

A New ASL Big Book Arrives

Since the last American Sign Language Big Book and *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* were produced over 15 years ago, members of the Fellowship who are Deaf have expressed to G.S.O. that it might be time to undertake a re-translation of both books to keep them up to date. The result is that the ASL Big Book DVD is now available, with *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* to follow soon.

“The new ASL translations were undertaken because of an expressed need by the A.A. Deaf community,” says David R., publishing director at the General Service Office. “This is a great story of cooperation — of a wonderful group effort to effect a translation that was every bit as careful and loving as translating the Big Book in the Twi language, for instance.” [See *Box 4-5-9*, Spring 2017]

The new ASL Big Book video was shot over a ten-day period (including one snowstorm) in January 2018, according to Ed Nyland (nonalcoholic), G.S.O. production manager, who was present for most of the filming. “The shoot took place in a small room on the ground floor of the building we’re located in here in New York [475 Riverside Drive]. There were two cameras and several monitors, different backdrops for both the Big Book and *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*. A portion of the room was set up for wardrobe and make-up.”

Patrick C., a G.S.O. staffer who arrived on the Accessibilities assignment in the spring of 2017 as the project was already taking shape, says that during the

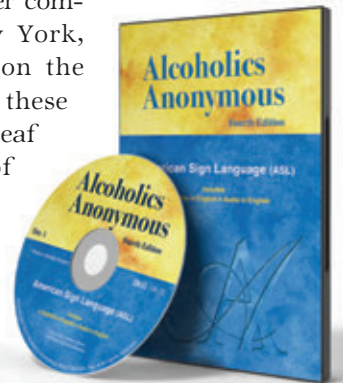
run-up to the production, a G.S.O. committee was formed to reach out for feedback from Deaf members of the sober community in upstate New York, Minnesota, Texas, and on the West Coast. Ultimately, these A.A. members who are Deaf helped select the trio of translators who worked on the new video.

Simply preparing for the shoot was a long process for these signers. “They spent three or four months working together before the shoot,” Ed says. “They were interpreting their parts — what to sign, how to sign it. The video came out well — the overall quality and production values are very sharp.” The new ASL Big Book is 409 minutes long, spread out over four discs, while *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* will run to about 319 minutes.

Shooting the ASL Big Book was a relatively small portion of the work involved, as nearly a year was spent in post-production editing. As chapters were completed, says Patrick, “We asked A.A. members who are Deaf to review portions so they could give us very specific feedback — on ASL interpreter delivery, language use, their pacing and appearance, whether the shot was appropriately framed, whether the background and lighting was what it should be.”

According to David, one of the translators works within the Fellowship coaching signers on signing for meetings. “To have this person involved was fantastic; this work is a shining example of ASL, which is a living, breathing, changing language with its own structure and vocabulary. Seeing it can be great for groups looking for signers for their own meetings.”

As the ASL Big Book was being completed, the next question was, how should this news be shared with the Fellowship? As part of the activity updates sent regularly to accessibilities committees at the intergroup, area



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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 and do not appear in photos.

and district levels, Patrick says, “We included two short ASL videos as links to convey information about the new translations.” (A third installment accompanied a Public Information press release as the Big Book was finalized. The full press release, in ASL, can be accessed on G.S.O.'s website at www.aa.org/BigBookASLpressrelease.)

Published on DVD, the new ASL Big Book includes subtitles and an audio track and can be viewed on aa.org as well as A.A.W.S.'s YouTube channel.

“We believe this project has been done with the right translators, in the spirit of A.A.,” says Patrick. “We’re hopeful that it will be a tool to help more members within the A.A. community who are Deaf and to help those alcoholics who are Deaf and are still out there suffering.”

As an addendum, a new intergroup website has been launched in Central Texas to serve A.A. members who are Deaf. As noted in their mission statement, “The A.A. Deaf Intergroup of Central Texas [<https://centexdeaf-intergroup.org>] is a service entity established pursuant to Tradition Nine of Alcoholics Anonymous to operate on behalf of the participating A.A. groups in accordance with A.A.'s Twelve Traditions and Twelve Concepts. The A.A. Deaf Intergroup exists to aid the A.A. groups in their common purpose of carrying the A.A. message to the alcoholic who still suffers by increasing accessibility to A.A. meetings for Deaf people in recovery.

“Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing A.A. members need the Fellowship’s assistance in order to both receive the message and be able to interact with other A.A. members and be a part of the group. The A.A. Deaf Intergroup of Central Texas exists in order to foster relationships between the hearing and Deaf A.A. members and ensure consistency of A.A. meetings with qualified interpreters. As one of our members has stated in the past, ‘We are to Deaf A.A. members, what other Intergroups are to hearing A.A. members.’”

For more information about A.A. resources for alcoholics who are Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing, contact the Accessibilities and Remote Communities Coordinator at the General Service Office at access@aa.org or by phone at 212-870-3344.

■ ASL Videos to Be Made Available from 2020 International Convention

A request made by a women’s group in a correctional facility in Area 73, West Virginia, to film ASL translators for the first time ever in those meetings at the 2020 International Convention that will have ASL translation — and make the videos available for sale post-Convention, just as is done with audio recordings — was approved by the General Service Board in January 2017. This will help to expand A.A.’s accessibility efforts and greatly broaden the reach of the International Convention to members and potential members who depend on ASL for their communications. G.S.O. staff will work with the same vendor that will be producing the audio tapes for the Convention (slated for July 2-5 in Detroit, Michigan) and plans for the filming and implementation are currently underway.

■ With an Eye to the Future: G.S.O. Staff Positions

We are beginning to update our file of applications from A.A. members who are interested in being considered for possible future openings for the position of G.S.O. staff member. The basic criteria include a minimum of six years continuous sobriety; a background in service at the group and possibly district and area levels; business or professional experience; and excellent communication skills. Another consideration is a willingness to relocate to New York, if necessary. G.S.O. staff people are A.A.s who carry out rotating assignments and correspond with A.A.s throughout the world on all aspects of recovery and service. Additionally, they represent G.S.O. at A.A. functions throughout the U.S. and Canada and provide the primary staff support for the General Service Board. Currently there are 13 staff members who cover a variety of assignments such as: Accessibilities/Remote Communities, Public Information, Literature, Cooperation with the Professional Community, Corrections, International and the General Service Conference. If you are interested or would like more information, please write to: Staff Coordinator, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163 or email staffcoord@aa.org.

