

How Do Groups Cope With the Moving Blues?

To its A.A. members, the home-group meeting place is just that—home, in the best, most reassuring sense of the word. So what happens when the group is forced to relocate? Do seasoned members drift off or do they pitch in to effect a (relatively) smooth transition from old abode to new? How do newcomers react? And what lasting effect does the move have on everything from the group's finances to friendships to overall unity and strength? Herewith some "moving pictures" shared by group members who have been there.

Martha W. of Houston has been through enough group moves to build an edifice complex. "My home group, the Rosewood Thursday Night Group, has stayed on the premises of a local hospital," she explains, "but because of major remodeling, we were moved all over the lot for a couple of years—from the cafeteria to the psychiatric ward to a small, stuffy library which held 12 people providing they didn't breathe deeply."

The constant dislocation affected the membership significantly, Martha says. "People had trouble finding us and would wind up late for the meeting. The rooms were all different and often uncomfortable, and the usual routine of setting up literature and refreshments was always being disrupted. Also, A.A.s—especially the newcomers—are sensitive to their surroundings. They draw reassurance from seeing the same people in the

same rooms, often in the same seats, something we couldn't provide for some time."

Attendance at meetings "fell off dramatically," Martha recalls, "as did morale, and at one point, we voted on whether or not to continue in the same location. The 'ayes' had it, and a small but cohesive core of members proceeded to stick it out. Today the hospital's facelift is complete and we meet in the same comfortable conference room every week. Our membership is expanding again; as a group we're close-knit and, for sure, we know we're adaptable! Still, I miss the people who used to be there and wish they had hung in with us. We need all the sobriety we can get."

Floridian Joyce K. tells what happened when her Coral Springs Group was faced with the need to move after 20 years in the same location. "We, the group members, phoned and ran around a lot but couldn't find another place, so we did a lot of praying, thanked our lucky stars and some competent group treasurers for having built up a prudent financial reserve, and let the Higher Power find it for us—a storefront about a mile away from our original meeting place.

"But before we found our new home, life was chaotic. For a brief time, the Thursday night meetings were held at an interim spot while the Monday night folks still carried on in the old place. The newcomers were con-



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fused and tended to drift away, but those who'd been around awhile just dug in their heels, smiled a lot and reassured the new folks that 'everything will work out fine a day at a time,' though they didn't know how in the world it would. As matters turned out, their words were right on."

On July 26th, the Coral Springs Group marked its 22nd anniversary in the new meeting room. "It was a nostalgic and joyous night," Joyce relates. "Recalling the big move, our main feelings were of relief, gratitude and A.A. love. This group's unity had been tested and we'd come through stronger than ever. There was much to celebrate and we did."

Up North, on New York City's East Side, the Seventy-Ninth Street Workshop holds as many meetings in one week—54—as some groups do in a year. "Looking at us today," says member Dorothy D., "one would not guess that we were in danger of having to disband just a few years ago."

Informed in 1986 that they would have to move out of their space on the third floor of a commercial walk-up, the Workshop members appointed an ad hoc search committee of ten members to hunt for new quarters. "We knew that finding a home for all our meetings, which then numbered 42 a week, mightn't be a piece of cake," Dorothy says, "but we didn't expect a hassle. After all, our group, almost a decade old at the time, was no stranger to moving; the present location was our fifth, and we'd functioned in a variety of digs, one of them over a methadone clinic. Well, we were wrong. There were several frustrating weeks of tangling with less than enthusiastic realty agents.

"Meanwhile, back home in our walk-up, the landlord threatened to rip the stairs out from under us, and at least one irate member wanted to slap him with a restraining order. It was getting to be high drama all the way. The one bright spot: We'd known for some time that our lease was expiring and we might be thrown out, so we'd been tucking money away like squirrels before the snow. We just kept asking members to dig a little deeper and they responded generously."

For Dorothy, "the Third Step saved the day—taking constructive action, then trying to 'Let Go and Let God.'

Finally, thanks to a very helpful realty agent, we connected with a church on the same street and secured a solid, long-term lease on space in its ample basement.

"As dividing walls went up, I thought of Bill W.'s touching description of the Fellowship at the 1955 Convention in St. Louis (*A.A. Comes of Age*, p. 234): 'We give thanks . . . [for] this wonderful edifice of the Spirit in which we are now dwelling. . . . The older ones among us have seen the side walls of this cathedral going up, and one by one they have seen the buttresses of the A.A. Tradition set in place to contain us in unity for so long as God may will it so. And now eager hearts and hands have lifted the spire of our cathedral into its place. That spire bears the name of Service.' In his elegant style, Bill was just talking about A.A.s like us."

Winter Olympics Anyone? There'll be A.A. Meetings Aplenty

Of the expected 150,000 visitors attending the world Championships of Bicycling, just held in August in Norway, A.A.s among them were welcomed by fellow Norwegian A.A.s and given an opportunity to attend meetings scheduled near the sporting competition sites.

"A.A. in Norway had established an extended telephone service and extra meetings in English, starting one week before and finishing one week after the competitions," write Nils B. and Erik B., of the Norwegian Central P.I. Committee.

Take note that similar meetings are scheduled for the Winter Olympics in Norway in February of 1994.

"Our groups have been alerted and are eager to greet A.A.s when they need us and want to get out of traffic jams, stressing moments and other unexpected problems," Erik and Nils write.

The resort town of Lillehammer is the main site of the Winter Olympics, but some of the competitions will be staged near Lake Mjosa, Norway's largest lake, where some of the bicycling championship races were recently held. Lake Mjosa is where "Skidbadner"—the world's oldest paddle steamer (built in 1856)—is anchored. On board, write Erik and Nils, visitors can "enjoy supreme Norwegian river salmon and fresh strawberries with cream while you watch the countryside pass by and relax from exhausting competitions."

