

## Gratitude Month— Our Chance to Say ‘Thank You!’

“The idea is in the air that A.A. might adopt Thanksgiving week as a time for meetings and meditation on the Traditions,” A.A. co-founder Bill W. wrote in the November 1949 issue of the Grapevine (*The Language of the Heart*, p. 95) shortly after publication of the Twelve Traditions. In fact, the idea had already taken hold earlier in the decade when, each fall, the General Service Board hosted small Gratitude Dinners—precursors of the larger, more elaborate Gratitude Luncheons that would be held during the '60s as an initiative of the trustees' Public Information Committee.

The first official recognition of an A.A. Gratitude Week, specifically designed to coincide with Thanksgiving week in the U.S. (Canada celebrates in October), occurred in 1956, when the Sixth General Service Conference approved the motion, stipulating that “this action be noted in the annual pre-Thanksgiving appeals to the groups for funds to help support A.A.'s worldwide services.” Three years later, Bill urged in a letter, “Gratitude should go forward, rather than backward. . . if you carry the message to still others, you will be making the best possible repayment for the help given to you.” (*As Bill Sees It*, p. 29).

The motivation behind A.A.'s Gratitude Lunches was threefold: to express personal gratefulness for the gift of sobriety; to carry the message of A.A. to other alcoholics; and to express appreciation to our professional friends for their numerous articles, books and radio and TV interviews relating to A.A. in the year just past. It was hoped, in the words of a General Service Office memo circulated at the time, that the luncheons would “advance A.A.'s public relations by bringing editors, publishers, writers and broadcasters in personal contact with sources of reliable information on the movement.”

Held without fail in November at New York City's Roosevelt Hotel, the luncheons were always well-attended. A typical list of invitees to the 1965 luncheon included representatives of *The New York Times*, *McCall's Magazine*, *Medical World News* and *The Christian Science Monitor*. Bill W. always addressed the gatherings, as did the late “Dr. Jack” Norris, then serving as A.A.'s

Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee chairman. A discussion period followed the proceedings, an ample selection of A.A. literature was available for the taking, and in 1965 Bill sent an autographed copy of *A.A. Comes of Age* to every guest.

The luncheons were discontinued in 1968, but the concept of gratitude persisted and expanded in scope. For decades now, A.A.s in the U.S. have set aside all of November as Gratitude Month—marking the occasion with special contributions to G.S.O. In the spirit of the Seventh Tradition A.A. is self-supporting through its members' contributions, and frequently turns away money from well-meaning outside contributors. This means that the active input of every A.A. is vital to the life of the Fellowship.

Grateful for the sobriety they've been given and eager to pass it on, A.A.s are busier than ever in Twelfth Stepping and service. They are reaching out in greater numbers to Loners, people with special needs, members of minority groups and previously unreached alcoholics. It is clear from their sharing that an overwhelming number of A.A.s—along with many of our professional friends—find their own special ways to say thank you during Gratitude Month and, indeed, all year long. Writes one member: “Enclosed is a check for Gratitude Month, because I want A.A. to be there for all those who need it, just as I did.” From another: “The enclosed check is from my own pocket, to help groups in correctional facilities like mine. Some of us are struggling to turn our lives around. We begin the process in here ourselves, and by reaching out.” And a nonalcoholic missionary wrote from India, “It is a matter of great encouragement and satisfaction that your A.A. has been a rich resource of guidance, help and light for a number of organizations dealing with problems related to alcohol. . . .”

Besides observing Gratitude Month, many a member uses the A.A. Birthday Plan “to give back what's been given to me,” as one wrote. And from another grateful A.A.: “I want to say thanks today for my life and my family's—for all of us alcoholics in recovery,” he wrote. “Enclosed is an anniversary check, because I want the

---

**Box 4-5-9** is published bimonthly by the General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115 © Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 2000

**Mail address:** P.O. Box 459, Grand Central Station  
New York, NY 10163

**G.S.O.'s A.A. Web site:** [www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org)

**Subscriptions:** Individual, \$3.50 per year; group, \$6.00 for each unit of 10 per year. Check—made payable to A.A.W.S., Inc.—should accompany order.

---

hand of A.A. to be there for all who need it." Like him, many members celebrate their A.A. birthdays by sending in a gratitude gift to G.S.O.—usually a dollar or two for each year of sobriety. Some groups follow this Birthday Plan by collecting contributions from members on a voluntary basis throughout the year, or until the number of dollars matches the members' total years of sobriety. On the group's anniversary, the money collected is sent to G.S.O. as a birthday contribution.

Gratitude. It's a weighty, high-dignity word, but in truth its close companions are humor and joy. As Bill W. observed early on in the Big Book (p. 132), "Outsiders are sometimes shocked when we burst into merriment over a seemingly tragic experience out of the past. But why shouldn't we laugh? We have recovered, and have been given the power to help others." What greater cause could there be for rejoicing than this?

---

## New Scottish Tartan Honors Our Co-founders

You might say that A.A. co-founders Bill W. and Dr. Bob are woven from the same cloth, thanks to a recent happening in Scotland. Reports Charlie S., manager of the A.A. Regional Service Office in Glasgow: "We are a little proud that Wilson and Smith are old Scottish family names, and that our small nation of substantial drinkers was able to produce the ancestors of our co-founders. Individual Wilson and Smith tartans (patterns of our national dress) have long been around, and we're pleased that now a blend of both family tartans has been woven. It is registered with the Tartan and Clan Societies as the 'Recovery Tartan.'"

