initials. But one American A.A., taking no chances, writes, "Thanks for today—Love, Me." Which shows how grateful and anonymous an A.A. can be.



## Heightened Group Conscience To Mark 'Age of Awareness,' Trustee Chair Predicts

"A.A. in the 1990s is entering an exciting Age of Awareness. Everywhere, especially in Eastern European countries, barriers are tumbling down and alcoholics all over the world are learning about Alcoholics Anonymous. We are on the threshold of worldwide service that was but a dream in the '80s, and how well we rise to this challenge is up to each and every one of us."

So says Michael Alexander, Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee chairman of the General Service Board. "In keeping with our primary purpose," he told the 1990 General Service Conference, "we should be in a position to assist all alcoholics who may need our help, wherever they may be. A.A. has been thrust into world prominence by events over which it has no control and, because of these events, has been presented with responsibilities it cannot ignore."

Here Mike points out: "In order to fulfill our expanding service role abroad, we must lead from a position of unity and support at home. From each individual member on through our groups, intergroups, districts, area assemblies and the General Service Conference, our Fellowship is only as strong as its weakest link." Accordingly, he suggests, "Let us take inventory of our weaknesses and strengths in some vital areas," as follows:

*Self-support*—"It is essential that our established groups become fiscally sound if we are to provide support for those that are struggling and yet to come. Without our A.A. groups and their support of services worldwide, there would be no Fellowship, no message to carry to suffering alcoholics. Yet group contributions have not kept up with the increasing costs of these services. In 1989, expenses climbed 15 percent while contributions held even, causing a shortfall of approximately \$750,000. The problem stems, in part, from the fact that approximately 45 percent of the 48,000 registered groups in the United States and Canada do not support A.A.'s essential services.

"The trustees, together with their Finance and Budgetary Committee, have pared any expense that could be safely eliminated without diminishing the services rendered by the General Service Office. But this routine procedure does not solve the problem. Like everything else in A.A., responsibility for our self-support Tradition lies squarely with the groups.

"Let us ask ourselves, 'Are we observing our Seventh Tradition, which states that "Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions"?' If we are still putting 50 cents or a dollar in the meeting basket as we did 20 and 30 years ago, the answer is NO. The dollar simply doesn't buy today what

it did then. Since 1960, for example, the price of a coin box call has jumped from 10 cents to 25 cents; a regulation U.S. postage stamp has gone from 4 cents to 25 cents; a 10-cent cup of coffee now runs 75 cents; and the minimum wage has nearly quadrupled from \$1 to \$3.85 (soon to be \$4.25).

"Recently I attended an open meeting in an affluent neighborhood. Some people arrived by taxi; and most were smartly dressed. Yet when the basket was passed, these same people tossed in a single dollar bill or a few coins. Some may have done so out of fear of appearing ostentatious by contributing more; others were merely following habit; and a few perhaps didn't have the means. But let's face it, the dollar today is not the dollar we knew 30 years ago.

"It stands to reason, of course, that an appeal for support from all groups is effective only if each individual group is financially sound *through the contributions of its members*. No group can give financial support to its area, district, local intergroup (central office) and to G.S.O. if it doesn't have the means to do so. Yet these services are vital, and it's up to A.A. members to see that their groups are fiscally sound."

*Newcomers*—"How can we help more of them to come and stay? According to A.A.'s 1989 triennial survey of its membership, about one-third of the people who come to the Fellowship leave us within a few months. Additionally, more newcomers are entering through halfway houses, treatment centers or the courts, and fewer as the direct result of A.A. contacts. Such trends could be caused by a number of factors, including insufficient Twelfth-Step contact and followup, sponsorship, and one-to-one interaction at meetings and in between.

"What should we do—assign sponsors wherever possible, hold more special meetings and orientation programs? Only imagination limits the possibilities. The first step, however, is to recognize that the condition exists and to make the effort to change it. Our Tradition of 'attraction, not promotion' in no way contradicts our credo: 'When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there. And for that: I am responsible.'

"A significant area of confusion concerns the influx of newcomers who are addicted to substances in addition to alcohol. It would be nice if everyone coming to A.A. were a pure alcoholic, but that's hardly the case. The arrival of those with problems in addition to their alcoholism is a fact of life, and if someone says 'I am powerless over alcohol and need help,' then it's up to us to have A.A. help available."

