

From the August 1960 Grapevine



by the woman delegate from Mississippi to the 1960 General Service Conference. The title refers to the eight women out of eighty-three delegates to that Conference.

IN THE FIRST edition of the Big Book was a woman's story—just one woman. But there it was for all to read: The earliest AAs accepted the fact that women suffered from alcoholism just as men did. Because of the social stigma that has so long haunted this illness, women have been reluctant to admit an alcoholic problem, even to themselves. Let's face it, most of the world still feels that "the hand that rocks the cradle" should by no means hoist the gin bottle. So we often have tried to hide, sometimes aided and abetted by family and friends.

Gradually, it became apparent that there was no corner dark enough to conceal an active alcoholic—man or woman. Attempts to shut ourselves away didn't conceal the facts or bring recovery, and "it" didn't go away. Progressively, we

experienced more suffering, bewilderment, and abysmal loneliness. AA had long ago accepted us. We began to come in and found that it worked for us, too—this program of recovery, growing maturity, and a new kind of outlook that quickly shed the aura of black despair. We belonged. We had come home.

Small wonder we look back in gratitude and love to the "pioneer women," the earlier ones who kept the doors open and plainly marked so that we could find the way to enter. With our brothers in AA, we now find ourselves inheritors of all that the Fellowship has to offer: Twelve Steps, our First Legacy; Twelve Traditions, our Second Legacy; and more recently, our Third Legacy—that of Service. When the first full quota of delegates met for the General Service Conference in

1952, two women were among those delegates. One of them, N. D. of Atlanta, Ga., wrote: "I really went to the Conference a little afraid the men would resent me, but I couldn't have been more mistaken."

Each year since then, women have served as Conference delegates. This year, when the eighty-three delegates of the tenth General Service Conference met in April, eight of them were women—the largest number to date. [At the 1979 Conference, seventeen of the ninety-one delegates were women.]

B. T., delegate from South and Southwestern Ohio, writes, "It was stunningly demonstrated how much stature AA has gained in the secular world. This gives reason for the individual pride we feel in belonging to such a fellowship. It works because of the spiritual principles outlined in the Steps. We know that we have made but a small dent in the overall problem of alcoholism and that there is much to be done service-wise. The genuine fellowship and sincere purpose of each one at the Conference were so evident that it didn't matter whether the delegate was a man or a woman."

E. B. of San Angelo, Tex., has this to say: "When I was asked to serve as delegate to the General Service Conference, my first thought was 'Am I capable?' It made me take the deepest inventory I've ever taken. When elected, I never felt more humble in my life, because I knew that a trust had been given me that I

must protect. I pray God that I can. I do believe the men liked having us there. They were all so courteous and helpful."

K. R. of San Antonio, Tex., writes: "AA fills my life with something new and interesting each year. The opportunity to make this trip to New York as delegate from my area is the highlight of my sober life. I had felt a slight apprehension about what kind of reception a woman delegate might get, but I found it no different from my acceptance into AA in the first place. Alcoholics are the same the world over—the men extending a helpful hand to the women and the women feeling at home in their midst."

H. S., delegate from Western Massachusetts, expresses her feeling in this way: "The General Service Conference was the most inspiring experience I have had since entering AA. The warmth with which I was greeted upon arrival lasted throughout the Conference. As women in AA, we were extended the same sincere feeling of welcome and belonging that we sense in all AA meetings."

H. McG. of South Dakota says, "The Conference was something I had dreamed about; the reality was overwhelming. Being a part of it is something I shall cherish the rest of my life. AA gave me a second chance to live. Being a delegate has given me a second chance to serve and share with others. I felt the men were sincerely happy to have us women

there. Beginning with our beloved founders, the men have made and paved the roads and set up the guideposts in AA for all of us. I hope that we, in our turn, can help smooth the way for future women delegates."

B.W., delegate from Northern Interior California, busily engaged with plans for AA's Twenty-Fifth Anniversary International Convention in Long Beach in July, joins in the chorus of gratitude to the groups in her area and in greetings to the many new friends with whom she served at the Conference.

M. A., Colorado delegate, seems to sum it all up succinctly: "My sincere thanks to the groups in my area and to the other delegates for the opportunity of sharing with them the General Service Conference."

As one of the eight women

delegates serving for the first time this year, I would like to say amen to the comments of my sisters. This reminds me of a true story about an AA who was making his first talk at a meeting. Very self-conscious and somewhat tongue-tied, he nevertheless came through with one of the shortest, yet most impressive statements I've ever heard. He said, "What that wonderful speaker before me said—that's what I feel, too." And he sat down.

Before I "sit down," I'd like to say to Bill [AA's co-founder], the General Service Board of trustees, our General Service Office staff, the Grapevine staff, and all other dedicated "background" workers—our thanks and appreciation. We were there! We listened and we learned.

And now home and to work!

R. B.