A.A. in Scotland dates back to 1946, when an alcoholic in Glasgow wrote to the General Service Office in

New York City and subsequently found sobriety as a Loner. The following year a gentleman-farmer from the west of Scotland, hoping to find a solution to his drinking problem, traveled to the U.S. to attend a Christian conference. There he met a woman in A.A. who took him to a meeting. Deeply impressed, he quit drinking and, after returning to Scotland, began carrying the message into prisons, hospitals, wherever he could find alcoholics. Later he was helped in his efforts by an American A.A. visitor. Thus the first two groups in Scotland came to be, in Glasgow and Edinburgh, and the message spread from there.

The A.A. Regional Service Office in Glasgow, formerly run by the Scottish Service Committee, "has been functioning as a satellite of G.S.O. Great Britain for a year and a half," Charlie relates, "and the growth of services has been phenomenal." Noting that the office facilitates all five regions of Scotland, he says the National Helpline (0845 769 7555) is open around the clock, seven days a week.

---

## 2001 Regional 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. These weekend sharing sessions enhance and widen communication, and help spark new ideas in better carrying the message through service work.

Mailings regarding each Forum will be sent to G.S.R.s, area committee members, delegates, and central offices and intergroups, approximately three months ahead of time. The final Forum in 2000 will be: Southeast, November 17-19, Best Western Gateway, Huntington, West Virginia. In 2001 Regional Forums are planned as follows:

- *Special*—January 6-7: Spokane and Yakima, Washington
- *Northeast*—June 8-10: Four Points Sheraton Hotel, Rochester, New York
- *West Central*—August 24-26: Best Western Rankotu Inn, Sioux Falls, South Dakota
- *Southwest*—September 28-30: Sheraton Old Town, Albuquerque, New Mexico
- *East Central*—October 12-14: Hilton Toledo, Toledo, Ohio

## Zonal Meetings Around the World Cement A.A. Unity

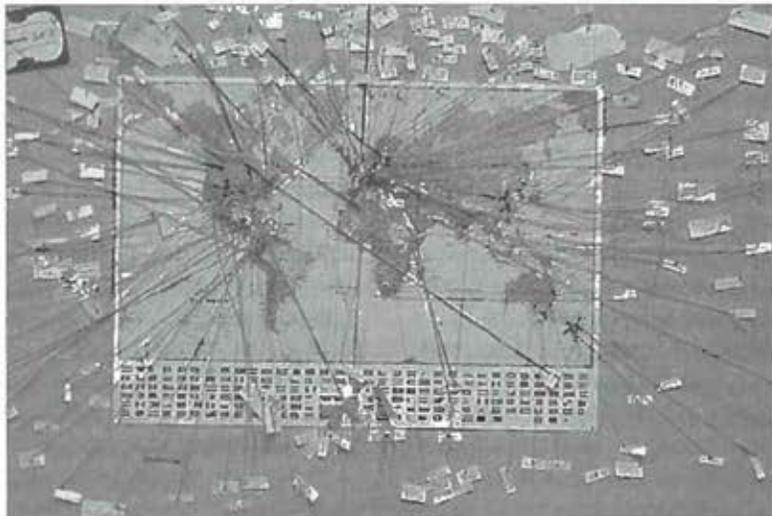
Last October (1999) two biennial service meetings were held in different parts of the world—the 11th Meeting of the Americas (known in Spanish as *Undécima Reunión de las Américas*), in San Salvador, El Salvador; and the 10th European Service Meeting in Frankfurt, Germany. In March 1999, the 3rd annual Asia/Oceania Service Meeting took place in New South Wales, Australia. Called “zonal meetings,” all three share the same reason for being: to strengthen unity through the sharing of experience, strength and ideas, and to help each other reach the thousands of still-suffering alcoholics in their lands.

It is estimated that A.A. exists in approximately 150 countries across the world. Delegates to the biennial World Service Meeting (WSM), the grandfather of the zonal meetings, are from countries with an existing service structure, a national office or a literature distribution center. Zonal meetings take place the year between WSMs, maintain continuity between meetings and offer help to A.A.s where no structure has yet been set up. The idea for zonal meetings came out of the Fifth WSM, held in 1978 in Finland, during a workshop on Communication Between Countries.

The *Meeting of the Americas* (originally called the Ibero-American Service Meeting) was the first of the zonal meetings to convene, in 1979 in Bogota, Colombia, and was attended by delegates from 10 countries. The latest meeting was held last October 8-12. Twelve countries, spoken for by two delegates each, were represented: Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua and the United States. Attending for the first time were the Dominican Republic, Honduras and Peru. On hand as an observer was an A.A. member from Belize, which is working toward establishing an A.A. structure.

Reports Oklahoman Dean R., Class B (alcoholic) trustee-at-large/U.S.: “The Meeting of the Americas opened Friday evening with a flag ceremony; the Salvadorian Military Band played the national anthem of each country as its respective flag was presented. More than 1,500 Salvadorian members of A.A. were at the opening ceremony, and their enthusiasm and love of the Fellowship was plain to see. Alex P., trustee-at-large/Canada, and I were able to communicate with all the Spanish-speaking delegates, thanks to the help of a Spanish interpreter. It was one big A.A. meeting.” Adds Alex: “What came through loud and clear was the language of the heart. Contemplating the theme of the meeting, ‘A.A. Beyond and Into the Future,’ I had no doubt that the Fellowship would continue to thrive in El Salvador.”

