

## ■ The Only Requirement...

... for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking. This is perhaps one of the most inclusive statements ever made by an organization — and one that is lifesaving for alcoholics caught in the deadly grip of their disease. The Third Tradition of Alcoholics Anonymous states that anyone who wants to join A.A. can. No dues, no forms, no initiation; no dress code or badges or funny hats. But the founding members of Alcoholics Anonymous were by and large also members of the most privileged class of the day — predominantly white, male and Christian — and quite often the exclusivity that characterized their social and business settings spilled over into their A.A. gatherings. Some thought “the fairer sex” could not be *real* alcoholics, and that people of color were better off “staying with their own.” Gay, bisexual and transgender people — considered aberrant by the medical profession — were ignored. The mentally ill were shunned for fear of wreaking havoc on groups. Atheists, though tacitly accepted, were often condescended to by others who assumed they would soon “see the light.”

Even as more women joined the ranks of A.A. and as meetings became more integrated, there was still, in more cliquish groups and provincial areas, an unspoken and subtle resistance to those who were *different*. Sadly, some of this continues to this day, perhaps not in the explicit use of racist, sexist, homophobic or gender non-conforming slurs, but with silence — a silence that can be just as alienating as hurtful words. Dennis, who is African-American, says that at non-urban meetings he is often met with reticence and not openly welcomed. When Deirdre is honest about her atheism, no one is rude — they just say nothing at all, and she is rarely invited out for coffee. Roland, meanwhile, has been snubbed by those who, unlike him, believe in an anthropomorphic “god.” Jesse, a transgender man, often feels invisible at meetings and is turned off by the gendered language in A.A. literature. He is concerned about the dearth of literature for transgender people — another form of silence. Nola, a gay woman, was uncomfortable at straight meetings when she was a newcomer and then experienced real prejudice during the AIDS crisis. Janice, who is black, was offended by a speaker at a predominantly white meeting who said she had been mistreated by black people her whole life. Roland was once told by someone to pull up his jeans, which he took as a not-so-subtle racial

slur. Dennis is also concerned that A.A.’s striving to make the literature race-neutral discourages people of color to share that racism is indeed a part of their story and fears that removing that truth could lead to a drink.

Although most members acknowledge that marginalization due to race, gender and other factors occurs less in A.A. than it does elsewhere, it *does* occur, and, in the spirit of the Third Tradition, it is essential to continue practicing love and tolerance with people whose skin color, language, sex, orientation, beliefs and social status differ from our own. Janice is adamant about this: “Welcoming people and making them feel comfortable is not something that comes naturally to some of us, but it *has* to be done.” Her point drives home the importance of greeters at meetings, the *literal* hand of A.A. reaching out as someone first walks through the door. It is hard enough for an alcoholic who has just hit bottom, who is sick and terrified, to take that enormous step. But if that person looks or sounds or acts differently from most of the people in the room, it is imperative that someone make them feel welcome at once. Janice says that her sponsor drilled it into her head that “There should never be a stranger at a meeting.” And it’s not just words that welcome, but actions. The offer of a cup of coffee can be a life saver: it encourages the new member to stay — and perhaps even to stay sober.

Some lateral attempts at inclusion in A.A. are “special meetings” — for example, women’s, LGBTQ, and atheist and agnostic meetings — but oftentimes the very groups formed to be more accommodating can end up being insensitive themselves. Deirdre went to a gay women’s meeting where there was a lot of complaining about bisexuals. At a largely African-American meeting, Angela was offended by people saying how terrible it was to drink and drug with “lowlives in Harlem.” When attending men’s meetings, Jesse is hurt by careless comments about transgender men and the use of the T-slur. Nola says two of her dear friends in A.A. were ostracized from a “Christian” A.A. group because they were lesbians.

“When anyone, anywhere reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there...” The A.A. Responsibility Statement is one of the cornerstones of our Fellowship, but it is critical to remember how different the hand that reaches out may be from the one that reaches back. Although special meetings do serve

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**Note on anonymity:** From time to time in this publication full names and/or pictures of G.S.O. employees, Class A trustees and other nonalcoholics are used. The anonymity of A.A. members is maintained, as they are identified throughout by first name and last initial only.

their purpose in making certain members feel more comfortable, it is each member's responsibility to make every meeting as open and welcoming as possible. A.A. is indeed a program of progress and not perfection; still, the progress needs to be steady, taking into consideration that society's conditioning and our own apathy at times can be deterrents to helping another alcoholic.

Recently, A.A. published four new or updated pamphlets: "Women in A.A.," "LGBTQ Alcoholics in A.A.," "A.A. for Alcoholics with Mental Health Issues — and their sponsors," and "The 'God' Word — agnostic and atheist members in A.A." There is also a new Grapevine book, *One Big Tent*, with stories by atheist and agnostic members, which has been a real comfort to Deirdre. Dennis is passionate about the pamphlet on mental health issues: "So many people who are suffering with depression are terrified to talk about it because of the judgment of others, be it vocal or silent." Janice concurs, "Nearly everyone I'm close to in A.A. is getting outside help." And although Jesse appreciates the LGBTQ pamphlet, he still feels there should be one specifically created for transgender and gender-non-conforming members.

Criticisms notwithstanding, A.A. has a laudable track record with respect to inclusion, especially when compared to dues-paying and induction-requiring organizations. Although he wishes there were more stories in the Big Book about people of color, Dennis has always found A.A. to be extremely accepting: "It is rare that I feel like an outsider." Deirdre says that the question of what she believes or doesn't believe regarding a higher power never comes up in the meetings she attends,

but she observes that sexism is everywhere — even in A.A. Jesse feels most comfortable in meetings that use gender-neutral language and loves that A.A. is open to whatever kind of meeting someone wants to start — as long as the primary purpose is to stay sober and help others. Angela feels lucky that she has always loved meetings and early on found friends of all colors and types to "trudge the road" with her.