*Minorities*—"A.A.'s Age of Awareness encompasses our need to reach the groups of people still underrepresented in A.A.—among them African Americans, Hispanic Americans, disabled persons, deaf and hard of hearing, members of the Armed Forces, and correctional facility inmates.

"The good news is that more and more women and young people are finding their way to A.A. Our steady progress in these areas shows that communication works. Across the U.S. and Canada our service committees—correctional facilities, treatment facilities, literature, public information and cooperation with the professional community—have labored diligently to reach out to minority groups; but much is yet to be done."

*International Services*—"For years, we in A.A. have said we're international. Now we truly are. In the past year or so, G.S.O. representatives, in the discharge of their responsibilities, have visited Chile, Czechoslovakia, England, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Mexico, Poland and the Soviet Union. *The Big Book, Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, and *Living Sober* have been translated into Russian; and the Big Book into Hungarian and Czech. Additional translations of A.A. literature are underway in Arabic, Chinese and Turkish.

"The pace of international work at G.S.O. is quickening and expanding. As countries that formerly were closed off become open and receptive to the A.A. program, we have the opportunity to carry the message almost everywhere it is needed, just as our founders envisioned. We can do this largely because alcoholism is a worldwide disease that respects no race, creed or nationality. Neither does it respect the old or young, the good or bad—nor can it be contained by artificial barriers. In A.A.'s Age of Awareness, alcoholics in the remotest of lands are getting information in a process that won't be stopped.

"Letters arrive at G.S.O. from around the world. 'Is the Big Book available in our language?', a Lithuanian inquires. 'If not, how can we go about translating it?' Such a question raises more questions: For instance, since many countries don't have the mechanisms in place to produce their own literature, should we do it for them at our own expense and, in the process, preserve the meaning and spirit of the original language? Or, in the case of countries with emerging service structures, should we assume a hands-off posture? These dilemmas give rise to a variety of philosophical discussions as we seek to help but not interfere. I am confident our collective conscience will lead us in the right direction.

"In all our service efforts, we are guided by A.A.'s Traditions, Concepts and the General Service Conference Charter—which provides a delicate and sensitive balance of interests among the A.A. elements, allowing each to fulfill responsibilities without interference from the others. The Charter also is a guard against impulsive and imprudent action in A.A.

"As the Fellowship looks to the future, with all its challenges and uncertainties, we are united and made strong in our singleness of purpose. Each time we reach out to an alcoholic who needs A.A., it is a priceless moment, because we cannot save ourselves without saving others."

## Retiring Vicente M. Has 'Made a Difference' At G.S.O.

Speaking in his native Español, English, and A.A.'s language of the heart, Vicente M. has helped Spanish-speaking members the world over to transcend language barriers and feel a part of the Fellowship as a whole. When he retires in March 1991 from his post as nonrotating Spanish Services coordinator at G.S.O., he also will have realized a goal close to his heart: the translation of most A.A. Conference-approved literature into Spanish.

The task was enormous and "could not have been achieved without the generous cooperation of G.S.O., the General Service Conference and its delegates, and many others," Vicente points out. "For example, when I came to G.S.O. in March 1984, there were several Spanish adaptations of the Big Book. They didn't agree and, furthermore, were in a dialect which many Hispanic A.A.s find hard to understand.

"Take the word 'hangover': Mexicans would rue their *cruda*; Colombians, their *guayabo*; Central Americans, their *goma*; and Ecuadorians, their *chuchaque*. We finally settled on the word *resaca*, which also means 'undertow.' Used widely in the Caribbean countries and throughout Spain, it is generally intelligible to the greatest number of Hispanics."

When Vicente says "we," he is referring mainly to nonalcoholic John de Stefano, who works at G.S.O. as associate editor for Spanish translations. "During the seven years Vicente and I have been together," John says, "my first impression of him as a cheerful ebullient man with unlimited patience and a great sense of humor has not changed."

Vicente makes his philosophy clear: "I don't believe in 'Hispanic A.A.' There's no such thing. There are, however, drunks who don't speak English, and they need to be able to read our literature and share with members who speak their language if they are to be part of mainstream A.A."