In his keynote address, El Salvador’s Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee Rene Brenes Morales urged delegates to find more ways to reach alcoholics, especially young people and women. Eva S., a staff member of the General Service Office, New York City, who presently has the International assignment, says that “attendees at the Meeting of the Americas were almost all men, and there were no women delegates representing the participating countries.” Later in the proceedings she spoke on “How to Integrate Women Into the Third Legacy of Service.”



*It is estimated that there is A.A. activity in 150 countries. The map on this bulletin board (approximately 3 1/2' x 2 1/2') in the International Hospitality Area of A.A.'s International Convention attests to the fact that we are everywhere. Convention goers were invited to write the name of their home group on a slip of paper and attach it by yarn and pushpin to the location. By the end of the Convention (this photo was taken early on) the map was no longer visible — it was a beautiful woven tapestry of golden yarn.*

*The European Service Meeting gathered for the first time in 1981 in Frankfurt, Germany, with 14 countries represented. The 10th meeting, held in Frankfurt (its permanent venue) October 22-24, was coordinated as usual by the General Service Office of Great Britain, which also serves as the European Information Center. This year's meeting brought together 39 delegates from 20 countries: Austria, Belgium, Denmark,*

Finland, Germany, Great Britain, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland—and, for the first time, Greece. Additionally, French-speaking Europe was represented by delegates from France and Switzerland. Delegates from Russia and Ukraine were expected but did not attend.

Addressing the theme “Unity—the Heartbeat of A.A.,” Meeting chairman Wieslaw L. of Poland spoke of the importance of unity throughout A.A.’s infancy in Poland back in the late 1950s. He expressed his belief that the sharing of experience, strength and hope would contribute to the development of countries not represented, of those that were, and of A.A. as a whole. The 11th European Service Meeting will be held in Frankfurt, October 2001. The theme: “Service Has No Boundaries.”

The fledgling *Asia-Oceania Service Meeting* was first held in 1995 in Japan, and its success led to a second meeting in Auckland in March 1997, with six countries participating: Australia, Hong Kong, Korea, New Zealand and Thailand. This newest zonal meeting defined its area of responsibility by listing the countries within the zone, then dividing them into “neighborhood” groups, with the most established country in each group asked to take responsibility for sponsoring others within its own neighborhood.

In his opening address at the 3rd Asia-Oceanic Service Meeting, in New South Wales, Australia, in March 1999, Alan T., chairman of Australia’s General Service Board, gently reminded the assembled A.A.s of the meeting’s theme—“Our Primary Purpose”—and urged them to “weave it, to the extent that you can, into your discussions.” He further noted that “this meeting, held with an open mind, absolute sincerity and no suspect intentions, will no doubt be used to achieve the increase of A.A. members in each of your countries. The growth of the world populations, together with increases in stresses and pressures, have brought about a rise in alcoholism.”

The 4th Asia/Oceania Service Meeting will be held in Korea in spring 2001, date to be announced. And, before then, the 16th World Service Meeting will convene Oct. 22-26 in New York City, attuned to the theme “A.A.—Our Future Is Our Responsibility.”

---

## Traveling A.A.s View Recovery In China

Last year a congenial group of A.A. friends made a common wish come true: to visit China and, at the same time, connect with other alcoholics and those who treat

them. Says Bruce K., who first had the idea of putting a trip together: “We were aware before going that we didn’t know anything about the state of recovery from alcoholism among the Chinese, about their willingness to receive the message of A.A. or even what kind of reception we might get. Our object was to learn more about these matters and to see if we could spread a few ‘mustard seeds’ around the landscape.”

The group of 14 (which included one Al-Anon member) were mostly from the San Francisco Bay area. “Bruce and nearly half the others on the trip had been to Russia,” notes one traveler, San Francisco Central Office manager Abigail H. “They’d taken Big Books in Russian and were helpful to alcoholics in Magadan, a little town in Siberia, and now they were raring to go to China.” Thanks to the help of a fellow traveler who had emigrated from China many years before, the group was able to arrange visits with public health officials, medical school faculty and researchers through a Chinese travel agency, “which is how such things are done,” Abigail explains.

Reports group member Arkie K.: “We saw only a handful of men (not women) who said they drank too much, and who may or may not have been alcoholics. In this sense our trip was mostly an activity resembling the work of a C.P.C. (Cooperation With the Professional Community) committee, and was different from the trips many in our same group had made to Russia and Cuba, where we were able to meet directly with groups of alcoholics.”

“The fact is,” adds Bruce, “we were told by some qualified professionals there that the Chinese simply don’t have drinking problems. Others told us that a large percentage of traffic and workplace accidents are alcohol-related. Still more said that alcoholism is indeed a significant problem. A 1992 research report we were told about indicated that slightly more than one percent of the population is alcoholic—bear in mind that one percent in China equals about 12 million people! So we came back without a solid feel for the problem, and we don’t know if the Chinese themselves know for sure.

“It was hard explaining what an alcoholic is,” Bruce recalls, “especially using translators speaking very slowly in a very simple language. We found this completely different from sharing our experience, strength and hope with people who have some inkling of what problem drinking is, or some cultural and linguistic reference point. However, our hosts were extremely gracious and friendly, and we did come away with a strong sense that A.A. activity may get started in at least one of the cities, perhaps Qingdao, and that we had definitely piqued the interest and curiosity of some of the professionals we met. E-mail contacts have been established, and two small English-speaking expatriate groups in Beijing and Shanghai have been linked with the professional community. We also were able to provide a cou-

ple of hundred Big Books and pamphlets in Chinese.”

