

## Our Common Bond— 'We're All Different'

Does anyone coming to A.A. for the first time not think, even fleetingly, that "this may be okay for them but, for me, well, I'm different"? With this likely in mind, co-founder Bill W. pointed out in the July 1965 issue of the Grapevine, "Newcomers . . . represent almost every belief and attitude imaginable. We have atheists and agnostics . . . people of nearly every race, culture, and religion." What binds us together, he stressed, is "kinship of a common suffering. . . Let us always try to be inclusive rather than exclusive. . ." (*The Language of the Heart*, p. 333)

Feeling different is a state of mind with an amazing number of variations on the theme, as Tennesseean Scott L. noted in an article in the January issue of *The Messenger*, the newsletter of the Nashville Central Office. "Recently," he wrote, "a very young newcomer in my Back Room Group told one of our oldtimers that he felt 'different' because of his age. Responded the oldtimer: 'We all feel different. Someone in this meeting is the tallest, someone's the shortest; someone has the darkest skin, someone the lightest; someone has the most education, another has the least. In each instance the person feels different."

"Some here have spent a lot of time incarcerated, some have never been arrested; some don't know one or both of their parents, some come from huge families, and both feel different because they never felt special. Some were abused as children, others have done the abusing, and both feel sure they're very different from the rest of us. Someone here has recently declared bankruptcy, someone has more money than he knows what to do with, and both are certain they're different because of money, or the lack of it. Someone here is driving a new luxury car and someone else has lost his driver's license, but that doesn't matter because he can't afford a car anyway. Someone has retired and has time on her hands, someone else is working two jobs and raising children as a single Mom—and do they ever feel different!"

As Scott tells it, the oldtimer then observed, "One thing alcoholics have in common is that we're all different." Smiling at the newcomer, he added, "You know, I was personally very glad when you showed up here because I'm sure tired of being the youngest guy in the

room." The newcomer laughed, Scott says, "because the oldtimer was at least 55." Since that exchange, he notes, "it has been a joy to watch the two of them develop a friendship. As it says in the Big Book (p. 17), 'We are people who normally would not mix. But there exists among us a fellowship, a friendliness, and an understanding which is indescribably wonderful.'"

## The Need Arose— And the Big Book in Mongolian Appeared

It is often said among A.A.s that in the Fellowship there are no coincidences . . . and there are miracles. Here's yet another heartwarming story that for sure makes it seem true.

Several months ago John B. of Ellensburg, Washington, met a man he had spoken with briefly in a bar a couple of years before. "It was during a time when a severe personal loss sent me crashing into despair," John recalls. "After years in A.A., I knew from the beginning that although others might have played a part in the circumstances bringing on my crisis, the crisis was mine. . . I knew where to focus my recovery. Thankfully I was spared drinking compulsions throughout the ordeal, and though my whole program got dragged through the fires of hell, [it] emerged revitalized.

"And now, on the street, I ran into this fellow again. He was Mongolian, and he spoke in very broken English," John relates. "We made small talk, but I could sense his desperation. Tentatively he mentioned A.A. 'You go there?' he inquired. 'Oh, yeah,' I replied. 'You don't drink?' 'Oh, no.' 'How long you don't drink?' 'Sixteen years.' His face twisted into total disbelief, then mirrored a ray of hope: 'You take me?' 'Sure,' I said. We arranged to go to a meeting together that night."

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АМИНЧЛАХ

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As the day wore on, John says, “I got to thinking about my new friend. I realized he’d have a hard time understanding what was said in meetings and, furthermore, wouldn’t be able to read the Big Book. So I called the General Service Office in New York and found myself talking to Eva S., who has the International desk assignment. ‘Eva,’ I said, ‘this may be an off-the-wall request, but by chance is there a Mongolian translation of the Big Book kicking around?’” At the other end of the line, silence. Then, in a quiet voice, Eva said, ‘one of the copies of the first printing of the Mongolian Big Book was put on my desk just hours ago.’”

John was incredulous. “Across 3,000 miles of phone line,” he exclaims, “two A.A. members were suddenly linked by a lightning bolt of gratitude and joy, and the hair literally stood up on the back of my neck. I fancied I heard God saying, ‘Well, ye of little faith, there’s your total gratitude you’ve been asking for. Anything else I can do for you?’” Eva sent that copy of the Mongolian Big Book by overnight mail, and my new friend and I have been doing a meeting a day ever since.”

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## Together, Service Entities Do What None Can Do Alone

The expression often heard in A.A.—“We can do what I can’t do alone”—applies not just to individual members, one-on-one, but to service committees all over the U.S. and Canada working toward a common end: to carry the A.A. message of sobriety. The power of unity is no more evident than in the demonstrated success of two combined-effort events that have become traditions—one in Western Missouri, the other in Southern California.

For nearly a decade, close to 500 A.A.s and their friends in the Western Missouri professional community have gathered the first weekend in May for a rousing

Hospitals & Institutions weekend, this year at Independence. “The area Corrections and Treatment Facilities committees take turns hosting the event,” says Leslie P., chairman of the C.F. committee. “This year it’s our turn—next year the honor belongs to James R. and the T.F. folks. Additionally, our other service committees and subcommittees—Archives, Bridge the Gap, C.P.C. [Cooperation with the Professional Community], Grapevine, P. I. [Public Information], Special Needs—pitch in to make the wheels go round. The same spirit of cooperation is evident at our annual state convention, co-hosted by Eastern and Western Missouri, and at our Bridge the Gap workshop weekends, also held yearly. These events promote unity between the two areas and the committees themselves, and they inspire lifelong friendships.”

Early Saturday evening a potluck dinner is followed by a speaker meeting, then a lively dance caps the day. On Sunday morning the host committee offers a panel discussion featuring professionals in the community—from health professionals to law enforcement personnel and the clergy.

“This year for the first time we had an extensive mailing to professionals, inviting them to attend,” says Leslie. “Ordinarily the weekend registration fee is \$10, but it’s waived for professionals. If they can learn more about A.A., if they help us connect with one or more suffering alcoholics . . . we’ll be very grateful.”

