

How one Drunk



HELPS another

on a worldwide scale

WHEN I came out of my alcoholic daze, I found myself in a new world speaking a new language. It was a world grounded on "a program of recovery" . . . and bounded by the good will and friendships of guys and girls interested in "service" to other alcoholics. A strange world and an even stranger language.

MY program of recovery was, I learned, being guided by AA's Twelve Suggested Steps. Service—helping other drunks—was clearly identified as the Twelfth Step, and was being practiced like all get-out.

So much I could understand. Then, as I learned to wear the cloak of sobriety without chafing, I discovered that the AA world was somewhat larger than I'd first thought. AA did not Originate in my group. There

were other groups, locally and nationally . . . even internationally. Apparently it was possible to have alcoholic jitters in any language.

Groups had contacts with each other . . . and with the "civilian" world. These relationships occasionally created problems . . . not great problems but some that called for sober solutions. The answers were not drawn from thin air; or dictated by the loudest voice in the room.

AA was old enough by that time to have collected the experiences of hundreds of groups and thousands of AAs, and to set these down as the Twelve Traditions. Our co-founder Bill wrote the Traditions out of the combined experiences of AA: the good and the bad—the calm and considered actions that helped AA and the hot-headed actions that hurt AA. They were not directives to the groups, but they did give the groups precedents to guide them. That intangible (but none-the-less forceful) *group conscience* did the rest.

The result was unity. Not perfect unity perhaps . . . but a lot better than anyone had a right to expect from a bunch of nonconforming drunks.

With the publication of the Twelve Traditions, AA now had two legacies from its founders: a program of *recovery* as represented in the Twelve Steps—and a program of *unity* is represented by the Traditions.

This was wonderful. Even I could understand that progress was being made. And best of all, this didn't interfere with the job of one drunk's helping another drunk. In fact, it gave an assist by keeping our group out of rhubarbs with other groups, out of interferences with the forces of law and order, out of ill-timed or too aggressive relations with the press.

On the theory of "little steps for tiny feet," some time went by before I was initiated into another phase of AA service. That was service beyond my abilities to perform single-handed

or—at the most—with the combined efforts of my group. I learned that there was a lot of AA work to be done beyond our resources. I could rush to rescue (or entertain) the drunk who phoned for help at 3 A.M. I could spot the newcomer at the meeting and make him welcome. But the fact was that I couldn't answer that 3 A.M. call if the drunk was in Costa Rica. And I couldn't welcome that drunk to a meeting if he was a seaman aboard ship—or a firewarden in Alaska.

My group could help a new group get started in our city . . . but not quite so easily in New Mexico or Arizona. We might be willing and eager . . . but we wouldn't even know about the need.

I learned then that there was a national AA headquarters that was just as concerned about the hopes of drunks in Timbuktu as we were about the newcomers in our group. Too, these headquarters people seemed to understand about the special problems of drunks in prisons and in hospitals. They knew how to talk with publishers and radio people and film producers—to explain our anonymity policy and to discourage too flagrant breaks.

Headquarters was a busy place, for in addition to these special services, it answered a flood of correspondence from AA groups everywhere—groups like my own with problems of club houses, finances, over-zealous chairmen, anonymity breakers, and how-can-we-get-members-to-do-some-work. No

Ed. note—this and the article following ("The Old Timer in the Back Row Speaks Up") are in response to our call for communications on how the average AA plays a part in our Third Legacy of Service.

rulings, no directives—but an *exchange* of information on how other groups had solved these same problems.

Headquarters had been at it almost since the beginning of AA. It had become busier and busier as AA grew in size and importance. Now it was up to its belt buckle in publishing, with the Big Book and the Traditions and some dozen of pamphlets. An associated group worked like mad to bring out the AA Grapevine on time each month. All this was Twelfth Step work . . . but on a scale that no group or Intergroup could hope to accomplish.

