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*Another Anniversary***Thirty Years of Grapevine History***The Grapevine has played a vital role
in the development and growth of AA*

THE AA Grapevine is not the *only* international monthly magazine written, edited, and illustrated by alcoholics.

It is merely the only such publication whose staff, contributors, and readers are thoroughly aware of that fact, and who candidly, cheerfully admit it.

With this June issue the Grapevine marks its thirtieth anniversary. The magazine came into being in 1944, during World War II, when AA itself was less than ten years old. Surprisingly but fittingly, the story of the Grapevine is parallel in many respects to the stories of many members of the Fellowship. In its early years it was a financial liability; then it became self-supporting, and eventually has contributed substantially over and above its costs to the General Fund of the General Service Board.

Unlike many of us individual ex-drunks, however, the Grapevine began its AA life by performing useful services for the Fellowship. For

many years the magazine was the only link between members and groups throughout the world and their only regular contact with AA's two founders and the AA headquarters in New York City.

Even after the Grapevine had helped bring into being the democratic service structure, co-founder Bill W. still described the magazine as "our biggest and best means of communicating current AA thought and experience in staying sober, in hanging together, and in serving." (*AA Comes of Age*, pp. 31, 32.)

During the three decades in which this AA magazine has grown in circulation and in financial stability, we have seen giant periodicals, with circulation in the millions, vanish from the newsstands and from the mails. This fact justifies regret and sadness, rather than smugness. It is cited here as evidence that the Grapevine is continuing to fill an urgent need in the lives of men and women whose very survival is tied to that of the Fellowship of Alco-

holics Anonymous.

The first issue of the Grapevine appeared as an eight-page newspaper in June, 1944. The founders, who later were fondly described by Bill W. as "six ink-stained wretches," had a serious purpose in starting the paper. Some of AA's members were servicemen, scattered all over the world in Army camps, Navy and Marine bases, in monotonous duty behind the lines, and in combat zones.

Thirty years ago, during World War II, the total membership of AA was slightly over 10,000 and the chances of a serviceman having a nondrinking alcoholic buddy to discuss the program with were quite slim. The Grapevine was intended as "a meeting in print," and was sent free to every AA member known to be in the services until World War II was over. Many came back sober. Thus the Grapevine was instrumental in proving that the AA program works when an alcoholic wants it to work, even under the most unfavorable and adverse conditions.

During the first months of its existence the Grapevine broke the news that a national health organization on alcoholism had been established. This year, then, is also the thirtieth anniversary of the National Council on Alcoholism, which, although never connected with AA, has helped reduce the suffering from the disease by engaging in jobs that AA cannot do. These include public education, research, and participating closely with medical and other resources. Many authorities credit NCA with reducing the stigma on alcoholism, thus motivating many victims of the disease to reach AA earlier.

Before its first year was up, the Grapevine had brought hope to families of alcoholics, including children of drinking parents. The December, 1944, issue carried the personal story of Bill W.'s nonalcoholic wife, Lois, in which she told how she learned to live by AA principles for herself, not just for Bill. In that same issue were letters by teenagers describing how AA had changed their lives for the better. Such pieces ran in the magazine until the Al-Anon Family Groups were started and developed their own publication. The Grapevine still prints one or two Al-Anon and Alateen articles each year.

It was through the Grapevine that sober AA members were able to make a valuable, and anonymous, contribution to science. In the pages

of the April, 1945, Grapevine appeared a questionnaire designed by Dr. E. M. Jellinek, then head of the Yale (now Rutgers) School of Alcohol Studies. Hundreds of readers responded, enabling Dr. Jellinek, a friend of AA to the time of his death, to produce his famous chart, *Phases of Alcohol Addiction*. This chart has been a useful instrument in helping professionals diagnose and understand the disease of alcoholism. It has also opened the eyes of "problem drinkers" to the nature of their illness and brought them into AA or to other forms of therapy.