As the staff member who represents G.S.O. at the Ibero-American Commission for Translation and Adaptation of A.A. Literature, Vicente has worked with several service structures wishing to produce their own translations of A.A. literature. "We seek uniformity, consistent with the spirit and meaning of the original English version, and we have received much cooperation, especially from the Mexican and Colombian structures," he explains, "but of course there are changes in keeping with the colloquialisms of the individual countries."

In Southern California, where Vicente sobered up 15 years ago in his beloved Nuevo Español Group in Paramount, he immediately plunged into A.A. service.

"I vividly remember my first meeting of Spanish District No. 33 back in 1979," says delegate Juan M. "There was Vicente, talking animatedly about the structure of A.A. and how wonderfully it works. He truly loves the Fellowship, and his enthusiasm is contagious."

Noting that Vicente calls her "my little gringa with a Latin heart," Diane O., past delegate of California, Northern Coastal, says that "he is like the Pied Piper of Hamelin. With a gentle touch, he has encouraged, inspired and nurtured the assimilation of the Hispanic community into A.A."

Soon Vicente will "fulfill the personal dream of my sober life": to live in a house he is building in his native Bahia de Caráquez, Ecuador, with his wife of five years, Clemencia. "I can't read music, but I play the piano and accordion by ear," he says, "and I hope to have time for my music and for my *dibujos*, or doodles—and drawings and paintings of tropical landscapes. And I will be active in A.A. service. I shall miss my good friends and associates at G.S.O. and at my Alfa y Omega Group in Queens. But I'm 73 years old, and it's time to make room for someone new."

## A Happy and Useful Sobriety

"In my first year of sobriety, I thought the only service work to be done was unpleasant. I've since learned that, with a little willingness, service can be a blast!"

So writes Michael P., general service representative of the Young People's Solution Group in Austin, Texas. His now active service life started, he explains, "when a young woman approached me at an A.A. meeting last year during a lonely, depressed time in my sobriety. She asked if I would help with the upcoming 1989 Texas State Conference of Young People in A.A. (TXCYPAA). A couple of weeks later, I attended a planning committee meeting and learned that volunteers were greatly

needed. Before leaving, I had assumed responsibility for the committee's outreach efforts."

Soon Michael found himself driving up, down and across the huge state of Texas, telling every A.A. he met about the Conference. Looking back, he says, "I must have visited close to 80% of the A.A. groups in the state. It gave me the opportunity to see how the Fellowship works in other towns and cities, and to meet many new A.A. friends. Almost everywhere I went, people took me in as if they had known me for years. It was a true lesson in love and the principles of the A.A. program at work, at a time when I needed it the most."

He notes that the conference itself "was like a reunion of all the people I had met over the past months, and more—new friends from everywhere coming together to celebrate a beautiful way of life. Something magical happened there."

Now three years sober, Michael has no time for depression—he is too busy working on the 1990 TXCYPAA Conference. "Service work continues to give me a feeling that nothing else can," he observes. "It gives me a way to strengthen my sobriety by sharing it, and to feel a part of A.A. as a whole. There are so many ways to be involved—a lifetime isn't long enough to participate in them all."

## The Group that Takes Inventory Together Can Grow Strong Together

"For the first time our yearly group inventory, normally scheduled for one meeting night, spilled over into two weeks' worth of discussion and signaled the birth of a new group conscience."

So says Karen B., general service representative for the Southwest Step Group in Durham, North Carolina.

**BOX**  **4|5|9**

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**P.O. Box 459**  
**Grand Central Station**  
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Using the long form of the A.A. Traditions and the pamphlet "The A.A. Group" as their guide, members tackled sensitive issues ranging from group turnover and the selection of officers to anonymity, finances and kitchen duty.

In an atmosphere conducive to candor and the expression of "principles before personalities," the ideas flowed. In response to the question, "What can we do to increase contributions to the General Service Office?," for example, one member suggested that "We should bake our own birthday cakes instead of buying them and send the \$8 we save to G.S.O. in honor of our celebrants." Turning to another subject, the group assessed the extent of its adherence to A.A.'s primary purpose. The members concluded that "It is our responsibility to focus our comments toward the newcomer no matter what the meeting topic is."