In Southern California, the comprehensive program announcing the 20th annual H&I conference of A.A. from April 27-29 in Orange, “with Al-Anon and Spanish participation,” states the event’s trifold purpose: 1) To improve the mutual understanding and cooperation between A.A. and hospitals, correctional and treatment facilities within Southern California H&I Intergroup; 2) To enhance communications between H&I committees of Southern California H&I Intergroup and A.A. as a whole, through workshops, panel presentations, speakers, general sharing and fellowship; and 3) To provide enjoyment and gratification [for] the A.A. members who give of their time, energy and money throughout the year, carrying the message to the confined alcoholic.”

A note points out that “professionals on this program are invited guests and not affiliated with A.A. The participation by representatives of other organizations or facilities does not imply endorsement by, nor affiliation with, A.A. or the Southern California H&I Intergroup.”

Observed Bruce H., a past chairman of the T.F. committee who also has served on the trustees’ C.F. committee: “Last year close to 700 A.A.s, Al-Anons and professionals were on hand, and we expect even more this time. Our service groups are always well-represented, and it gives everyone a wonderful opportunity to share ideas, problems and goals, and to renew our energy for the important work ahead.”

## Literature Orders Get the Red Carpet Treatment at G.S.O.

"My name is Oswald the Great, and I'm an A.A. World Services literature order. I started my journey to G.S.O. on Staten Island, New York, three days ago. I nearly blew off the ferry, but here I am. . . ."

So starts a film born of questions that have peppered the General Service Office for some time: "If I wish to purchase literature for myself or my group, how do I go about getting it?" "Once my order is placed, what happens to it?" "Where do the books and pamphlets come from?" "Who will see that I get what I want, intact and in a timely fashion?"

Back in 1999 the need for answers was much on the mind of Andrea Brennan, supervisor of G.S.O.'s Order Entry department and a nonalcoholic (as are all personnel of the Order Entry, Accounts Receivable, and Mail and Shipping departments referred to here). Andrea was readying a talk about order processing for the October '99 Intergroup Seminar in Bradenton, Florida, when, she remembers, "the idea hit me: Why not make a movie that visually explains how we fill an order at G.S.O.?" Not one to wait around, she promptly got to work, basic script in head and camera in hand, and with help from her friends at G.S.O., including general manager and sometime cameraman Greg M., came up with a 10-minute film that clarifies even as it spoofs the order, accounting and shipping operations.

*My Name Is Oswald W.* premiered at last year's Intergroup Seminar in Little Rock, Arkansas. It features the voice-over of G.S.O. staff member Doug R., whose



Catherine Petkovits

day job—which he isn't giving up anytime soon—centers on the Regional Forums/Service Material desk. And Doug knows how to bring an order to life: As our hero, Oswald the Great, gets a ripping reception from Aubrey Pereira, supervisor of the Mail and Shipping department, Doug feels his pain: "Aubrey, ouch! Aubrey, be gentle opening my envelope—I'm fragile. Here we go, into the mail basket—oh, I'm so handsome—and whisked to Accounts Receivable. . . . There's Catherine Petkovits, a one-woman wonder at G.S.O. these past 10 years. Catherine logs in all cash and check orders and makes



Andrea Brennan — 'overseeing'  
Stella Johnson and Liz Ramdarass.

sure I have the information necessary. She peels off my check, puts me with the rest of my buddies, Earl and Howard—they're credit card orders people placed yesterday. After Catherine pins an order number on me, off I go to the Order Entry department. . . ."

Now Oswald is in "Andrea's world," where she, Stella Johnson and Liz Ramdarass, "form the trio responsible for processing and posting all orders on the computer, and for balancing daily, monthly and yearly sales reports," Andrea points out. "The phone orders we took in the year 2000 came to 9,416. That same year we received 5,200 credit card orders, or approximately 55 percent of the total. Additionally, we give price quotes and provide many callers with general information about the ordering of literature. On balance, I'd say we receive more than 1,000 calls a month."

Orders stream in by fax (212-870-3137), phone (212-870-3312) and e-mail (new address: [orders@aa.org](mailto:orders@aa.org)). "We really appreciate having orders faxed or e-mailed in, as it saves time for other things," Andrea affirms. "For an order to be billed, it must be \$25 or more; otherwise we ask for checks, money orders or credit cards. A group order should be accompanied by a group service number. And, if ordering by phone, you really speed things up by having your service number handy."

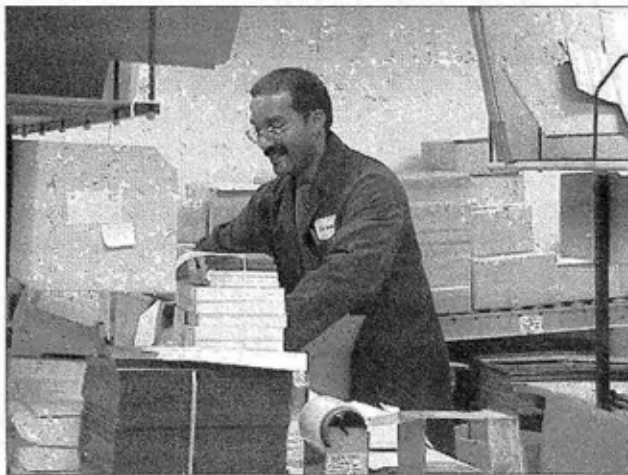
Sometimes, she acknowledges, "people phone in and find it a downer to get our voice mailbox—but that happens because there are so many orders and only three of us to go around. So, much as we'd like to answer every call personally, we aren't always able to. But for sure, we always call back, as quickly as we can." Andrea, who has worked at G.S.O. for more than 22 years, speaks with the voice of experience, as do Stella and Liz, who both have been at the office for more than 10 years. Even they find it hard to believe the overall figures for

the year 2000: 27,540 paid orders, with total gross sales topping \$9,550,000. And that isn't all. Observes Andrea: "We also processed more than 20,000 no-charge orders for new groups, new G.S.R.s (general service representatives) and other complimentary literature requested by the G.S.O. staff."