In case you're planning to go, the Norwegian General Service Office international telephone number is: (0-11-47) 223-87218. The international fax number is: (0-11-47) 224-68177.

International Deaf Group Meeting by Mail: Early Members Reminisce

Twenty-five years ago two men, as if taking a cue from our co-founders, decided they needed to communicate with each other to maintain their sobriety. Since they lived in different countries, naturally they had to do it in writing. If they'd met face to face, however, they would have had to talk to each other in sign language, as they both were deaf. They were Herman R., of Duarte, California, who will be 86 in September, and John B., of New Brunswick, Canada. The year was 1968.

Thus began the International Deaf Group Meeting by Mail (listed in the *A.A. Directory* under Special International Contacts). One of the group's early members was Carl M., of Fairmont, West Virginia, who celebrated his 32nd A.A. anniversary in March. Carl shares that as a young newlywed he moved to Akron, Ohio, finding employment at the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company, where a number of other deaf individuals also worked. His drinking was already getting him into more and more trouble. He became the father of two little girls, his wife left him many times, and eventually, when her own drinking became a problem, they divorced.

The one bright side was that "my home was always full of my daughters' friends . . . they played in the high school band and, because I couldn't hear, they could play music in my house as loud as they wanted. They liked me! The whole house shook from music vibrations, I could feel them," Carl writes. As the years went by and his drinking continued, he became almost unemployable. At one point Carl had become a barber, but his hands now shook dangerously, and he would probably not have been able to continue working much longer. One day a customer asked him why his hands shook so much.

"I told him I drank too much. He said he knew a fellow in A.A. and he could come and see me. I told him to send him. His name was Mike, and he was a barber too. Mike and I started to make the rounds of A.A. meetings almost every night. Mike knew finger spelling . . ." Carl writes.

A few years later Carl happened to read an article in the *A.A. Grapevine* "about two deaf men trying to start the Deaf International Group and I began to write to them," Carl writes. Eventually, he met one of them, John B., at an A.A. convention in New Orleans.

John B., in response to a recent letter to him from Carl, writes the following about how the group originally began: "When I was sober two or three months (around January 1968), I started to wonder if there were other deaf A.A. members in Canada or the U.S. that I could share with. My sponsor suggested I write to G.S.O.

To my surprise, they came up with five names. I wrote to them all, but one of them, Herman R., suggested we form a new group, International Deaf Group Meeting by Mail.

"I have enjoyed being with it for a long time," John continues, "and owe a lot to A.A. and the group for my good, solid sobriety. . . . It was always very exciting to receive other members' letters and I know they liked receiving mine. When a beloved member whom I never met in person passed away, it was incredibly sad for me, but the inspiration I received through their letters will never be forgotten."

In addition to a video of the Big Book in American Sign Language, other service material is available: Steps for Signing, and Guidelines for Carrying the A.A. Message to the Hearing-impaired Alcoholic. These can be obtained through G.S.O.'s Group Services Desk.

SERVICES AT G.S.O.

Carrying the Message to Treatment Facilities

"The Treatment Facilities assignment really brings you close to the illness," says Sarah P., G.S.O. staff member currently serving on the Treatment Facilities desk. "It also brings you close to the wonderful, dedicated A.A.s who are on the front line in terms of carrying the message. I have found the members of the T.F. committees a terrific group to work with."

Although some treatment facilities have been closing or curtailing services in recent years, there's been no lessening of the Twelfth Step work offered by the Fellowship's volunteers who carry A.A.'s message into those institutions throughout the U.S. and Canada. In fact, says Sarah, "As far as carrying the message goes, most treatment facilities committees report there's been no change. We're still going in, still doing Twelfth Step work, still greeting the people when they come out."

The assignment receives two types of letters, Sarah says, "One, we hear from new A.A. members undergoing treatment, wanting to tell their stories and asking for literature. And two, we hear from A.A.'s serving on treatment facilities committees, looking for shared experience in handling any number of challenges they face in following through with Twelfth Step commitments."

As part of its basic service, G.S.O. sends all area, district and central office committee chairpersons, the Treatment Facilities Workbook, a loose-leaf book with sections covering everything from anonymity to temporary contact programs. Chairpersons also receive *Box*

4-5-9 and *About A.A.*, our newsletter for the professional community.

The biannual Treatment Facilities Newsletter, also sent to T.F. committee chairs, is compiled by the staff member from sharing received from the different area volunteers. For example, in a recent issue, a letter from a committee chairperson in Colorado shared the need for separate appointments with treatment facilities' management staff and patients; another, from Virginia, spoke of efforts to open lines of communication with the staffs of new outpatient facilities; from Manitoba came a description of different steps taken in setting up and maintaining temporary sponsorship programs.

"G.S.O. often receives letters from treatment facilities clients," Sarah says, "explaining they have no money and would greatly appreciate our sending them a Big Book and a Twelve and Twelve." In turn, G.S.O. refers the request to the local T.F. committee and ask if they can supply literature for the use of everyone at the facility. One particularly heartwarming letter that recently arrived at G.S.O. is excerpted in the Treatment Facilities department on page 10.

Playing Doctor in A.A. May Be Hazardous to Someone's Health

The caveats echo throughout the Steps, Traditions and other literature: "Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers" . . . "Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues" . . . and "We A.A.s are sober alcoholics, not physicians."

That's all well and good, comments Chicago district committee member Richard M., "but some members in our area and others are equating sobriety with total abstinence not just from alcohol but from doctor-prescribed medication too." Because of the very real problems that many alcoholics have with drugs, he adds, "such members hold that medication is a no-no under any and all circumstances. While this position has undoubtedly prevented relapses for some, it has been outright dangerous for others."