Janice has attended meetings where, she says, "The moment I walk through the door, I have been greeted as a true 'fellow' member. The smiles seem genuine, and there is a curiosity and interest in who I am and why I'm there." Unfortunately, she points out that this is not the case with all meetings, white or black: "Harlem meetings can feel just as exclusionary as some on the Upper East Side." Although Nola may have felt uncomfortable at some meetings due to her sexual orientation, she adds, "No one was ever rude or unwelcoming ... I can think of no organization more accepting than A.A. Like many of my fellows, I believe the world would be a better place if every human being attempted to live by A.A.'s Twelve Step principles." But she is also aware that getting sober in an urban area may be a very different experience from doing so in other parts of the country. Roland agrees, with an important caveat: "A.A. is more accepting on principle; however, principles are only as good as the practitioner's understanding of their importance — and their willingness to actually practice them."

Beyond literature, what other actions can be taken with respect to promoting inclusion at meetings? Dennis feels that a regular part of the announcements should include the statement from the Big Book, "We are not doctors..." so that newcomers with mental health issues are not afraid to seek outside help for their problems other than alcohol. He also feels A.A. is not inclusive enough regarding prayer — that it should be a neutral space with respect to beliefs, because "A.A. is fluid and people are ever changing." Jesse finds the "men with the men/women with the women" language of sponsorship announcements in meetings estranging, because any concerns in choosing an appropriate sponsor should have more to do with sexuality than with gender. He also feels that adapting meeting announcements to be non-binary would be more inclusive. On the other hand, some people, both cis and transgender, appreciate hearing language in meetings in the pronouns that they identify with. Deirdre thinks that local intergroups should be taken to task when they stop listing agnostic or secular A.A. meetings — that





“atheists, agnostics and freethinkers can and do have profound recovery in A.A. without G-O-D” — and that, in this matter, A.A. needs to widen the door of inclusivity even further. Roland feels strongly that no one should ever be judged or criticized for their clothing style, and he would like to see more focused literature and discussion in meetings about our willingness to practice A.A. principles in all of our affairs, and what actions we are taking to that end. Angela is forgiving yet cautious: “Slightings and stupidity have more to do with ignorance than with trying to offend. In fact, I do think people try *not* to offend ... but we need to keep the rooms safe.”

In the new A.A. pamphlet “The ‘God’ Word,” there is a quote by A.A. co-founder Bill W., who, on the subject of diversity in A.A., brings it home: “We have atheists and agnostics. We have people of nearly every race, culture and religion. In A.A. we are supposed to be bound together in the kinship of a common suffering. Consequently, the full individual liberty to practice any creed or principle or therapy whatever should be a first consideration for us all ... Let us always try to be inclusive rather than exclusive; let us remember that each alcoholic among us is a member of A.A. so long as he or she [or they] declare.”

## Recovery in the Wilderness: The 18th Native American Convention



*Located in the Côte Nord region of Québec province, the 18th Native American Convention took place on the Pessamit First Nations Reserve and Innu community, underneath a shaputuan, created each year by volunteers who work for days to ready it.*

Last summer, G.S.O.’s French editor/translator Juliette L. was engaged in the French retranslation of the pamphlet “A.A. for the Native North American.” Curious about the French vocabulary the Native peoples of Québec used, she brought a copy of the translation in progress to the Eastern Canada Regional Forum in July. “As is often the case with A.A.,” Juliette says, “one person introduced me to another, and before long I met Léopold H., who invited me to the Congrès autochtone A.A., the 18th Native American Convention, the only one of its kind in Québec.”

The Convention took place the weekend of August 24–26 on the Pessamit First Nations Reserve and Innu community, located in the Côte Nord region of Québec province, a five-hour drive north of Québec City. Aside from getting tips on her translation, Juliette says, “I wanted to go because I wanted to discover what this

remote A.A. convention and community were all about.” What she found was a gathering that reflected the mission of A.A. everywhere — to help suffering alcoholics, an especially serious problem in the Innu community. She also found a gathering rich in Native traditions and spirituality.

One unique aspect of the convention is that it is held in a Native structure known as a shaputuan, created each year by volunteers who work for days to ready it. It’s a huge structure, based on a traditional Native long-house, made out of tree branches bent and tied together to create a frame over which canvas is placed. It can seat 150 people at a time. (A smaller, open version becomes the “coffee room.”) Outside, a huge fire, started on Friday night, burns continuously until the convention’s close on Sunday.

Another attendee at the convention was Diane P.,

who lived in the area for 23 years before recently moving to Québec City. Although not Native herself, Diane is known affectionately by the name Perle de Rosée, or “Dew Pearl,” bestowed upon her by her Native friends. She has attended all 18 Native American conventions, including the first, started in 2000 by Léopold H., who — after reading about Native conventions in the U.S. in *Box 4-5-9* — decided he wanted to start his own for the Innu people and their friends. Funding was a problem at first, but this was solved in A.A. fashion by the Seventh Tradition and volunteer labor. “We don’t have any meetings to prepare for the convention,” Diane says. “One person phones another, and they say, ‘You do this, I’ll do that,’ and we get it done.”

Diane says that once at the convention, “We tell people to put away their watches and go on Native time. Which means that we start when we’re ready and end when we’re done.” There is a schedule, but it’s not exactly followed to the letter (Juliette calls the process “organized chaos”). The speakers include families, couples and individuals; they are generally Native, although one non-Native person always speaks. The attendees are mainly Native, but everyone is welcome.

According to Diane, the convention is like an extended A.A. meeting, or a series of them, and it also has a Twelfth Step function. “Alcoholism is a major problem in the Innu community,” she explains. “When we first started, the youth would come because they thought we were just going out into the woods to drink. They didn’t believe us that we’d go an entire weekend without drinking. And now, some of them come back year after year — they got their start in A.A. this way.”

This year at the convention, people picked up cake and tokens (newcomer tokens are moose antlers) representing anywhere from five to 25 years of sobriety. The most mov-

ing story, according to Diane, “was the one-year token given to a 20-something Native girl by her 33-years-sober grandmother — under the eyes of her grandfather and her mother, who are also A.A. members.”

On Saturday night, a dinner featuring beaver, moose, salmon, duck, bustard and bannik — traditional Native dishes — is served. People donate what they can for the meal, and the proceeds form the basis for funding the next year’s convention. On Sunday, people gather in a great friendship circle around the fire. Everyone dances the makusham, an Innu dance. They eat cake, the fire is extinguished, and the shaputuan is taken down. And the following year, the process starts again.