During a session at Qingdao University, the American group met with nine Chinese medical professors and experts in health education. “After an hour of speeches and sharing,” Arkie relates, “our hosts announced that we would now witness a demonstration of a traditional Chinese medicine to cure drunkenness. White-coated attendants placed two large white rabbits on a steel table and proceeded to introduce controlled amounts of alcohol into their mouths via tubes. We were told the rabbits would be drunk in 10 minutes and, indeed, it was so. Then one of the rabbits was given a tubeful of the ‘secret drink cure.’ We were told this rabbit would sober up in 20 minutes, and it did. Within a half hour the rabbit was back up and apparently normal, while the other appeared to be still semicomatose. We were asked to comment, and our spokesman, Bruce, remarked that we were impressed—and that, happily, the experiment also enabled us to explain the difference between alcoholism and drunkenness.

“Bruce said, ‘Assume these rabbits go to a bar and get drunk. Then they take the “cure” and sober up. Well, if they are alcoholic, they will simply get into a car and drive to another bar.’”

---

## Grateful A.A. Buys Big Book on the Installment Plan

Last December, Bill W., an A.A. in an East Coast prison, wrote to the General Service Office asking for a copy of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, A.A.’s basic text. The request landed on the desk of G.S.O. staff member Adrienne B., who saw to it that a soft-cover copy of the dark-blue book was promptly sent out, no charge.

Billy nonetheless felt strongly about paying for it. In March he wrote G.S.O., “Enclosed you’ll find my first installment payment for the Big Book I received during the month of December. I’m extremely grateful and appreciative for the Big Book and God does answer prayers.” Attached to his letter was a check for \$2.

Adrienne quickly sent Billy a note of thanks for “your donation to G.S.O. Everyone here is deeply grateful for your interest and support.” She noted that “the Big Book is now available in 40 languages, with more to come one day at a time.”

In late April, he wrote again. “I’m Billy, I’m an alcoholic!” he reminded G.S.O. “Although I’m presently incarcerated, A.A. has shown and taught me that misery and pain can be turned into peace and strength. I have always thought I was destined to be a bad person; but

through A.A. and the Twelve Steps I’ve learned that I’m a beautiful and sick person plagued with the disease of alcoholism. The Big Book and, now, volunteer A.A. contacts and weekly meetings drive home the fact that I never have to drink again—one day, one Step at a time.

“Knowing that God loves me and hears my prayers, I hardly ever have a dull day; my character defects and shortcomings are but figments of my ill alcoholic imagination. As long as I live the A.A. way, all will be well.”

In conclusion, Billy said, “I give my appreciation and thanks to God and A.A. for saving me and showing me how to live life on life’s terms.” With the letter he enclosed “another installment payment” for his Big Book, a draft for \$3.

Like Billy during his first months in prison, many alcoholics in correctional facilities seldom have even one A.A. meeting available to them. Thus, carrying the message via A.A. literature such as the Big Book is crucial to their sobriety (*Bar 4-5-9*, April-May 2000, p. 7). So next time you see a Correctional Facilities committee’s pink (or blue) can set out at meetings as collection containers for literature and other C.F. work, you might remember Billy and dig for some change or, better yet, a dollar bill, realizing, as one A.A. put it, that “there but for the grace of God go I.”

---

## Indiana A.A.s Input A State-of-the-Heart Answering System

The Wabash Valley Intergroup, serving five counties in the Terre Haute, Indiana, area, had a nagging headache many will recognize as their own: a faulty, expensive answering service that inadequately supported the A.A.s’ central effort: to be available at all times for the suffering alcoholic. Here’s the way it was, what happened, and how it is now—a story with a happy “ongoing” that the Indiana members are pleased to share.

“The method we formerly had worked fine in theory,” says South Indiana’s immediate past delegate Sue F.: “A professional service answered the call, took a message and phoned a member on the volunteer list who immediately phoned back. But the trouble was, we had a difficult time staffing the office with volunteers and ended up with ‘live’ coverage only a couple of afternoons a week. The service was pricey; did not keep good records of the number of calls coming in, resulting in poor accountability; and tended to contact the same volunteers, so that just a few people were shouldering the bulk of the calls. Another big disadvantage was that the first person the caller connected with—

the answering service operator—was not an alcoholic.”

Remembers Susan S., a member of the Intergroup service committee: “The dilemma was an ongoing topic of discussion at our monthly meeting. Then one night a member, Gene E., piped up with a brilliant idea—‘Let’s get a computer!’ We did, and so began a process that is proving to be a positive experience for many of us.” Known affectionately around Intergroup as “our resident technophile,” Susan relates that “in the spring of 1999 we acquired a simple but effective system: a 200 MHz rebuilt Pentium computer and voice-fax-data modem (\$550); installed software called Super Voice Pro (about \$80)—not the Cadillac of programs but one we felt would be affordable for our specific needs—and the first of three refurbished beepers (\$10 each; a total of \$30 per month to maintain). Various members donated peripherals, including the monitor, a printer, mousepads and more. (Very early we added a UPS—uninterrupted power supply—at a cost of \$130.)” Then, she says, “we began the long, tedious job of configuring the system, setting up the hierarchical message tree and recording voice messages. Believe me, it was worth every moment of aggravation because it works, it really works!”