Some confusion has arisen, Richard feels, from misinterpretation of the Conference-approved pamphlet "The A.A. Member: Medications and Other Drugs"—perhaps because some people have read only part-way. Prepared with the help of physicians who themselves are members of A.A., the pamphlet details the harrowing experiences of three A.A.s who have taken drugs while sober. It notes the alcoholic's "tendency to become addicted again" and cautions that "the use of medica-

tions and drugs to relieve stress becomes an almost automatic response for many alcoholics."

At the same time, the pamphlet states up front that A.A. is "a program for alcoholics who seek freedom from alcohol. It is not a program against drugs." The text explains that "some of us have had to cope with depressions that can be suicidal; schizophrenia that sometimes requires hospitalization; and other disabling physical and emotional illnesses."

It further notes that "A.A. members and many of their physicians have described situations in which depressed patients have been told by A.A.s to throw away the pills, only to have depression return with all its difficulties, sometimes resulting in suicide. We have heard, too, from others requiring medication, that well-meaning A.A. friends often discourage them from taking prescribed medication. Unfortunately, by following a layperson's advice, the sufferers find that their conditions can return with all previous intensity. On top of that, they feel guilty because they are convinced that 'A.A. is against pills.'"

In "Julie's Story," in the pamphlet, the writer concludes, "I think it is very important for anyone in the program who is considering taking medication to get as much information as possible before taking it. Certainly, the decision to take medication should be made primarily between a doctor who is informed about alcoholism and a patient who is informed about the medication."

Double Take

Gratitude never wears out the welcome mat, and the General Service Office was delighted recently to receive a warm expression of it from a member in San Francisco.

"Two-and-a-half years ago," writes Lana N., "I sent you a letter of despair about my inability to understand the English version of the Big Book. You kindly sent me the Swedish translation and I have stayed sober. I've even returned to Sweden and gone to meetings in my hometown."

Noting that she still tries to read both versions of the Big Book, Lana adds, "I am trying to put the action into my heart and not my head. I love each 24 hours I am given, and I want to be part of A.A. and responsible for my actions. Which brings me to the Swedish Big Book you sent, I never did receive an invoice and only recently found out how expensive it is [\$44, as compared to \$5 for the English hardcover edition]. I hope the \$50 enclosed will cover the book's cost and mailing expense.

"Thank you for being so kind and helpful. It makes a big difference to me that someone cared and wanted to help."

Do We A.A.s Have A Case of the Twelfth Step Blahs?

Once upon an A.A. time, Twelfth Stepping was a vital, hands-on affair. Members routinely made house calls, visited newcomers in the hospital or detox, escorted them to numerous meetings, shared their own experience, strength and hope nonstop, acted as sponsors and, in the case of A.A. co-founder Dr. Bob, almost killed their taste buds with a surfeit of sauerkraut, tomatoes and Karo syrup.

In *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, co-founder Bill W. writes of the "wonderful energy" Twelfth Stepping releases and "the eager action by which it carries our message to the next suffering alcoholic." But these days, all too few A.A.s seem to identify with the experience. As Virginia Area archivist Mary Ann H. observes, "A lot of the newer members think a Twelfth Step call means phoning intergroup to locate a meeting. Chances are, they've never made a house call and haven't the remotest idea of how to go about it."

There are as many alcoholics out there as ever, so why the lethargy and lack of know-how? Over the past decade or so, Mary Ann points out, treatment facilities mushroomed everywhere. From the beginning, they were quick to embrace A.A. and directed their patients to our meetings in ever-increasing numbers. To a large extent, they were doing our work for us.

"The result: With so many newcomers coming to A.A. sober, or at least 'dry,' a whole new generation of



This "Man On the Bed" painting, depicting two alcoholics Twelfth Stepping a third, hangs in many A.A. meeting rooms. Originally titled "Came to Believe," it first appeared in the December 1955 issue of the Grapevine. The artist, Bob M., an A.A. member who was a volunteer illustrator for the Grapevine, presented the original to Bill W. in 1956. Reproductions are available from the Grapevine.

us has never made those house calls, and we don't know what it's like to see an alcoholic in a convulsion at a meeting, never mind knowing how to help them. Now many of the treatment centers are closing down, more sick alcoholics are coming directly to A.A., and we need to be there for them."

This important subject was discussed at last December's Southeast Regional Forum, which was attended by both Mary Ann (a past delegate) and past trustee Sam S. of Miami, Florida. "We talked about what could be done at a spirited 'What's On Your Mind?' sharing session," Sam reports. "One fellow deplored the fact that meetings today are so 'laundered' and said that some of our new people have never seen a sick, dirty, obstreperous drunk roll in."

Both Sam and Mary Ann cite the need for strong, knowledgeable sponsorship. "Among other things, my sponsor showed me how to make A.A. house calls," Mary Ann remembers. "She taught me never to go unaccompanied by another A.A. member . . . to try to approximate closeness of age for identification if possible . . . not to toss out the liquor in the house myself but to get the sick alcoholic to do it . . . to think of myself only as a temporary sponsor . . . to wait until I was more than two minutes sober before venturing forth on such a mission . . . and much more."

Sam notes that his South Dade County Group, which holds several meetings daily, has a Twelfth Step room where newcomers can spend the time of day or night connecting with other A.A.s passing through. "This setup has produced and sustained a lot of quality sobriety," he says, "and it would be good to have more like it."

"I'd also like to see intergroups and central offices hold in-depth Twelfth Step workshops. It's up to them and the General Service Office to get the word out, but most of all it's up to each of us to put the git-go back into carrying the message. Have we a choice? As Bill wrote in the April 1961 Grapevine, 'A.A. is a society of alcoholics in action. We must carry the message, else we ourselves can wither and those who haven't been given the truth may die.'"

Canada Celebrates 50 Years of A.A.