■ NAATW and TIAA: Grassroots Sharing on A.A. and Technology

This article is the second of three in a Box 4-5-9 series on the technology that is changing the way Alcoholics Anonymous communicates to suffering alcoholics and interacts with its members.

“Imagine,” says Lew G., a co-founder of the online forum Technology in A.A. (TIAA), “an international society with two million members with, conceivably, as many as 10,000 web presences that don’t coordinate with each other, that sometimes provide conflicting information, that are slow to update and that are often dependent on someone’s niece or brother-in-law to fix when they get broken.”

What you’ve imagined, of course, is Alcoholics Anonymous, which has been represented by a hodgepodge of different websites for groups, districts, areas and intergroup/central offices. While this has worked, more or less, for a while — “and in a certain sense, is in accordance with A.A. and our Tradition of group autonomy,” Lew says — there have been ongoing problems in terms of people showing up at the wrong places and the wrong times for meetings in new places, or finding reliable contacts when they needed another alcoholic to speak to. Lois L., an administrator on the TIAA online forum and a professional digital strategist and user experience (UX) consultant who advises G.S.O., echoes this: “Someone can create a website and then go out and drink, or just disappear, and there’s no way to fix or update it because of credentials and password issues. Sometimes these are sites containing important archive collections that go dark and what’s on them is lost.”

It’s long been apparent to a number of A.A. members, both with and without tech backgrounds, that there has to be a way to share technology within Alcoholics Anonymous so that every new webmaster doesn’t have to reinvent the wheel and, even more importantly, so that fresh ideas on how to use tech to spread the message to suffering alcoholics can come bubbling to the surface.

One answer came in August of 2014, which saw the very first meeting of the National A.A. Technology Workshop (NAATW). NAATW was the brainchild of Brouck H. and Blaine B., both of whom work in the tech industry and have advised the General Service Office on technology. Brouck consulted with G.S.O. to fix problems with the e-reader app, released in 2012. The team



he put together included Blaine. Their work made them realize how much needed to be done as A.A. inevitably, but slowly, moved forward into a technological age. And so they began giving workshop forums on their own, both in the U.S. and in Canada, many of them to intergroup office managers — intergroup/central offices being on the front line of communicating with members and active alcoholics seeking help.

“One of the issues that was important,” Brouck says, “is that we presented tech issues from the perspective of A.A. members — not outside vendors. In talking to people, we understood what they were up against and why it was so difficult to get answers to some of the technological questions they had. We realized that there had to be more communication, more sharing, so we thought, How do we organize this and make it happen?”

The answer was NAATW, which they based on the model of the National A.A. Archives Workshop (NAAAW). Attendees at that first St. Louis Workshop — such as Lois L., who became an NAATW steering committee member — spoke to the fact that there was no general role in A.A. for focusing on technology. They also addressed the concern that service in tech would require special knowledge, leaving A.A. dependent on a cadre of expert technologists — a situation that would run counter to the spirit of rotation, a central principle of the NAATW. Published on their website, (<https://naatw.org/12-statements-of-technology/>) NAATW’s “12 Statements of Technology” begin with implementing

technology “where it supports our primary purpose,” making an informed group conscience “a part of technology decision making,” and using technology “to make information available, not limit it.”

NAATW has continued to do just that as it grows. Its latest workshop was held in Bowling Green, Kentucky, in September 2019, and it will host a hospitality suite at the International Convention in Detroit next summer. “When it comes to spreading the message about how to use tech,” Brouck says, “we are agnostic about platforms. The real issues are: Is it stable? Can you afford it? Is support available? And is it adaptable without writing your own code? That’s the fundamental outline of it for most A.A. entities.”

Aiding in this work of spreading the message about technology are Lew G. and his TIAA co-founder Keith D., who has spent a career working in IT and was a Panel 67 delegate for Area 65 in Northeast Texas. The TIAA forum — intended expressly for both technical and non-technical members — began out of a need to keep ideas percolating all year-round between NAATW conferences in order to share questions and solutions on everything from how to support new websites to finding the best answering service for your district. It now has more than 700 members and, as of August 1, a board of directors, president, secretary, treasurer and 501c3 nonprofit status. Interested members can sign up at tiaa-forum.org.

“What’s exciting is to see new members come on and get some of the answers they need,” Lew says. “I’d like to expand our How-to sections to give incoming members easier access to basic information they need to create a website. We’ve had subgroups go off and do actual development and code for the forum and for A.A. as a whole.” A recent visit to the “Forum” page revealed substantive threads on a broad range of subject matter — everything from archiving your A.A. archives website to the best apps for recording speakers to changing your website’s domain name system settings. Adds Lew, “One of the biggest successes for us has been the Meeting Finder app [See *Box 4-5-9*, Fall ’19], whose developer Josh R. received support and feedback from the forum and from NAATW. Josh came out of this community. Hopefully, the next great app or web development can arise out of some email interchange here or members having coffee somewhere.”

Clement C., staff member on the Communication Services assignment at the General Service Office, is a TIAA forum member and regularly attends NAATW forums, as does Julie Gonzalez (nonalcoholic), Communication Services staff assistant. He emphasizes that he and Julie don’t participate in the workshops or on the forum as official voices of G.S.O. “There is no official connection, but we listen.” In the first NAATW conference he attended, Clement noted that G.S.O. was in the process of drafting a request for proposal (RFP)

for the new G.S.O. website that is currently in development, adding, “Before the weekend was over, I had a seven-page report with suggestions on how to craft it.” As A.A. continues with its YouTube channel, the Meeting Finder app, the new website and any number of forthcoming projects, Clement says, “There have been people who came out of NAATW/TIAA helping every step of the way.”

