

June 1989

The Little Book



I knocked around the program eight years before I was able to put a year together without a drink or a drug.

During those eight years, four of my stories were published in the Grapevine. When I brought my first story to the GV, the editor did not ask for any documents attesting to the length and depth of my sobriety. Nobody told me I needed 90 days of sobriety to write for the Grapevine — or, for that matter, that I needed to be sober at all! When I got word that my first story was accepted and would be published I went out and got drunk. I remember showing the acceptance letter to the bartender at a Blarney Stone on 14th Street.

This year marks the forty-fifth anniversary of the Grapevine and the tenth year of my sobriety.

For the eighteen years I have been around the program I have felt a stronger linkage to the Grapevine than I have to the Big Book. On the literature table at my first meeting in March of 1971, both the Big Book and the Grapevine were displayed,

but it was the *little* book that caught my attention. During that eight year period when I was both a contributor to the GV and an active drunk I had two occasions to see the magazine from a unique position—as an inmate at a rehab and a patient at a detox, where I saw old GVs with stories I had written donated to these institutions.

In the years I've been sober I've both chaired and spoken at detox meetings and I always check to see if they have a supply of old GVs lying around — partly, it's vanity: are any of *my* stories here? But mainly I'm curious to see which issues get the most attention. Some look like they have never been opened, but most are well worn, many have dog-eared pages, some have the joke page or Victor E. torn out; others have been folded to fit into back pockets; some have passages heavily underlined. The ones that move me the most, however, are those issues that have been folded and refolded so often they have lost their covers: I *know* that these anonymous issues have been loved and read and passed around by many drunks, some of whom are now sober and can trace

their awakening to something they read in the Grapevine.

It's 1989: An AA member working at an insurance office on Montgomery Street in San Francisco sends a cartoon of two drunks sitting on a curb to an AA friend working at a law office in Boston via Fax machines — elapsed time between transmission and reception: three minutes. There are AA networks where members meet only by way of computer modems. A sponsor in a restaurant hears his beeper go off, finds a public telephone and calls back his pigeon, whose number is displayed on his beeper readout. In Los Angeles and New York there are "bicoastal" groups, members of which live and work in both cities, flying back and forth several times each week. Those AAs who have not been to meetings in other parts of the world have, at least, heard speakers who have. This is the time of AA's "Global Village." Enjoy it.

In 1944 there were, perhaps, 300 groups in North America. For the most part these groups lived in isolation from each other. "Headquarters" — Bill's name for what later became the General Service Office — did what it could to keep these groups informed of what was new and what was going on in AA in general, but it was a huge task for an office that had little money and a small, mostly unpaid, staff who had to work at other jobs to support themselves. Besides that, in case you've forgotten, there was a war going on!

The war at home meant shortages of goods and services; restrictions on transportation and communications. At the end of 1941 they stopped making cars for civilians, so if you *had* a car in '44, it was an *old* one — parts were nearly impossible to get. Gasoline was severely rationed; no AA member would casually make a fifty mile round-trip journey to an outlying AA meeting. Most people did not have telephones in 1944 and if you were newly sober and felt you needed a telephone, you couldn't get one until 1946 — unless you had special priority (recovering from alcoholism was not considered essential to the war effort). Making or receiving a long-distance telephone call in those days was a major event unless you were a corporation executive or a movie star. Almost nobody flew in those days and if you were going coast to coast by train it would take you three days, if you were lucky; if not, you could spend hours stopped and waiting in a siding while troop trains or trains loaded with war materials used the main line.

Besides the Big Book and a couple of pamphlets there were no AA publications in 1944. After the Jack Alexander article appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post* in March of 1941 AA had increased dramatically from 2,000 to 8,000. The war caused vast movements of people to the various war-production centers around the country; new groups sprang up everywhere. We will never know how many of these groups went bad for lack of

guidelines and the wisdom of experience that had shaped the earlier groups. It was obvious that an ongoing national AA communication link was needed, but what form it should take was not yet clear.

There were a few local newsletters in 1944. In the Los Angeles area there was one called the *Eye-Opener*. In Ohio there was the *Cleveland Central Bulletin* — a rather grand name for an amateur two-page effort. But early in 1944, a copy of that home-spun Cleveland newsletter was presented and passed around to a gathering of AA friends at an apartment in White Plains, a town a few miles north of New York City. Lois K. took one look at that newsletter and wondered why New York didn't put out its own publication. Lois had been worried about "the growing pains which were causing a certain amount of lack of understanding among the few groups which were forming in and around the Metropolitan area." She thought a newsletter could provide "harmony between groups."

The next day Lois went up to Bedford Hills. Bill W. was stretched out on the floor in front of the old cobblestone fireplace while Lois told him of her idea to produce a local magazine. Bill, no doubt already seeing this as a national or international journal, told Lois to go for it, "And blessings on you."