It was a great celebration! The first weekend in July, between 6-7,000 A.A.s and friends from Canada, the U.S., South America, Europe and Asia, gathered in Toronto to celebrate 50 years of Alcoholics Anonymous in Canada. Some of the countries represented were: Mexico, the West Indies, Brazil, England, Ireland, Scotland, Holland and Sri Lanka.

Chairpersons Marlene V. and Frank O., program chairman Bob D. and committee members often worked under some trying circumstances coordinating the event. Over 554 alcoholics participated at the meetings, excluding those taking part in the talkathons or acting as greeters, buddies and cookout workers. The full program included 31 speaker meetings, 26 panels, 40 marathon meetings lasting 50 hours and two talkathons.



Toronto's Metropolitan Centre

The first event, a speaker meeting, took place at the Royal York Hotel with a full house at 7 p.m. on Thursday July 1, Canada's holiday similar to the U.S.A.'s July 4th. Following the meeting there was a great display of fireworks over the waterfront in celebration of Canada Day.

Speakers at the highlight meetings were Canadians from across the country: Bev. T. from Chatham, Ontario; Cec. C. from Prince Albert, Saskatchewan; Sean A. from Vancouver, British Columbia. The Closing Meeting speaker on Sunday was Kay H., from Montreal, Quebec. Kay's sobriety date was September 4, 1950, so it was fitting that she finished the celebration.

Saturday morning the trusted servants served breakfast to the members—proving that they 'did not govern.' Past delegates donned aprons and t-shirts and served Western sandwiches in the morning and fish fry sandwiches at lunch.

At the sobriety "count up" on Saturday evening the attendee with the longest sobriety was George S. from Vancouver, who got sober November 11, 1944. But, as at every A.A. meeting, it was the newcomers who got everyone's attention. At the close of the convention four new members, who had stopped drinking in the last week, were introduced. Marc P., Eastern Canada regional trustee, gave each newcomer a copy of the June Grapevine—the all Canada issue—and an Ontario History Book.

A newcomers room was open throughout the weekend, and was visited by nine brand-new people and over 100 comparatively new A.A. members—representative of the members who may well lead the Canadian regions into the next 50 years.

Abridged Pocket Version of Big Book Now Available

Alcoholics Anonymous is now in an abridged, soft-cover format that will easily fit into pocket, purse or suitcase. The 3 $\frac{7}{8}$ " x 5 $\frac{5}{8}$ " volume contains all front matter, Prefaces, Forewords and Dr.'s Opinion; the text of pages 1-164; "Dr. Bob's Nightmare" and Appendices. An order form is enclosed with this issue of *Bar* 4-5-9, or order from your local intergroup or the General Service Office. (B-35) \$4.00 each; quantity discounts available.

Guideposts to Sobriety

All travelers through life need occasional guideposts that help to point us in the right direction; A.A.s, moving along the sometimes rocky path of recovery, are no exception. These guideposts are not just useful as daily pointers; they are often essential to our continued sobriety. When you get right down to it, most of us wouldn't be able to stay sober without them.

This is what Sidney (Sid) M., past delegate of Louisiana, discovered years ago, after a fortuitous reading of an article in a February 1977 issue of the *Grapevine*, entitled "Guideposts to Sobriety." The article, he says, opened him up to a recognition of how particular guideposts, spotted in A.A.'s Big Book, the Twelve and Twelve and other daily readings, would help him maintain his sobriety. Sid described his experience in a presentation he gave at the December 2-4, 1992 Southeast Regional Forum in Virginia Beach, Virginia.

"One day I was reading a new issue of the *Grapevine* in which someone had written an article to which I was very attracted because the author's version of guideposts to sobriety were referenced to the page number and paragraph in the Big Book. I researched all of them and highlighted them in my Big Book. I read the 'guideposts' often and each time I read them I would find something in the Big Book that I had never read before," Sid said.

He was familiar by then with a good deal of A.A. literature, Sid said. About a month after he had first joined A.A., he had found a sponsor, who told him right off to buy the Big Book, Twelve and Twelve and a meditation book. "Within a short time a glimmer of light appeared and I began to understand what they had been talking about at meetings," Sid said. Before that time, he explained, all the things he heard people talk about—"carrying the message, spiritual experiences, spiritual awakenings, Twelve Step calls, and on and on"—had made him suspect that "maybe this was an elite group of ex-drunks, of high intellect, and that

... I was in the wrong place."

But by the time he read the Grapevine guideposts article he had known for some time "that I was in the right place," Sid said. The article explained how the Big Book was full of guideposts, and all we had to do was to follow them. For example: if a part of Chapter 5 is read at a meeting, the article said, especially the words "Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path," the *path* referred to is in the Big Book and along that path are guideposts, showing us the way to comfortable sobriety.

Another citation was on page 14 of the Big Book, in "Bill's Story," where it spoke of the "imperative to work with others." Again, on page 89, the article went on, it pointed to another guidepost: "Practical experience shows that nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as intensive work with alcoholics." Numerous other citations were given.

Sid began to spot guideposts for himself in many more pages of A.A. literature. "I started reading the Twelve and Twelve and was amazed at the 'guideposts' I found in it," he said. "I read the literature each day and found daily guidance in it. I became my group's G.S.R. and started studying the *A.A. Service Manual*. A new legacy of guidelines opened up for me in the Manual and took me to new heights I never dreamed of achieving in A.A."

"In retrospect," Sid concluded, "I knew that my confusion in the beginning, the way I got a sponsor, the article in the Grapevine, everything I've done and everything I do, are guideposts to sobriety. Sometimes the guideposts are not for me, but rather for me to pass on to someone else. Through God's grace I get to do that often."

A.A. in Cuba—A Recent Phenomenal Growth

We have recently witnessed the Fellowship's burgeoning growth in Cuba, especially in just the last six months. Of course, the A.A. message had been filtering into the country for quite some time, but never so much as lately.