“The thing that was exciting to me at the NAATW forum [in Bowling Green],” Julie says, “was people’s reactions to solutions they are hearing. That look of relief that we can make this work. People get fired up and excited. They got emotional during a session on how people are using video-conference software to hold remote meetings.” And both Lois and Brouck point to simultaneous phone-translating software that can allow meetings to be held remotely in a host of different languages, with anonymity intact, as among a number of innovations that will help spread the word of A.A. in the not-too-distant future.

In practice, how will the growth of tech work in A.A.? Blaine B., co-founder of NAATW, sounds a cautionary note: “The more we make this about technical expertise, the more it scares people off. It’s regular A.A. service work. People always say, ‘I’m not very technical,’ but for the most part, that’s not what this is. Much of what we communicate is very low tech, stuff that people can do from simple little recipes, as it were. So, it’s a mistake to attach some kind of mystique around it that makes it seem unapproachable or more difficult than it is.”

Keith D., now a member of the NAATW steering committee, takes a nuanced view of how tech can develop within A.A. principles. “Showing someone on a how-to TIAA board steps to build a website in WordPress is not that hard. If you can use a computer fairly well, you can do it. Most webmasters in this sense, with a little help, can rotate in and out of positions on a regular basis. But there are more technical service jobs where someone with IT expertise is needed. Sometimes that person, like certain archivists, may be in the job for years. And sometimes districts may need to pay people for specialized expertise. None of this is new.”

In the end, Keith feels, “The point is that we are going in the right direction or at least the conversation is going in the right direction. I love A.A. and it has changed my life. *The Language of the Heart* is a book I read a lot, and through it I’ve gotten pretty familiar with Bill W.’s viewpoint. I’m willing to bet if he were alive today, he’d say, ‘Oh my God, let’s see how we can use this to make A.A. more effective.’ We may screw up, and we’re going to fall on our faces, just like we do during our recoveries. But then we use that experience to get better.”

The 2020 NAATW will be held in Greater Seattle. For more information and to sign up for the NAATW newsletter, visit naatw.org.

■ Women in A.A. — Leaders of Today and Yesterday

Early A.A. experience is filled with stories of struggle, hope, redemption and freedom from our common affliction of alcoholism. Early accounts by women — their struggles with alcohol, their freedom from it and their subsequent newfound “usefulness,” both in their personal and public lives — may not be exactly abundant, but they do exist, and many of us know these early female A.A.s by name or by story.

Appearing in the Big Book’s First Edition, the story “A Feminine Victory” is one such account. Though this woman’s narrative does not appear in subsequent editions, her story had a critical impact: it helped compel another early alcoholic woman, Marty M., to take her first hopeful steps into a 1939 meeting at Bill and Lois’s Brooklyn brownstone. Marty M., of course, went on to become the founder of the National Committee for Education on Alcoholism and a national force in the understanding and treatment of alcoholism. She devoted her life to spreading information about alcoholism and fighting the stigma attached to it. Marty’s tireless work and her public identification as a female alcoholic threw many A.A. meeting doors wide open to women. Not unexpectedly, in subsequent editions of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, women began to appear more in the stories that follow the first 164 pages. And, if they weren’t exactly crowding the pages, their presence and voice were growing.

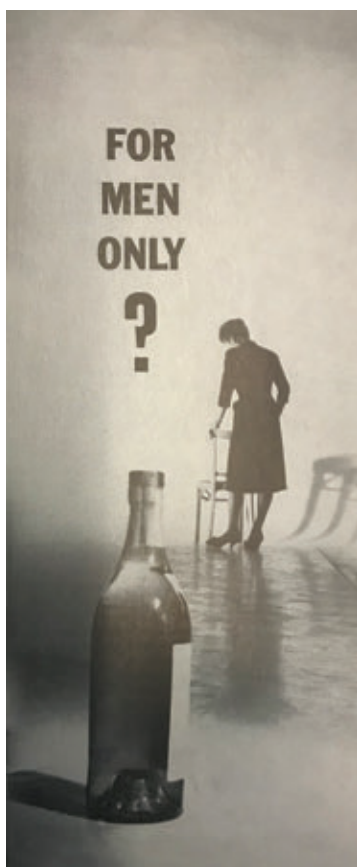
Published in 1960 to commemorate A.A.’s 25th anniversary, the Grapevine publication *AA Today* contains a story written by Marty M. titled “For Men Only?” In it, she writes about the difficulty she encountered in her first year of A.A. because she was a “woman alcoholic.” Certain that she was not the only woman suffering from alcoholism and hoping fervently that A.A. could work for women, she made it her “self-appointed task of getting women into A.A.” Following through on this turned out to be far from easy, but Marty was up to the challenge. “I had plenty of prospects but few results. All that long hot summer I went into New York once a week to the meeting, hoping a woman might appear, find me, know that she was *not* alone and unique, and stay.” After searching long and hard, she says, she finally found two other women alcoholics. She was elated. “Now there were three of us the country over — but three is a crowd. Three can be neither alone nor unique, and we were all three too different to be the same kind of freak!”

These first A.A. women were crucial to the early movement of Alcoholics Anonymous, and a great many of us are also familiar with the names of A.A.’s “friends” who were women — nonalcoholics such as Sister Ignatia, Lois W., Anne S., Ruth Hock and Henrietta Seiberling. Their names have gone down in the annals of our history. But not all the names of A.A.’s female nonalcoholic friends are so familiar. One such woman who served the Fellowship in its early years was Margaret Farrand, who holds the distinction of being A.A.’s first female trustee, having served on the board of the Alcoholic Foundation from 1941 to ’44. Wife of a former Cornell University president and a friend of the U.S. surgeon general, Margaret was a wealthy socialite who helped raise funds to support the Alcoholic Foundation’s early work.

Similarly, many A.A. women who performed essential services for the nascent Foundation remain relatively obscure. Many A.A.s instantly recognize the name of Ruth Hock, Bill W.’s secretary and the typist of the Big Book, but they may not have heard of Bobbie B. By many accounts, Bobbie, who took over as secretary when Ruth left in 1942, worked exhausting hours for over a decade out of love and dedication to the Fellowship during the years of “explosive growth” that followed publication of Jack Alexander’s article in the *Saturday Evening Post*. Thanks to her enormous industry and her communication and letter-writing skills, untold numbers of remote A.A.s gratefully and lovingly called her “sponsor.”