“The convention was great, amazingly moving,” Juliette says. “There was a lot of emotion. And because it was so intimate, I got to shake everyone’s hand. I was the first person from G.S.O. to come all the way there — they’re so remote that this has never happened. I felt they were happy to have me there, that they felt more connected to A.A. as a whole.”

Diane is certainly ready to extend an invitation to A.A. at large. “The convention has reached its maturity — 18 years old. What does adulthood have in store for us? If you come next year, you’ll have a good idea.”

## ■ The Thai That Binds

“If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again” coupled with the slogan “Do the next right thing” might well characterize the struggles endured by the A.A. Thailand translation committee in their efforts to publish the Big Book in Thai, the second edition of which finally made it into print last year.

The first translation of *Alcoholics Anonymous* into Thai was printed in the 1980s, long before the Thailand service structure was formed. It was an effort that, unfortunately, never fully panned out. According to John M., the first chair of Thailand Area, the original version must have been translated by a political appointee at the U.N. or Thai embassy, as it was written in what is known as “Hi-So” (high-society) Thai, which is unreadable by most Thais. Some other concerns with the publication were the page layout, which was different from the English-language version, and the exclusion of personal stories. The biggest problem, however, was the word used for God, which refers specifically to the Judeo-Christian God of the Bible, not a more universal “higher power.”



### Reminder: Résumés for Trustee Election due Jan. 1, 2019

Two new Class B (alcoholic) trustees, from the Northeast and Southwest regions, as well as the trustee-at-large/Canada, will be elected at the General Service Conference in May 2019. Résumés must be received at G.S.O. no later than January 1, 2019, and must be submitted by delegates only.

The new Northeast regional trustee will fill the position currently held by Richard P. of Windham, NH. The next trustee from the Southwest region will follow Yolanda F. of San Antonio, TX. The new trustee-at-large/Canada will replace Scott H. of Kamloops, British Columbia.

Please submit your candidate’s résumé to the Secretary, trustees’ Nominating Committee, General Service Office at [nominating@aa.org](mailto:nominating@aa.org).



Shortly after the publication of the first Thai Big Book, G.S.O. staff member Adrienne B. visited Thailand to meet with the newly formed Thailand Intergroup. Adrienne brought along facts sheets of what A.A. is and what it is not, as well as copies of a proposed translation of *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* into Thai that G.S.O. had received. Not only did that project run aground, but, overcome by growing pains, the Thailand Intergroup disbanded. It would be almost five years before the formation of a new service structure based on areas and districts would spring up — and along with it, a resurgence of the translation projects.

In 2009, when Thailand Area was formed, John M. became area and translation chair. John had copies of the proposed “Twelve and Twelve” translation sent to the ten or so sober Thai nationals, and asked them if they would review the material and suggest changes so that the copy could be made ready for print. Although the area offered to make travel arrangements and to provide food, accommodations and a venue in which to meet, the gathering never occurred. Ongoing feedback had persuaded John and others that the “Twelve and Twelve” translation, like the first Thai Big Book translation, was not written in a colloquial style of Thai. John also suspected that the translator was a member of the Christian clergy and was convinced that this might render the entire project pointless since most Thais (95 percent) are Buddhist.

John decided to drop the idea of working on the “Twelve and Twelve” for the time being and began looking for a way to retranslate the Big Book. Valerie O’N., the A.A.W.S. publishing director at that time, first met with John at an Asia-Oceania Service Meeting held in Bangkok. Her support and encouragement were just what John needed to move forward in earnest to publish a newly translated second edition. Although John met with — and hired — a few different translators over the next few years, he was unable to find the right person for the formidable job. When his term as area chair rotated out, he continued as translation chair and managed to get “Whatever Happened to Joe?” and the illustrated versions of the Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions pamphlets translated and printed in Thai.

In 2013, when Ross M. took over as translation chair, he not only picked up the ball from John, he ran with it. Ross had heard the rumblings about a new translation of the Big Book and learned of the various attempts to make it a reality. After reading the first translation, Ross agreed with John that the language was too highbrow for most Thai folk. He also felt that it lacked a true understanding of the concepts of A.A., especially the idea of a higher power that was not endemic to any creed. Ross was all too aware of some Thai people’s fear that the whole “A.A. thing” was a missionary venture. Additionally, he discovered that the actual translation process wasn’t properly executed — noticing, for example, that several

of the twelve Ninth Step promises were missing from the text. He joked to his Thai friends that perhaps it was because the Thai weren’t ready for all twelve!

Ross had come to Thailand 16 years earlier knowing no Thai but determined to learn the language and use it in Twelfth Step work. He claims it was the hardest thing he’s ever done, and so when it was originally suggested that he should be the one to spearhead the new translation effort, Ross was far from enthusiastic. However, his sponsor pointed out that since he spoke and read Thai better than any other expat in Thailand A.A., it was, for all practical purposes, his job by default.

Since the first Big Book translation, A.A. in Thailand had grown considerably; however, the many issues with the translation were continuing to cause confusion and to hamper further growth. Ross believed that Thai A.A.s needed a version of the Big Book as good as the original one — in simple, readable Thai. But the struggles inherent in dealing with stateside translators had slowed things down and made progress increasingly difficult. Ross became firmly convinced that if the job were to be done right it had to be done by Thai A.A.s themselves. He believed the members in Thailand could do the job, and he proposed that they take control of the process entirely — financing, translating, printing and distributing the book locally. He also felt strongly that Thai A.A. members should contribute their own stories for the back of the book (as was done in the Spanish- and French-language versions) rather than using translations of the existing stories in the English-language version. Ross wanted it to be a “Made in Thailand” Big Book that local Thai people could take pride in — if he could just convince New York. Ross contacted A.A.W.S. and got to know the members of the G.S.O. team responsible for translations and licensing of A.A. materials, and his dream moved closer to becoming a reality. The G.S.O. team was instrumental in helping to secure approval for producing the book. Once legal documents were signed, the first (standard) step needed to be taken — a test translation of Chapter Five submitted to A.A.W.S. Once approved, the work could then begin in full. Through an A.A. member with a journalism background, Ross found Yod, a wonderful Thai writer who had translated some twelve-step literature for another fellowship. After Yod completed a first draft of Chapter Five, he sent it to Ross and the other members (as he would do with all future copies), who read it and made suggestions and adjustments. After the draft went back and forth several times and everyone agreed it was ready, Ross sent the new Chapter Five translation to New York.