A number of different efforts by A.A.s have contributed to the startling opening to A.A. by Havana's authorities. But the largest share of this successful, country-to-country Twelfth Step work was accomplished through the diligent efforts of A.A.s in Mexico. In fact, Mexico has become Cuba's A.A. "sponsor." Early this year, writes Mexico's World Service Meeting delegate, Pedro H., his country's G.S.O. undertook a C.P.C. effort to inform the Cuban government of the A.A. program of recovery.

"For the past several years," Pedro explains, "we had tried to carry the message, without any results due to the situation in Cuba."

But alcoholism had continued to spread rampantly, Pedro says. Over time, the Cuban authorities had apparently recognized their "powerlessness over the whole situation." An official change of mind took place and an A.A. group, "Sueno" (Dream Group) was begun in Havana in February. Membership has grown from six to thirty members and a second group is now active.

An informal report from some A.A.s traveling to Cuba revealed the following:

1) Many doctors and other health care providers in Cuba recognize alcoholism to be an incurable disease. For example, the physician in charge of alcoholism treatment at Havana's oldest hospital described alcoholism not only as an "incurable, family disease," but he even "stated that the most effective treatment (occurred) when alcoholics just talked to each other;"

2) A visit by the A.A. members to just one of the hundreds of family clinics situated across the island, and the interest generated by a discussion of alcoholism with the facility's doctor, who was eager to receive A.A. literature, was an indication to the visiting team of how A.A.'s message could, and probably will, continue to spread;

3) The country's current alcoholism treatment strategy, outlined by Dr. Ricardo Gonzales, director of Alcohol Treatment for Cuba, is: "Catch 'em before they get into full-blown alcoholism." During the group's visit to the alcoholism unit of a large psychiatric hospital outside of Havana, Dr. Gonzales said that he believed alcoholism to be incurable and progressive, but also that "with enough drinking, anyone could become an alcoholic."

4) A public information meeting, scheduled by the visiting A.A.s in the town of Cardenas, brought seventeen church leaders, all of whom showed a keen interest in A.A. and how it works;

5) The visitors met regularly to discuss A.A. topics with members of the fledgling Dream Group;

6) Interest in A.A., its literature, concepts and how it works, was high wherever the group went.

Why has all of this been happening lately? "It's hard to say exactly why," Danny M., who serves on G.S.O.'s Spanish Services desk, says, "except that members of the Fellowship traveling to Cuba have been spreading the word for years. Many A.A.s, particularly from Mexico, went there for a long period of time, carrying the message, the Big Book and other literature. No doubt a lot had been percolating under the surface for a long time, producing results that are only now emerging."

Other factors may have influenced the changes, Danny suggests. For example, a regularly scheduled A.A. meeting in English, held at the American Army Base at Guantanamo Bay, though not open to Cubans,

may have—by its very presence—played a role in carrying the message to the local population.

Danny agrees with Pedro H.'s sharing about alcoholism in Cuba. "It's a monumental problem," he says, "but the foundations of A.A. are now firmly planted, and they'll probably spread in the future at the same rapid rate of recent months. One reason for this is the Cuban culture's strong grounding in the family.

"It is a close, family society. Brothers, aunts, uncles, all of them are closely involved, and take great pride in a relative's recovery," Danny says. "For example, over the years, many a Cuban exile living in Florida got sober in A.A., and word got back to Cuba of his or her recovery. Word spread among the person's family members back home, and the seed was planted that A.A. works."

Guidelines Reflect A.A. Experience As It Happens

Thirty-odd years ago, when every letter at the General Service Office was typed or penned by hand, the first of a string of A.A. Guidelines—on clubs, as it happened—was produced with the purpose of consolidating shared A.A. experience on questions that cropped up frequently in correspondence.

Like everything else in the Fellowship, the Guidelines are not rules; they simply distill A.A. experience as it becomes available. In the interest of timeliness and accuracy, they are updated, when necessary, to reflect current group thinking as well as Advisory Actions of the General Service Conference.

Unlike A.A. Conference-approved literature, which is produced only as the result of Conference Actions, the Guidelines, along with other service material, are published by G.S.O. in response to A.A. members' expressed needs for clear, concise information.

Among the service pieces most requested at G.S.O., the Guidelines are presently available on 12 topics, including: central or intergroup offices; clubs; conferences and conventions; the relationship between A.A. and Al-Anon; cooperating with court, A.S.A.P. and similar programs; finance; and forming local committees on service in Correctional and Treatment Facilities, Public Information, and Cooperation With the Professional Community. A number of these are available in French, Spanish or both.

New Guidelines, such as those now being prepared on Literature Committees, are developed as the need arises. Conversely, the Guidelines on Answering Services, the Armed Forces, and Current Usage of A.A. Directories are rarely asked for these days, and will be dropped

when the inventory is depleted.

A.A. Guidelines, which are listed in our literature catalog, are available singly or in complete sets.

P.I.

Newsletter Helps A.A.s To Carry the Message

In Dutchess County, New York, a lively newsletter tells A.A.s what they want and need to know in order to carry the message of sobriety more effectively.

Says editor Tom E., chairperson of the Dutchess County, New York Public Information Committee: "We started publishing the newsletter last January. With a little bit of luck it comes out once a month, is circulated to about 40 general service representatives (G.S.R.s) at area service meetings and mailed to 70 groups."

In truth, he acknowledges, "I've learned more by researching various topics—many that never find their way into the newsletter. As with most things in this Fellowship, I give a little and get back a lot."

Here Tom notes that much of his information comes from the A.A. Guidelines on Public Information published by the General Service Office, *Box 4-5-9* and the Grapevine. "I borrow liberally from proven A.A. experience," he adds, "and I credit the source whenever I can."