About then—1950—Bill and Dr. Bob decided the time had come to make sure that the future of AA was safe. The drunk supply would probably continue forever, but the same could not be guaranteed for the small group who took the responsibility of keeping headquarters running. To insure AA's future, they reasoned, the national headquarters must become the job of AA as a whole.

The General Service Conference was the result. This is a body of hardy souls elected by AAs for the express purpose of seeing that AA never gets off the track.

Each area (a state, a province, or part of one) has a delegate to the Conference who serves for two years. (This I liked—rotation made sense.) Delegates meet once a year to review progress, and to decide where we go from here. Between annual meetings, delegates stay in close touch with the

groups in their areas, listen to beefs and suggestions, generally act as a sounding board for the ideas which groups have on how AA should progress, and for their reactions to proposals from headquarters on matters affecting AA as a whole.

At the beginning, the Conference was advisory. Delegates suggested actions but couldn't insist. Then, last July at the Twentieth Anniversary Convention in St. Louis, Bill officially gave AA into the care of the General Service Conference. The ceremony was a moving one; it said in effect: "AA has come of age—boys and girls—take it from here." Then just to make sure that no one ever grabs the ball and runs with it, there is a Charter that makes everything clear . . .

That in all its proceedings, the General Service Conference shall observe the spirit of the AA Tradition, taking great care that the Conference never becomes the seat of perilous wealth or power;

That sufficient operating funds, plus an ample reserve be its prudent financial principle;

That none of the Conference members shall ever be placed in a position of unqualified authority over any of the others;

That all important decisions be reached by discussion, vote and, whenever possible, by substantial unanimity;

That no Conference action ever be personally punitive, or an incitement to public controversy;

That though the Conference may act in the service of Alcoholics Anonymous and may traditionally direct its World Services, it shall never

enact laws or regulations binding on AA as a whole or upon any AA Group or member thereof, nor shall it perform any other such acts of government; and

That, like the society of Alcoholics Anonymous which it serves, the Conference itself will always remain democratic in thought and action.

That is not all of the Charter but to me it's the important part. When

I had waded through the ten-dollar words, I found it pretty basic AA. It meant that AA would go on doing its work far into the future, with one drunk helping another drunk—whether he does it on an individual basis . . . or through his group or Intergroup . . . or through his Worldwide Service Headquarters.

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THE OLDTIMER IN THE BACK ROW SPEAKS UP

THIS article is an attempt to practice the Tenth Step. I was an "average" kind of a drunk and I am an average AA member. A short time after I came into AA, I helped make the coffee for my group and got a real kick out of doing it. The next year I served a three-month term as group secretary and learned how important "Easy Does It" and "First Things First" can be. It's been some time now since I've held a job in my group, but I'm pretty active in Twelfth Step work and attend my meetings regularly.

Perhaps you're wondering what all this has to do with the Tenth Step. Just thought it best to give you my background before discussing the main

point, which is about worldwide AA services and the General Service Conference. Until recently, they didn't mean much to me.

Frankly, the Conference delegates sounded to me like a bunch of "would-be big shots" and it was hard to imagine what they did when they got together in New York every year. As for the New York Office and the letters and bulletins that came from there—well, the New York office in my mind was always "Bill's office," and I complacently let it go at that. It never occurred to me that they had problems to solve and needed guidance to meet the needs of our growing AA Fellowship. Bill, the office, and the Conference all seemed far removed

from me, and as perfect as the absolute principles in the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions.

In view of my rude awakening the other evening, that sure was a silly attitude to have!

The other evening at our group meeting, the secretary read an announcement about the meeting of General Service Representatives for our area. I was sitting in the next-to-the-last row whispering with my neighbor about a "pigeon" who was having some trouble. I figured we weren't disturbing anybody. Furthermore, since I wasn't the General Service Representative, why should I bother listening to the announcements? Then, a couple of members turned about and "ssshed" me.

Boy! Did I get a resentment. But I shut up, for just then the announcements were over and the last speaker was introduced. However, I couldn't listen very well. My inner conversation went something like this:

Ego: Why do they have to make this kind of announcement in a group? If they bore me, a newcomer must be ready to jump out of his skin!