But back to the adventures of Oswald: From Order Entry he trucks on down the hall and back to Shipping and Mailing, where Aubrey and his staff of four—Frank Smith, Bill Heinitz, Joe Moglia and Ronnie Shelton—are waiting to box and pack him off. (Aubrey will be with G.S.O. 19 years come June—no big deal to his staff, who all have been there more than 20 years.) "Easy there. . . ouch, ooh, ahh, take it easy, guys!" Oswald brays (in Doug's Actor's Studio tones). "It's dark in here. You sure the box is big enough? That's better, now stuff the slip in there. Oh, gosh, I weigh that much? Expensive to send, huh?" Then down the elevator and out into the mail truck he goes, with Earl and Howard for company, bound for a group of Staten Island A.A.s eager for their order to return—filled out and fully packed with A.A. books, pamphlets and service pieces.

"The Mailing and Shipping department expedites all East coast 'pick 'n pack' orders," Aubrey reports. "These account for about 15 percent of all orders. The others are handled by our warehouses in Church Hill, Tennessee, Oakville, Ontario, and Calgary, Alberta, Canada."

But mailing and shipping are just part of the picture, he is quick to note. "Much of our job is a matter of coordinating schedules—so we can supply literature for



Aubrey Pereira

meetings, Forums and other A.A. events on time." Aubrey says that the most interesting aspect of his work is working with others: "Because the staff rotates every two years, we interact with many different people on a regular basis. Invariably they offer fresh perspectives on projects we thought we knew all there was to know."

## Stretching Our Wings on the Web

As we look back over the aspects of growth of A.A. one area that will resonate soundly into the future is our presence on the World Wide Web. Since its establishment as a Public Information vehicle at the end of 1995, we have seen *www.aa.org* grow into a multilingual (English, French and Spanish) full-service reference platform designed to offer information to professionals and the public, recovery material to the still-suffering alcoholic and, most recently, service material for A.A. members, groups and committees.

While face-to-face contact will remain A.A.'s most valuable form of communication, the benefits of having full-time information about our Fellowship available to the universe are just beginning to be realized. In the year 2000 we received approximately 1.2 million visitors to the General Service Office site, a 62% increase over our 1999 figures. Amongst the many firsts for the Fellowship this past year were: Information and Registration for our International Convention were conducted via our Web site. Press releases during the Convention, including same night photos and reports of the Opening Flag Ceremony, were also posted on the site.

Bill A., G.S.O.'s Web site liaison, is quick to note that, no matter how much we broaden the scope of the site, the material which consistently records the highest number of visits are those directly related to our Twelfth Step work. "The most popular page of the Web site," Bill reports "was the A.A. *Fact File*, (190,676). Following closely in popularity were *List of Central Offices/Intergroups and Answering Services* (165,592) and *Is A.A. for You?* (139,817), both directly related to carrying the message."

Ideas for the growth of the site are sometimes the result of suggestions and loving appraisal (sometimes known as criticism) from committees and A.A.s from around the Fellowship. These ideas received are considered and first discussed at the G.S.O. Web site Committee, comprised of management and staff from the different departments at the office, which is responsible for planning the growth of the site. The committee is chaired by G.S.O.'s services director, Tom J. "The growth of the Web site" Tom feels, "needs to be considered in relation to two primary questions. One, is it necessary? And two, is it practical in light of the current resources of the office?" The Web site Committee considers both aspects of any idea and forwards any major expansion or change to the Services Committee of A.A. World Services, which has oversight responsibility on behalf of the General Service Board, for their consideration.

The role of the General Service Office is to act as the repository of the shared experience of the Fellowship

and to furnish the necessary resources to ensure that A.A. members, groups and committees have what they need to do their Twelfth Step work. The office does not generally do direct Twelfth Step work. It does, though, facilitate the work that is done in approximately 58,000 groups across the U.S. and Canada and acts as a resource for international G.S.O.s and the developing A.A. communities that currently exist in approximately 150 countries around the world.

In the same spirit, the G.S.O. Web site does not attempt to short circuit the normal A.A. practice of acting locally and ultimately on a one-to-one basis. John K., a A.A.W.S. director and past member of the Services Committee, has frequently voiced a cautionary note concerning the growth of the site. John says, "The Web site cannot replace the magic that occurs when two alcoholics share as directly as possible, or when a newcomer is given a cup of coffee and a meeting list. Neither can it replace the many aspects of our A.A. service structure or the group conscience process of the group, central office, district or area committees. We need to remember that the Web site can only convey information. Wisdom and information are two different things. In A.A. our wisdom is found in the group conscience which is formed from our shared experience."

Most of the recent Web site additions have been to the Fellowship Services Section. The last major event has been to create e-mail access to the G.S.O. assignments through the Web site. As of February 16, 2001, members wishing to communicate with a staff member at the office have the option of going to the Fellowship Services menu and clicking on to *Communication With G.S.O.* This page outlines the different avenues to follow to ensure that your inquiry is directed to the appropriate staff member. Visitors are reminded that a phone number and postal address are helpful, because sometimes the most appropriate response cannot be sent by e-mail. It also underlines G.S.O.'s policy of dealing with e-mail correspondence. E-mail is treated like all other types of correspondence. In other words, just because something is received by e-mail does not mean that it will have priority over faxes or "snail mail." We attempt to respond to all correspondence within ten working days. Depending upon the complexity of the inquiry and the amount of research required, some may require additional time.

Since the World Wide Web circles the world, we have tried to underline that our Web site is one which reflects the experience here in the U.S. and Canada. E-mail correspondence from outside the U.S. and Canada should be directed to the staff member on the International assignment or referred to the G.S.O. in that country, or

in a country in close proximity, which may have experience more germane to the issue. In the interest of creating better international communication, we have established hyperlinks from our site to those overseas G.S.O.s who have made this request.

There has been some comment that the site should have a master meeting list of all A.A. meetings. This really goes beyond the scope of services that G.S.O. offers. Meeting lists and answering the call for help from the still-suffering alcoholic have always been the responsibility of the local central office or intergroup. G.S.O.'s Web site lists all the Central Offices/Intergroups and Answering Services in the U.S. and Canada. Some of these entities have their own Web sites, which often contain meeting times and locations. Currently these offices are furnishing our office with e-mail or web addresses to be added to our listing, which would make access to this information easier.