Lois says of herself at this time: "I was a dizzy alcoholic with a dreamy idea and no experience to back it up." She was three years sober — a

time when many recovering alcoholics discover the fire burning within themselves (Bill, after all, at three years of sobriety, had begun writing the Big Book). "I had," Lois writes, "the courage of my ignorance."

After another visit with Bill, Lois had dinner at a little restaurant on 23rd Street with Marty M. and Priscilla P. Marty was a professional writer and one of the first women sober in AA. Priscilla was an art director for a magazine, and both she and Marty were immediately infected with Lois' enthusiasm. "Bless them," Lois later wrote. "They caught fire at once and over a tough piece of pot roast and muddied coffee, the Grapevine was started on its way toward its happy, though painful birth.

"We saw clearly that we needed more people than just us, preferably men. These, remember, were early days in AA. It was a man's organization and we women were tolerated as long as we knew our place — and stayed there." Two men were found: Chase H. and Abbott T. (who was known by all as "Bud"), plus another woman, Maeve. By April, they had produced a rough dummy of the first issue. The next order of business was to decide on a name for the as yet non-existent magazine. Lois took to her bed with fever of 104 and after a night of fantastic thoughts and feverish nightmares came up with a name. "This," she told the others, "is probably the result of delirium and fever, but how about Grapevine for a name?"

THE GRAPEVINE
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May we remind those who are, read and possess a copy of this paper but who are not members of A.A. of the meaning of these two initials - - and ask them to respect our anonymity? Please do not quote or reprint without our permission.

**TWO YALE SAVANTS
STRESS ALCOHOLISM
AS TRUE DISEASE**

At the launching of *The Grapevine*, we wish to express our heartiest congratulations and best wishes for the success of this new publication. The initiation to contribute a note on the Yale Plan Clinics in the first issue of *Journal*, indicates our brief in the close relation between the interests of Alcoholics Anonymous and the honest studies we have undertaken on all aspects of alcoholism. The New York Plan, which are at

of the Clinics, the latter will limit their activity solely to the guiding of alcoholics in those facilities which, according to diagnosis seem to be the most promising in the individual case. Such guidance is being provided or given at the Clinics by bringing suitable cases into contact with the local groups of Alcoholics Anonymous. It goes without saying that one of our objectives is to further interest and confidence in Alcoholics Anonymous among those who have not heard of it or who are inadequately informed. The contacts of the Clinics with the courts, with various departments of State government and with state agencies will contribute greatly to the most adequate understand-

ing alcoholics in other cities. The indications are that there is a wide interest in the rehabilitation of alcoholics and that only dissemination is needed to give it full display. The problem of the alcoholic is too great to be solved by any one person or even by any one organization. The cooperation of all individuals and all organizations, based on mutual respect and understanding of each other's aims, is needed to bring success to the efforts of all those who are interested in bringing back the alcoholics into the life of the community.

New Haven, Connecticut
Howard F. Haggard
E. M. Jellinek

They added several members to the staff — one or two took one look and quietly disappeared. Kay M. and Grace O., however, stuck around for a while. Kay, who in real life was a proofreader, was of immense value to the fledgling publication. Grace and her nonalcoholic spouse helped in more ways than one: the printing costs of the first issue (\$125) were paid for by Grace's husband (a well-known writer and editor who had written an early favorable article about AA).

Some of the "editors," however, had no publishing experience at all; in fact, such trade terms as "galley," "dummy," "paste-up" seemed like gibberish to them. Lois tells about the time she went with Priscilla to the printer's to pick out a paper stock: "...Were my eyes opened! For instance, the sample of paper that looks absolutely magnificent is no good,

the next one is slightly off-color (it looked pristine to me) so, after rejecting one after another, you delve into the dusty shelves at the back and find the perfect *goodie*." After selecting the paper, Priscilla told Lois that now they would have to decide on the type. Lois said, "Don't we just give him the copy and let him print it?" Priscilla raised an eyebrow and gave Lois a withering look while she conferred with the printer in an obscure language with words like pica, bold face, Bodoni, and Times Roman until, finally, everything was settled.

The first issue arrived from the printer late in May. It was bravely labeled "Volume I, Number 1." It was newspaper size (tabloid), three columns wide, eight pages long. A very professional-looking job (facsimile copies of that first issue are available through the Grapevine). Even though

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everyone involved with the production for the first Grapevine intended it to be strictly a local newsletter, they decided to mail off copies to the 300 group secretaries across the country. On the back of each copy was printed a subscription form. It wouldn't be the first time an alcoholic would think small while dreaming big!