More and more groups are coming to understand the importance of a periodic group inventory in arriving at a group conscience. But in A.A.'s "benign anarchy," understanding has not come about easily. As A.A. co-founder Bill W. recounted, "Fewer obstacles have been tougher to remove than those which blocked the way to realization that A.A.'s group conscience can be the only ultimate authority in our affairs."

In New York State, the North Shore (Long Island) Young People's Group feels that it has "come of age" largely through the process of an all-out inventory that spared no ground, however rocky. As a result, it has seen a lot of potential thorns come up roses.

Explains member Scott S.: "Shortly after celebrating our 14th group anniversary last year, we faced the fact that attendance at our meetings ranged from a high of about 80 regular attendees to as few as seven. We concluded that a 'searching and fearless' group inventory would be in order, and a member graciously volunteered to obtain guidelines from G.S.O."

The most common complaint voiced, Scott says, "concerned lack of communication among members of the group. But, keeping in mind that anonymity is the spiritual foundation of our Fellowship, how could members call each other without access to individual phone numbers? Because we are a group with special emphasis on the younger A.A. member, and attract a fairly stable nucleus, we decided to start a listing for all members who *wanted* to be listed. First names and last initials are shown on the circulated list, which is updated every month or so. More specific address information is available to a few key contacts willing to provide rides to meetings for fellow members and newcomers."

Another issue concerned the feeling of some members that the group had become "too cliquish." Friends would cluster together at meetings, they said, making the newcomer feel awkward and alone. "We've since made good progress," Scott affirms. "More of our members are introducing themselves to someone coming for the

first time. Additionally, we're making an effort to involve new people by asking them to read the Preamble or the paragraphs from the Big Book on 'How It Works.'

"We also offer newcomers a copy of the phone list, circling our own name. In turn, we ask for theirs, in hopes of a 'follow up' if they don't appear again at the meeting after a couple of weeks. Remembering that ours is a program of attraction, not promotion, we hardly 'bird dog' people to come back, but it's amazing what a brief phone call can do to make them feel wanted."

While certain members used the group inventory simply as a gripe session, Scott reports, "the majority seemed to get behind it and respond constructively once positive direction was established."

He notes that additional input was sought from "veteran" members via an informal phone survey. "Although the group has never taken formal attendance records, archival lists provided leads that showed early members living across the country. Were they ever surprised to hear from the group in which they'd sobered up! A surprising number had stayed sober, and several had married fellow A.A.s."

The inventory of course hasn't solved all the group's problems, Scott observes, "but we've opened our lines of communication and continue to get a lot of positive feedback. One visitor from Ohio, sober for years in A.A., said he was amazed to find a fairly orderly group being conducted by teenage alcoholics in recovery. 'I'd been told this was a young people's group,' he exclaimed, 'but I had no idea a group existed that was handled so capably by high school and college-age A.A. members.'"

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## Spanish Services Staff Member Sought for G.S.O.

As a rule, members of the G.S.O. staff rotate in their assignments every two years. However, the Spanish Services assignment is nonrotating because of the nature of the work involved. Vicente M., after serving for seven years as Spanish Services Coordinator, will retire in March of 1991 and, for this reason, G.S.O. has extended the deadline previously set in seeking applicants for the position.

Fluency in both English and Spanish is required, as well as excellent writing skills in both languages. A minimum of six years' sobriety is necessary; A.A. service experience will be a consideration, in addition to the applicant's willingness to relocate to New York, if necessary. Applicants should also be willing to travel to the different areas of our service structure upon invitation.

Please send employment and A.A. service resumes as soon as possible to: Staff Coordinator, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163.

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Please post *Twelve Tips on Keeping Your Holiday Season Sober and Joyous* (page 11) on your group bulletin board.

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## P.I.

### The Voice of A.A. Is Non-Stop In Kansas City

The Kansas Area Public Information Committee has found a way to carry the A.A. message directly into the homes of more than 100 people a day.

All one need do is pick up the phone and dial a number. In response to the ring on this particular day, a friendly voice says, "Greetings from a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. Today's reading is from *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, page 88." After reading the selection, the speaker concludes, "For more information or for the location of a group near you, call A.A.'s 24-hour 'Hot Line' number: (913) 384-2770. Pass it on."