Another aspect of the Fellowship Services section which may be of interest to A.A. members and groups is the Regional Forums page. It currently lists dates and locations of scheduled Forums into the year 2003. As a Forum approaches, detailed invitations and downloadable versions of both the Forum and hotel registrations are added to the site. In an effort to facilitate the transmission of Group Information (U.S. and Canada), the site has downloadable versions of both the Alcoholics Anonymous New Group Information Form and the Alcoholics Anonymous Group Information Change Form. The easy availability of the forms will hopefully encourage the groups to send up-to-date information to G.S.O.'s Records Department, ensuring uninterrupted communication from our office with the groups.

Greg M., general manager at G.S.O., believes that "Our office has acted with just the right balance of initiative and prudence in moving forward with changes and growth to the Web site. We know that we will never be a cutting edge site, nor do we want to be.

"We continue to respond to the expressed needs of the Fellowship. We do our best to consult through the structure and inform the Fellowship through the reports we give the A.A.W.S. Board. In cyberspace, the potential for increased communication and access to the Fellowship's shared experience is unlimited. We will continue to move forward in a measured fashion, knowing that while we take flight into new and uncharted territory, we remain grounded in the bedrock principles of our Steps and Traditions. The untapped resource of the Internet offers new and creative opportunities to continue the tried and true A.A. practice of one drunk talking to another."



## Showing Up for Life, and Death, Is The Gift of Sobriety

"Emily is dying in room 107 at a local hospice—dying gracefully, at 87, the way she does everything. It's Friday, my volunteer day at the hospice, and I sit quietly beside the bed and hold her hand, thinking of the path that has brought me here. I remember that day in court."

Sharing vivid flashbacks, Marty recalls in *The Last Drop*, the newsletter of the Denver Area Central Committee of A.A., "Scowling from the bench the judge said, 'I have no choice but to sentence you as the law prescribes, to a term of not less than five years, nor more than life, in state prison.' Five years later, when I was about to walk out of Folsom, the sergeant told me, 'We gonna save you a cell, kid, because guys like you can't make it out there. You crawl back into a bottle and then hit somebody over the head when you run out of whiskey. It don't take no Einstein to figure you jerks out. . . .' That was 31 years ago."

Now, intent upon Emily, Marty sees that "her breathing is shallow. I follow it, grateful beyond words that I can be there, sober. I was not there when my own father died. I seldom showed up for anything then—not for births, deaths, weddings, anything. Most often I was missing. Most often I was drunk. It's what I did. No excuses. Emily's breathing is shallow. She squeezes my hand and her eyes flutter, but she is beyond seeing. I talk to her because I know that hearing is the last of the senses to fade. 'It's me, Emily,' I say. 'I love you. Be sure you know that before you leave. And thank you for all you've taught me. When you get where you're going, tell my father that I love him, will you? I never told him that. His name is Charley, and you can't miss him. He's a great big guy who always looks like he needs a shave.'

"Emily's breathing is uneven, and her free hand moves from time to time, tracing mystic circles in the air. I close my eyes and remember her favorite saying of Winnie the Pooh, her most favorite character in the world: 'It's not much fun for one, but two can stick together.' I feel that Emily's hand is cold and whisper goodbye, tears in my eyes, knowing that all the roads in my life, from prison to recovery and everything in between, have led me to this hospice so that I might be with her when she dies."

"That," Marty affirms, "is the gift of sobriety. That and the tears. Day by day, moment by moment, that I might show up and be present. And above all, I know what it's like to be grateful."

## Lending Libraries Serve A.A.s with Special Needs

"While there are no special alcoholics, many A.A. members have special needs," says Gary L., now serving a second year as chairman of Florida's Broward County Accessibilities Committee. "An important part of our effort, we've come to realize, is to see that members who are blind, hearing impaired or otherwise physically challenged are given the opportunity to absorb A.A. literature any way they can, whether in Braille or on audiotape and American Sign Language (ASL) videotape." Toward this end the South Florida committee and at least two others—one in Minneapolis, Minnesota, the other in the western half of the Missouri Area—have established lending libraries to fill the need.

In Broward County the fledgling lending library started by the Accessibilities Committee is just months old. It has copies of the Big Book and Twelve and Twelve in Braille and on ASL videotape, and "we hope to keep adding more material as time passes," Gary says. "We still haven't decided where the loan library will be permanently housed," he adds ruefully, "but at present it's at home in the Broward County Intergroup, which has been truly awesome in its support. The folks there have forwarded so many calls to our committee—they're always helpful."

Because the committee is barely three years old Gary points out, "we are still feeling our way and welcome the experience of other areas. You know, whatever we're doing here in service, we're for sure getting back a lot more than we could ever give."

In Minnesota the Minneapolis and Southwest Suburban Intergroup also serves as the locus of a special-needs lending library. Says David K., information technology manager and jack-of-all-trades:

"We have on hand all videos and tapes produced by the General Service Office in New York for the visually- and hearing-impaired. Some groups in the area—the Tradition Five Group of Golden Valley, for instance—have bought sets of the Big Book and Twelve and Twelve in Braille and on ASL videotape, and other groups are getting the idea of following in their footsteps."

David observes that "there are approximately 1,100 meetings weekly in the area, and about eight of these are speaker meetings with ASL signers. So it is clear that the A.A.s in our community are eager to carry the message to those with special needs, once we know who they are and what they require. If it is within our means and the area goes along, we will do our best to provide the necessary services. As our co-founder Bill W. said, 'Once a need becomes clearly apparent in an individual,

a group or in A.A. as a whole . . . we cannot stand still and look the other way [Grapevine, July 1965]. . . ”

In Missouri not just one but two thriving lending libraries—housed in the Kansas City and Springfield Intergroups, respectively—are the pride of the area Special Needs Committee. Says co-chairwoman Ruth C., “Our first library was conceived in 1994. At the beginning it was set up so that only the district committee member could check out items at the quarterly assembly; but that arrangement proved too constricting, and now a Special Needs Committee representative or general service rep also can check the materials out. In order to build and maintain a broad, active circulation,” Ruth says, “we try to restrict loans to two weeks, but the sky doesn’t fall when people go over the limit, and they often do. The important thing is to get the A.A. message out to people who need it.”

