

October 1975

That Fabulous Convention!

AA's 40th Anniversary
Denver, Colorado • July 4-6, 1975

THE RECORDS say that AA's 40th Anniversary International Convention was held in Denver, Colo., July 4-6, 1975. But for me it was the summer of '58 come back again, and the location was that almost-forgotten pink cloud. Whatever our AA "ages" (the range went upward of thirty years), the Convention restored to all of us the newcomer's sense of wonder.

When we joined our beloved home groups, it was exciting to hear that we had somehow stumbled into a worldwide fellowship. But how much more exciting it was to *see* — to be actually surrounded by AAs from twenty-nine nations, to exchange smiles with a passing New Zealander, to share coffee conversation with a lady from London.

The coffee flowed in gallons from spigots fed by huge vats in Currigan Hall. And the deluge was needed, for the AAs arriving in Denver before and during the Convention built up to numbers far beyond expectations. The final total of registrations was 19,300, outranking all other conventions ever held in Denver. Before that announcement, wild rumors had pushed the figure up to 100,000, but the explanation was: "It only *seemed* that way."

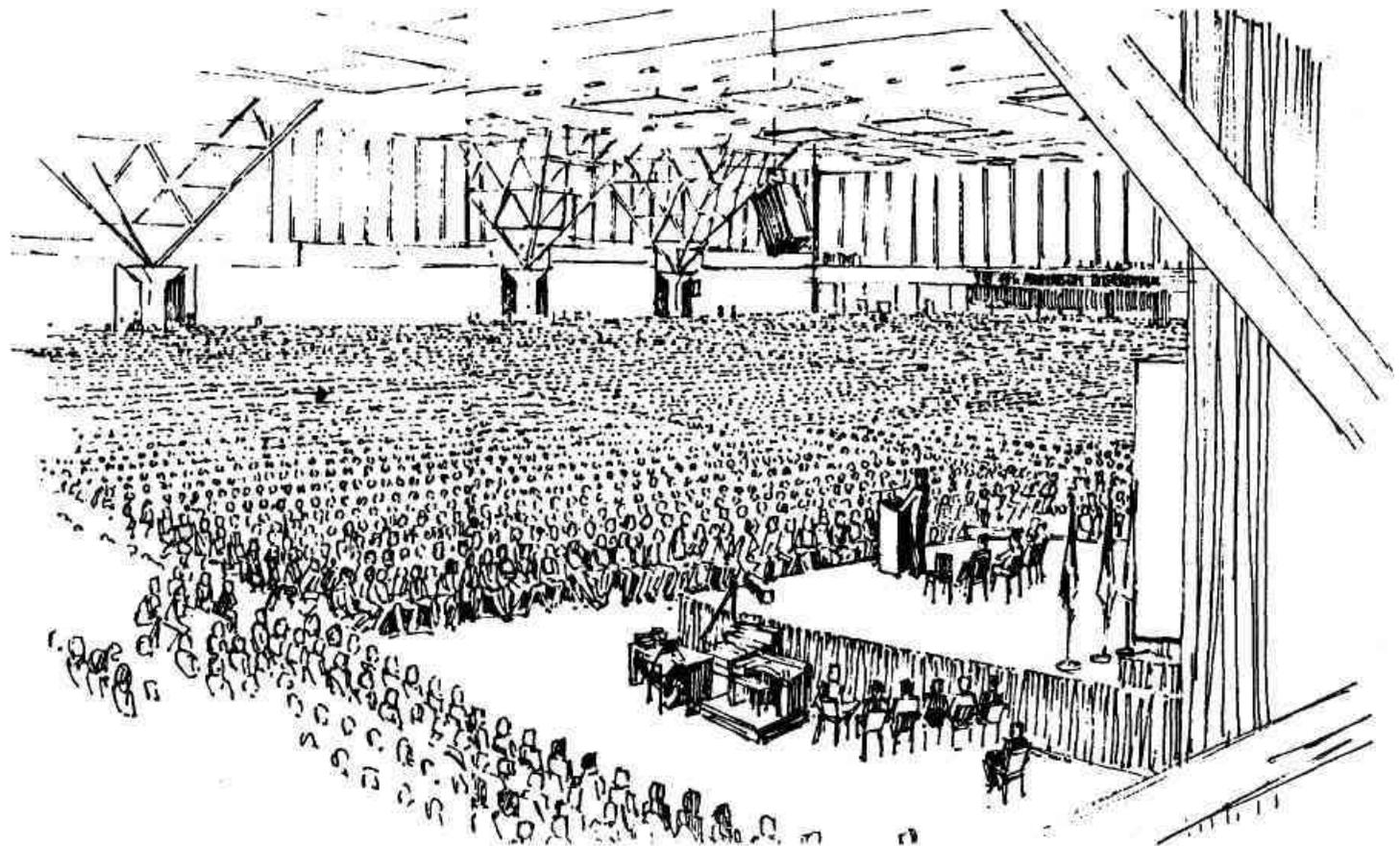
At the big meeting on the night of the Fourth, the first two AAs looked

down on the throng from photographs flanking a monster replica (28' x 14' x 3') of the Big Book, which gave its name, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, to the Fellowship founded forty years ago. Make that total 19,302, for Bill W. and Dr. Bob were with us all the way; at the

spiritual meeting that closed the Convention Sunday morning, we heard Bill's words repeated in the gentle voice of his widow, Lois.