"The response to our 'A.A. Message of the Day' has been tremendous," says Roger H., P.I. chairperson of the Kansas Area Assembly. "The program is under a year old and we're monitoring it closely, but so far all systems are 'go.'"

Adds Roy H., P.I. chairperson of District 10, which embraces Kansas City, Kansas: "Many A.A.s say they find comfort in starting their day with the message. One newcomer told me, 'it puts me on track for the next 24 hours.' And a seeing-impaired member said that being able to hear the voice of A.A. any time of day or night makes him feel closer to the Fellowship."

The P.I. committee records its "Message of the Day" through a local answering service. "The cost is unbelievably low," Roger reports. "We pay about \$26 a month for the service and there is no extra charge to the caller. Our speakers are all A.A. volunteers; we try to alternate voices of men and women for purposes of identification." A side benefit of the project, he notes, is that "A.A.s who never thought about doing service work are becoming involved. Their enthusiasm is something to see."

Simply by dialing an access code on any touchtone phone, the volunteers can record their messages with "Annie" (the voice retrieval system). No message may exceed three minutes in its entirety. Readings presently are selected from the books *Alcoholics Anonymous*, *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, and *As Bill Sees It*.

"To date the program has been so successful that we're contacting other P.I. committees about the feasi-

bility of extending it beyond our immediate area," Roger says. "What's interesting is that the response is all due to word-of-mouth, in line with Tradition Eleven which states that 'Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion.' Other than that, our information consists of plain white cards reading, 'For an Alcoholics Anonymous Message of the Day, call (913) 967-7066,' which we hand out at various meetings."

As news of the "A.A. Message of the Day" spreads, he says, "we are reaching not only newcomers and seasoned A.A.s, but an increasing number of suffering alcoholics as well. That's what the message is all about—making sure that the voice of A.A. is always there for anyone who wants our help."

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## C.P.C.

### West Virginia Committee Finds New Ways to 'Sponsor a Professional'

"In our efforts to reach out to professionals in the community, we all agree that supplying information and written encouragement is only the first step," says Roger S., chairperson of the West Virginia Area Committee on Cooperation With the Professional Community. "That's why we have instituted a 'Sponsor a Professional' campaign that emphasizes face-to-face communication between C.P.C. members and the professionals they sponsor."

To make the challenge more manageable, the Area C.P.C. Committee generally connects with individual professionals through their agency network. "Along these lines," Roger reports, "a number of our members met with the director of the West Virginia Department of Health, Behavioral Health Division. He was eager to learn about A.A. as a resource for his mental-health and state hospital workers; together we developed a program that ultimately would provide an 'A.A. friend' for each mental-health professional in the state."

Once direct communication with a specific agency official has been established, C.P.C. members are encouraged to contact individual professionals within the agency, provide them with A.A. literature, and offer to take them to an open meeting.

As part of its attempts to involve professionals, the C.P.C. committee has begun to submit short articles on the "Sponsor a Professional" program to various state agencies and employee assistance associations for possible insertion in their newsletters.

The committee also distributes a brief flier on attending an A.A. meeting. Originally designed for those required to attend some A.A. meetings whether they have a problem with alcohol or not, it has proved informative and helpful to professionals working with these people. The flier lists eight suggestions, as follows:

(1) Attend only OPEN meetings; (2) You need not say anything, but you may share if you wish and are called upon; (3) You don't need to say the prayers, or stand and hold hands; (4) You are welcome to the coffee and any refreshments; (5) You need not put money in the basket—it is for members only; (6) You are asked not to tell anyone whom you saw at the meetings—your anonymity will be protected also; and (7) Feel free to ask questions before and after the meeting, and help yourself to the informational pamphlets."

The West Virginia C.P.C. Committee further seeks to prevent some problems that arise when nonalcoholics attend closed A.A. meetings. "We are distributing numerous copies of the piece, 'Information on Alcoholics Anonymous,' published by the General Service Office, to C.P.C.s and other A.A.s, as many within our Fellowship are unaware of its existence and usefulness," Roger notes. "We're also circulating meeting lists of open and beginners meetings only. Those districts with temporary contact programs find this to be very helpful."

