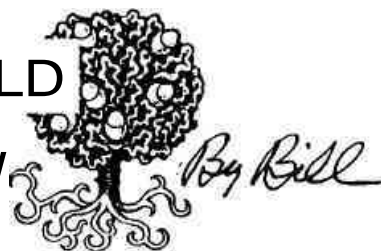


June 1955

## HOW AA'S WORLD SERVICES GREW



WE had started the year 1941 with 2,000 members, but we finished with 8,000. This was the measure of the great impact of the Saturday Evening Post piece. But this was only the beginning of uncounted thousands of pleas for help from individuals and from growing groups all over the world that have continued to flow into General Service Headquarters to this day.

This phenomenal expansion brought another problem, a very important one. The national spotlight now being on us, we had to begin dealing with the public on a large scale. Public ill-will could stunt our growth, even bring it to a standstill. But enthusiastic public confidence could swell our ranks to numbers of which we had only dreamed before. The Post piece had proved this. It was not only a big problem, it was a delicate one. Blunders that aroused prejudice could cost lives. A carefully thought out public relations policy had to be formed and put into operation.

Of highest importance would be our relations with medicine and with religion. Under no circumstances must

*Part Two of a three-part series on AA history by our co-founder, Bill.*

we get into competition with either. If we appeared to be a new religious sect, we'd certainly be done for. And if we moved into the medical field, as such, the result would be the same. So we began to emphasize heavily the fact that AA was *a way of life* that conflicted with no one's religious belief. We told the doctors how much we needed hospitalization, and we urged upon psychiatrists and drying-out places the advantages of cooperating with us. At all times, religion would be the province of clergymen, and the practice of medicine would be for doctors. As laymen, we were only supplying a much-needed missing link.

Maintained over the years since, these attitudes have brought heart-warming results. Today we have the unqualified support of nearly every religious denomination. Most medical practitioners who really understand AA send their alcoholic patients to us. AA members frequently speak before religious gatherings and medical societies. Likewise, the men of medicine and religion are often seen at AA's large open meetings.

Important as they are, medicine and religion proved to be only a fraction of the total public relations field.

How could we best cooperate with press, radio, motion pictures and, more recently, television? How would we deal with employers who wanted special help? What would be the right attitude toward the field of education, research and rehabilitation, private and public? What would we say to prisons and hospitals that wanted AA groups within their walls? What were we to say to AAs who went into some of these fields and were tempted to capitalize on the AA name publicly for advertising or fundraising? What would we say or do if AA were ever publicly exploited, defamed or attacked by outsiders? Right answers and workable solutions to all these and many more such problems would have to be found or else AA would suffer.

Finding the right answers to all these public relations puzzlers has been a long process. After much trial and error, sometimes punctuated by painful mistakes, the attitudes and practices that would work best for us emerged. The important ones can today be seen in the AA Tradition. One hundred per cent anonymity at the public level, no use of the AA name for the benefit of other causes however worthy, no endorsements or alliances, one single purpose for Alcoholics Anonymous, no professionalism, public relations by the principle of attraction rather than promotion—these were some of the hard-learned lessons.

Thus, our Board of Trustees and the Headquarters office became the

focal point around which the AA Tradition was formed. By 1945, order had come out of what had been a chaotic public relations situation. On all sides, the leadership of our society asked for the experience and guidance of the New York office in these matters. So much success attended these efforts that the average AA member has always taken our excellent public relations record for granted. That was natural since these services were largely invisible to him. Nevertheless, this unseen public relations activity has surely been responsible for much of AA's unbelievable growth.

Thus far in our Service story, we have seen the Foundation, the AA book, the development of pamphlet literature, the answered mass of pleas for help, the satisfied need of groups for counsel on their problems, the beginning of our wonderful relations with the public, all becoming part of a growing Service to the whole world of AA. At last, our society really began to function *as a whole*.

But the 1941-1945 period brought still more developments of significance. The Vesey Street office was moved to 415 Lexington Avenue, just opposite the famed Grand Central Terminal. Our new Post Office Box became 459, Grand Central Annex, New York. We made this move because the need for serving the many AA travelers through New York had become urgent. The moment we located near Grand Central, we were besieged with visitors who, for the first time, began to see Alcoholics Anony-

mous as a vision for the whole globe. These were only the vanguard of thousands of AAs, their families, their friends, their clergymen, their doctors and their employers who have since visited the New York Headquarters.