One of the Grapevine's founding editors, Marty M., was at that time organizing what later was to become the National Council on Alcoholism (NCA). Beginning in October of 1944, Marty left town for a year to drum up interest and support for her infant organization. She traveled 25,000 miles on this mission, but wherever she went she visited AA groups, passing out copies of the Grapevine and collecting subscrip-

tions. No question about it, from the start, that little *local* newsletter had delusions of grandeur!

One of the original concepts of the Grapevine was to provide a "meeting in print" to the estimated 300 AA members in the armed forces all over the world. In the first issue there was a page called "Mail Call for All AAs in the Armed Forces." It was a page of letters from servicemen, and this section continued for the rest of the war and into the period of Occupation where it became "Mail Call for AAs at Home and Abroad." The feature continues today as "PO Box 1980."

The first issue of the Grapevine appeared in June of 1944 — on the ninth anniversary of Bill's meeting with Dr. Bob. It was an exciting time for the tiny staff of the Grapevine: not only was their little magazine launched, but on June 6th the long-awaited Allied invasion of France began and the end of the war in Europe seemed, at last, to be in sight.

Twelve hundred copies of that first issue were printed, and while many were given away, the rest were sold for fifteen cents each. The "six ink-stained wretches" — the appellation the founding editors gave themselves in the first issue — hoped to get enough revenue from subscriptions to finance the July issue. Subscriptions started to trickle in from all over the country. The editors, who still had no real office, met at each other's homes, waiting until they were all together before opening the mail; all

wanted to share the excitement and the ritual of opening and reading the congratulatory letters and subscriptions. It was a heady time.

The first typed statement of "subscriptions received" was dated June 10, 1944. From Pennsylvania came 31 subscriptions; Wisconsin, 11; Ohio, 10; California, 17. There was no record of how many subscriptions came from the Metropolitan area, but the rest of New York State produced only five subscriptions. Lois K. later wrote, "Of course we were delighted, but by tacit agreement we closed our eyes to the self-evident truth that we were more popular in Texas, Michigan, California, *et al*, than we were east of the Hudson.

"Then came the night I'll never forget. We were gathered around the big table with the tin plate ashtrays almost full, looking over our store of material for the coming issue and reviewing our subscription list, when one of us said, 'Let's face it, kids, this isn't a local job — it's national!'"

By the fall of 1945 new subscriptions were coming in at the rate of 100 a month from every state in the union and from other countries as well. There were over 3,000 paid subscribers and additional copies were sold individually at meetings. And although business was booming, costs had also risen sharply: there was now office rent to pay and, that spring, they had to hire a part-time employee to help manage the office and deal with the mass of paperwork the magazine generated. They asked Head-

quarters for help. Bill personally sent out an open letter to all AA groups asking if they wanted the Grapevine for their national publication. The response was overwhelmingly affirmative. The December 1945 issue bore the legend "The national monthly journal of Alcoholics Anonymous," and it had grown to twelve pages. By January 1946, the Grapevine's yearly subscription rate went from \$1.50 to \$2.50.

The Grapevine's first real office was a small one-room apartment near Grand Central Station leased in September of 1944. Early in 1945 they realized they needed a paid employee to manage the office, type letters and manuscripts, and help with the rapidly increasing subscription list. Bill sent for his half-sister, Helen Evans, then living in Canada, inviting her to come live in Bedford Hills and to "share in the AA way of life," and, not to worry, there was a job for her.

On Helen's first day at the office the first *renewal* subscription came in the mail to everyone's surprise and delight. They had not yet begun to solicit renewals, so it was totally unexpected; it seemed to underscore that the Grapevine was no "flash in a pan," but was here to stay.

Helen soon realized that the office was in total disarray; that she would *earn* her \$40 per month salary. Record keeping was chaotic: for some reason it took three separate cards to keep track of each subscriber. Helen was able to reduce it to one card each.

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MINETTA LANE

"The treasurer, Bud T., who was a real dear, kept all the records in his shirt pocket on tiny pieces of paper!"

Several months later, they had to vacate that apartment when the landlord discovered it was being used as an office — the wartime housing shortage made it illegal to lease housing for commercial purposes. They moved everything to the basement of an old church building on 41st Street and Ninth Avenue, which also housed an AA clubhouse. There was no way they could get a telephone because of wartime restrictions, so all of the Grapevine's calls had to be made from a pay phone on the corner.

Soon, they had to move again. The old church building had been sold. They found a basement in a condemned building on Minetta Lane in Greenwich Village, just off Sixth Avenue. No one had any money to pay a moving van so they persuaded an ice-truck driver they knew, who had delivered ice to the old clubhouse, to move all their possessions down to Minetta Lane. The basement office was gloomy and dark; the floor slanted so badly wheeled furniture would roll to one corner, but it was home, at least for a while. Outside, drunks and derelicts were often found sitting on the stoop.