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## Treatment Facilities

### Communication Breakdowns Are Hazardous to Health Of A.A. Meetings 'Inside'

A breakdown in communication between the authorities at a large Chicago area treatment facility and the A.A.s bringing meetings "inside," for a time threatened to upset the whole apple cart. By keeping their cool and remembering their place as "guests" in the hospital, the A.A.s found a way to cooperate with the hospital within the framework of the Traditions. Nobody lost and everybody won because the A.A. lifeline to alcoholic patients remained intact.

What triggered the brouhaha was a turnover in administration and staff with a hands-on role. For more than 40 years, A.A.s had been holding mainly closed meetings at the hospital. In the beginning, the A.A.s and staff met regularly to facilitate understanding; but as time went on and everything seemed to go smoothly, these sessions were gradually permitted to lapse.

Last year, the new coordinator of the hospital's

twelve-step volunteer program sent a letter to "our A.A. guests," announcing that henceforth the status of most of the A.A. meetings would be changed from closed to open, including the special-interest meetings for men and women. The rationale behind this move: that, despite their initial denial, "most patients have come to realize, after attending A.A. meetings, that they are in fact alcoholics as well as drug addicts. It is because of this effective means to penetrate their denial that we have incorporated mandatory attendance of twelve-step, self-help meetings as part of our patient program."

The letter profoundly disturbed many of the outside A.A.s, since the impression given by the hospital was that the new "open" meetings were to serve as a vehicle for the airing of *any* addiction problem. But managing to put "principles before personalities," they formed an ad hoc committee—composed of members representing all the groups currently holding meetings at the hospital—to study the situation with a view toward openness, flexibility and a level-headed approach.

Only after thorough sharing and study of the A.A. Guidelines for Treatment Facilities Committees, prepared by G.S.O., did the committee write back. Its response detailed A.A.'s singleness of purpose as it pertains to both open and closed meetings, and emphasized the Third Tradition which states, "The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking."

Pointing out, among other things, that "once a men's or women's meeting becomes 'open,' it is no longer exclusive to men or women," the committee asked for clarification "as to which of the two meeting types you wish A.A. to provide. We will then go back to our groups," it explained, "to obtain their group conscience in terms of A.A.'s Traditions and singleness of purpose."

The committee requested a meeting "as soon as possible" with the hospital administrator and concerned staff. The hospital proved cooperative and, during the next several months, meetings were held that included Cathy W., manager of the Chicago Central Office, and Steve C., a district delegate to the Chicago Area Hospitals and Treatment Facilities Committee. "Since December 1989," Steve reports, "there have been six open and four closed A.A. groups and meetings at the hospital each week instead of the 11 mostly closed meetings formerly held.

"Among other changes, the formerly closed men's and women's meetings were combined to create an open meeting; a previously closed beginners meeting became open as well." Steve adds that A.A.s from the community continue to attend, although not as many as before.

Much good has emerged from what he regards as a "learning experience." Ad hoc committee members and other A.A.s representing groups and meetings in the hospital now meet with key staff on a monthly basis in

order to keep the lines of communication open; additionally, they have conducted a number of A.A. orientation meetings for interested personnel.

Some of the A.A.s have expressed unhappiness with the revised meeting formats by halting their Twelfth-Step efforts in the hospital, Steve says, "but the good news is that there has been a renewed involvement by our area H. & T.F. Committee in participation at this facility, as well as enhanced communication and cooperation between our members and the staff."

He observes that the hospital itself "has come up with some super ideas to serve the needs of its patients: (1) provide a Spanish-speaking A.A. meeting; and (2) institute Al-Anon meetings to coincide with the A.A. meetings, so that families of alcoholic patients can more conveniently participate in the recovery process."

Steve concludes, "I believe the staff has a clearer idea of what A.A. is and isn't; and of our area's commitment to serving the alcoholic in the treatment setting. At the same time, the community's A.A. members who attend the hospital meetings have grown closer to the Traditions and our Legacy of Service. In the best A.A. way, they have come through with flying colors!"

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## Correctional Facilities

### How Can A.A. Reach Out to The Part of Our Future That's 'Behind the Walls'?

"Part of the future of our Fellowship is right now locked up in jails, prisons and juvenile detention centers," says Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee Amos Reed of Salem, Oregon, "and from the base to the top, alcohol is the primary or supporting cause. For those who are sober in the Fellowship, the years ahead can be a mission in which we make a collective effort to reach the alcoholics already behind bars—and those yet to come."