AA Voice: Get honest! Didn't you listen eagerly to everything—didn't you hang on every announcement and ask questions when you were new? Wonder why you lost your curiosity? Perhaps it's time to start asking again!

Deflated Ego: Well . . . maybe . . . Yes, that's a good idea. I'll start right after the meeting and ask about the G.S.R. meeting.

Well, I asked questions, I read the Third Legacy Manual and, because I was interested, I was invited to attend the General Service Representatives meeting as an observer. It's been a revelation!

I learned that my individual opinion about AA affairs *is needed*. That it's another kind of Twelfth Step work, but that you have to put yourself into it if you are going to get anything out of it. My opinion, and every AA member's opinion, is needed to help form the group conscience which guides AA as a whole.

In the last five years my group has been asked many times to voice its opinions. Where, oh where had I been when such matters as changing the name of The Alcoholic Foundation to the General Service Board of AA was considered? Because it was just another AA business meeting, I wasn't there. I had purposely stayed away.

Some members had gone and had studied the issue at stake and tried to answer it and other questions. Here are some of the matters that they considered and advised on: should the groups waive their group discounts on the AA Big Book and *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* to build up the reserve fund needed for the safety of our worldwide services?; should the General Service Representative Plan be approved?; should Alcoholics Anonymous be incorporated?; should AA have a Twentieth Anniversary Convention in St. Louis in 1955? and so forth. . . . Others had given their time and effort to try to under-

stand and answer so that the voice of the group conscience could be heard.

The Group Representative reported the group's opinions to the District Committeeman. The Committeeman in turn reported the opinions of all the groups in his District to the Area Delegate so that he could know how his area stood, in general, on these proposals and could go to the annual meeting well-informed. In some areas the process of opinion-gathering is entirely through informal discussion arriving at general agreement; in others, an actual vote is taken among those present. The main thing is to furnish as much in the way of guidance for Conference delegates as is possible within AA's "loosely-knit" organizational form.

This is the chain of service links that makes it possible for each member to have a voice in AA services worldwide. And it works both ways, too! Not only do proposals come from Headquarters for the groups' consideration, but proposals may start at the group level and through General Service Representatives, Committeemen and Delegates be presented to the Conference to consider. The proposals can be either a matter which affects AA as a whole, or an area matter of such importance in its implications or consequences that the whole Conference of AA should know about it.

This, then, is the way that my own local group has a voice in AA world services. And my voice is needed to carry the AA message here just as much as it is needed to talk to a new

member. It makes me an active part of AA as a whole. That is, if I take action and put something into it. I don't necessarily mean money, although that is important too. It has its place, but the \$2.00 per member per year which is suggested as a yardstick is a very small amount.

The things that have come to mean the most to me and the idea that I would like to share with others is that AA world services are vital to my own existence and growth. Each day I can open my heart, my mind and my ears to the opportunity to help AA world services and the General Service Conference.

Just as each day I practice sobriety and the Twelve Steps so I can try to be a better-informed AA member. At meetings, I now seek out our group's G.S.R. and ask him what is happening in AA affairs as a whole. I ask our secretary what news has come from Headquarters in the monthly bulletin. I talk about some of these things at closed meetings, and to the newcomer. I no longer think of a Twelfth Step call and an AA meeting as "good AA," and business meetings, Conference meetings and announcements about them as dull and a thing apart. Business meetings are also good AA and they are where I belong and where I am needed.

As an "average" member of AA, I can by this daily practice take my rightful place and accept the responsibility of the Third Legacy of World Service. This is my way of accepting the trust placed in me by Bill and the

old-timers last year at our Twentieth Anniversary Convention, where Bill declared: "The Third Legacy of World Service will henceforth be for all members of Alcoholics Anonymous

to have and to hold for so long as God may wish our Society to endure." May I have and hold a service heart in readiness for daily action.

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