Here’s how: The phone at Intergroup is answered by an automated computerized system that gives the caller an options menu. If the caller presses zero, leaving a name and number, a beeper is activated and the volunteer carrying the beeper returns the call at once. The caller has other options as well: to leave a nonemergency voice message, listen to current schedules of the approximately 95 Wabash Valley area meetings, and to retrieve other information. Sue F. is quick to point out that “the caller’s first human contact is with an alcoholic. And the response time has been terrific.”

Today, she explains, “there are 31 volunteers, each of them carrying the beeper one day a month. So more people are directly involved in Twelfth Step referrals; they also are more keenly aware of Intergroup as an entity and the broad scope of its effectiveness in helping the alcoholic.”

Before volunteers can carry a beeper, they must have at least nine months of sobriety in A.A. “Getting the initial 31 volunteers trained,” Sue F. recalls, “took several sessions, each lasting a couple of hours, and volunteers were given ample opportunity to practice retrieving calls.” As of now, she adds, “there are three beepers to accommodate the three teams, each headed by a leader. The calendar is set up so that team members have a couple of days in which to pass the beeper on to the next in line. For example: The A team covers the 1st, 4th, 7th and 10th days of the month, and so on; the B team covers the 2nd, 5th, 8th and 11th days of the month, etc.; and the C team covers the 3rd, 6th, 9th and 12th days, etc. Each of the 31 volunteers signs up for the same day each month. If Jean, for instance, is responsible for the beeper on November 17, she has two days to retrieve it

from Bill, who had it on the 14th—and, after finishing her stint, she has two days to give it to Jill, who will be beeper keeper on the 20th.”

Initially, Sue F. observes, “some thought that playing ‘pass the beeper’ would be a nightmare. Far from it. Usually our volunteers arrange to connect at meetings; if someone is unable to take the beeper as scheduled, most folks are good-natured about pinch-hitting.”

As for Susan S., she continues to be “the system technician and trouble shooter, along with a few other A.A.s now trained to help out.” She reports that “each month our new system has been up, we’ve logged more than 300 calls and have been able to respond to many urgent Twelfth Step calls and other requests, some from as far away as Nevada. We’ve had our share of gaffes—we’ve dropped the beepers . . . forgotten to turn them on . . . failed to get them to the next person scheduled. At the same time, however, we’ve reduced the draining \$200-per-month answering-service bill down to \$30. And we have increased the number of local A.A.s involved in Twelfth Step work. I guess the bottom line is the same for us as for the A.A. in the Big Book story called ‘Doctor, Alcoholic, Addict’ [p. 449]. Like him, when we ‘stopped living in the problem and began living in the answer, the problem went away.’”

---

## The ‘Bus Lady’ Makes the Wheels Go Round

She answers to the name Bus Lady, and for a year and a half she assured general service volunteers in Manhattan County of smoothly coordinated rides to and from area assemblies, conferences and Regional Forums. Thanks to the efforts of this committed A.A., also known as Cathy C., Manhattan County Treatment Facilities chair, attendance at the assemblies has risen noticeably. Indeed, she is so good at her second A.A. job that she can’t seem to lose it.

As Cathy explains, some counties in the Southeast New York Area have budgets for transportation, and many of them rent buses to transport volunteers to A.A. events. (Sometimes it is financially prudent for two counties, such as Manhattan and Brooklyn, to charter a bus together.) The general service representatives, district committee members and various other committee members are charged nominal fees in Tradition Seven’s spirit of self-support. “And that’s where I come in,” Cathy says. “It all started at my first cluster meeting when I was a very green G.S.R. Lynn B., a woman whose sobriety I admired, was leading the meeting. When I raised my hand and asked an innocuous question about

busing, she responded, 'Does this mean you'd like to do bus service for us?' Lynn happened to be the chair of the county meeting, so she had the authority to officially sandbag me like that. What could I say but 'yes'? It felt like the coffee-making commitment I'd made after my first 90 days in A.A. . . . like I had been elected cheerleader!"

Not knowing where to start, Cathy obtained the phone number of someone who had "done buses" before. "When I called and asked what to do," she recalls, "the A.A. said, 'Oh, I just looked in the Yellow Pages, called a bunch of places and found out quickly what the going rate was. When one came in a little cheaper and I thought I could work with the people there, that's the one I hired.' So that's what I did, and I've been doing it ever since, with the wonderful help of 'deputies' from my cluster who collect money and names and phone numbers and pass them on to me."

One of Cathy's favorite memories concerns her first experience in making the wheels of the bus go round to and from the Northeast Regional Forum in Altoona,

Pennsylvania. "The Southeast New York Assembly had a budget for chartering the bus and for putting the driver up for the weekend," she says. "It turned out that a large national bus company charged the same as the smaller operations, and they had a garage a few miles from where we were going. So we got the bus without needing a hotel room for the driver, which actually saved us money. The deputies and I made reports on our progress, got phone numbers and money from the assembly members, made the calls—and it all worked like a charm. S.E.N.Y. as a whole was very well-represented at that Regional Forum."

She adds that "everyone seemed happy to have it all made so easy. The bus picked us up at one central location that was convenient for all and dropped us back at the same place. (A helpful hint: Be sure to get a bus with a bathroom if the trip lasts more than an hour.) Also, the fact that the S.E.N.Y. chair had planned three months ahead proved a big help. That way everyone had ample time to hear about the bus, make their plans and pay their fares." Being Bus Lady has yielded "a nice

## Holiday Gift Ideas

The holiday season is fast approaching and many A.A.s like to give (and receive) A.A. literature.

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, \$6.00) is a gift that will last all year.