Subjects covered in the one-page newsletter range widely from "What Is an Anonymity Break" to "How Groups Can Help with Public Information." Under the heading "Public Information Is Not Promotion," for instance, a clear, crisp item states: "When Tradition Eleven calls for 'attraction rather than promotion,' this is tied primarily to 'personal anonymity' at the public level.

"A.A. can send out news releases, offer pamphlets, ask radio stations to run public service announcements, and provide speakers for meetings without violating the Traditions. We avoid making exaggerated claims. We stick to the topic we know, which is the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. We avoid controversy. And we maintain personal anonymity at the public level."

When the P.I. committee is about to embark on a new project, Tom points out, "we find it useful to publish relevant information. Recently we had the opportunity to participate in a local radio program—to talk about A.A. and answer callers' questions—and the newsletter promptly cited the experience of other A.A.s who had appeared on such programs. Similarly, when the committee got ready to launch its Speaker's Bureau in response to requests for A.A. speakers from schools

and other organizations, the newsletter aired the need for volunteers with good results."

Basically, Tom explains, "it's a no-frills tool for improving the P.I. committee's communication with the groups and their members. It also keeps other service committees informed of what we're doing and often saves unnecessary duplication and overlapping of efforts."

Correctional Facilities

Joint Workshop in Oklahoma Gives Inmates A New Lease On Hope

It was a banner occasion when the Oklahoma Department of Corrections joined with A.A. and a local prison to sponsor the first cooperative informational event of its kind in the state. "Within the spirit of the Traditions," says Chuck P., chairperson of the Southeast District Correctional Facilities Committee, "we were friendly with our friends. Thanks to their help, we were able to carry the A.A. message more effectively than we could have alone."

Since 1980, Chuck has taken two meetings a week into the Mack Alford Correctional Center (MACC) in Stringtown. "Last year," he explains, "the fellows were restless—they wanted more spice in their meetings—so

I approached the chaplain, who also serves as program director, and suggested doing a workshop. He was familiar with A.A. and had recently attended one of our C.F. informational workshops and had a good grasp of what I was talking about. He went to work, I went to work, and pretty soon all systems were GO for the one-day event, which MACC had agreed to host."

The workshop was held within the correctional facility itself. It drew about 35 participants, including the A.A. inmates, personnel from three neighboring correctional facilities, and members of both the Bridge-the-Gap and C.F. committees.

Reports Chuck: "The inmates opened the workshop, as they would any open A.A. meeting, with the Serenity Prayer and readings of the A.A. Preamble and 'How It Works,' from Chapter Five of the Big Book. A.A. presentations were made on the Twelve Traditions; responsibilities and purpose of A.A. in its efforts to cooperate with correctional facilities (taken largely from the Correctional Facilities Workbook); A.A. Conference-approved literature; sponsorship; and bridging the gap between prison and the outside world."

Then, Chuck continues, "the correctional facilities' people took over. They candidly discussed several points of interest, including why and how they cooperate within A.A.'s Traditions. Noting that alcoholic inmates active in A.A. seemed to benefit, they stressed the need for more A.A. members to carry the message 'inside.' They also explained what A.A. members can and cannot do while visiting correctional facilities in view of the need for security at all times. A spirited open-discussion period followed the presentations."

Afterward, Chuck relates, "the corrections people expressed their enthusiasm for the workshop and their desire to hold more like it in the future. Relations between them and us were infinitely strengthened and,



The Correctional Facilities Workbook is now available in a new, easy-to-handle format. Correctional facilities information, formerly contained in the loose-leaf insert pages, is now available in a convenient booklet (8" x 5 1/4"), the same size as Living Sober. Front and back pockets in the vinyl folder contain assorted pamphlets, Guidelines and bulletins. (M-45) \$7.00.

consequently, our communication is excellent at this time. Most importantly, the inmates were overwhelmed by the number of 'outside' A.A.s who cared enough about their recovery to attend. Several of them commented that they now felt 'like we belong to A.A.' "

Treatment Facilities

A Big Book for Those to Come

Just before being released from a treatment facility in Oklahoma, Jan H. wrote to the Treatment Facilities desk at G.S.O.

"This past month an A.A. meeting was approved for this facility, and those with a serious drive to work the program look forward to these excellent meetings. Many have never experienced the bonding and care that comes from such meetings, nor do they really understand what meetings on the outside are like. We learn of the Big Book, but only one copy exists, which belongs to the meeting leader.

"I will be released and going home this Friday, and will be able to obtain my own Big Book through the A.A. group in my area. But it would be such a blessing if the A.A. group in this center had at least 10 Big Books which would remain the property of the hospital for the multitude of people who will continue to come and go throughout the years to come.

"I just want to tell you what a wonderful program and way of life Alcoholics Anonymous is for me. I am anxious to continue my program when I am released."

C.P.C.

North Florida Committee Shifts Into High Gear

Thanks to an infusion of zest, determination and contributions from the area budget, North Florida's Committee on Cooperation With the Professional Community is expanding in size and scope and reaching an

unprecedented number of professionals at the exhibits where they gather.

When asked, "What happened," C.P.C. committee chairperson Brian S. says, only half kidding, "We stashed a couple of tigers in our tank, but not all at once." At the beginning of 1993, he explains, "we were still trying to make do on an annual budget of \$500 that had been in place for several years. When we asked the area assembly for more, they said, 'What for? You've never spent what you had anyway.' Which was true because, after all, what kind of a major project could you get moving with hardly enough money for postage."

Going back to the drawing board, the committee figured it would need \$1,700 over and above the usual \$500-\$900 for exhibit expenses and \$700 for literature. Then, Brian reports, "we returned to the area assembly and made our pitch, complete with a couple of skits showing how additional dollars could help us step up our activities. Our enthusiasm was contagious and the assembly went for it."