The Special Needs Committee is large—32 members in all—and very busy. Last year they set up their second loan library. “This way the area is covered nicely,” Ruth

explains. “We have all the literature that is available through G.S.O.—tapes, video cassettes, the Big Book, Twelve and Twelve, *The A.A. Service Manual*, *Daily Reflections* (some of these in Braille, Spanish and large print), and more. Our aim is to be able to offer for loan anything you’d find in G.S.O.’s Special Needs Service Piece [A.A. Literature and Audiovisual Material for Special Needs].” It costs “about \$170 to purchase all the items from G.S.O.,” she reports, “and at present it takes two or three medium-size storage boxes to house the material—to keep them as damage-free as possible and make everything easier to transport for display at the assemblies.”

Money for the tapes and literature comes from the annual amount the area allocates to the Special Needs Committee. “Establishing a library is really very easy,” assures Ruth, “and we have been pleasantly surprised to see how much it is accessed. Importantly, if someone has a need we can fill now, we’ll go all out to find a way to do it.”

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## It Happens Every Spring. . .

Everyone at G.S.O. is gearing up for the 51st Annual General Service Conference, to be held April 22-28 at the Crowne Plaza Manhattan in New York City.

This week-long event, often referred to as “A.A.’s annual business meeting,” is closed to all but Conference members — the 93 delegates from service areas in the U.S. and Canada, trustees and directors and G.S.O. and Grapevine staff members.

The theme for this year’s Conference is “Love and Service” — that well-known phrase from Dr. Bob’s last message, which will be read at the Opening Dinner by Dr. Bob’s son.

Meanwhile, back at G.S.O., staff members have prepared the background material that is mailed out for each of the 13 Conference Committees. Conference coordinator Susan U. and Yee Tully (nonalcoholic), her assistant, are busy with last minute details. Friday before Conference approximately 50 cartons are trucked to the hotel where a command center is set up.

Watch for your June/July issue of *Box 4-5-9* to see how this all turned out and the Advisory Actions resulting from Conference deliberations.



*Miguel Rodriguez and Shawn Bunkley (nonalcoholics) take a break in the copyroom. To copy and collate the background material for both Conference Committees and other delegates requesting the information constituted over a week’s work. Each package weighed approximately 5 pounds.*



*Frank Smith (in background), Ronnie Shelton, Bill Heinitz, and Joe Moglia (inset), all nonalcoholics, pack up cartons of literature and other material headed for the hotel.*



*Yee Tully, staff assistant on the Conference assignment. *Box 4-5-9* (Aug./Sept. ’98) readers may remember a similar photo of Yee drowning in paper, when she was working on the Big Book Fourth Edition stories. This time it is Conference background material.*

## 13th Stepping: Why It's a Problem, Not a Solution

Much is said but little is written about the practice commonly referred to as 13th-stepping—which takes place when a more-or-less-seasoned A.A. member acts out a sexual attraction to a newcomer, often under the guise of lending a helping A.A. hand. Last year, however, the monthly newsletter of the Sonoma County (California) Intergroup Fellowship faced the problem head-on by reprinting an article entitled “A Woman’s Point of View on the 13th Step” from the May/June 1997 issue of *The Road Back*, published by the Dublin, Ireland, General Service Office.

“Throughout my years in A.A.,” the woman, whom we’ll call Mary, says candidly, “I have from time to time heard occasional mention of the problems of 13th-stepping and have myself indulged to my own detriment. Unfortunately the general attitude when this subject is mentioned swings between a snicker and acute embarrassment; but the consequences have recently hit close to home, in my own group, and I believe a completely honest look at this matter is way overdue within the Fellowship.”

As a woman, Mary says, she is “particularly concerned with the effects of 13th-stepping upon those of my own sex. The assumption that a woman who does not resist sexual advances is a willing partner and, therefore, no harm is done, is total fallacy. Many women, when they first join A.A., feel a great trust toward the members and often are unable to distinguish between a

man who is sincerely helping and one who is just looking for a good time. Sure, it takes two to tango, and there are many successful marriages within A.A., but these aren’t the situations that concern me. I am talking mainly about the newcomer who is reaching out for help and is in a very vulnerable state. I feel it is up to the members of the group to look out for and warn such a woman who frequently is unaware of the emotional disaster such an encounter can cause and lacks the resources within herself to offer much resistance. This should definitely *not* be interpreted as her being keen to oblige. She is very sick, just as most of us are when we first stop drinking.”

Mary points out that the Big Book, on pages 68-70, “deals with the subject of sex quite clearly.” She suggests that members read carefully and then subject their conduct to this litmus test (p. 69): “We reviewed our own conduct over the years past. Where had we been selfish, dishonest, or inconsiderate? Whom had we hurt? Did we unjustifiably arouse jealousy, suspicion or bitterness? Where were we at fault, what should we have done instead? . . . In this way we tried to shape a sane and sound ideal for our future sex life.”

Why does the problem of 13th-stepping persist? Corine P. of New York City suggests that for some men, “the old habits of drinking and fancying themselves as Casanovas rescuing maidens in distress die hard. They might well benefit from meetings, meditations, sponsorship and Step Ten in particular.”

On a note of optimism, Corine points out that for every 13th-stepper in A.A., “there are a great many who do the right and sober thing. I remember one instance in which a young newcomer kept following a man in her home group around like a lovesick puppy. Finally he sat

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her down and gently told her: 'When you've been sober a year or so, perhaps we can consider dating, but not now. The only thing that matters is your sobriety, and to keep it you need to immerse yourself in A.A.—to the exclusion of anything else that gives you the feeling of a high but that, like all roller-coaster rides, goes down as well as up.'"