These early participants in A.A. — nonalcoholic and alcoholic women alike — lent their considerable talents and time to holding hours of meetings, writing countless letters, arranging necessary introductions, giving critical talks and having important discussions. In the

decades of A.A. growth that followed, women such as these served on various boards and in various roles of responsibility to Alcoholics Anonymous. However, it was not until 1962 that the first female AA Grapevine Board chair was elected: Mary B., Class B (alcoholic) trustee. Serving through 1966, Mary was the second female to serve as trustee, some 18 years after Margaret Ferrand’s term in the 1940s. Nearly two years after Mary’s election, the first female chair of the A.A.W.S. Board was elected: Jacquelyn (Jackie) S., Class B (alcoholic) trustee (1984–85).



Nearly two decades went by before 2001, when Elaine Johnson McDowell, PhD, Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee became the first woman (and the first woman of color) elected to chair of the General Service Board. In 2009, Phyllis H. — after serving as Class B trustee from 2002 through 2006 — became the first female general manager of the General Service Office, and served in that role until 2015.

In 2019, A.A. reached another milestone. For the first time in A.A. history, all three board chair roles (the General Service Board, the A.A.W.S. Board and the AA Grapevine Board) are filled by trustees who happen to be women. Michele Grinberg (Class A) serves as chair of the General Service Board; Cathy B. (Class B) serves as chair of the Alcoholics Anonymous World Services Board; and Ginger R. B. (Class B) serves as chair of the AA Grapevine Board.

All three chairs were asked to share their thoughts on this “first.” Said Cathy B., A.A.W.S. chair, “Until you mentioned it, I didn’t realize it. The best part, to me, is that it really doesn’t seem like that much of a big deal to the Fellowship. It shows me how far our society has come — even though there is still a lot of road left ahead.”

Ginger R. B., AA Grapevine chair, commented, “At one point, we were all together, and I noticed that all three chairs were women — and so is the current treasurer of the General Service Board, Class A trustee Leslie Backus!”

Class A chair of the General Service Board Michele Grinberg responded, “I actually did not realize the significance of the three women board chairs until someone else mentioned it to me. I think the Fellowship doesn’t care — in the best possible way. In other words, we answer to the Fellowship in our roles as servant leaders, regardless of gender, size, color, religious background, and so on.”

If, as Marty M. said, “three is a crowd,” then A.A.’s three chairs are certainly a crowd, and, a few years down the road, the history pages documenting 2019 will look rather different from those for years past. However, our most important goals have not changed — A.A.s continue to “give freely of what [we] find.” And, we “... hope that all those who have as yet found no answer may begin to find one in the pages of [the Big Book] and will presently join us on the high road to a new freedom.” As A.A.W.S. chair Cathy B. says, “My goals today are ... to learn to walk forward with an open heart ... because I love and trust myself and others [and] because I have a Higher Power today and I am in the care of that Higher Power.”

What will our future pages look like? As Michele Grinberg says, “I am so pleased that the General Service Board chose Bill’s idea that A.A. should always be inclusive, never exclusive, as one of our key goals. Perhaps the three women board chairs help to enhance that idea by our very presence. I hope so.”

■ ‘This Is Our Fellowship, Too’

For Spanish-speaking women to recover from alcoholism in A.A. there are obstacles that may not be widely known, but they are slowly — and surely — being overcome.

In many Spanish-speaking meetings, often dominated by men, the obstacles can be myriad. Women are frequently discouraged from becoming sponsors for other women; instead, they are told that it is better to have a male sponsor to guide them through the Steps. Women are also often deterred from taking on service commitments, particularly leadership positions (DCMs and GSRs), and are guided toward making coffee and cleaning up instead. In other scenarios, new female members are sometimes told that they don’t have a problem and that perhaps they should attend Al-Anon. Even more disturbing, women are sometimes sexually harassed by male members, and some women never return.

“Could it be that bad?” some may ask. The short answer is yes.

Paz P. got sober in Mexico City in 1997 before moving to Phoenix in 2000; at the time, she was one of the few women who attended mixed Spanish-speaking meetings in her area in Arizona. “We had women coming for a few weeks and then they would disappear,” Paz recalls. “It took a while to understand what was happening; even with the best of intentions, it was difficult to keep women in the group.”

“A.A. is a microcosm of our society at large,” explains Amalia C., who is originally from El Salvador and got sober in Connecticut. She wasn’t even aware of Spanish-speaking meetings until she had 16 years of sobriety. Later, she began attending Spanish-speaking meetings, got involved in service — and witnessed a significant amount of behavior that wasn’t conducive to recovery. “Culturally, there is a lot of shame regarding women and any kind of addiction in the Hispanic culture,” she explains. “The perception is that it’s a moral issue. For some reason, it’s okay for men to have the disease, but not for women.”

Irene D., former editor of *La Viña* and now serving as a staff member at the General Service Office (see page 9), spent most of her early A.A. years in English-speaking meetings after landing in Bellevue Hospital. “I learned English in A.A.,” says Irene, who is from Chile and moved to the States 23 years ago. “I didn’t know that there were Spanish-speaking meetings. Once I was in A.A. and learned about these groups, my sponsor talked to me about the difficulties faced by Hispanic women in the program, and that I needed to start helping the newcomer.” Initially, when Irene attended these groups, she found only men. “Eventually, I found a couple of other Spanish-speaking women in another meeting,” she recalls, “but I realized these meetings were much different from what I had experienced in English-speaking meetings. There was no space for

women to talk about women-specific things.”

In 2015, A.A. member Zoraida R., who grew up in a Spanish-speaking household in Southern California, started to recognize the critical need to bridge the Spanish-speaking community with the English-speaking one. Initially, she was inspired by an article entitled “Women in A.A. Groups and Service: When a Culture Restricts Women’s Access to A.A.,” written by María del Pilar Correa, a psychologist and former Class A trustee and president of the General Service Board in Chile, and which was published as a part of A.A.’s 23rd World Service Meeting in 2014. The piece spoke openly about the sexism and loneliness often faced by women seeking recovery from alcoholism in Spanish-speaking cultures. At the end of the article, Correa encourages women who have experienced these obstacles to help other women through sponsorship and other means of service. “In this way, we would be passing our example on to society and helping to bring about the necessary adjustments, freeing ourselves from obstacles,” Correa wrote. “We should then be opening the door to fulfillment of our Third Tradition.”