The committee was delighted when A.A.W.S. gave the go-ahead. Although some representatives did mention that the translation seemed rather “informal,” Ross assured them that this was indeed by design. In fact, Yod was an upper-class Thai with a master’s degree in translation from the best university in Thailand, and he

would normally have used literary language; however, Ross had gone to great lengths to explain the program to him as well as to articulate what they were trying to do: to make a book that was accessible to the average Thai alcoholic. An internal, annotated version of the Big Book by Tim P. of the committee was also produced to help Yod better understand and translate the early-20th-century American slang and the many colloquial, obsolete and archaic terms used by Bill W. Ross knew these references were hard enough for 21st-century English-speaking Americans to grasp, let alone non-English-speaking Thais.

In his determination to produce a book that accurately rendered the meaning and message of the English version into useable Thai, Russ and his committee gave each chapter the same level of scrutiny they had given Chapter Five. Once the new draft of the entire book was completed, a Thai editor read it and commented on style, punctuation and grammar. Ross explained, “The very architecture of the Thai language — how an idea is built in a phrase, sentence and paragraph — is so different from English that care had to be taken in not making the translation read like an ‘English’ book.” And while the painstaking process of clarifying the language went on, Thai A.A. member Maymay S. worked with Ross to collect nine stories from local A.A. members to complete the book.

Yod helped find a reputable publishing house, and once the additional legal documents to protect the all-important copyright of the Big Book were drawn up and funding was secured through Seventh Tradition contributions, 1,000 copies were ordered from the printer. Yet another challenge emerged during the printing process. Ross points out, “In Thai, there are no spaces between words in sentences nor is there any punctuation — such as periods, commas, quotes, semi-colons, colons, parentheses, dashes, etc. — so it was a challenge to lay out each page and make line breaks.” Whenever there was a change or a correction, the whole

process had to be repeated. After extensive readings and examinations of the printing draft, the committee agreed on the size of the book, the paper stock, the color of the cover, and the overall design.

In July 2017, a little over four years after Ross had started on the project, 1,000 copies of the Thai Big Book were delivered to his home in Bangkok. It was such a huge moment for Ross that he took a selfie with the books and sent it to all the friends who had helped him and his colleagues along the way. Over the next year, 800 copies of the book were sold in Thailand, and the committee (Ross, Tim and Maymay) are now working on another printing. Encouraged by the success of the new Thai Big Book, work has also started once again on the translation of the “Twelve and Twelve,” with an aim toward publication in 2019.

Ross is enormously proud of the generosity of the local Thailand service structure and the amazing support for this project. “The journey, although a difficult one, was deeply rewarding. From the multiple readings throughout the process I learned so much about the message, vastly improved my language skills, and became acquainted with the amazing services rendered every day by A.A.W.S. and G.S.O.” Ross is most grateful for the opportunity to have been of service through this contribution to A.A. and the never-ending process of carrying the message to the still-suffering alcoholic.

### **Addendum:**

*In 2016, the Thailand Area Assembly held a workshop where a discussion highlighted the need for material other than in printed format for Thai A.A.s who are unable to read. This discussion was followed up at the next assembly, where an audio version of the new Thai Big Book was approved, with professionally produced recordings of each chapter to be made available to the Thai public. This project has been successfully completed.*

## ■ Systems Update from G.S.O.

As we have been communicating throughout this year, our office is immersed in an exciting major project that will modernize all of our business systems, impacting nearly all of our business functions as we move them to a single platform. We are taking these measures with the goal of providing increased efficiencies, security, and the enhanced overall support of the A.A. community.

Testing of the new systems has been taking place in the office and will continue into next year. There will be changes affecting literature ordering and fulfillment, how contributions are processed, and how A.A. service records are maintained.

**IMPORTANT:** Our systems will be shut down during the change-over period from January 23 – February 4, 2019.

Please note that during this transition period we will be unable to accept literature orders (via phone, fax, online webstore, or any other means), online contributions, and any changes or updates to service records housed in FNV or elsewhere.

Ultimately, we are working together so that members interacting with G.S.O. through this new unified, updated system will have a much-improved user experience.

Many thanks for your patience and support.

## ■ Dr. Irma Morales Moya “A Luminous Spirit” in Costa Rica

Yvette N. remembers her great aunt Irma — whom everyone called Mima — as a free spirit who made her own yogurt, drank strong coffee with heated milk, collected dolls from all over the globe, was passionate about music, and, without children of her own, loved her nieces and nephews as if they were sons and daughters.

“My mother is conservative and used to roll her eyes at my aunt,” says Yvette, former Panel 63 Western PA delegate. “Mima could be silly, always happy, giggling and smiling.” Yet at the same time, this extraordinary woman, relatively unknown in the United States, was one of a long line of nonalcoholics (Dr. William Silkworth, Sister Mary Ignatia, Father Ed Dowling, Bernard Smith, just to name a very few) who were instrumental in helping suffering alcoholics.

Irma Morales was born in Heredia, Costa Rica, in 1908, one of two girls in a family of nine children. After training as a teacher in Costa Rica, she moved to the United States, where she studied administrative sciences at Columbia University and psychology at Smith College before receiving her Ph.D. in social sciences from Fordham in 1948 — all the more extraordinary because she was 40 years old at the time. In the early 1950s, when she returned to Costa Rica, Dr. Irma set out to work within the marginalized social sectors of her country — women, the poor, the elderly. But it was her work with alcoholics for which “Dr. Irma” is best known. “The notorious ignorance that alcohol is a dangerous drug,” she would write, “makes it necessary to change the cultural patterns of our people in regards to the use of alcoholic beverages.”

