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EVERYONE must agree that we AAs are unbelievably fortunate people; fortunate that we have suffered so much; fortunate that we can know, understand and love each other so supremely well—these attributes and virtues are scarcely of the earned variety. Indeed most of us are well aware that

these are rare gifts which have their true origin in our kinship born of a common suffering and a common deliverance by the Grace of God. Thereby we are privileged to communicate with each other to a degree and in a manner not very often surpassed among our non-alcoholic friends in the world around us.

From AA's very beginning our success with each new prospect has always rested squarely on our ability to identify with him (or her) in experience, in language and especially in feeling—that profound feeling for each other that goes deeper than words. This is what we really mean when we say "one alcoholic talking to another."

Years ago, however, we found that the kinship of having suffered severe alcoholism was often not enough in itself. To cross all barriers, our channels of communication had to be broadened and deepened.

Practically all of AA's first members were, for example, what we today call "last gasp" (or low bottom) cases. We oldsters, for the most part, were at the jumping-off place. When the still mildly afflicted (or high bottom) cases began to turn up they usually said, "But we were never jailed. We were never clapped into mental hospitals. We never did those horrendous things you fellows talk about. Surely AA can't be for people like us."

For years we old timers simply couldn't communicate with folks like these. Somehow our transmission lines to them had to be increased in numbers, and in power. Otherwise we'd never get through. Out of much experience a means and a method was developed.

To each new "high bottom" we hammered home the verdict of

noted doctors that "Alcoholism is a fatal and *progressive* malady." Then we would go back to those earlier periods in our drinking careers when we too were mild, or seemingly not too serious, cases ourselves. We would recall how very sure we were that "next time" we could control ourselves when we took a few drinks ... or maybe how we rather admired the notion that, on occasions, unrestrained grog consumption was after all no more than a good "he-man's" fault. Or, in the next phase, how our dram consumption was the fault of unfortunate circumstances or the distressing behavior of other people.

This much identification achieved, we'd proceed to regale the prospect with many a tale showing just how insidious and irresistible the progress of our illness had been; how, years before we realized it, we had actually gone much beyond the "point of no return" so far as our own resources of strength and will were concerned. We kept pointing out how right the doctors were.

Slowly but surely this strategy commenced to pay off. With the aid of the authority of medical science and by a better presentation, the low bottoms had begun to communicate at depth with the high bottoms. But this tedious process and its sparse results didn't have to go on forever. We joyfully discovered that the moment any AA locality was possessed of even a small group of "high bottom"

drunks, then progress into this class of topper became progressively faster and easier. Today we know why—one high bottom can talk to another high bottom as nobody else ever could. So this segment of our fellowship grew and grew. It is probable that one-half of today's AA membership has been spared that last five, ten or even fifteen years of unmitigated hell that we low bottoms know all too well.

Since these first elemental problems of communication were solved, AA has taken on and has successfully communicated with every single area of life and living where alcoholics dwell.

In the beginning, for instance, it was four whole years before AA brought permanent sobriety to even one alcoholic woman. Like the high bottoms the women said they were different; AA couldn't be for them. But as the communication was perfected, mostly by the women themselves, the picture changed. Spread all over the globe, our sister AAs must be thirty-thousand strong by now.

In like manner, this process of identification and transmission has gone on and on. The skid rower said he was different. Even more loudly the socialite (or Park Avenue stumble bum) said the same—so did the arts and the professions, the rich, the poor, the religious, the agnostics, the Indians and the Eskimos, the veterans, and the prisoners.

But nowadays all of these, and

legions more, soberly talk about how very much alike all of us alcoholics are when we all admit that the chips are finally down; when we see that it is really a question of do or die in our wide world fellowship of "the common suffering and the common deliverance."

Now this is our yearly international issue of the AA Grapevine. Here we feature the news and views of our far-flung and treasured groups beyond the seas who today return to us in double measure the inspiration that years ago we tried to send to them. In those days there was a problem of communications indeed. Could we possibly identify ourselves by mail, by our literature and its then scarce translations, and through random AA travelers abroad?

By 1950, we weren't any too sure. So Lois and I wondered a lot as we headed for Europe and Britain to see for ourselves in that wonderful year. Could AA really and fully transcend all of those formidable barriers of race, language, religion and culture; all of those scars of wars, recent and ancient; all of those kinds of pride and prejudice of which we knew we had our share in America? What about the Norwegians, the Swedes, the Danes and the Finns? What about the Dutch, the Germans, the French, the English, the Scotch and the Israelis? How about the Africans, the Boers, the Aussies, the Latins, the Japanese, the Hindus, the Mo-

ammedans, and, of course, the Eskimos! Could AA finally cross all of the very barriers that had, as never before, divided and shattered the world of our time?

The moment we alighted in Norway, we knew that AA could and would go everywhere. We understood not one word of Norwegian, and translators were sometimes scarce. Scenes and customs alike were new and strange to us. Yet there was a marvelous communication from the first moment. There was an incredible sensation of oneness, of being completely at home—Norwegians were our people, Norway was our country, too. They felt the same way about us; it shone in their faces; they reached our hearts.

As we journeyed from land to land, it was the same everywhere. In Britain we were accepted as Britons; in Ireland we were at one with the Irish. Everywhere, everywhere it was the same. It was so much more than minds cordially meeting minds, it was no simple and merely interesting comparison of mutual experiences and aspirations. This was much, much more; this was the forming of heart to heart in wonder, in joy and in everlasting gratitude. Lois and I then knew that AA could circle the globe—and it has!

For us no more proof will ever be needed. Should any AA still

*(For some delightful details on the once-lonely Japanese AAs, see the article beginning on page 15—THE EDITORS.)*

doubt he ought to have heard the sweet and stirring story told me only last week.

Here it is:

It's about a small English-speaking AA group in Japan. More properly, it's about two of its members—two Japanese who can't understand a word of English. It should also be known that the rest of the group—the English speaking—don't know a word of Japanese. The language barrier is complete. The two Japanese have probably read a translation of the Twelve Steps; that's about all.

For months now the two Japanese have not missed a meeting. They are bone dry, too. So there they sit in the meeting place, their faces wreathed in beautiful smiles. Their concentration on every speaker is intense; they act as though they savor and understand every word that is said. Those English words—as words—are still without meaning. Yet these speakers, and that meeting, are nevertheless full of meaning for them. We all know why. The speakers are talking far more than English; they are speaking the universal language of deep and abiding brotherhood—the language of the heart.

The once lonely and solitary Japanese are no longer alone—they see, they feel, they understand. And, thank God, so do all the rest of us.