Leaving the imprint of her devotion upon our society for all time, Ruth had left, in 1941, to be married. She was followed at the office by Bobbie B., one whose immense industry was to acquaint her with uncounted thousands of AAs during the next ten years. Hers was to be a signal service in the exciting time of AA's adolescence, when no one could be sure whether we could function or even hang together at all.

The expansion of Alcoholics Anonymous soon became nothing less than staggering. Reaching out into Canada, the U. S. possessions and numbers of foreign lands, we got under full swing. This foreign development brought us a whole new set of dilemmas to solve. Each new beachhead had to go through its flying blind and its pioneering period just as we had done in the United States. We ran into language barriers, so more and more of our literature was translated into other tongues.

Then too, our foreign friends raised new and special doubts. Maybe AA was just a Yankee gadget that would be no good for Ireland, England, Holland, Scandinavia, Australia and the Pacific. Since their countries were so different, the alcoholics must be different too. Would AA work in their "cultures," they asked.



Again, we resorted to heavy correspondence. Sometimes we were helped by American members who could translate for us. We searched out and briefed AA travelers going abroad. By these means, we gradually made some headway. But it was long indeed before we knew that AA could surely cross all barriers of distance, race, creed or language. Nevertheless, the AA map shows us today in fifty-two countries and U. S. possessions. This is answer enough. We now know it is only a question of time when every alcoholic in the world will have as good a chance to stay alive and happy as we have had here in America. Serving the foreign groups has therefore become a major activity, though we've scarcely scratched the total problem so far. If AA's Headquarters had never done anything else, this effort alone is worth many times its cost.

Since AA was growing so fast, Headquarters had to grow too. The group contributions and our bulging literature sales soon demanded a full

time bookkeeper. Letter and Kardex files began to appear in rows. The Group Directory began to look like a suburban telephone book. More alcoholic Secretaries were engaged. As they divided the work among them, departments began to be created. Today's office has a good many—group, foreign and public relations, AA Conference and office management, mailing, packing, accounting, stenographic and special service to prisons and hospitals.

Happily, though, the office did not have to grow as fast as AA did. The bill would never have been paid if it had. AA was getting so big that we couldn't possibly educate all its members on what we were doing. Therefore, many groups failed to help us at all. Less than half of them contributed anything. We had constant deficits which, luckily, could be plugged up with money from the sale of the Big Book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*. That book was not only saving alcoholics, it repeatedly saved the Headquarters too!

The year 1944 unfolded another development of immense value. Down in Greenwich Village, probably in an attic, a few literary news-minded AAs began to issue a monthly publication. They called it "The Grapevine." It was by no means the first local AA bulletin or magazine. But, from the start, it was such a fine job that it caught on nationally. After a time, it became the mirror of AA thought and action, country-wide. It was a magic

carpet on which all of us could travel from one distant AA outpost to another. It became a wonderful exchange of our current thought and experience.

But the Grapevine founders, after awhile, discovered they had a bear by the tail. It was always fun to get in the material and edit the pieces. But licking all those postage stamps and mailing thousands of copies became impossible for them.

So the Grapeviners came to the Foundation and asked that we take over. The Trustees inquired of the groups if they would like to make the Grapevine their national magazine. The answer came back an emphatic "Yes." Forthwith, the journal was incorporated as "The A.A. Grapevine, Inc." Two Foundation Trustees



were then seated on its five-man Board, along with the editors. Funds from the Foundation Reserve took up a mounting deficit and, of course, the necessary special workers were hired. But the editors and their successors have continued to serve as volunteers without pay to this day. In ten years, the subscriptions, coming from all over the world, jumped to 30,000. In this fashion, still another Headquarters World Service was born and has grown.

As early as 1945, mediating and giving suggestions by mail for the solution of group problems had put a tremendous volume of work on Headquarters. With most of the metropolitan AA centers, correspondence files had grown six inches thick. Seemingly, every contestant in every group argument at every point of the compass wrote us in this period.