In 1955, Dr. Irma was named the Director General of Costa Rica’s Commission on Alcoholism (COA), which later became the National Institute on Alcoholism (NIA) and then the Institute of Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (IAFA). At this time, Dr. Irma was well acquainted with the tenets of A.A.: Yvette feels it’s likely she may have met Bill W. and Lois while living in New York. Using the COA’s white van, she literally picked up alcoholics from bars and street corners and brought them to the COA’s small center in San José for detoxification treatment. A medical doctor who worked with her remembers, “Sometimes, because there were no beds, we used to put the drunken gentlemen on the floor, with a newspaper for a bed, and we would take care of them ... and Dona Irma would kneel next to these men lying on the ground and hug them and help clean them up.”

It was at the COA that Dr. Irma introduced alcoholics to A.A.’s literature and encouraged them to form an A.A. group outside the commission itself. At least in part as a result of her urging, on July 30, 1958, six alcoholics from



the COA met at the house of Luis H., and “A.A. Grupo Tradicionalista No. 1,” Costa Rica’s first A.A. group, was born. By 1963, eight groups would be meeting country-wide and a General Service Office would open in San José.

Dr. Irma was a seminal figure in other ways when it came to alcoholism in Costa Rica. Her concern was not just for alcoholics, but for their families, so she introduced support groups for families with sick alcoholics in their midst — the first Al-Anon groups in the country. Remaining head of the National Institute of Alcoholism in Costa Rica until 1976, she successfully lobbied to have alcoholism declared a disease by the Costa Rican legislature — an effort that echoed Marty M.’s work in the United States with the National Committee for Education on Alcoholism (NCEA). In fact, Yvette N. has a book that Marty M. inscribed to her great aunt: “To Irma Morales of Costa Rica — friend from far away who has carried the message so well.” Yvette has donated this book, as well as other materials on her aunt, to the G.S.O. Archives.

By the time she died in 1998 at the age of 90, Dr. Irma Morales Moya’s effect on Costa Rica was profound — not only her work with A.A. and Al-Anon, but her labor to help the poor, to provide equal rights for women, and to protect the elderly against abuse. As a former colleague recalls, “Dona Irma was an angel of kindness, a luminous spirit. In professional terms, she was a great expert on the geography of the human soul.”



## ■ ‘A Special Kind of A.A. Service’

The incarcerated often speak of being “invisible” to the world at large. For alcoholics behind bars, the invisibility is twofold, as they often feel they must hide the disease from the peers who do see them. The pain, fear and isolation caused by keeping that secret hidden creates a prison inside a prison. It is for this reason that A.A. organizes volunteers to bring in meetings and provide a safe space for those sick and suffering alcoholics who need to talk to others like themselves.

Although there are indeed hundreds of A.A. meetings brought into prisons throughout the country, it continues to be difficult to find volunteers who are willing and able to do this vital service. Time constraints and remote locations can be challenging factors, as are the often complicated steps for clearance and the necessary completion of copious paperwork.

And yet, there is another way to carry the message behind the walls. One of the most rewarding and rarely mentioned forms of Twelfth Step work, where one alcoholic reaches out to another, is through the time-honored and impactful practice of writing letters. The pen has often proved mightier than the sword throughout history, but in this instance, it is not only mighty: it can be a lifesaver.

Reaching out to a total stranger used to be the last thing Aaron B. thought of doing. While drinking, his M.O. was not unlike that of most alcoholics — self-centeredness and egotism to the extreme. But all of that changed shortly after Aaron got sober in 2008. A friend offered to take him to a meeting at a youth detention facility in Washington State. Aaron was instantly taken with the potent atmosphere and thirst for recovery. He began showing up at the center regularly and soon had a solid service commitment. Having had a troubled childhood himself, Aaron bonded with the young men in the meetings. He identified firsthand with the alcohol abuse, the bullying and the fear they experienced.

But as Aaron started reaping the benefits of sober living — a good job, a happy marriage, and the birth of his first child — he found it increasingly difficult to juggle his responsibilities, especially being present for his job and family while traveling the long distance to the facility. It wasn’t long after making the difficult choice to let go of his service commitment that he realized just how much it had meant to him, and so he volunteered to be a district Corrections chair in Renton, Washington. Although he enjoyed the position, he still missed the one-on-one work with incarcerated alcoholics. While serving as Corrections chair, Aaron read a pamphlet about the Corrections Correspondence program (“Corrections Correspondence — a special kind of A.A. Service,” available from G.S.O.). He immediately filled out the return

slip at the back of the pamphlet, requesting to be connected to men serving time in prison who had asked for A.A. contact on the outside. He had no idea how much of an impact it would have. “I have always loved writing, but I was in for much more than I expected,” he says. In true A.A. fashion, Aaron would learn that, in his willingness to help others, the person who really benefited was him. “The miracle in my life is that by sharing through letters with men just like me, I have not had a drink.”

The unique quality of the Corrections Correspondence Service is that it can get the A.A. message into prisons and reach the suffering alcoholic where other help is not obtainable. Treatment, A.A. meetings and other services that are readily available on the outside are not always available in prisons. Aaron is adamant about the efficacy of the correspondence program. “Being able to connect with another alcoholic and give them A.A. as their first introduction to sobriety is what our Fellowship is all about.” He also observes that today it is rare for someone in prison to have A.A. as their first contact with recovery, as other professional outfits usually get there first.

Aaron is convinced that his sobriety has been immeasurably enhanced by the correspondence program, which enables his work with incarcerated men and allows him to witness the miracles taking place in their lives. “What I love about communicating with A.A.s in prison is the honesty. Men in prison have no reason to hold back.” Aaron has had the honor of working the Steps by mail with many of his correspondents and seeing how this has changed their lives. He has seen men get released, re-establish relationships with their families, find jobs, and become sober members of society.

There are currently over two million people incarcerated in the United States and Canada. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism estimates that 26.9 percent of adults admit to binge and heavy drinking. Meanwhile, the American Justice Bureau reports that 42 percent of crimes are committed under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs. Doing the math is even more alarming when one considers the likely underreporting of alcoholism due to denial, shame and stigma of the disease. Numbers and statistics notwithstanding, it is obvious how crucial it is that men and women on the inside be reached by their fellows on the outside. An anonymous inmate at an upstate New York correctional institution put it best when he referred to programs like these as “bringing light into a very dark place.”