In response to this call to action, Zoraida decided to explore the possibilities of starting female Spanish-speaking meetings. It’s hard to believe, but in 2017, there were only four Spanish-speaking meetings for women in the United States. There had been several attempts to get meetings started, but there wasn’t enough structure, consistent participation, or focus on the Traditions and literature to sustain the meetings. In addition, women’s Spanish-speaking meetings were met with some resistance: Some male members said these meetings weren’t aligned with the Traditions, postulating that the Preamble states “a fellowship of men and women,” thereby precluding meetings for women only. However, many of these same individuals didn’t seem to have a problem with other special-interest meetings, such as gay meetings or meetings for young people.

Along with other women, Zoraida persevered and started a Spanish-speaking women’s meeting called *Grupo de Mujeres Viviendo Alegria, Felices, y Libres* (Living Happy, Joyous, and Free, Women’s Group) in Temple City, California, in July 2017. This local effort has since spawned 17 Spanish-speaking women’s meetings and one bilingual women’s meeting in California. “Away from the cultural distractions, these women can get sober,” explains Amalia. “Then, when these women do go to mixed Spanish-speaking meetings, they have strengthened themselves. When your soul is strengthened, it is hard to let others get you down.”

Zoraida also organized the first Hispanic Women’s Workshop at the Pacific Region Alcoholics Anonymous Service Assembly (PRAASA) in December 2016. “After this first workshop, I was approached by many general service members asking for more information,” she recalls. These workshops, along with a general

increase in awareness, led to the 2018 General Service Conference Advisory Action calling for a pamphlet by and about Spanish-speaking women in A.A. Stories have been solicited for the pamphlet, and development by the Trustees’ Literature Committee is underway.

Meanwhile, this important cultural conversation has continued to expand. For example, during the second year of the Hispanic Women’s Workshop, several women from the United States, Peru, Bolivia, Mexico and other countries were able to videoconference into the workshop. “It is something we try to offer every year to help carry the message to other Spanish-speaking women who are not able to attend the workshop,” explains Zoraida, “so they know that they, too, belong and that they are not alone.”

This service work speaks to the bridge that Zoraida and others are interested in creating between all meetings. For example, Paz P. served as an interpreter for a delegate in Arizona for the General Service Conference. “He didn’t understand English,” she said, “but through the interpreting, he could participate and bring more unity to the program.” Paz is actively looking for volunteers to interpret so more English- and Spanish-speaking members can participate in meetings together. “At the bottom of everything,” Paz says, “everyone wants to help, but sometimes we don’t know how.”

This movement is certainly gaining momentum, and the cultural barriers are beginning to lower in significant ways. “We have a lot of supporters now,” Zoraida explains. “We know that we belong. We know that this is our Fellowship, too.”

■ A Matter of Life and Death

Sitting on the concrete hallway floor of death row at Angola State Prison, A.A. member Stacy C. reads from Spanish-language pamphlets to Maria, an inmate with whom she has developed a close bond. Stacy purchased a variety of literature in Spanish for Maria, and while Stacy is trying to learn Spanish and Maria is trying to learn English, they keep each other sober. Stacy apologizes over and over to Maria, who smiles patiently through the bars. When Stacy asks if it is frustrating to her, Maria assures her, “*Nunca...* never,” and then openly admits how much she longs to hear her own language outside of her head. Stacy finds this beautiful.

Known as the “Alcatraz of the South,” the Louisiana State Penitentiary (or Angola State Prison) is the largest maximum-security correctional facility in the United States. Sprawled over 18,000 acres, Angola houses about 6,000 inmates, almost 2,000 correctional officers and 20 assistant wardens. Only recently have women been imprisoned there — exclusively on death row. The prison complex is built on the former Angola Plantations, a remote patch of land bordered on three

sides by the Mississippi River. It is so isolated that the prison grows its own vegetables, cotton and sugar cane, and death row inmates make their own coffins.

When Stacy C. moved to Louisiana from North Carolina and learned of Angola, she immediately inquired if there were A.A. meetings there. When told there hadn't been any for years, she tabled the idea of restarting them (considering the four-hour drive, one way) and focused on women's facilities in and around her new hometown of Minden. Getting involved with the Area 27 Louisiana Corrections Committee, Stacy started a meeting at Tallulah Prison and supported meetings at Caddo Correctional Center, which has over a hundred members. Before long, Stacy was elected as Area 27's Corrections Committee chair.

In 2018 Stacy revisited the idea of taking meetings to Angola, and after a series of phone calls, emails and a face-to-face meeting at the prison, she convinced the warden (with the help of a PowerPoint presentation) of the need to bring in the message of recovery. On September 14, 2018, Stacy, along with A.A. members from Lafayette, Baton Rouge and New Orleans, held the first meeting at Camp F, an all-trustee camp of lifers isolated in the back of the prison, next to death row. Stacy says she will never forget that first meeting. Rarely had she run across anyone who had never been to a meeting on the outside. "It was a little uncomfortable. They didn't know why we were there really — what we wanted or what our motives were." Twenty men attended, with time served ranging from 18 to over 40 years.

At meetings every other Saturday, Stacy and her friends spent most of the time getting to know the men, acting as "the only copy of the Book Big they had ever seen." They spent months talking about the basics — introducing oneself, avoiding crosstalk and understanding A.A.'s primary purpose. Due to the length of the commute for Stacy and the others, meetings at Angola generally last from two to two and a half hours. Most of them focus on the Big Book, while others are old-fashioned "Bill and Bob" meetings where everyone talks and shares their experience.