Comments Mike H., of Ventura, California: "What people sometimes forget is that women as well as men engage in 13th-stepping—I remember one good-looking guy who was new to A.A. and had the girls bearing down on him like so many freight trains. Furthermore, 13th-stepping can be detrimental to the stepper as well as the steppee. When I came into A.A., my group was full of newcomers who were very attractive but also very sick. I was lucky to have an assist from a fellow in the group who'd been sober awhile. 'We stay away from the newcomer women,' he counseled, 'not for them but for our own sobriety.'"

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## The Way It Was Can Happen Now

"As a fairly new A.A. who sobered up in December 1998," says Steve M. of the Glendale Group in Queens, New York, "I'm beginning to catch on to how it used to work. At a meeting I attended last week, the speaker arrived accompanied by five or six of her group members. I said to myself, 'Wow! That's cool.' It really showed unity, fellowship and the WE program."

In a letter printed in the autumn 2000 *QIAA Newsletter* of the Queens Intergroup of Alcoholics Anonymous, Steve further related, "It suddenly occurred to me to bring the incident up with my group members. Many remembered that when they first came around A.A., that's what they did—they supported all outgoing group commitments, and their fellow members, by just being there. I'd like to see this happen a lot more often. Most of the sobriety I witness is on the way to the meeting or on the way home from it. So let's encourage 'road trips' . . . and good sobriety."

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## G.S.O.'s Frequently Asked Questions

**Q.** What are the criteria for listing A.A. conferences, conventions and similar events in *Bar 4-5-9* and the A.A. Grapevine?

**A.** We generally try to list all A.A. events of two or more days in length about which we are informed in

time. There would not be enough room to list one-day events.

**Q.** Okay, then what is an A.A. event?

**A.** As far as we are concerned, any event which is run by A.A.s, about A.A., and for A.A.s is an A.A. event. Some are under the auspices of regions, areas or districts; others of central offices or intergroups or even groups; and still others of a committee of A.A. members. Al-Anons are included in some events. Many of the events are service-connected, others are purely for A.A. sharing and fun.

**Q.** We are putting on an A.A. roundup, and some A.A. members are saying that since we are charging a registration fee for attendance at an A.A. function, we are not acting in accordance with A.A. Traditions.

**A.** There is a big difference between "no dues or fees for A.A. membership" and a registration fee for an A.A. roundup. The word "fee" is a strange one in a self-supporting Fellowship, but someone has to pay the bills! There are many, many A.A. roundups, conventions, and conferences (see the Bulletin Board Section of *Bar 4-5-9* or the Calendar of Events in the Grapevine) and in most cases, registration fees are charged to cover the expenses of the event. Often a special event, such as a banquet, is put on for the purpose of raising additional funds to support a central office or the work of an institutions committee.

Depending on the situation, and in the judgment of the planning committee, sometimes special arrangements are made for A.A.s who would like to attend but cannot afford to. There are also events, such as a banquet, which only ticket holders attend, but after the meal the room is opened up to everyone, with or without a ticket, to hear the speaker. But again, this decision is made by the planning committee as they are the ones responsible for covering costs.

**Q.** Are raffles within A.A. Traditions?

**A.** Past General Service Conferences have been asked this question. The Conference has not come forth with a recommendation in regard to raffles. A show of hands usually indicates that about half the delegates think they are all right and about half the delegates think they should be discouraged. So the best we can do when asked is to reply that it is up to the group conscience.

**Q.** We are planning to hold a roundup in our city, and wonder if it's okay to ask the groups for seed money?

**A.** This can be answered only by the group conscience of the groups concerned. However, if the group agrees to take a collection at its meeting to support the roundup, a separate basket for this specific purpose is often passed for those who wish to give, rather than taking money from the group funds.

**Q.** Is there such a thing as an A.A. Club?

**A.** No. Many clubs act as a landlord for A.A. meetings. A.A. meetings remain autonomous and are not involved in club operations or policy. For more information, request A.A. Guidelines on Clubs from G.S.O.

**Q.** Does A.A. sponsor spiritual retreats?

**A.** Based on Tradition Six, A.A. does not sponsor such gatherings.

**Q.** Why doesn't the General Service Office give me their opinion when I ask for it?

**A.** The role of the General Service Office is to share the collected experience of A.A., which is gathered through correspondence, service meetings and staff travel. Staff members will search diligently in our literature for solutions to group problems.

**Q.** What is the difference between an "open" and "closed" A.A. meeting?

**A.** *Closed* meetings are for A.A. members only, or for those who have a drinking problem and "have a desire to stop drinking." *Open* meetings are available to anyone interested in the A.A. program of recovery from alcoholism. *Open* meetings may be the only opportunity for a guest/observer to see how A.A. works.

Whether *open* or *closed*, A.A. group meetings are conducted by A.A. members, who determine the format of their meetings.

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## Correctional Facilities

### The A.A. Message Brings Hope Where There Was None

Laura H. was Southeast Michigan delegate (Panel 49) from 1998-2000. In January '01 she found yet another way to serve—never dreaming that carrying the message "inside" would help her "rediscover joy in this Fellowship on a dreary, freezing night when the best I could muster was putting one foot in front of the other across the prison yard."

Explains Laura: "For some time a real need had existed in a nearby prison sorely lacking regular volunteers, and then the administration became suddenly willing to admit women A.A.s into this men's facility. For me the prison experience was a new one. I'd spent a night in a county jail once and am phobic enough to view any confinement as life-threatening. Just entering an institution is difficult, but knowing 'I am responsible . . .' has prodded me into a

number of places I would not have chosen to go."

Laura, who celebrates 16 years of sobriety this April, says she is often the lone volunteer at prison meetings—"one woman among the 50 or so inmates that gather." Sometimes, she admits, "I feel like a babysitter, other times like a teacher in an out-of-control classroom or a senile old relative who is treated politely but ignored. I keep listening to the stories, hear some striking inventories and a degree of hopelessness I cannot bear. As I left the meeting one such night, Joe S.—who rarely talks—caught up with me and, as he put it, 'dumped' his story. It brought tears to the eyes of both of us; I later asked God to show me the good in such a painful history and to bless Joe for the leap it took to get it out of his mouth to me. I had already spread around copies of the Grapevine and urged the fellows to take them to the block. However, with Joe's story in mind, I insisted on speaking first at the next meeting: I shared pictures of New York, described the General Service Office and staff, my own experience at the General Service Conference, and the news that our current delegate, Bill T., had once been a prisoner too. Then I urged the men to start writing—explaining that while some might never leave the prison, their stories had a power that walls could not contain."