The Corrections Correspondence program is certainly the most viable alternative to a live meeting in bringing in that light. Brian C. of Knoxville, who is active in bringing live A.A. meetings into prisons in Tennessee, is working on getting a post office box for his group to facilitate more prison correspondence in his area. He is aware that those who may not be willing to use their home address to communicate with an inmate may be more open to



this service if they are able to communicate through a P.O. box. Brian is another powerful example of an A.A. member who is willing to go to any lengths, not only in his own service work, but in encouraging and supporting others who feel responsible to reach out the hand of A.A.

To access more information about A.A.'s Corrections Correspondence Service, visit [https://www.aa.org/assets/en\\_US/search/f-26-corrections-correspondence-a-special-kind-of-aa-service](https://www.aa.org/assets/en_US/search/f-26-corrections-correspondence-a-special-kind-of-aa-service) or look for a brochure at your meeting's literature table.

## ■ Class B Trustee Beau B. Joins the General Service Board

Following his selection in April at the 68th General Service Conference, the General Service Board of A.A. welcomed Beau B. as a Class B (alcoholic) general service trustee.

Beau got sober in 1986 at the tender age of 16, giving him 32 years of continuous sobriety. "At that age," he says, "I had already been arrested and was failing out of high school, and no one in my family was particularly eager to have me around. When people who are older come in, they'll say they lost their job, their house, their car. I wasn't on track to even begin to get any of those things."

Thanks to his sobriety, Beau was able to enter college at the age of 20 and begin a career in marine biology, before working at subsequent jobs in marketing analytics within the finance and pharmaceutical industries. He now runs his own consulting company and lives in Neptune, N.J., with his wife and son, close to the ocean they all love. Beau's home group is the Sunday Morning Wisdom Off the Wall Group in Manasquan. He has served as a nontrustee director of A.A.W.S., Section Six coordinator in Area 44, and a D.C.M., alternate D.C.M. and G.S.R. in District 28 in Area 44.

"Without a doubt, everything I have now I owe to A.A.," Beau explains, "which is why I felt so honored and humbled when I heard about my selection as trustee." He believes A.A. is going through an interesting period of change, a time "filled with great conversations" about the best approach to getting the program's message across when the way people consume information has changed so drastically. "Our message is perfect and timeless," he says. "It's how to make it accessible, now and for the next 20 or 30 years — that's what I'm excited about."

To that end, Beau has been instrumental in helping to get the new A.A. app and meeting finder into development at A.A.W.S. Meeting Guide was originally created by Josh R. of California for intergroups there, but it has now spread to the point where it has 100,000 users. Free for IOS and Android, the mobile app is easy to download — look for the folding chair in the circle superimposed over a blue background — and easy to use to find meetings.

Josh has licensed all the technology and data for free to A.A.W.S. to support a new meeting finder on [aa.org](http://aa.org), which will launch sometime in the spring of 2019.

Beau feels strongly that Meeting Guide can go beyond finding meetings. The app already contains a "News" section that will carry messages and items of interest from A.A.W.S., the General Service Board and AA Grapevine. (The [aa.org](http://aa.org) Meeting Guide launch will also contain Big Book and *Daily Reflections* messaging capability.) He envisions a day when A.A.s will be able to find local events and meetings in foreign countries via the app, or follow links to stories about people and events within all of A.A. "It's a new way to connect people," Beau says. "People will be able to see what's happening in A.A. beyond their home groups, to see the great work being done at G.S.O. and elsewhere, and to share their own experiences."

Beau wants his tenure as trustee to be all about future A.A. connection and growth. "Imagine if we took all the pamphlets and dropped them into a knowledge base where they were all connected to each other. And consider video: 80 percent of the web content people consume is through video," he continues. "We can make A.A. video more accessible, more digestible. Imagine the *A.A. Service Manual* put into short instructional videos, each one on a different section, so that people can find, and watch, what they need. And that really could just be the beginning."

One of 21 trustees on the General Service Board, Beau currently serves as a director on the A.A.W.S. board.

## ■ La Viña — In Living Color

In response to a 2018 General Service Conference advisory action, *La Viña* published its first issue in full color. With the September/October issue, *La Viña* joined Grapevine in 64-page, full-color format. Said *La Viña* editor Irene D., "The change has been very well-received within the Spanish-speaking A.A. community. It brings a vibrancy to the magazine that is especially exciting for our readers." One reader involved in carrying the message into correctional facilities noted about the new look, "It has been especially useful in providing a colorful window of hope to alcoholics behind the walls."



## ■ A.A.W.S./G.S.O. YouTube Channel

A YouTube channel has been launched for A.A. World Services, Inc. (A.A.W.S.) and the A.A. General Service Office (G.S.O.). The new channel can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/c/AlcoholicsAnonymousWorldServicesInc>. It provides an additional platform from which A.A.W.S.-produced videos can be easily shared with a broad audience in order to enhance carrying the message to alcoholics, the general public and the professional community.

### Frequently Asked Questions about the A.A.W.S./G.S.O. YouTube Channel

1. **Q. Why YouTube?**

**A.** *The YouTube Nonprofit Program is a powerful tool that will allow Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. to accomplish three goals:*

  - a. *Share A.A. video content more broadly in a contemporary medium while improving our search engine optimization; making A.A. easier to find.*
  - b. *House A.A.W.S. video content in a location which gives local service structures and Intergroups the ability to embed this video content directly into their websites.*
  - c. *Measure and improve engagement with the general public, professional community, those seeking help, and local service structures.*
2. **Q. What content will be on this channel?**

**A.** *Conference-approved videos as well as videos developed from service material available from the General Service Office (G.S.O.).*
3. **Q. How can I identify the A.A.W.S. YouTube channel?**

**A.** *G.S.O.'s YouTube channel is identified by the registered trademarks of A.A.W.S. (the Blue People and "Alcoholics Anonymous" in blue typeface), and by the information on the "About Us" page. Also, all videos from G.S.O. on YouTube have a notice at the beginning and end stating that they are A.A.W.S. productions.*
4. **Q. Can G.S.O. control what plays after the selected video?**