For more than a year the writing, editing, and mailing of the Grapevine had been faithfully handled almost entirely by the six original volunteers. The rapid growth of AA with its expanding numbers of groups had created a task beyond the energies of even these dedicated and capable alcoholics. Their first names, listed by Bill in *AA Comes of Age*, indicate that nearly all of the original Grapevine volunteers were *women* — and in those days, thirty years ago, the general AA membership was predominantly male.

When the volunteer journalists finally called for help, "the Foundation," as the General Service Board was then known, polled the 600 groups on whether the publication was valuable to the Fellowship or should be dropped. By membership demand the December, 1945, issue of the Grapevine became the na-

"Was America big enough for two magazines called 'The Grapevine'?"

tional monthly journal of Alcoholics Anonymous.

As practicing alcoholics many of us had varying degrees of trouble with the law. It probably should come as no surprise, then, that early in 1946, the Grapevine was "investigated" by the FBI. It seems that the highly respectable house organ of the FBI already bore the same title as the new magazine printed by former lushes. Was America big enough for two magazines called *The Grapevine*? Suppose that various upright lawmen all over the country picked up a publication expecting to read about the proper professional and social activities of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and, instead, were stunned by horrendous tales of drunken exploits.

A friendly compromise was reached. The magazine for recovering drunks became the AA Grapevine.

Having been "cleared," so to speak, by the FBI, the magazine advanced further into respectability. The AA Grapevine was copyrighted, and in that same year incorporated, with five directors on the Corporate Board (it's now nine). The price was raised from 15 cents to 25.

In its thirty-year history so far, probably the greatest contributions the Grapevine has made to Alcoholics Anonymous are the printed discussions on group experiences that led to the adoption of the Twelve

Traditions, and the exchange of ideas that brought about our self-governing procedures through the General Service Conference.

Following the famous Jack Alexander article in the *Saturday Evening Post* in March, 1941, AA membership expanded rapidly. Groups were formed, collapsed, split up, were torn apart by dissension, disrupted by power-grabbers, diverted by members who mingled AA recovery principles with other doctrines and causes. Letters flooded into the small New York office, begging for advice, demanding punishment or expulsion of other members who wouldn't do things the letter-writer's way. Out of this confusing torrent Bill and a few others sifted certain principles that appeared to further group survival, by discouraging practices that usually produced conflict and disaster.

A series of pieces about AA's experiences was started in the August, 1945, Grapevine and reached a climax in April, 1946, with Bill's article "Twelve Points to Assure Our Future." Discussion waged hot and heavy, in groups and in the magazine, for more than four years. Reasoned debate and abusive diatribes dealt with these issues and others: Should we drop anonymity? Should we accept fortunes left in wills? What should we do about clubhouses? Should we have rules

for membership, and if so, which ones? How should we handle bleeding deacons?

Bill's original twelve points, later termed the Twelve Traditions, were not, Bill stated, invented by him but were "forged on the anvil of experience." Recalling those years of controversy, Bill wrote that the Traditions met with a mixed reception. "Only groups in dire trouble took them seriously," thus paralleling the behavior of most individual alcoholics who take the Twelve Steps of recovery seriously only when in "dire trouble."

Through the Grapevine the issues got a thorough airing, as members in Seattle could exchange views with other AAs in Bangor, Savannah, Phoenix, and Des Moines. Finally the Twelve Traditions were accepted in their present form at the 1950 Cleveland Convention as our Second Legacy, that of Unity.

That Convention itself was the result of free discussion made possible through the Grapevine, which also was adapting to changes and growth of the Fellowship.

By 1947 the Grapevine was circulating more and more among non-alcoholics. Many of them, including professionals in medicine, law enforcement, the clergy, and other fields, knew little about AA. In order to make clear what we are and what we aren't, the June Grape-

vine of that year carried a concise definition. Known throughout AA today as "the Preamble," that description begins, "Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share ...," and was co-authored by the Grapevine's first editor.

Since its first issue the Grapevine has provided the "feedback" that enables the membership of our loosely knit Fellowship to remain unified while adapting to changing conditions. In mutual interaction, the magazine helps shape AA as a whole, and in turn is shaped by the needs of the members. In response to a poll of its readers the Grapevine in 1948 took on its present size and shape.