The crowd at both meetings had to be divided between Currigan Hall and the neighboring Arena, where closed-circuit TV brought speak-

ers near the audience. The get-acquainted dances on Thursday evening also were held in two places simultaneously. But there was no way to accommodate the crowds that flocked to the workshops and panel meetings in the daytime on Friday and Saturday. Whether the



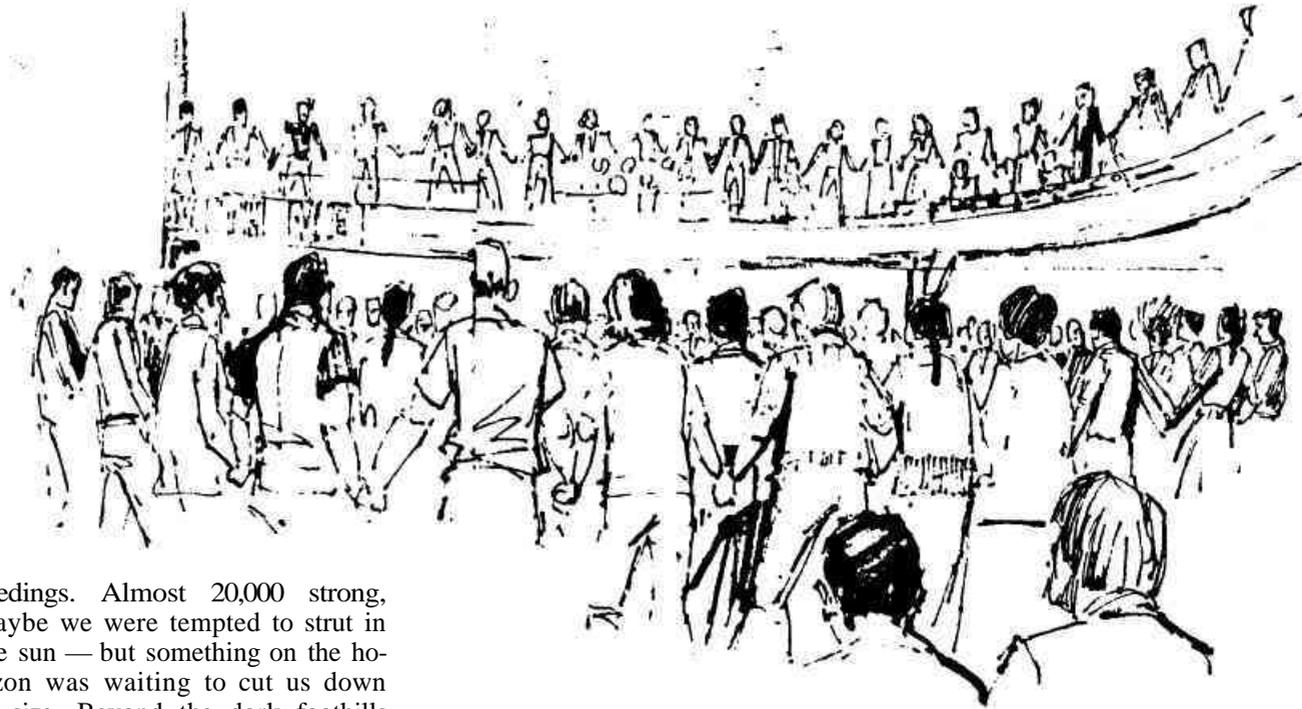
subject under discussion was the Grapevine or intergroups, Loners or AA cooperation with our friends, the large conference rooms of the Arena building all offered standing room only — and rarely enough of that. (Al-Anon and Alateen gatherings, held at various hotels, also were jammed.) Nobody voiced resentments, because the good AA principle of rotation came to the rescue. Every so often, many of those seated rose and went off to sample another interesting session, whereupon the standees gratefully sat down, leaving their posts against the wall to the AAs who had been eagerly waiting outside.

Between events, we really took over the town. From the plaza in front of Currihan Hall, where countless small "AA meetings" went on under the trees, Convention-goers spread all through central Denver. Wherever we strolled in the dry heat of Colorado summertime, it was one "Hi!" after another; every passerby seemed to be sporting the Convention badge. For a non-AA resident, I cleared up a mystery. He had been puzzled by the sudden blossoming of *Easy Does It* bumper stickers everywhere, not realizing that each translated as a silent "Hi!"

"It was *our* city!" one happy visitor wrote to the AA General Service Office, which had teamed with Denver committees in the months of hard work behind the deceptive smoothness of the Convention pro-

ceedings. Almost 20,000 strong, maybe we were tempted to strut in the sun — but something on the horizon was waiting to cut us down to size. Beyond the dark foothills were the snowy heights that the first Americans named the Never-Summer Range. Even to this vaguely agnostic AA, the Rockies kept recalling the psalmist's words: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my strength."

The spirituality of this Convention was not confined to Sunday morning; it was present every minute. And on at least one occasion, it was expressed in an unfamiliar, wonderfully stirring way. Among the alkathons that went on and on each noontime and midnight, there was a "drum and dance meeting" presented by Indian AA groups. Between talks, the huge drum spoke in



tribute to the Higher Power that the leader chose to call the Great Spirit, and AAs in the regalia of many tribes went onto the Arena floor to dance — but not alone. They reached out their hands, and soon white AAs and black AAs were on the floor with them.

From the balcony, it was a breathtaking sight, and I was astonished to find myself doing more than watch it. Between the balcony and the mezzanine, there was a walk that made a full circuit of the vast Arena. Led by one enterprising couple, people began joining hands on the walk, reaching out to pull bashful onlookers from their seats, stretching arms

to bridge gaps — until we made up one unbroken circle, stepping steadily around to the accelerating heartbeat of the drum.

It was like the feeling that came over me when a workshop opened with a hundred-voiced Serenity Prayer, when the Convention closed with thousands of voices saying the Lord's Prayer — and when I first heard some twenty voices saying that prayer at the end of an AA meeting. But the Convention feeling was far happier, because the early doubt and bewilderment were gone. Here was the proof, in every face: Yes, it works; yes, this is the good life.

J. G., Manhattan, N.Y.