**A.** *No. The YouTube program does not allow for control of the content that plays following a selected video. We can suggest other videos on our channel with a pop-up "card" at the end of each video and playlist, but the suggested video will not automatically play, that is the viewer's choice.*
5. **Q. Can G.S.O. stop videos playing automatically after the selected video?**

**A.** *No. As the channel administrator G.S.O. does not have control of the auto-play feature. However, individuals can turn off auto-play in their YouTube settings.*
6. **Q. Who is responsible for the YouTube channel?**

**A.** *The G.S.O. Website Committee is responsible for day to day maintenance of the YouTube channel as guided by the A.A.W.S. Board and A.A. Traditions.*
7. **Q. Who responds to questions and feedback about the YouTube channel?**

**A.** *The Communications Services Assignment coordinator at G.S.O. reviews feedback and responds to questions regarding the YouTube channel.*
8. **Q. If I subscribe to the A.A.W.S. YouTube channel, will my name appear on the subscription list and break my anonymity?**

**A.** *No. Subscriber names/profiles are not shown anywhere on our channel. However, our channel logo will appear on an individual's profile, in their list of subscriptions, unless made private.*
9. **Q. Can other A.A. entities embed our videos on their websites?**

**A.** *Yes, the Google for Nonprofits Program allows A.A.W.S. to offer local service structures and Intergroups the ability to embed our video content directly into their local websites. The linking of content and websites will increase the search rankings of all the sites involved and improve their organic search results.*
10. **Q. Can other organizations link to our videos on YouTube?**

**A.** *Yes, other organizations can provide links to videos on this channel. However, we ask that a request to link to A.A.W.S. copyrighted material be sent to G.S.O.'s Intellectual Properties Coordinator at [ip@aa.org](mailto:ip@aa.org).*
11. **Q. Can I submit a video to be posted on this channel?**

**A.** *No. A.A.W.S. doesn't accept unsolicited videos. Only Conference-approved videos as well as videos developed from G.S.O. service material will be posted on this YouTube channel.*
12. **Q. Why are the comments turned off?**

**A.** *The 2017 General Service Conference Action that requested the creation of the YouTube page specified that: "A.A. World Services, Inc. create a Google for Nonprofits account, with use of the account limited to the YouTube Nonprofit Program and with a guarantee that comments not be shown on A.A.W.S. YouTube pages."*  
*Conference discussions identified a concern that an active comments page may become a platform for controversy regarding the videos and A.A. as a whole.*

## ■ AA Grapevine, Inc. Seeks Publisher

The AA Grapevine Board of Directors is seeking candidates for the position of Publisher of the AA Grapevine, Inc. Candidates for this position should be Alcoholics Anonymous members preferably with ten (10) years of continuous sobriety or more who have the qualifications below:

- 10 or more years in a senior leadership/management publishing position; with experience in digital and print distribution.
- Corporate board experience.
- Experience in A.A. general service.
- Strong communication and presentation skills.
- Financial acumen.
- Undergraduate degree or higher.

Interested members may forward their professional and A.A. service résumés, along with any questions regarding the position, to [resumes@aa Grapevine.org](mailto:resumes@aa Grapevine.org) by December 31, 2018.

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*Bill W. hoped Grapevine would connect members and groups. The Grapevine 75th Anniversary Toolkit celebrates and supports this vision.*

## Planning a Future Event?

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

For your convenience and ours — please type or print the information to be listed on the Bulletin Board page, and mail to Editor: Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163 or [literature@aa.org](mailto:literature@aa.org).

Date of event: from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_\_

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

Location: \_\_\_\_\_  
CITY STATE OR PROVINCE

Address to list: \_\_\_\_\_  
P.O. BOX (OR NUMBER AND STREET)

CITY STATE OR PROVINCE ZIP CODE

Website or email: \_\_\_\_\_  
(NO PERSONAL EMAIL ADDRESSES)

Contact person: \_\_\_\_\_  
NAME PHONE # AND EMAIL



## 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.

**Please note that we cannot attest to the accuracy, relevancy, timeliness, or completeness of information provided by any linked site.**

### December 2018

7-9—*Birmingham, Alabama.* Magic City Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 55103, Birmingham, AL 35255; [www.magiccity-roundup.com](http://www.magiccity-roundup.com)

### January 2019

3-6—*Boise, Idaho.* WACYPA. Write: Ch., Box 191037, Boise, ID 83719; [www.wacypaaxii.org](http://www.wacypaaxii.org)

11-13—*Ormond Beach, Florida.* Big Book Comes Alive. Info: [bbcaormond@yahoo.com](mailto:bbcaormond@yahoo.com)

11-13—*Skokie, Illinois.* We are not Saints Conv. Write: Ch., Box 409300, Chicago, IL 60640; [www.wearenotsaints.com](http://www.wearenotsaints.com)

11-13—*Mahnomen, Minnesota.* 17th Wild Rice Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 203, Mahnomen, MN 56557; [www.wildriceroundup.com](http://www.wildriceroundup.com)

17-20—*Raleigh, North Carolina.* Tar Heel Mid-Winter Conf. Write: Ch., Box 18412, Raleigh, NC 27619-8412; [www.tarheelmidwinter.org](http://www.tarheelmidwinter.org)

18-20—*Bismarck, North Dakota.* 5th Rule 62 Rendezvous: Ch. Box 71, Bismarck, ND 58502; [www.rule62rendezvous.org](http://www.rule62rendezvous.org)

25-27—*Boston, Massachusetts.* Freedom Trail Conf. Info: <http://2019freedomtrailconference.eventzilla.net>

25-27—*Fairmont, Minnesota.* Recovery, Unity & Svc Conf. Write: Ch., Box 2812, Minneapolis, MN 55402; [rusc@area36.org](mailto:rusc@area36.org)

25-27—*Hilton Head Island, South Carolina.* 39th Hilton Head Mid-Winter Conf. Write: Ch., Box 6256, Hilton Head, SC 29938; [www.hiltonheadmidwinterconference.com](http://www.hiltonheadmidwinterconference.com)