For years, now, A.A. members have been solving gift-giving problems by sending friends a Grapevine subscription. To keep track of your days (one at a time) are the Grapevine Wall Calendar, with beautiful color photos, \$5.50, and the GV Pocket Planner, \$3.50.

A new book from the Grapevine, which was introduced this summer at the International Convention, is *A.A. Around the World: Adventures in Recovery*, \$5.00.

Also introduced at the Convention is the Flip calendar version of *Daily Reflections* (see page 8).

Most of these items may be ordered from G.S.O. or through your local intergroup or central office. Grapevine books and other items are available by contacting the A.A. Grapevine: Grand Central Station, Box 1980, New York, NY 10163-1980.



personal payoff," Cathy says, "just like doing coffee for my home group. Everyone got acquainted with me and vice versa. Still, there's that service adage: 'Once you know what you're doing, it's time to move on.' On the Manhattan County level, I'm having a hard time giving it away and am eagerly seeking a successor." Meanwhile, she notes, "I am pleased as always to share my experience, strength and hope as the Bus Lady."

One thing more. Remember Lynn B., the lady who "sandbagged" Cathy into her busing job? "Well," Cathy reports, "I sandbagged the sandbagger into being my service sponsor. Predictably, the ride is great."

---

## How to Reach Us...

Box 459, like the name of this newsletter, has long been the number associated with the A.A. General Service Office. Just a reminder—all correspondence, group and individual contributions, and A.A. related information and questions should be addressed to our mailing address: Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163

We are always happy to welcome visitors. Last year 1,097 A.A.s and friends from around the world dropped by for a tour, a cup of coffee or to attend our Friday 11:00 a.m. A.A. meeting. We are located on the 11th Floor of the Interchurch Center, 475 Riverside Drive (between 120th & 119th Sts.), New York, NY 10115, Phone: (212) 870-3400. Our hours are 8:30 - 4:30. Enter 61 Claremont Ave.

---



*This International Convention Souvenir item is available from G.S.O. The flip-top, calendar version of Daily Reflections is \$10.75; quantity discounts apply. Available in English (B-53) and Spanish (B-54).*

## C.P.C./P.I.

### Putting A.A. On the Air

There are many ways to be friendly with our friends in the print and electronic media, to cooperate with them in reaching out to alcoholics. But for this to happen, we need to make certain they understand the philosophy of A.A.—what it is, what it can and cannot do. Such is the task that has faced the Southeast New York (S.E.N.Y.) Area 49 Committee on Cooperation With the Professional Community.

Says Dorothy D.: "Many times our members are asked to 'pass it on' through various means such as speaking before various groups in the community—court personnel, students, seniors and members of the clergy, to name a few. In some areas, public service announcements (P.S.A.s.)—those brief spots that have attracted thousands of alcoholics with the reassuring words, 'A.A. It works'—are made available to local TV and radio stations. So when a radio production team came to our New York City Intergroup for assistance in planning a series of pilot programs, we knew from past experience that our first order of business was to provide a C.P.C. orientation session for the producers—to give them a nuts-and-bolts introduction to the Fellowship. They also were invited to attend an open A.A. meeting."

These actions, Dorothy reports, "jump-started a dialogue with the production team, and we made every effort to keep channels of communication open throughout the broadcasting process." The centerpiece of the series is an open A.A. meeting, she notes, "and it was decided that the speakers would share their experience, strength and hope for 10-15 minutes each, maintaining anonymity as they saw fit. None used last names; some used pseudonyms in place of their first names; and one person chose to give no name at all, stating simply, 'I am an alcoholic.' This offered the moderator a chance to explain that anonymity is the spiritual foundation of A.A., assuring our members that their recovery will be private."

Before each of the 10 audio tapings completed thus far, Dorothy says, speakers have been reminded of the importance of guarding A.A.'s Traditions as they share their stories, perhaps none more strongly than Tradition Eleven, which states, "Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films."

At various times during each of the two-hour programs, listeners are given information on how to find an

A.A. meeting in their vicinity as well as the New York City Intergroup's phone number. The information is repeated again at the close of the program. To date, Dorothy reports, four pilot programs have been completed and offered to syndicators for weekly broadcasting.

Initially, she adds, "there was some nervousness about this project. But after much discussion and drawing on the collective experience of A.A., our committee members came to the conclusion that this was just an expanded P.S.A. We figured that, after all, it's the Higher Power that decides who will get sober—we A.A.s just carry the message."

---

## Correctional Facilities

### Letters of Sharing Benefit Everyone From the Inside Out

For Alfred S., an inmate in a Texas correctional facility, exchanging letters with an outside A.A. has reinforced hope, strength and the sense of belonging to A.A. In reverse, the same is true. "Alfred is so happy to have an outside contact that he is almost beside himself and writes frequently," says his outside A.A. contact, Willy O., of Clinton, Maryland. "He is sober nine years. As for me, I have been blessed with continuous sobriety since June 1977 and feel a special need to give back through Step Twelve what I have been given over the years."

Alfred and Willy met through the General Service Office's Corrections Correspondence Service (C.C.S.), through which A.A.s on the outside correspond with fellow members inside correctional facilities. Every month the Correctional Facilities desk at G.S.O. receives more than 500 letters from inmates, many asking for names of outside A.A. members with whom they can exchange letters, or for help in making contact with A.A. upon release. The C.F. desk tries to fill these requests as quickly as possible, primarily through the A.A. network of area, district and local C.F. committees throughout the U.S. and Canada, but still there is a waiting list. It is suggested that men correspond with men, and women with women. Since most inmates requesting a pen pal are men, that's where the greater need lies.