Then in May, he continues, "we had a stroke of good luck. While exhibiting at a small convention in Orlando, Joe C., our district committee member, and I strolled across the street and found a crew setting up for the annual congress of the Oncology Nursing Society." Joe adds, "When we found that 5,000 nurses were preregistered, Brian and I looked at each other, said 'what have we got to lose,' and talked our way into late—very late—registration."

The response to the hastily assembled exhibit was heartwarming, Joe reports. "In fact, it was so popular that the manager moved us from the periphery into the main ball with most of the larger exhibitors. All this for \$150 instead of the \$1,365 originally quoted!"

It's "difficult to assess the actual number of people we may have influenced," Joe observes, "but I know that we helped at least 11 C.P.C. people stay sober another day. For the newer committee members, it was an exciting introduction into the wonderful world of service."

Whereas the committee formerly used the tabletop exhibit available from the General Service Office, Brian relates, "we now have our own, constructed for next-to-nothing and donated anonymously by a carpenter in A.A." Here he mentions an innovative feature that is proving successful: "We've noticed at a number of exhibits that some professionals (possibly those who have a problem with drinking) seem to pull away from our booth for fear that someone will brand them an 'alcoholic.' So we've put up a sign on which is printed in large letters, 'Could This Literature Help Your Patients/Clients?' It removes any discomfort professionals may have in approaching us for information, and lets us get close to them with our message of sobriety, which is what we're all about."

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

- 1-3 — *Tucson, Arizona.* Arizona Area Conv. Write Ch., Box 50472, Tucson, AZ 85703-0472
- 1-3 — *Crescent City, California.* Seventh Sobriety by the Sea Rally. Write: Ch., Box 871, Crescent City, CA 95531
- 1-3 — *Burley, Idaho.* Area 18 Fall Assembly. Write: Ch., 1717 E. 1700 S, Gooding, ID 83330
- 1-3 — *Lincoln, Nebraska.* Big Red Roundup. Write: Ch., 2840 70th St., Ste. 127, Lincoln, NE 68506
- 1-3 — *Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada.* 18th Annual Roundup. Write: Ch., 236-408 Broad St., Regina, SK S4R 1X3
- 1-3 — *Somerset, New Jersey.* Area 44 Conv. Write: Ch., Box 952, Green Brook, NJ 08812-0952
- 1-3 — *Rochester, New York.* 13th Annual Rochester Conv. Write: Ch., 10 Manhattan Sq. Drive, Rochester, NY 14607
- 1-3 — *Weston, West Virginia.* Jackson's Mill Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 825, Clarksburg, WV 26302-0825
- 7-10 — *Augusta, Georgia.* Georgia 40th Pre-paid Conv. Write: Ch., 2142 Faircrest Ave., Augusta, GA 30906
- 7-10 — *Las Vegas, Nevada.* Third National Native American Conv. Write: Ch., Box 30335, North Las Vegas, NV 89030-0335
- 8-10 — *Montgomery, Alabama.* Alabama/NW Florida Area Assembly. Write: Sec., 4621 Bridgedale Rd., Pensacola, FL 32505
- 8-10 — *Roosevelt Lake, Arizona.* Third Annual Roosevelt Lake Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 5242, Scottsdale, AZ 85261
- 8-10 — *Santa Barbara, California.* Sober Unity 1993. Write: Ch., Box 238, Santa Barbara, CA 93102
- 8-10 — *Stockton, California.* NCCAA 46th Annual Fall Conf. Write: Tr., 1540 Market St., Room 150, San Francisco, CA 94102
- 8-10 — *Lafayette, Louisiana.* 10th Cajun Country Conf. Write: Ch., Box 3160, Lafayette, LA 70502
- 8-10 — *Grenada, Mississippi.* 18th Annual North Mississippi Roundup. Write: Ch., Rt. 1, Box 219A, Pittsboro, MS 38951
- 8-10 — *Great Falls, Montana.* Fall Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 2071, Great Falls, MT 59403
- 8-10 — *Sudbury, Ontario, Canada.* Sober and Free. Write: Ch., 123 Beatty Street, Apt. 2, Sudbury, ON P3L 4E5
- 8-10 — *Sherbrooke, Quebec, Canada.* 23rd

- Conv. Write: Ch., C.P. 1541, Sherbrooke, QC J1H 5M4
- 8-10 — *Ogden, Utah.* Rocky Mountain Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 9152, Ogden, UT 84409
- 14-17 — *Hagerstown, Maryland.* MCYPAA's Ninth Fall Conf. Write: Ch., Box 1388, Ellicott City, MD 21043
- 15-17 — *Duderstadt, Germany.* European Roundup (hosted by gay & lesbian members). Write: Ch., German Advisory Council, Postfach 420 821, 1000 Berlin 42, Germany
- 15-17 — *Rimini, Italy.* Ninth Roundup in Rimini. Write: Ch., Adria Congrex S.R.L., Piazzale Indipendenza N. 3, 47037 Rimini (FO) Italy
- 15-17 — *Kyung Ki-Do, Korea.* Second International Conv. Write: Ch., C.P.O. Box 1415, Seoul, Korea 100-611
- 15-17 — *Austin, Minnesota.* Hiawathaland Get-Together. Write: Ch., Box 5792, Rochester, MN 55903
- 15-17 — *Bensalem, Pennsylvania.* 1993 Philadelphia Freedom Roundup (hosted by gay & lesbian members). Write: Ch., Box 794, Bensalem, PA 19020
- 15-17 — *Montreal, Quebec, Canada.* Congrès Bilingue De Montreal. Write: Ch., 5789 — Rue Iberville, Montreal, QC H2G 2B8
- 15-17 — *Rapid City, South Dakota.* Fall Conf. Write: Ch., Box 955, Rapid City, SD 57709-0955
- 15-17 — *Williamsburg, Virginia.* Area Comm. Fall Assembly. Write: Ch., 7711 Fisher Dr., Falls Church, VA 22043
- 15-17 — *Casper, Wyoming.* Fall Conv. Write: Ch., Box 1825, Casper, WY 82602
- 22-24 — *Des Moines, Iowa.* Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 752, Des Moines, IA 50303
- 22-24 — *St. Cloud, Minnesota.* Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 125, St. Cloud, MN 56302
- 22-24 — *Reno, Nevada.* Third Annual Northern Nevada H & I Conf. Write: Ch., Box 2406, Reno, NV 89505

Closed Meeting Topics From the Grapevine

For more detailed suggestions, see the pages noted.