25-27—*Nanaimo, British Columbia, Canada.* Nanaimo's Rally. Info: [www.nanaimoaarally.com](http://www.nanaimoaarally.com)

25-27—*Costa Tegui, Lanzarote, Canary Islands, Spain.* 10th Internat'l EN Speaking Conv. Info: [www.aalanzarote.com](http://www.aalanzarote.com)

### February

1-3—*Tampa, Florida.* Pockets of Enthusiasm. Write: Ch., 12435 Collier Blvd., Ste. 107 Naples, FL 34116; [www.serenityclubswfl.org](http://www.serenityclubswfl.org)

1-3—*Dilworth, Minnesota.* 38th Winter Warm-Up. Write: Ch., Box 558, Moorhead, MN 56560; [moorheadthursdaynight@hotmail.com](mailto:moorheadthursdaynight@hotmail.com)

1-3—*Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada.* 32nd Mid-Winter Round-up. Info: [aa.fredericton2018@gmail.com](mailto:aa.fredericton2018@gmail.com)

7-10—*Los Angeles, California.* 55th Internat'l Women's Conf. Write: Ch., Box 82570, Los Angeles, CA 90082; [www.internationalwomensconference.org](http://www.internationalwomensconference.org)

8-10—*Orange Beach, Alabama.* 35th Jubilee Conv. Write: Ch., Box 724, Gulf Shores, AL 36547; [gulfcoastaa@gmail.com](mailto:gulfcoastaa@gmail.com)

8-10—*Little Rock, Arkansas.* 37th Winter Holiday Conv. Write: Ch., Box 26135, Little Rock, AR 72201; [www.winterholidayconvention.com](http://www.winterholidayconvention.com)

8-10—*Fort Walton Beach, Florida.* 48th Gulf Coast Round-up. Info: [www.gulfcoastroundup.com](http://www.gulfcoastroundup.com)

8-10—*Lexington, Kentucky.* 68th KY State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 910594, Lexington, KY 40591; [www.lexstateconvention.com](http://www.lexstateconvention.com)

8-10—*Liverpool, New York.* Salt City Mid-Winter Round-up. Write: Ch., Box 367, Syracuse, NY 13209; [www.saltcityroundup.com](http://www.saltcityroundup.com)

15-17—*Yakima, Washington.* Yakima Valley Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 10802, Yakima, WA 98902; [www.yakimavalleyroundup.com](http://www.yakimavalleyroundup.com)

22-24—*Hunt Valley, Maryland.* NE Reg. Svc. Assembly. Write: Ch., Box 442, New Market, MD 21774; [www.neraasa2018.org](http://www.neraasa2018.org)

### March

1-3—*Sioux City, Iowa.* Sioux City Tri-State Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 1823, Sioux City, IA 51102

1-3—*Moorhead, Minnesota.* West Central Reg. Svc. Conf. Write: Ch., Box 117, Biwabik, MN 55708; [www.wcraasc2019.com](http://www.wcraasc2019.com)

1-3—*Toronto, Ontario, Canada.* ON Reg. Conf. Info: [orcvolunteers@gmail.com](mailto:orcvolunteers@gmail.com)

1-3—*Hamilton, Bermuda.* Bermuda Conv. Info: [www.aa.bm](http://www.aa.bm)

1-3—*Puebla, Mexico.* Convención Mexicana. Info: [www.aamexico.org.mx](http://www.aamexico.org.mx)

8-10—*Mount Sterling, Ohio.* Area 53 Mini Conf. Info: [www.area53aa.org](http://www.area53aa.org)

15-17—*South Bend, Indiana.* 66th IN State Conv. Write: Box 962, Griffith, IN 46319; [www.area22indiana.org](http://www.area22indiana.org)

15-17—*Qwara, Malta.* 13th EN Speaking Internat'l Conv. Info: [www.aamalta.org.mt](http://www.aamalta.org.mt)

22-30—*Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.* 27th Area 60 Pre-Conf. Assembly. Write: Ch., Box 1496, Washington, PA 15301; [altdelegate@wpaarea60.org](mailto:altdelegate@wpaarea60.org)

29-31—*Ames, Iowa.* Aim for Ames. Write: Ch., Box 2522, Ames, IA 50010; [www.aimforames.org](http://www.aimforames.org)

28-31—*Charleston, South Carolina.* SC State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 13796, Charleston, SC 29422; [www.area62.org](http://www.area62.org)

### April

5-7—*Seguin, Texas.* SWTA 68 Pre-Gen. Svc. Conf. Write: Ch., 1142 Eikel Rd., New Braunfels, TX 78130; [swtaconference2019@gmail.com](mailto:swtaconference2019@gmail.com)

18-21—*Eureka Springs, Arkansas.* Springtime in the Ozarks. Write: Ch., Box 9237, Fayetteville, AR 72703; [springtimeintheozarks@gmail.com](mailto:springtimeintheozarks@gmail.com)

19-20—*Taipei, Taiwan.* 4th Taiwan Roundup. Info: [www.aataiwan.com](http://www.aataiwan.com)

26-28—*Los Angeles, California.* 32nd Men's Internat'l Conf. Write: Ch., Box 83803, Los Angeles, CA 90083; [www.iaamc2019.org](http://www.iaamc2019.org)

26-28—*Bundoran, Donegal, Ireland.* All Ireland Conv. Info: [www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie](http://www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie)

26-28—*Alicante, Spain.* 7th Internat'l Conv. Info: [www.albirconvention.org](http://www.albirconvention.org)

### May

3-5—*Marietta, Georgia.* Marietta Spring Roundup. Info: [www.mariettaroundup.com](http://www.mariettaroundup.com)

3-5—*Kailua-Kona, Hawaii.* 31st Big Island Bash. Write: Ch., Box 390727, Keauhou, HI 96739; [www.bigislandbash.com](http://www.bigislandbash.com)

17-19—*Kimberly, Wisconsin.* Area 74 Spring Conf. Write: Ch., Box 8582, Appleton, WI 54912; [www.area74.org](http://www.area74.org)

19-21—*Port Angeles, Washington.* Olympic Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 1081, Port Angeles, WA 98362; [www.olympicroundup.org](http://www.olympicroundup.org)