Now retired from his position as secretary of the Department of Corrections for the State of Washington, Amos is chairperson of the trustees' Correctional Facilities Committee. As one who has spent 52 years working in corrections, education and public welfare, he is deeply concerned about how A.A. can step up its collective efforts to meet the rising tide of alcoholics in our prison population.

"Statistics show that as many as 80% of our prisoners should be classified as either problem drinkers or alco-

holics," Amos points out. "This figure assumes a critical dimension when you consider that about 55% of the people convicted of violent crimes were drinking at the time the crimes were committed—and most of them were males aged 17 to 27."

In the past decade, Amos says, A.A. appears to have made great strides in carrying the message "inside." It is estimated, he reports, that in the United States and Canada, there are presently 1,650 A.A. groups in correctional facilities. "This figure looks impressive—until you go back 20 years ago to 1971. We had 900 such groups then, even though the alcoholism problem in our prisons was not nearly so pervasive as it is now."

Here he notes that "dedicated A.A. correctional facilities committees across the U.S. and Canada regularly take meetings inside, act as release and prerelease contacts, and work to cooperate with officials in adhering to institutional rules and regulations.

"Additionally, G.S.O. provides the committees and confined A.A.s with complimentary pamphlets, including 'A.A. in Prisons' and 'It Sure Beats Sitting in a Cell'; Box 4-5-9 and other literature and audiovisual materials. The Grapevine donates its back issues."

Amos observes that A.A. will make a real difference in the 1990s, he believes, if:

- "A.A. members are willing to go into our prisons, jails and detention centers in greater numbers, and to share, without reservation or prejudice, our strength in sobriety. A huge gap can exist between those on the outside and those in prison; yet there is a cool and healing sympathy through one A.A. reaching out for another;
- "We try harder to carry the message to the minorities who are still underrepresented in A.A. but who constitute a disproportionate number of our alcoholic inmates;
- "All of us work even harder to establish a cooperative relationship with prison officials, their chaplains, probation officers and participating agencies—to familiarize ourselves with their internal issues, their weaknesses and strengths. We have made gestures, mainly via mail, but that's no substitute for the one-to-one approach;
- "A.A. committee members make progress in establishing and sustaining a comprehensive contact-sponsorship network."

When all this is said and done, Amos emphasizes, carrying the message to A.A.s already incarcerated is still not enough. "The greatest challenge ahead of A.A. is to reach alcoholics before their illness causes them to be incarcerated.

"In order to respond to a need, we must first become aware of it, talk about it and become willing participants in fulfilling it," Amos contends. "Carrying the message is a shared responsibility; only to the extent that we each do our part will A.A. as a whole become part of the solution for the suffering alcoholic who is presently incarcerated—or likely to be in the future. It is already very late, so let us act together now."

## 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** Go to church. Any church.



**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.

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

## 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.

### December

- 7-9 — *Shreveport, Louisiana*. Southeast Regional Forum. Write: Sec., Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163
- 7-9 — *Hong Kong, Asia*. "21 Years in Hong Kong—One Day at a Time." Write: Ch., c/o PSI HK Ltd. 2nd Fl., 31 Queen's Road East, Wanchai, Hong Kong, Asia
- 15-17 — *Homestead, Pennsylvania*. "The Golden Triangles." Write: Ch., 5601 Penn Ave., #C-58, Pittsburgh, PA 15206
- 23-26 — *Woodbridge, Virginia*. Fourth Annual Alk-A-Thon. Write: Ch., 15923 Fairway Drive, Dumphries, VA 22026
- 30-January 1 — *Boston, Massachusetts*. First Annual NECYPAA. Write: Ch., 492 East Broadway, Box 387, Boston, MA 02127