It was chiefly from this correspondence, and from our mounting public relations activity, that the basic ideas for Tradition of Alcoholics Anonymous came. In late 1945, a good AA friend suggested that all this mass of experience might be codified into a set of general principles; principles simply stated which could offer tested solutions to all of AA's problems of living and working together and of relating our society to the world outside. If we had become sure enough of where we stood on such matters as membership, group autonomy,

singleness of purpose, non-endorsement of other enterprises, professionalism, public controversy, and anonymity in its several aspects, then such a code of principles could be written. Such a traditional code could not, of course, ever become rule or law. But it could act as a sure guide for our Trustees, Headquarters people and, most especially, for AA groups with bad growing pains. Being at the center of things, we of the Headquarters would have to do the job. Aided by my helpers there, I set to work. The Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous which resulted were first published in the so-called "long form" in the AA Grapevine of May 6, 1946. Then I wrote some more pieces explaining the Traditions in detail. These came out in later issues of the Grapevine. (See April 1952 and subsequent issues.—ED.)

Meanwhile, at the Foundation, we had taken another significant action that was forthwith imbedded in these Traditions. In 1945, we had written Mr. Rockefeller and the 1940 dinner guests that we would no longer need their financial help. Book royalties would look after Dr. Bob and me; group contributions would pay the General Office expenses. Since that day when we declared for self support, the AA Headquarters has steadily refused "outside" contributions.

The first reception of the Traditions was interesting and amusing. The reaction was mixed, to say the least.

Only groups in dire trouble took them seriously. From some quarters there was a violent reaction, especially from groups that had long lists of "protective" rules and regulations. There was much apathetic indifference. Several of our "intellectual" members cried loudly that the Traditions reflected nothing more than the sum of my own hopes and fears for Alcoholics Anonymous.

Therefore I began to travel and talk a lot about the new Traditions. People were at first politely attentive, though it must be confessed that some did go to sleep during my early



harangues. But after a while, I got letters containing sentiments like this: "Bill, we'd love to have you come and speak. Do tell us where you used to hide your bottles and all about that big, hot-flash spiritual experience of yours. But for Heaven's sake, please don't talk any more about those damned Traditions!"

But time presently changed all that. Only five years later, several thousand AA members, meeting at the 1950 Cleveland Convention, declared that AA's Traditions, by then stated in the now familiar short form, constituted

the platform upon which our Fellowship could best function and hold together in unity for all time to come. They saw that the Twelve Traditions were going to be as necessary to the life of our society as the Twelve Steps were to the life of each member. The AA Traditions were, the Cleveland Convention thought, the key to the unity, the function and even the survival of us all.

Of course I realized that I had not been the actual author of the Traditions. I had merely mirrored principles which had already been hammered out on thousands of anvils

of AA group experience. It was clear too that AA's General Headquarters, its Trustees and its Staff had made the forging of these vital principles possible. Had there been no AA Headquarters to bring our problems into focus, the Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous could never have been written.

By this time, AA had found still more favor in the world of medicine. Two of the great medical associations of America did an unprecedented thing. In the year 1944, the Medical Society of the State of New York

invited me to read a paper at its annual meeting. Following the reading, three of the many physicians present stood up and gave their highest endorsement. These were Dr. Harry Tiebout, AA's best friend in the psychiatric profession, Dr. Kirby Collier, also a psychiatrist friend and an early advocate of AA, and Dr. Foster Kennedy, the world-renowned neurologist. The Medical Society itself then went still further. They permitted us to print my paper and the recommendations of these three doctors in pamphlet form. Very large numbers of this pamphlet have since been distributed all over the world, carrying the assurance to doctors everywhere that AA is medically sound.

In 1949, the American Psychiatric Association did exactly the same thing. I read a paper at its annual meeting in Montreal. The paper was reprinted in the *American Journal of Psychiatry*, and we were permitted to put it in pamphlet form under the title "The Society of Alcoholics Anonymous." This greatly increased our standing with the psychiatric profession everywhere. These medical papers have served the foreign groups especially well, saving them the years of time that were required here in America to persuade physicians of AA's worth.

While on the topic of medicine, the part Headquarters has played in the field of hospitalization ought to be reviewed.

As all of us know, many hospitals have been reluctant to take us in for the short periods of treatment we

usually need, granting our sponsors the necessary visiting privileges and cooperating with our area Intergroup Associations.