October (page 35): Drinking again; what's going on in your group?

November (page 27): Twelfth-step- ping; gratitude.

- 22-24 — *Buffalo, New York.* Fall Conv. Write: Ch., Box 923, Amherst, NY 14226
- 22-24 — *Tarrytown, New York.* 12 and 12 Book Study. Write: Ch., Box 426, South Salem, NY 10590
- 22-24 — *Scranton, Pennsylvania.* Women-to-Women Seminar. Write: Ch., Box 4131, Scranton, PA 18505-6131.
- 29-30 — *Harvey, Illinois.* Second Big Book Study. Write: Ch., Box 3018, Country Club Hills, IL 60478
- 29-31 — *Duncan, British Columbia, Canada.* 24th Annual Rally. Write: Ch., 14-3065 Allenby Rd., Duncan, BC RR#6, V9L 4T8
- 29-31 — *San Ysidro, California.* Fourth Baja Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 435280, San Ysidro, CA 92143
- 29-31 — *Springfield, Missouri.* Area Conv. Write: Ch., Box 80-B, Lamote, MO 65337
- 29-31 — *London, Ontario, Canada.* 40th Annual Western Ontario Conv. Write: Ch., 388 Dundas St., London, ON N6B 1V7
- 29-31 — *Mt. Vernon, Washington.* Mt. Baker Roundup. Write: Ch., 3216 Maryland Pl., Bellingham, WA 98226

Planning a Future Event?

Please send your information on December, January or 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

November

- 5-6 — *Grafton, Illinois*. Third Great River Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 559, Wood River, IL 62095
- 5-7 — *Springfield, Illinois*. IFCYPAA. Write: Ch., Box 6483, Springfield, IL 62708
- 5-7 — *Victoria, Texas*. First Crossroads Soberfest. Write: Ch., Box 4491, Victoria, TX 77903
- 11-14 — *Ft. Walton Beach, Florida*. Gulf Coast Roundup. Write: Ch., 5964 West Shore Dr., Pensacola, FL 32526
- 11-14 — *Statesboro, Georgia*. 14th Chattahoochee Forest Conf. Write: Ch., Box 363, Statesboro, GA 30459
- 11-14 — *Lenexa, Kansas*. Mid-America Big Book Seminar. Write: Sec., 604 S. Central, Olathe, KS 66061
- 12-14 — *Penticton, British Columbia, Canada*. B.C. Yukon Conv. Write: Ch., Box 27150, Collingwood, P.O., Vancouver, BC V5R 6A8
- 12-14 — *Colorado Springs, Colorado*. Winter Area Assembly. Write: Ch., 670 Elkton Dr., Colorado Springs, CO 80907
- 12-14 — *Leominster, Massachusetts*. 30th State Conv., Write: Ch., Box 454, Leominster, MA 01453

- 12-14 — *Omaha, Nebraska*. Workshop. Write: Ch., 2211 Jones St., Apt. 3A, Omaha, NE 68102
- 12-14 — *Snyder, Texas*. Area 66 Assembly. Write: Sec., 4602 87th St., Lubbock, TX 79424
- 13-14 — *Regia, Latvia*. Fifth Anniversary Conf. Write: Ch., Box 156, Riga, LV1010, Latvia
- 19-21 — *Santa Barbara, California*. Ninth Annual Conv. Write: Ch., Box 91731, Santa Barbara, CA 93190-1731
- 19-21 — *Wichita, Kansas*. 10th Fall Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 47713, Wichita, KS 67202
- 25-28 — *Las Vegas, Nevada*. Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 43177, Las Vegas, NV 89116
- 25-28 — *Selcuk-Kusadasi, Turkey*. Ninth Turkey Wide Conv. Write: Ch., 1377 Sokak No. 7, D.3, Alsancak, Izmir, Turkey
- 26-28 — *Hamilton, Bermuda*. Bermuda Conv. Write: Ch., Box 178, Warwick WK BX, Bermuda
- 26-28 — *Clearwater Beach, Florida*. Suncoast Conv. Write: Ch., Box 8332, Clearwater, FL 34618
- 26-28 — *Ann Arbor, Michigan*. 15th MCYPAA. Write: Ch., Box 7097, Ann Arbor, MI 48107

- 26-28 — *Detroit, Michigan*. Thanksgiving Holiday Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 43202, Detroit, MI 48243-9998
- 26-28 — *Diamondhead, Mississippi*. Fourth Annual Gratitude Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 7851, Gulfport, MS 39506
- 26-28 — *Tulsa, Oklahoma*. Green County Thanksgiving Weekend. Write: Ch., Box 2724, Tulsa, OK 74101-2724

December

- 3-January 2 — *Chicago, Illinois*. Third Annual Blazing Trails Mega Alkathon. Write: Ch., 2018 W. Giddings Street, Chicago, IL 60625

January

- 7-9 — *Garden City, Kansas*. 24th Annual S.W. Kansas Conf. Write: Ch., 826 N. Durham, Ulysses, KS 67880
- 14-16 — *Galveston, Texas*. S.E. Texas Area Conf. Write: Ch., 1215 Ball St. #2, Galveston, TX 77550