Laura's words fell on receptive ears. One group member, who wrote to G.S.O. asking to have the group recognized, "was amazed and grateful for the prompt, positive response," she recalls. "I told him and the others that they could count on a warm response whenever they wrote." Since then, Laura reports, many have been thinking about their own stories. They look at themselves in a new light and focus on something more than bare existence—*hope*. Several of them have become interested in CCS [Corrections Correspondence Service, a program in which A.A.s on the outside correspond with inmates], and one of our members has submitted two recovery stories to the Grapevine. We were all pleased when Joe had a letter published in the Winter issue of *Sharing from Behind the Walls*, a confidential quarterly newsletter containing excerpts from inmate letters received at G.S.O.

"I'm an alcoholic," he wrote, "and in 34 years I have lost and destroyed everything I have loved and cared for. In the past 10 years I've been to prison four times. When I came back in April '99, I was a beaten man—mentally, physically, spiritually. I didn't care about anything or anyone, and didn't care if I lived or died. . . . But God . . . introduced me to A.A., and with the help of my Higher Power, the Twelve Steps and the Fellowship, I was able to start changing my life. After almost two years of vigilant recovery, I have finally started to live again. . . . It is the most wonderful feeling in the world to be released from the chains of active alcoholism."

## 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.

### April

- 5-7—*Gatlinburg, Tennessee*. Second Quarter Assembly. Write: Ch., 605 Gardenvale Apts., Maryville, TN 37803
- 6-8—*Fort Wayne, Indiana*. 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Northeast Indiana Conv. Write: Ch., Box 3316 Arrowwood Dr., Ft. Wayne, IN 46815
- 6-8—*Reno, Nevada*. Reno Spring Festival. Write: Ch., Box 72, Reno, NV 89504
- 6-8—*Richmond, Virginia*. Serenity Weekend. Write: Ch., Box 832, Midlothian, VA 23113
- 12-16—*Bundoora, Melbourne, Australia*. 36th Australian Conv. Melbourne 2001. Write: Ch., Box 368, Geelong, Victoria, Australia 3213
- 13-15—*Ames, Iowa*. Aim For Ames Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 2522, Ames, IA 50010
- 13-15—*Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada*. Celebrate Sobriety Conf. (presented by gay and lesbian members) Write: Celebrate Sobriety, Box 93516, Nelson Park, Vancouver, BC V6E 4L7
- 19-22—*Athens, Greece*. Seventh Annual Conv. of the Parthenon Group, Athens. Write: Ch., Box 18732, Plateia Varnava, Pagkrati, Athens 116 10 Greece
- 20-22—*Banff, Alberta Canada*. 28<sup>th</sup> Banff Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 6744 Station "D", Calgary, AB T2P 2E6
- 20-22—*ChIPLEY, Florida*. Country Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 173, ChIPLEY, FL 32428
- 20-22—*Cold Lake, Alberta*. 39<sup>th</sup> Dist. 3 Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 141, Cold Lake, AB T9M 1P3
- 20-22—*Eureka Springs, Arkansas*. Springtime in the Ozarks. Write Ch., Box 2427, Rogers, AR 72757
- 20-22—*Galt, California*. 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Northern California Hospital & Institution Conf. Write Ch., Box 214, Galt, CA 95632
- 20-22—*Moorehead City, North Carolina*. Tri-Area Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 12482, Raleigh, NC 27605
- 20-22—*St. Louis, Missouri*. International Men's Conf. Write Ch., Box 430025, St. Louis, MO 63143-0025
- 20-22—*Stillwater, New Jersey*. 19<sup>th</sup> Garden State Young Peoples Conf. Write: Ch., Box 10195, New Brunswick, NJ 08906
- 20-22—*Topeka, Kansas*. 11<sup>th</sup> Trail of Hope Indian Conf. Write: Ch., Box 750322, Topeka, KS 66675
- 20-23—*Erie, Pennsylvania*. 26<sup>th</sup> Erie Area Spring Conf. Write: Ch., Box 10443, Erie, PA 16514-0443
- 21-22—*Hyannis, Massachusetts*. Second Annual Spring into Sobriety Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 662, Hyannis, MA 02601

- 21-22—*Norfolk, Nebraska*. Norfolk Area Spring Classic. Write: Ch., 1500 Bluff Ave., Norfolk, NE 68701
- 26-29—*Kona, Hawaii*. Big Island Bash. Write: Ch., Box 390727, Kailua-Kona, HI 96739
- 27-29—*Burlington, Vermont*. Area 70 Conv. Write: Ch., Box 2001, Wallingford, VT 05773
- 27-29—*Canandaigua, New York*. 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Conf. of the Lakes. Write Ch., Box 982, Canandaigua, NY 14424
- 27-29—*Cedar Mountain, North Carolina*. Carolina Women's Retreat. Write: Ch., 101 Wilshire Dr., Greenville, SC 29609
- 27-29—*Dauphin, Manitoba*. Dauphin Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 453, Dauphin, MB R7N 2V3
- 27-29—*Galesburg, Illinois*. Spring Fling 2001. Write: Ch., Box 1772, Galesburg, IL 61402-1772
- 27-29—*Ridgecrest, California*. 14<sup>th</sup> Indian Wells Valley Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 421, Ridgecrest, CA 93556
- 27-29—*Watertown, New York*. 36<sup>th</sup> Annual Anniversary-Thousand Island Dist. 38 Int'l. Write Ch., Midtown Towers, Apt. 803, Watertown, NY 13601

### May

- 4-6—*Albuquerque, New Mexico*. Eighth Annual - Red Road Conv. Write: Ch., Box 9460, Albuquerque, NM 87119
- 4-6—*Cincinnati, Ohio*. Pockets of Enthusiasm Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 43458, Cincinnati, OH 45243
- 4-6—*Grants Pass, Oregon*. 26<sup>th</sup> Rogue Roundup. Write Ch., Box 1741, Grants Pass, OR 97528
- 4-6—*Greensburg, Pennsylvania*. 55<sup>th</sup> Laurel Highlands Conf. Write Ch., Box 6, Boward, PA 15619
- 4-6—*Hibbing, Minnesota*. Iron Range Get-Together. Write: Ch., Box 232, Hibbing, MN 55746

## Closed Meeting Topics From the Grapevine

For more detailed suggestions, see the pages noted.