One night, the chapel in which meetings were usually held was unavailable, so the group was moved to a nearby conference room. The room was so comfortable and well-furnished that they requested and received permission to continue meeting there. One evening, a regular member, Bone, looked up at Stacy and said, "Ms. Stacy, it just occurred to me that I don't think you know where you are... This is the 'last supper' table." Bone went on to explain it was the room where those being executed had their last meal, and that the door at the end of the room, not 15 feet away, was the entrance to the execution chamber. He said that for years the room had been designated solely for death, but now, because of Alcoholics Anonymous, it was about life. Stacy cried as Bone repeatedly thanked her



Reproduction of "AA #3 — The Man on the Bed" created by inmate Bobby H., made of string and glue, using a paper clip, toenail clipper and the empty casing of a writing pen.

for helping to bring about that transformation.

Seven months after A.A. was firmly reestablished at Angola, Stacy was allowed to conduct meetings on death row. She was permitted to take two trustees along to help break the ice. The blistering heat and fetid atmosphere did not daunt Stacy and her cohorts. They walked up and down Tier A, going cell to cell and speaking to anyone who was interested. Stacy comments, "It was so emotional; everyone was filled with anxiety and excitement. We were scared of them — and they were scared of us!" Stacy did most of the talking, trying to determine who were the alcoholics and who were not, before moving on to Tier B. It took quite a long time to reach everyone because Stacy wanted to make sure she and the trustees went back and visited those they had already met to provide constancy. At first she saw the death row inmates every other week, and then she started making the eight-hour round trip weekly.

It was after the men's regular meeting was moved to the "last supper" room that Stacy learned of the five women recently moved to death row (literally around the corner) after a flood at St. Gabriel's Women's Prison necessitated their relocation. Quickly recovering from her shock at the arrangement, Stacy sprang into action and received permission to visit the women. The facility did not allow male A.A. members in at that time, so Stacy visited each woman on death row herself. Eventually, two other women from the outside, Amy L. and Marlena G., joined her. Everyone split up, and each woman sat outside the cell to speak with the inmate Stacy had selected to best match the outside member's personality.

Besides Maria, Stacy's Spanish-speaking prospect, two other women on death row, Jen and Keana, admit their powerlessness over alcohol and drugs, and talk about how those factors have undoubtedly contributed to bringing them to where they are now. Andrea is quiet and Antoinette doesn't identify as an alcoholic, but all the women are high risk — some having multiple escapes — and Stacy sees there is a long way to go.

Not long ago, seven more women were brought to Angola, and there are now plans to expand the women's death row population to 100, which, unfortunately, has caused the suspension of women's meetings until movement has stopped and a new warden has settled in.

Recently, history was made at Angola when the warden allowed the very first A.A. meeting to be held outside of the cells of the men's death row. Nine attended — three A.A. volunteers, three inmate trustees (Bone, Kyle and Willie Boy) and three death row inmates who were shackled to their chairs. The trustees now lead the meeting every week (Stacy and her crew attend every other week) and have nicknamed the group the "Circle Up" meeting. The prison currently permits six death row inmates at a time, and Stacy looks forward with great anticipation to when she will be allowed to conduct such meetings with the women on death row.

On September 14, 2019 — one year to the day that Stacy held the first new meeting at Angola — an A.A.

Corrections Conference was held at the facility. Two hundred outside members from 10 states attended, and 24 inmates, two from each camp, represented the prison population. Meetings were held throughout the prison, including on death row. The inmates, mostly lifers, were effusive when sharing their experience of A.A., stressing how it is changing their lives, and how they now try to carry the message to men in the yard and on the block.

Of the conference, Stacy remarked, "One of the coolest parts is that we had a professional panel of nonalcoholics who were transmitted by closed-circuit TV throughout the whole prison." All 6,000 inmates were able to watch it, and the death row men and women could listen on the radio. Stacy described the overall result as "unbelievable" and was deeply moved by the impact it seemed to have had on all the participants, both inside and out. Filled with gratitude for the work she is doing, Stacy keeps it simple: "I can't help but think that maybe one person heard what they needed to hear."

■ Two New Staff Members Arrive at G.S.O.

This past summer, the General Service Office welcomed two new staff members to serve on the Corrections and Accessibilities assignments. One made a journey of over 1,000 miles to get to her new job; the other literally stepped across the hallway.

Brenda B. arrived at G.S.O. on July 1, traveling from Memphis, Tennessee, where she had worked for 18 years as office manager of the Memphis Area Intergroup Association. The move from Memphis to New York was "a huge undertaking," Brenda says, "but I was ready for it. I've always had a deep desire to work at the General Service Office and I stepped into it and trusted the process."

Brenda is currently serving on the Corrections assignment, which suits her, since she has always empathized with the plight of those incarcerated. Her 26-year-old brother was killed in prison. "He got sober in prison, but I didn't know that," says Brenda, who has 27 years in A.A. "That was in my active heyday, when I was young and full of alcohol and resentment." But a few years ago, she found a picture of her brother that his prison A.A. group had sent her parents after his death. "It had the name of the group and the inmates, and the 7th and 11th Step prayers," she says. "All of that tied in the gratitude I feel for A.A. I'm living a life beyond my wildest dreams."

The Corrections desk is a busy one, Brenda says. "We get 400-500 letters a month from inmates and maybe 200 emails and 80 phone calls from the Fellowship. We respond to each and every one of these." In addition, Brenda is secretary of the Corrections committee and prepares the Corrections agenda and background information used at board meetings. The fast pace isn't

overwhelming, Brenda says since "my colleagues are always willing and open to answer and guide me in the right direction when I need help."

Brenda also gets help from her sponsor in Memphis and her new home group, two blocks away from her Harlem apartment. They do things "a little differently" in New York meetings, but she's taken on a service commitment. "I'm making friends and becoming a friend. I'm grateful for the Twelve Steps, for sponsorship and for God's help — that all gave me the foundation to pack up and move to New York."

Irene D., who took on the Accessibilities assignment on July 22, is a familiar face to people in the General Service Office. She had been editor of *La Viña*, Grapevine's Spanish-language sister magazine, for a decade, using her experience in publishing in South America and Spain to help guide a publication that is essential to many Spanish-speaking A.A.s.