It was physically and functionally prepared for an enormous task that loomed on the horizon. Now AA had about 2,000 groups throughout the country. Yet most of the essential service jobs were still performed by a few of the older members just as they were when the Fellowship consisted of a handful of sober alcoholics.

Bill and Dr. Bob were both concerned for the day when the growing membership would no longer have living founders to serve as guides and symbols. Would alcoholics, clustered in virtually independent groups throughout the continent, respect suggestions, let alone the authority, of utter strangers in the New York Headquarters? Self-government, admittedly full of risks for

alcoholics, was the only alternative to anarchy. In 1950 Bill and Dr. Bob suggested, through the Grapevine, that the groups assume responsibility for the management and continuity of the Fellowship. The magazine was then the only access to the group conscience, and it provided an excellent means of communication. In April, 1951, the General Service Conference came into being. Through their Delegates, several thousand sober alcoholics undertook the responsibility of preserving their only means of survival. The Third Legacy, that of Service, had been born.

After eleven years at 25 cents a copy, rising costs made necessary the raising of the Grapevine's price to 35 cents in 1957, a figure that has been maintained for seventeen years, even with galloping inflation.

Today the AA Grapevine has a worldwide circulation of more than 76,000 copies, a comparatively small number compared to our total membership of around 650,000. Still, each copy is read and circulated through many hands in clubs maintained by AA members, and distributed by those carrying the message to prisons, hospitals, jails, skid-row missions, and other institutions.

Among Grapevine writers and artists are some of the nation's highest paid professionals, not one of whom has ever received, or sought, one penny for his or her contributions. The editors assert, however, that the bulk of the best pieces arrive through

the mail, unsolicited, from members in all walks of life.

The Grapevine's editorial staff consists of an editor, managing editor, free-lance copy editor, and editorial secretary. They conduct their professional activities in cooperation with an Editorial Board of ten, who function in an advisory capacity. Board members carry out specific assignments and originate ideas for the magazine. All the editors and staff artists are sober alcoholics, with the Board made up chiefly of sober alcoholics and one or two nonalcoholics.

Since AA is anonymous at the public level of press and other media, no full names of AA members appear in these pages. Post office regulations, however, require that once a year every publication sent through the mails publish some full name as "publisher." A nonalcoholic member of the Corporate Board and a long-time member of AA's General Service Board, Austin MacCormick, annually donates the use of his name for this purpose.

Subscriptions are handled by a circulation manager and business crew of six nonalcoholics, who handle mailing and other duties with patience and accuracy rarely found anywhere.

The Grapevine's acceptance by the AA membership is reflected in its present solvency. During its first twenty years the magazine operated in the red, its deficits made up as need arose by withdrawals from the

General Fund. In 1964 the Grapevine came into the black, and was able to repay its outstanding loan of more than \$11,000 to the General Fund.

In the spirit of AA's Seventh Tradition, the Grapevine in 1967 became not only self-supporting but able to contribute \$5,000 to the General Fund. Each year since then the magazine has contributed that much and more. Over the past seven years the Grapevine has turned over a total of \$102,000 to that very General Fund that had once subsidized the magazine.

A few years ago an inside-the-Fellowship survey indicated that Grapevine subscribers had a significantly higher achievement of continuous sobriety than another random sample of nonsubscribers.

Whether or not a cause-and-effect relationship is warranted by the results of that questionnaire, the writer of this article believes that the Grapevine is a necessary part of his AA sobriety. During the last fourteen of my sixteen years in AA I have read and contributed to this magazine. The Grapevine keeps me in touch with AA thought and feeling; it inspires me, amuses me, and, upon occasion, incites me to self-righteous anger. Then, when I turn the page, it calms me down, reminds me that, as an alcoholic, I must put *First Things First, Live and Let Live, Think, and "Let go and let God."*

L. H., Denver, Colo.