A.A. John C., who recently volunteered for C.C.S., explains why. "I got sober in August 1995," he writes, "and three months later my best friend was busted and received a two-year sentence. So I began writing to him and found that many a night it was the only thing that kept me sober.

Every night I would write about my day in a journal and then send it off at the end of the week. Later my friend returned these letters to me, and I have been given the gift to see what a miracle it was that I stayed sober. My friend never did get sober, but I know that if it were not for the letters, I might not be here in A.A. today. I haven't written a letter in two years, and some nights I lie awake wishing I had someone to write to. Well, [C.C.S.] is my chance to help me and another alcoholic."

Another volunteer, Joe Y. of Toronto, Ontario, writes that he has been "writing young men in prison for nine years. A lot of my A.A. friends did short and long terms. All are out now and through the grace of God are living dry, positive lives. This is what they learned in A.A. while doing time. In these years I was fortunate to witness their growth." Now, Joe says, "I would like to share with another A.A. behind bars. I too was there, and I know how important it is for alcoholics [inmates] to experience the feeling they are not alone."

Outside correspondent Rick S. of Texas wrote last February that he wants to "pass on what I have received." Four years ago, while incarcerated in a Texas prison, he explains, "I heard from one of the men at an A.A. meeting that I might be able to find me a sponsor through the mail. So I wrote to G.S.O. and sure was blessed when Carlo D. sent me a letter. We kept corresponding, and I couldn't have asked for a better sponsor. He's even walked in my shoes, so I have treasured his wisdom and experience all the more. Carlo has patiently taken me through all the Twelve Steps and remains my sponsor and friend all these years."

A.A. Tom S. says he is a correspondent because "a man named Mike wrote to me while I was incarcerated. His letters were critical to my continuing sobriety. The fact that a fellow alcoholic on the outside cared about me staying sober made the lowest time of my life bearable." Upon his release in December 1992, Tom immediately wrote to G.S.O. to connect with an inmate. "I also started carrying a meeting into the local penitentiary," he adds, "and I'm happy to say that by keeping these actions a vital part of my recovery, I have stayed sober and live a great life today."

Like Tom, many A.A.s on the outside, along with those inside, enhance their sobriety, indeed their entire lives, by sharing through the mail. And as the flyer "Corrections Correspondence—a Special Kind of A.A. Service" reports, "Those who have participated in this service have found . . . a very gratifying form of Twelfth Step work."

Writes one A.A. from a correctional facility in the northeast: "The Fellowship allows us to share without rejection. . . . I now look forward to that first A.A. meeting in the street, the chance to share strength, hope and sobriety. Just as the journey of life starts with our first breath, the journey to sobriety starts with the First Step."

## 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.*

## 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.

### October

- 5-7—*Hagerstown, Maryland*. NERC 2000. Write: Ch., Box 19958, Baltimore, MD 21211
- 5-8—*Decatur, Illinois*. 17th Women to Women Seminar. Write: Ch., Box 882, Decatur, IL 62525
- 5-8—*Lafayette, Louisiana*. 17th Annual Cajun Country Conf. Write: Ch., Box 3160, Lafayette, LA 70502
- 6-8—*Lunteren, Netherlands*. Dutch Conv. Write: G.S.O., Postbox 2633, 3000 CP Rotterdam, Netherlands
- 6-8—*North Bay, Ontario, Canada*. 45th NE Ontario Area Conf. Write: Ch., Box 1165, North Bay, ON P1B 8K4
- 6-8—*Toronto, Ontario, Canada*. 22nd Roundup (presented by gay and lesbian members). Write: Ch., Box 31, 552 Church St., Toronto, ON M4Y 2E3
- 6-8—*Crescent City, California*. Sobriety by the Sea. Write: Ch., Box 871, Crescent City, CA 95531
- 6-8—*Modesto, California*. 53rd Annual Fall Conf. (NCCAA). Write: Ch., 1308 Vine Circle., Rocklin, CA 95765-4710
- 6-8—*Oklahoma City, Oklahoma*. Fifth Annual Red Road to Freedom Conf. Write: Ch., Box 76171, Oklahoma, OK 73147-2171
- 7-8—*New York, New York*. 20th Hispanic State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 5, Old Westbury, NY 11568-0005
- 13-15—*Puerto Penasco, Mexico*. Seventh Rocky Point Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 66926, Phoenix, AZ 85082-6926
- 13-15—*Petit Jean Mountain, Arkansas*. ARKYPAA XVIII. Write: Ch., 8528 Shimrod Rd., Benton, AR 72015
- 13-15—*Stateline, Nevada*. 25th Lake Tahoe Fall Festival. Write: Ch., Box 91307, So. Lake Tahoe, CA 96151
- 13-15—*Bastrop, Texas*. 16th Fellowship in the Pines. Write: Ch., 282 Old 71, Cedar Creek, TX 78612
- 19-22—*Augusta, Georgia*. 47th State Pre-Paid Conv. Write: Ch., Box 14446, Augusta, GA 30919-0446
- 19-22—*Memphis, Tennessee*. Bluff City Fellowship. Write: Ch., Box 240831, Memphis, TN 38124
- 20-21—*Columbus, Ohio*. Third Annual Area 53 CFC Conv. Write: Ch., Box 1201, Columbus, OH 43216