### January

- 4-6 — *Dodge City, Kansas*. SW Conf. Write: Ch., 826 N. Durham, Ulysses, KS 67880
- 11-13 — *Laughlin, Nevada*. First River Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 2237, Laughlin, NV 89029
- 11-13 — *Galveston, Texas*. SE Area 29th Conf. Write: Ch., Rte. 4, 2241 St., Brazoria, TX 77422
- 11-13 — *Tyler, Texas*. 44th Anniversary. Write: Ch., 903 Pinedale, Tyler, TX 75701
- 11-13 — *Jamestown, North Dakota*. 10th Annual Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 1030, Jamestown, ND 58402
- 18-20 — *Midland, Texas*. 21st Mid-Winter Conf. Write: Ch., 2502 Cuthbert, Midland, TX 79701
- 19-20 — *Hyderabad, Andhra State, India*. Eighth General Service Conf. Write: Ch., Box 2031, Secunderabad-500 003, Andhra Pradesh, India
- 25-27 — *Raleigh, North Carolina*. 24th Tarheel Mid-Winter Conf. Write: Ch., Box 18412, Raleigh, NC 27619
- 26-February 2 — *New Orleans, Louisiana*. Sixth Cruise Without Booze. Write: Ch., Box 9183, Tulsa, OK 74157

### February

- 1-3 — *Schaumburg, Illinois*. ISCYPAA. Write: Ch., Box 5099, Palatine, IL 60078
- 1-3 — *Casa Grande, Arizona*. Arizona Area Assembly. Write: Ch., Box 828, Casa Grande, AZ 85222
- 1-3 — *Universal City, California*. 16th Annual San Fernando Valley Convention. Write: Ch., 12958 Bloomfield St., Studio City, CA 91604
- 1-3 — *Brugge, Belgium*. North Sea Conv. (English-speaking). Write: Sec., P.O. Box 3, B.8000 Brugge 1, Belgium
- 1-3 — *Cagayan de Oro City, Philippines*. Ninth National Conv. Write: Ch., Box 268, 9000 Cagayan de Oro City, Philippines
- 1-3 — *Nanaimo, British Columbia, Canada*. 23rd Annual Rally. Write: Ch., 779 Townsite Rd., Nanaimo, BC V9S 1L6
- 2-3 — *Brawley, California*. Imperial Valley Roundup. Write: Ch., 860 Brentwood, Holtville, CA 92250
- 2-3 — *Kindersley, Saskatchewan, Canada*. 20th Annual Roundup. Write: Ch., #4 O'Connor Crt., Kindersley, SK S0L 1S1
- 15-16 — *Greeley, Colorado*. 40th Annual Greeley Stampede. Write: Ch. 2644 11th Ave. #D, Greeley, CO 80631
- 15-17 — *Montgomery, Alabama*. 47th Anniversary & 10th Heart of Dixie Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 6043, Montgomery, AL 36106
- 15-18 — *New Bedford, Massachusetts*. Second S.E. Massachusetts Roundup. (sponsored by gay & lesbian members) Write: Ch., Box E-736, New Bedford, MA 02742-0736
- 22-24 — *Burlington, Iowa*. South Eastern Iowa Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 188, Bonaparte, IA 52620

### Closed Meeting Topics From the Grapevine

For more detailed suggestions, see the pages noted.

*December* (page 19): The holidays; hiding out in A.A.; anonymity.

*January* (page 28): Active drunks; "rekindling the fire"; the Washingtonians.

22-24 — *Lexington, Kentucky*. 40th State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 23, Lexington, KY 40501

22-24 — *Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada*. 24th Intergroup Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 8878, Saskatoon, SK S7K 6S7

22-24 — *Chattanooga, Tennessee*. Ninth ICYPAA. Write: Ch., Box 8861, Chattanooga, TN 37411

23-24 — *Suwanee (Atlanta), Georgia*. District 16 Weekend. Write: Ch., Box 1333, Norcross, GA 30091-1333

27-March 3 — *St. Simons Island, Georgia*. 29th St. Simons Island Weekend. Write: Ch., Box 892, Statesboro, GA 30458

### Planning a Future Event?

Please send your information on February, March or April events, two days or more, in time to reach G.S.O. by *December 10*, the calendar deadline for the February/March issue of *Box 4-5-9*.

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 \_\_\_\_\_, 19\_\_\_\_

Name of event: \_\_\_\_\_

Place (city, state or prov.): \_\_\_\_\_

For information, write: (exact mailing address) \_\_\_\_\_

Contact phone # (for office use only): \_\_\_\_\_

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