She moved into her present staff position at the suggestion of Greg T., general manager, who thought her communication skills and Spanish language — Irene is from Chile, originally — would be of value as a G.S.O. staff member. "The idea of it scared me at first," Irene says, "but my sponsor reminded me that I had been scared of taking the *La Viña* job in the beginning, as well. And, of course, you don't say no to A.A."

Despite her initial trepidation, Irene's background makes her a good match for the Accessibilities desk, where she works with underserved communities within A.A. — people who are deaf, blind or elderly, as well as people who live in remote communities (separated by distance or by cultural or linguistic barriers).

"My personal experience has defined me in two

ways,” Irene says. “You come here thinking you’re going to be American, but in some ways you are always your immigrant identity — always from Chile or Hispanic. The other thing is, as an alcoholic woman in Hispanic culture, I was always on the outside. It’s not an easy task for a woman to get up and say, in Spanish, that you are an alcoholic. But I’m so proud that I am — I am so grateful that I have this life.”

With her understanding of barriers and A.A., Irene — who has 14 years of sobriety — has immersed herself in her job. She is correspondent for the East Central region; secretary of the Conference committee on Treatment/Accessibilities; co-secretary of the trustees’ Cooperation with the Professional Community/Treatment/Accessibilities committee; liaison with Remote Communities; and coordinator for the *Loners/Internationalists Meeting* (LIM), where she works with Publishing to put out the bimonthly bulletin of sharing from A.A.’s spread around the world who are seagoing members, international travelers, confined to their homes or who cannot make regular face-to-face meetings for a variety of reasons.

Among her recent projects are helping gather stories for the new edition of the pamphlet “A.A. and the Older Alcoholic,” as well as coordinating with the Public Information assignment to help produce an activities update video in ASL announcing the availability of the new ASL Big Book (see page 1).

“Working in Accessibilities, I’ve started to think that way,” says Irene. “Who needs help? Who is not here? What communities or ethnic groups could be served? This is a huge effort on the part of G.S.O. and A.A. and I’m excited to be a part of it.”

■ Why Should We Pay To Go to A.A. Events?

Why, some members have asked, do A.A.s have to pay a fee to attend an A.A. conference, convention or other special event? As one Californian wrote to the General Service Office, “Some of us have difficulty when it comes to having the A.A. name attached to any gathering that requires payment to participate. What’s more, some of the prices at many of these functions are not cheap.” And, he adds, “What about the payment of travel expenses and lodgings for certain ‘select’ speakers?”

It’s true that A.A. membership is free, and meetings and most A.A. events are self-supporting through voluntary contributions in the spirit of the Seventh Tradition. But what about A.A. get-togethers beyond the group-meeting level, ranging from special one- or two-hour meetings to banquets and weekend events — area, statewide, regional and international? These events require months of planning, preparation and money

presented upfront to the hotel and other business facilities involved. Arrangements may also need to be made for A.A.s with accessibility concerns: providing wheelchair access, sign-language interpreters or, perhaps, programs in Braille.

Additional expenses include the printing of flyers, schedules, postage and supplies, not to mention renting meeting space, insurance coverage, and travel and accommodations for the invited speakers, many of whom live thousands of miles from the convention site. A.A. members are not paid to share their experience, but as invited guests of a convention or conference, their expenses are generally reimbursed.

How are the costs of a convention covered, and what can be done to ensure that the venture won’t go deep in the red? Registration fees cover costs for special events, and those who wish to participate in the convention pay their own way in the spirit of the Seventh Tradition. According to the A.A. Guidelines on Conferences, Conventions and Roundups, available from G.S.O., “there’s no substitute for common sense here; the committee must take a business-like approach to finances and keep expenditures somewhere within a conservative estimate of anticipated revenues.... Since the registration fees can be established at a level sufficient to cover the total costs, this should result in no actual out-of-pocket costs to groups.”

At the area level, two sound methods for underwriting special events seem to be in general use: (1) Underwriting of the event by area groups. Since the registration fees can be established at a level sufficient to cover the total costs, this should result in no actual out-of-pocket costs to the groups; and (2) Building a convention fund to which the area groups contribute year-round. This method obviates the need to charge a registration fee except for visitors from out of state.

The criterion for using the A.A. name generally specifies that the event be put on by A.A.s for A.A.s about A.A. Although a golf tournament or a dance is beyond the purview of A.A.’s primary purpose, such events are often scheduled as social adjuncts to the main meetings and workshops scheduled.

When Al-Anon participates in an A.A. convention, the relationship and financial arrangements usually follow one of two patterns: When an A.A. convention committee invites Al-Anon to participate with its own program, A.A. may pay all expenses (for meeting rooms, coffee, etc.) and keep all income from registrations and such in a single fund earmarked to cover the convention bills, after which any excess income reverts back to A.A. Alternatively, Al-Anon may have a separate registration and cover its own expenses directly, besides assuming its share of common expenses. In this case, Al-Anon receives its own share of the registration income and also shares in any losses incurred.

box 459 BULLETIN BOARD

Items and Ideas on Area Gatherings for A.A.s—Via G.S.O.

Winter 2019

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 2019

- 6-8—*St. Michaels, Maryland.* Bill and Bob's Book Into Action. Write: Ch., Box 112, Crownsville, MD 21032; wearenotsaints@gmail.com
- 28-31—*Södertälje, Stockholm, Sweden.* SCANCYPAA. Info: www.scancypaa.org