- 20-22—*Nassau, Bahamas*. Seventh Sobriety in Paradise Conv. Write: Nassau Group Activities, Box EE-16414, Nassau, Bahamas
- 20-22—*Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada*. 56th Keystone Conf. Write: Ch., 208-323 Portage Ave., Winnipeg, MB R3C 2C1
- 20-22—*Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Canada*. Area 81 Assembly Conf. Write: Ch., 220 Kent St., #3, Charlottetown, PEI C1A 1P2
- 20-22—*San Bernardino, California*. Inland Empire 13th Annual Conv. Write: Ch., Box 962, Moreno Valley, CA 92556
- 20-22—*Santa Maria, California*. Eighth Annual 52nd Dist. Conv. Write: Ch., Box 481, Santa Maria, CA 93456-0481
- 20-22—*Louisville, Kentucky*. KCYPAA. Write: Ch., Box 39091, Louisville, KY 40233-9091
- 20-22—*Mackinac Island, Michigan*. 12th Annual Fall Weekend. Write: Ch., Lansing Central Off., 302 So. Waverly, Lansing, MI 48917
- 20-22—*Austin, Minnesota*. Hiawathaland Get-Together. Write: Ch., Box 5792, Rochester, MN 55903
- 20-22—*Greensburg, Pennsylvania*. 54th Laurel Highlands Conf. Write: Ch., Box 6, Bovard, PA 15619-0567
- 20-22—*Rapid City, South Dakota*. Area 63 Fall Conf. Write: Ch., Dist. 2, Box 2767, Rapid City, SD 57709-2767
- 20-22—*Clarksville, Tennessee*. Area 64 Fourth Quarterly Assembly. Write: Ch. 5454 Marion Rd., Cunningham, TN 37052
- 20-22—*Latham Springs, Texas*. Brazos Riverside Conf. Write: Ch., Box 5624, Laguna Park, TX 76634
- 26-29—*Hagerstown, Maryland*. 16th Annual Area 29 Fall Conf. Write: Ch., Box 3864, Crofton, MD 21114
- 27-29—*St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands*. 14th Annual Caribbean Conv. Write:

## Closed Meeting Topics From the Grapevine

For more detailed suggestions, see the pages noted.

- October (page 41): Warm Welcome
- November (page 59): The Home Group

- Ch., Box 303435, St. Thomas, U.S. VI 00803-3435
- 27-29—*London, Ontario, Canada*. Western Ont. Conf. Write: Ch., 956 Dundas St., Box 46036, London, ON N5W 3A1
- 27-29—*Bossier City, Louisiana*. 55th Tri-State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 495, Shreveport, LA 71101
- 27-29—*Wakefield, Massachusetts*. 12th NE Woman to Woman Conf. Write: Ch., Box 35001, Brighton, MA 02135
- 27-29—*Branson, Missouri*. Western Area of Missouri Conv. Write: Ch., Box 3263, Springfield, MO 65808
- 27-29—*Hannibal, Missouri*. Miss. Valley Regional Conf. Write: Ch., 728 Hickory St., Hannibal, MO 63401
- 27-29—*Broken Bow, Oklahoma*. Beaver's Bend Round Robin. Write: Ch., Box 132854, Tyler, TX 75713-1328

### November

- 3-4—*Cheyenne, Wyoming*. Area 76 2000 Fall Conv. Write: Ch., Box 2785, Cheyenne, WY 82003
- 3-5—*Chapel Hill, Tennessee*. Eighth Int'l. Conf. for Old Timers. Write: Ch., Box 427, Blue Springs, MO 64015

## Planning a Future Event?

Please send your information on December, January and February events, two days or more, in time to reach G.S.O. by October 10, the calendar deadline for the Holiday 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): \_\_\_\_\_

Flip up this end of page - for events on reverse side

- 10-11—*Cornwall, Ontario, Canada.* 53rd Anniversary in Cornwall Conf. Write: Ch., Box 1984, Cornwall, ON K6J 6N7
- 10-12—*Okoboji, Iowa.* 17th Annual Pre-Winter Rally. Write: Ch., Box 282, Spencer, IA 51301
- 10-12—*Fitchburg, Massachusetts.* 37th Annual Mass. State Conv. Write: Rgsr., Box 344, Westminster, MA 01473-0344
- 10-12—*Cincinnati, Ohio.* Eighth Annual Buckeye Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 5314, Cincinnati, OH 45205
- 17-19—*Huntington, West Virginia.* Southeast Regional Forum. Write: Forum Coordinator, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163
- 17-19—*Fontana, Wisconsin.* McHenry's Soberfest. Write: Ch., Box 717, McHenry, IL 60051-0717
- 18-19—*Paris, France.* 40th Anniversary. Write: Ch., 21 rue Trousseau, 75011, Paris.
- 23-26—*Las Vegas, Nevada.* 34th Annual Las Vegas Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 43177, Las Vegas, NV 89116
- 24-26—*Diamondhead, Mississippi.* 11th Annual Gratitude Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 7851, Gulfport, MS 39507-7851

## December

- 1-3—*Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.* Ninth Sandapper Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 14634, Surfside Beach, SC 29587

## January

- 5-7—*Garden City, Kansas.* 31st Annual SW Kansas Conf. Write: Ch., 410 N. Main, Scott City, KS 67871
- 6-7—*Spokane and Yakima, Washington.* Special Regional Forum. Write: Forum Coordinator, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163
- 19-21—*Corpus Christi, Texas.* 47th Annual Coastal Bend Jamboree. Write: Ch., 5433 S. Staples St., Ste. F, Corpus Christi, TX 78411