During the 1940's, two hospitals did meet all these urgent needs and afforded shining examples of how medicine and AA could cooperate. At St. Thomas Hospital at Akron, Dr. Bob, the wonderful Sister Ignatia and the hospital's staff presided over an alcoholic ward that had ministered to 5,000 alcoholics by the time Dr. Bob passed away in 1950. At New York, Knickerbocker Hospital provided a ward under the care of our first friend in medicine, Dr. William Duncan Silkworth, where he was assisted by a red-headed AA nurse known as Teddy.

By 1954, 10,000 alcoholics had been referred to Knickerbocker by the New York Intergroup and had passed through this ward, the majority on their road to freedom. It was in these two hospitals and by these pioneering people that the best techniques of combining medicine and AA were worked out.

Since proper hospitalization was, and still is, one of AA's greatest problems, the New York Headquarters has retained this early hospital experience, along with the many subsequent developments and ramifications, to groups all over the world—still another very vital Service.

Meantime, too, the great tide of public approval continued to sweep in. Nothing contributed so much to this as did our friends of the press, radio and, in recent times, television.

Long since, the Headquarters office had subscribed to several clipping services. Magazine articles and a never-ending deluge of news stories about us continued to feed the Headquarters scrapbooks. Writers asked us to check their manuscripts; members were helped to appear anonymously on radio and TV programs. Hollywood wanted to do motion pictures. Making arrangements for public relations became more than ever a primary effort of the New York Office. How many lives all this saved, how many years of misery were averted for thousands of alcoholics and their families, only God knows.

About this time a serious threat to our long time welfare made its appearance. Usually meaning well, members began breaking their anonymity all over the place. Sometimes they wanted to use the AA name to advertise and help other causes. Others just wanted their names and pictures in the papers. Being photographed with the Governor would really help AA, they thought. (I'd earlier been guilty of this, too.) But at last we saw the appalling risk to AA if all our power-drivers got loose at the public level. Already scores of them were doing it.

So Headquarters got to work. We wrote remonstrances, kind ones of course, to every breaker. Then about every two years, we sent letters to nearly all press and radio outlets, explaining why AAs shouldn't break

their anonymity before the public. Nor, we added, did AA solicit money: we paid our own bills.

In a few years the public anonymity-breakers were squeezed down to a handful; thus another valuable Headquarters Service had gone into action.

To maintain all these ever-lengthening Service lifelines, the office had to go on expanding. In 1950 we moved to 141 E. 44th Street, still close to Grand Central. Today, it has the "Do It Now" Henry G., as part time Manager, and the five fine Staff Secretaries, Helen,\* Lib, Marian, Eve and Ann have been seen and heard by thousands on speaking trips, often requested by large regional meetings. On its service staff, twelve non-alcoholics sparked by Grace and Dennis look after the office routines of book-keeping, filing and stenography. The enthusiastic receptionist Dolores presides over the outer office. There the visitor sees the walls covered with sectional maps showing the world-wide stretch of our Fellowship. On a table stands a Winged Victory, symbol of the noted Lasker Award given to AA by the American Public Health Association in 1951.

The editorial offices of the Grapevine are on the same floor. Here, volunteer editors headed by Don G. meet with a full time Managing Editor, Louise and her assistant Sarah, to hit the monthly deadline. Further downtown, where rents are cheaper,

\* Helen resigned to be married in April. And I here record our thanks to all those others who have previously served at AA Headquarters. Our newest staff member is Hazel.

there is a large floor space where Kitty and her staff look after Grapevine's 30,000 subscribers and their needs—as well as their complaints!

Three blocks away from the main office, we have a good sized loft space where all our shipping and mailing is done. Six busy young lads do nothing but this. Last year, they shipped about 40,000 books, hundreds of thousands of pamphlets, many of these newly designed and brought out. They mailed about 30,000 letters and bulletins and did huge quantities of mimeographing. Like our three other offices, this place has the best of modern equipment—and needs it!

Down one side of the long packing room, there are shelves reaching to the ceiling. On these can be found, boxed up, tons of the old files of our Headquarters, going clear back to the old days at Vesey Street. The whole world story of AA is hidden in these boxes, waiting only to be dug out. In fact, we have just begun this two-year job. In a partitioned-off corner office near those files, I now have two tireless assistants, Ed and Nell, researching the history of Alcoholics Anonymous. I hope the day will come when I shall be able to write it. In any case it is now sure that the story of AA can never become distorted. Such is our newest vital service.