April (page 37): A Tidal Wave of Loneliness

May (page 23): Step Five

- 4-6—*Kansas City, Missouri*. Western Area Institution Weekend. Write: Ch., 2634 E. 8<sup>th</sup> St., Kansas City, MO 64124
- 4-6—*Lac de Flambeau, Wisconsin*. Area 74 Spring Conference., Write: Ch., Box 103, Suring, WI 54174.
- 4-6—*Turtleford, Saskatchewan, Canada*. Turtle River Open Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 225, Livelong, Saskatchewan S0M 1J0
- 11-13—*Dayton, Ohio*. Women's XXIII Workshop. Write: Ch., Box 1527, Dayton, OH 45401-1527
- 11-13—*Louisville, Kentucky*. 11<sup>th</sup> Falls City Conv. Write: Ch., Box 37137, Louisville, KY 40233-37137
- 11-13—*Melbourne, Florida*. Spacecoast Roundup. Write: Ch., 720 E. New Haven Ave., #3, Melbourne, FL 32901
- 17-20—*Daytona Beach, Florida*. 11th Spring Conf. Write: Ch., Box 214911, S. Daytona, FL 32121
- 18-20—*Chetwynd, British Columbia, Canada*. Fourth Annual Chetwynd Round-up. Write: Ch., Box 1902, Chetwynd, BC VOC 1J0
- 18-20—*Kamloops, British Columbia, Canada*. 49<sup>th</sup> Annual Roundup. Write: Ch., 108-2400 Oakdale Way, Kamloops, British Columbia V2B 6W7
- 18-20—*Laughlin, Nevada*. 17<sup>th</sup> Annual Tri-State Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 12568, Las Vegas, NV 89112

## Planning a Future Event?

Please send your information on June, July and August events, two days or more, in time to reach G.S.O. by April 10, the calendar deadline for the June-July 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

- 18-20—*Port Angeles, Washington*. Second Annual Olympic Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 1081, Port Angeles, WA 98362
- 18-20—*Santa Barbara, California*. 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Santa Barbara Get Together. Write: Ch., Box 2337, Santa Barbara, CA 93120.
- 19-20—*Waco, Texas*. NETA Correctional Facilities Conv. Write: Trsr, 1810 Winjoyce Rd., Apt. 102, Garland, TX 75043
- 20-23—*Bangalore, India*. 35<sup>th</sup> General Service Conference and 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Write: Ch., 46, 8<sup>th</sup> Main, Malleswaram, Bangalore - 560 003, India.
- 25-27—*Batavia, New York*. 2001 CNY Area Assembly. Write: Ch., Box 276, Pembroke, NY 14056
- 25-27—*Bloomington, Minnesota*. Gopher State Roundup XXVIII. Write: Ch., Box 65295, St. Paul, MN 55165-0295
- 25-27—*Helena, Montana*. Area 40 Spring Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 6883, Helena, MT 59604
- 25-27—*St. Petersburg, Florida*. Sobriety In Action Conv. Write: Ch., Box 2571, Pinellas Park, FL 33780-2571
- 25-27—*Cadillac, Michigan*. Spring Roundup, Northern Michigan Interarea. Write: Ch., Box 1363, Gaylord, MI 49734
- 25-28—*Dallas, Texas*. 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Roundup (sponsored by gay and lesbian members). Write: Ch., Box 192067, Dallas, TX 75219-9067

## June

- 1-3—*Flagstaff, Arizona*. Flagstaff Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 22148, Flagstaff, AZ 86002
- 2-3—*Basel, Switzerland*. Big European Roundup. Write: Ch., Deutschspractriges Laendertreffen, Box CH 4006, Basel, Switzerland
- 6-5—*Casper, Wyoming*. 26<sup>th</sup> Annual June Jamboree. Write: Ch., 152 N. Kimball, Casper, WY 82601
- 8-10—*Akron, Ohio*. Founder's Day Conf. Write: Ch., Box 337, Lakemore, OH 44250
- 8-10—*Grand Island, Nebraska*. Area Reunion 2001. Write: Ch., Box 4502, Lincoln, NE 68504-4502
- 8-10—*Mobile, Alabama*. 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Azalea City Jamboree. Write: Ch., Box 9005, Mobile, AL 36609
- 8-10—*New Orleans, Louisiana*. 33<sup>rd</sup> Big Deep South Conv. Write: Ch., 3117 Independence St., Ste. D, Metairie, LA 70006
- 8-10—*Rochester, New York*. Northeast Regional Forum. Write: Forum Coordinator, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163
- 8-10—*Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada*. W.R.A.A.S.A. Write: Ch., 208-323 Portage Ave., Winnipeg, MB R3B 2C1
- 22-24—*Aberdeen, South Dakota*. Spring Conf. 2001. Write: Ch., Box 195, Mellette, SD 57461
- 29-July 01—*Santa Rosa, California*. NCCAA 54<sup>th</sup> Annual Summer Conf. Write: Secy, 1723 Anamor St., Redwood, CA 94061-2529

## July

- 6-8—*Oshkosh, Wisconsin*. 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual East Central Regional Conf. Write: Ch., 2319 W. Rawson Avenue, Oak Creek, WI 53154-1321
- 13-15—*Binghamton, New York*. 33<sup>rd</sup> State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 147, Owego, NY 13827.
- 20-22—*Volcanoes National Park, Big Island of Hawaii*. 2001 HICYPAA. Write: Ch., Box 4175, Hilo, HI 96720
- 27-29—*Windsor, Ontario, Canada*. 26<sup>th</sup> Annual Windsor—Essex County Conv. Write: Ch., 9740 Menard Street, Windsor, Ontario N8P 1G6.