Bill had an old oak desk of his moved into the basement on Minetta Lane. Although Bill wrote the editorial in the first issue of the Grapevine, he was never an editor, nor was he ever connected in any other "official" way to the magazine. He plainly loved the Grapevine; from its very beginning, he gave it his full support. Early on Bill promised to write an article every month for a period lasting several years because he knew the value to the magazine of this kind of personal endorsement. The Twelve Traditions first appeared in the GV, beginning with a 1946 article Bill wrote called "Twelve Points to Assure Our Future." Until his death in 1971 Bill often "hung out" at the various Grapevine offices. He loved to "bounce ideas" off the staff. In a sense the Grapevine was Bill's forum — if not his personal magazine. As Bob P., past general manager of the General Service Office, points out: "There were several reasons for this special interest. Bill perceived early that this was a means for him to communicate directly with the Fellowship without going through the Board of Trustees — especially when he was at odds with them on a given issue." For the most part, though, Bill realized that the membership of AA had grown so large and spread-out that he could no longer speak to all the members in all the groups as he once had. The Grapevine became Bill's way of talking to each of us. It is hardly surprising then, that *The Language of the Heart*, Bill's collected Grapevine

writings, published last year by the Grapevine, seems likely to become the best selling of all the GV books!

There is at least one instance where a letter written to the GV by Bill was rejected for publication on the grounds that it was "an improper intrusion of the Grapevine's editorial independence" — a policy, incidentally, established by Bill himself! As the Grapevine gained prominence in AA, a corporate structure was set up naming five trustees (now a board of ten directors) to oversee its operations and insure its editorial independence from the Alcoholic Foundation (now the General Service Board).

Over the years the Grapevine's income has not always caught up with its expenses. Ideally, the Grapevine should be completely self-supporting, but because of its value to the Fellowship as a whole, its shortfalls have at times in the past been underwritten by the Reserve Fund of the General Service Board.

There is a favorite story about how the Grapevine became the AA Grapevine. Seems that early in 1946 someone told Bill that the FBI called and he'd better call them back pronto. The next morning Bill called and discovered that the call was really from a delegation of former FBI agents who put out a newsletter called *The Grapevine*. They threatened to sue if the AA publication didn't change its name. A friendly compromise was reached and "AA" was added to the official name.

If the September 1948 issue of the

Grapevine were to appear on the literature table at your local group today, you might at first glance mistake it for the current issue. This was the first "pocket-sized" Grapevine. Earlier, the Grapevine polled its readers about the proposed change to the more convenient size and got overwhelming support. There is much in the September '48 issue that would be familiar to today's readers: there is a letters page; there are jokes; the Serenity Prayer; the Twelve Steps; the Preamble (written by the GV's first editor); there are stories from members that are little different from stories found in current issues. The lead article is from Dr. Bob. Bill writes an "Editorial" about the Tenth Tradition (its first appearance in print). There is also a book-review section, a feature long discontinued. But overall, there is a wonderful sameness; a comforting familiarity between those first issues and today's Grapevine.

Today, the Grapevine occupies one floor in the same midtown Manhattan building that houses the General Service Office and AA World Services, Inc. The offices are light and spacious. If, by some trick of time, the founding editors could see what their "local newsletter" has become, they would probably keep their cool and remark, "A very professional looking operation." They might *really* be impressed, but you know how New Yorkers are. If we were to tell them that the Grapevine has a staff of twenty-two paid employees

and monthly circulation of slightly over 130,000, that might widen their eyes a little bit. When they learned that the GV also publishes books: *The Best of the Grapevine* (Volumes I and II); *Best Cartoons from the Grapevine*; *The Language of the Heart*. That the GV also publishes calendars, pocket planners, plus pictures, slogans, et cetera, et cetera, and so on. Oh yes, the GV also produces a line of audio tapes for people who don't read, can't read, or want to get the message while they are driving their car, working at something else, riding their bike, watching a ballgame, or idling on their yacht.

At this news one or two of the founding editors might begin to twitch. When told that the GV budget for 1989 is nearly two million dollars, tears would appear in their eyes — remembering, no doubt, the humble beginnings and their fear that they would not get enough subscriptions to put out the second, the July 1944, issue.

In all of the history of publishing, there is no magazine like the Grapevine. What other magazine do the readers write? In the first issue the editors wrote: "We six are sort of garage mechanics, servicing the paper. We don't write it. That's the creamy part for every Jack and Doris of AA who can lay hands on some news and a pencil stub. We wrestle with the punctuation, if any. Hammer for copy as the deadline creeps up. Paste up the dummy and hope for the best."

Richard K., New York, N.Y.