Money-wise, our present array of Services may look like big business to some. But when we think of the size and reach of AA today, that isn't true at all. In 1940, for example, we had one paid worker to every 1,000 AAs;

in 1947, one paid worker to every 3,000 AAs. Today, one paid Headquarters worker serves 6,000 AAs. It therefore seems sure that we shall never be burdened with a bureaucratic and expensive service set-up.

Here's another illustration of how really small, physically and financially, our Headquarters world operation really is. An AA friend of mine owns a garage, filling station and a small car agency in a suburban town. His building is a hundred feet long and fifty feet wide, about the same total floor space that we have at Headquarters. His showroom holds only two cars for exhibit. His mechanics do repairs out back, and, in front, stand four gas pumps. This is hardly big business.

Yet my friend tells me that on car sales, repairs, gas and oil, his business takes in and pays out more money yearly than AA's whole world Headquarters, the AA Grapevine, AA Publishing and the AA General Service Office all put together.

Therefore, our Headquarters is hardly big business either. My friend's garage serves a small community; but AA's Headquarters serves 150,000 members and nearly 6,000 Groups. And these services, well maintained, will continue to make the difference between sickness and health, even life or death, to uncounted alcoholics and their families who haven't yet found AA. So let's now have an end to all that talk of big expense and big business at the New York Headquarters!

When we first opened for business

at Vesey Street, \$1.00 per member per year was required to do the overall job. But at that time, a dollar was a dollar. Today, a dollar is only fifty cents. If AA's present membership actually sent us a dollar apiece every year, we would still have enough funds to run our Headquarters in spite of the watered dollar. And we could pay all expenses of the General Service Conference besides. But we still have to ask our contributing Groups to give *two dollars per member per year* for the distressing reason that only about half of AA's Groups give their World Headquarters any support whatever. In fact Group voluntary contributions have fully paid office expenses in only five years out of the last fifteen. That Headquarters reserve of "book money" has had to foot the ten deficits. We have grown so fast that the average member has lost touch, and does not understand his World Headquarters and what it does. So I deeply hope that this picture of mine, plus the great work the Conference delegates and committeemen are now doing will be graphic enough to arouse in non-contributors a continuing desire to help. Indeed, I'm certain that it will.

Until 1951 our Headquarters was constantly over-hung with even a greater threat to its existence. While this danger still loomed, and if the problem it posed wasn't solved, our whole world service structure might someday wind up in complete collapse.

The danger was this: during our infancy and adolescence, the Board

of Trustees, all friends of Dr. Bob and mine, had been entirely responsible for the conduct of AA's services—services which had accounted for at least half the size of Alcoholics Anonymous and for much of its unity. As early as 1945, some of us felt that our virtually unknown Board of Trustees had to be securely linked to AA. None but a trifling fraction of our membership even knew who their Trustees were. The main linkage of Headquarters to the movement was through Dr. Bob and me, and we were perishable. The Board of Trustees had become an isolated island in the middle of a fellowship sprawled through fifty-two countries. Hence, we began to debate the desirability of some sort of an advisory board of AAs. Or, maybe we needed a Conference of larger numbers elected by AA itself; people who would inspect Headquarters yearly, a body to whom the Trustees could become responsible, a guiding conscience of our whole world effort.

But the objections to this were persistent and nothing happened for several years. Such a venture, it was said, would be expensive. And worse still, it might plunge AA into disruptive political activity when Conference Delegates were elected. These objections had considerable merit. Therefore, the whole project hung fire until about 1948. But by this time, group contributions nowhere near supported the growing AA office. The Grapevine was losing \$1,000 a month, and voluntary contributions for office ex-

penses were in the frightening arrears of \$2,000 a month.

Then Dr. Bob fell ill, mortally ill. Finally, in 1950, spurred on by the relentless logic of the situation, the Trustees authorized Dr. Bob and me to devise the plan with which this

booklet\* deals. It was a plan for a General Service Conference of AA, a plan by which our society could assume full and permanent responsibility for the conduct of its most vital affairs.

*(to be continued)*

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*\*Third Legacy Manual. This is the second of three installments in which AA's co-founder Bill tells "How We Learned To Recover—To Stay Together—and To Serve." Part three, "How We Learned To Serve," will appear in the July issue.*

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