January 2020

- 16-19—*Melbourne, Florida.* Space Coast Roundup. Write: Ch., 720 E. Haven Ave., Ste. 3, Melbourne, FL 32901; www.spacecoastroundup.com
- 16-19—*Raleigh, North Carolina.* Tar Heel Mid-Winter Conf. Write: Ch., Box 18412, Raleigh, NC 27619; www.tarheelmidwinter.org
- 17-19—*Bismarck, North Dakota.* Rule 62 Rendezvous: Ch. Box 71, Bismarck, ND 58502; www.rule62rendezvous.org
- 17-19—*Christchurch, New Zealand.* 57th National Conv. Write: Ch., Box 10139, Christchurch, NZ 8145; www.aaconvention.org.nz
- 24-26—*Springfield, Illinois.* 15th Journey Continues Conf. Write: Ch., Box 10244, Springfield, IL 62791; www.journeycontinues.org
- 24-26—*Cambridge, Massachusetts.* Freedom Trail Conf. Info: bgbbwknd@gmail.com
- 24-26—*Lake Elmo, Minnesota.* Recovery, Unity & Svc Conf. Write: Ch., Box 2812, Minneapolis, MN 55402; rusc@area36.org
- 24-26—*Corpus Christi, Texas.* Coastal Bend Jamboree. Write: Ch., Box 6889, Corpus Christi, TX 78411; www.cbjamboree.org
- 24-26—*Galveston, Texas.* SETA Conv. Write: Ch., Box 301, Pearland, TX 77588; www.aa-seta.org
- 24-26—*South Padre Island, Texas.* Dist. 27 Jamboree. Write: Ch., Box 100 Madelyn Rose, Bayview, TX 78566; www.district27aa.org

31-1—*Tyler, Texas.* XXXIV Reunión Zona Norte de TX. Write: Ch., Box 1228, Denver City, TX 79323

February

- 7-9—*Little Rock, Arkansas.* 38th Winter Holiday Conv. Write: Ch., Box 26135, Little Rock, AR 72221; www.winterholidayconvention.com
- 7-9—*Liverpool, New York.* 33rd Salt City Mid-Winter Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 367, Syracuse, NY 13209; www.saltcityroundup.com
- 7-9—*Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada.* 33rd Mid-Winter Roundup. Write: Ch., 33 Huntingdon Cir., Fredericton, NB E3B 0M1; district5mwr@gmail.com
- 14-16—*Novi, Michigan.* EC Reg. Conf. of Delegates Past and Pres. Write: Box 66125, Roseville, MI 48066; www.aa-semi.org
- 20-23—*Indianapolis, Indiana.* 56th Internat'l Women's Conf. Write: Ch., 1300 E 86th St, Ste 14, Box #291, Indianapolis, IN 46240; www.internationalwomensconference.org
- 21-23—*Nashua, New Hampshire.* NERAASA. Info: www.neraasa.org
- 21-23—*Lone Wolf, Oklahoma.* 18th Sunlight of the Sprit. Write: Ch., 1604 NW 32nd St, Lawton, OK 73505; sdopol@att.net
- 21-23—*Yakima, Washington.* Yakima Valley Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 10802, Yakima, WA 98909; www.yakimavalleyroundup.com

21-23—*Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada.* 53rd SK Roundup. Write: Ch., 245 3rd Ave S, #515, Saskatoon, SK S7K 1M4; www.aasaskatoon.org

21-23—*Pattaya, Thailand.* Thailand Roundup. Info: www.aathailandroundup.org

27-1—*Greenville, South Carolina.* 73rd SC State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 16151, Greenville, SC 29606; www.area62.org

28-1—*Honolulu, Hawaii.* 27th Aloha Roundup. Write: Ch., P.O. Box 88293, Honolulu, HI 96830; www.aloharoundup.com

28-1—*Billings, Montana.* West Central Reg. Svc. Conf. Write: Ch., Box 21291, Billings, MT 59104; www.aa-montana.org

28-1—*Chattanooga, Tennessee.* TCYPAA. Write: Ch., 5928 Hixson Pike, Hixson, TN 37343; www.tccypaa2020.com

March

- 6-8—*Tucson, Arizona.* 53rd PRAASA. Write: Ch., Box 1414, Green Valley, AZ 85622; www.praasa.org
- 13-14—*Spokane, Washington.* 26th NW Pockets of Enthusiasm Roundup. Write: Ch., 4415 W. Excell Ave, Spokane, WA 99208; nwpoockets.chair@gmail.com
- 13-15—*Aberdeen, North Carolina.* Area 51 Corrections Conf. Write: Ch., Box 1201, Mebane, NC 27302; corrections@aanorthcarolina.org

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

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

Web site or email: _____ (NO PERSONAL EMAIL ADDRESSES)

Contact person: _____ NAME PHONE # AND EMAIL

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

20-22—*Schaumburg, Illinois*. NIA Spring Conf.
Write: Ch., Box 1003, Palatine, IL 60078;
www.niaspringconference.com

20-22—*Newport, Rhode Island*. 44th RI Conv.
Write: Ch., Box 449, Charlestown, RI 02813;
www.aainri.com

27-29—*Ames, Iowa*. Aim for Ames Roundup.
Write: Ch., Box 2522, Ames, IA 50010;
www.aimforames.org

27-29—*San Pedro, Belize*. Meeting in Paradise.
Info: www.meetinginparadise.com

April

3-5—*Manchester, Vermont*. VT State Conv.
Write: Ch., Box 1505, Montpelier, VT 05601;
www.aavt.org

9-11—*Managua, Nicaragua, Central América*.
39 Conv. De América Central. Info:
www.aaosgdenicaragua@hotmail.com

24-26—*Saint Louis, Missouri*. Spring Fling
Conv. Write: Ch., Box 1916, St. Charles, MO
63302; www.springflingstl.com

24-26—*Paphos, Cyprus*. 12th Paphos Conv.
Info: paphos.convention@aamail.org

30-3—*El Albir, Alicante, Spain*. 8th Internat'l
Conv. Info: www.albirconvention.org

May

1-3—*Waco, Texas*. Heart of TX Conf. Write:
Ch., 1218 Pembroke Dr., Waco, TX 76710;
www.heartoftexasconference.wordpress.com

15-17—*Ashland, Wisconsin*. Area 74 Spring
Conf. Write: Ch., Box 996, Ashland, WI
54806; www.area74.org

21-24—*Eretria, Evia, Greece*. 26th Internat'l
Conv. In Greece. Info: www.aa-greece.gr

22-24—*Anaheim, California*. XLV Conv. Estatal
Hispana de CA. Write: Ch., 330 N. State
College Blvd, Ste 207, Anaheim, CA 92806

29-31—*Calgary, Alberta*. Western Canada Reg.
Forum. Write: Forum Coord., Box 459, Grand
Central Station, New York, NY 10163; region-
alforums@aa.org

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