

BOX 4|5|9

News and Notes From the General Service Office of A.A.®

VOL. 47, No. 6/ HOLIDAY ISSUE 2001

At this Holiday time, may we be grateful for our sobriety and continue to extend the hand and the love of A.A. to the alcoholic who still suffers.

Having left the darkness behind us, may we look toward the light of the future with gratitude and hope, sharing in the fellowship of the spirit.

We wish each of you a sober and happy
Holiday Season.



Box 4-5-9 is published bimonthly by the General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115, © Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 2001

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New York, NY 10163

G.S.O.'s A.A. Web Site: www.aa.org

Subscriptions: Individual, \$3.50 per year; group, \$6.00 for each unit of 10 per year. Check—made payable to A.A.W.S., Inc.—should accompany order.

Rotated—But Not Out of Service In Newfoundland

What happens to trusted servants when they rotate? Putting it bluntly, Tradition Two suggests that “Ultimately, they divide into two classes” . . . “elder statesmen,” who understand, even embrace, the wisdom of rotation; and “bleeding deacons,” who are rigid, bossy and power-driven. “Happily,” the Tradition points out, most trusted servants survive rotation and “live to become elder statesmen . . . the real and permanent leadership of A.A.” (Twelve and Twelve, p. 135)

What holds true at the group level pertains as well to our trustees. In Newfoundland, Bill B., who served as a Class B (alcoholic) Eastern Canada regional trustee from 1994-98, doesn't worry about which category he falls in—he's too busy carrying the A.A. message, as are so many others who have rotated out of office. In May, for example, the General Service Office received a letter from someone we'll call Harry, a man in Harbour Grace, Newfoundland, who wrote, “I am an alcoholic and at present a practicing one. I have tried many times to arrest the disease I have but constantly fail. I have completed treatment programs, both inpatient and outpatient, and always go back to drinking shortly after.” Noting that “there are no A.A. meetings in Harbour Grace,” Harry continued, “I am very interested in starting my own group but need the literature necessary to begin such a venture.”

Upon receiving Harry's letter, the G.S.O. office promptly contacted Bill. He in turn called past Class B trustee David O'L., also of Newfoundland, who served as trustee-at-large/Canada from 1991-95. “We tried to help Harry, who has a problem with drugs as well as booze,” Bill reports. “I sent him literature—the Big Book, Twelve

and Twelve and pamphlets, including ‘Is A.A. for You?’ and ‘A Newcomer Asks.’ Because I live on the other side of Newfoundland, about 500 miles away from Harry, I gave him the phone number for Dave in St. John's, which is much closer to him.

“Several of us A.A.s have tried to help Harry—including past delegate Boyd S. (Panel 49), who lives in Holyrood, not far from him—but unfortunately Harry's not attending meetings nor in touch with any A.A.s so far as we know. Still, the seed has been planted. Harry knows that if he wants help, the hand of A.A. is ready to grab his. Sobriety is a gift, and we never know when it will happen. All we can do is stay sober, keep carrying the message and hope it takes.”

Bill himself has been sober in A.A. since October 1967 and is a longtime member and current treasurer of the Corner Brook East Serenity Group. “I used to sponsor a lot of people,” he says, “but these days it seems that the younger people are looking to sponsors in their own age group.” He finds that “newcomers today seem to have a lot more facts about A.A., maybe because there's a lot of information out there and so many come directly from rehab—you don't see as many low-botton drunks as in the old days.”

But paradoxically, he notes, “sponsorship seems to be on the wane. This program was built on sponsorship—personally and in service our co-founders Bill W. and Dr. Bob wound up sponsoring each other, only then it was called sharing. I don't think it's less important today. The sponsor can ease the newcomer into life without alcohol and help him or her to navigate the Steps and Traditions. In return I have found that being a sponsor has strengthened my own sobriety. It's true what they say: The best way to keep sobriety is to give it away.”

The A.A. tradition perhaps closest to Bill's heart is anonymity. “It is both practical and spiritual,” he says, “and the longer I'm sober the more important I feel it is to communicate this to newcomers. Otherwise, how can they understand that anonymity is simply humility at work? It reminds us that personal ambition has no place in A.A., that we're each a vital but small part of a great whole, and that the unity and welfare of the Fellowship must come before personal gain.”



Please post *Twelve Tips on Keeping Your Holiday Season Sober and Joyous* (page 10) on your group bulletin board.

A.A. at Ground Zero

“When anyone, anywhere reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there. And for that, I am responsible.”

The words of our Responsibility Declaration, which most often assure help for active alcoholics or A.A. newcomers, have taken on a special meaning in the aftermath of the tragic events of September 11, 2001. Shortly after crews of firefighters, police, medical, construction and other workers began the massive cleanup operation at the site of the collapsed World Trade Center twin towers, A.A. members among them — working virtually around the clock, and too exhausted to make their regular meetings — began asking for meetings near the site. New York members responded immediately, and in the midst of the horror and chaos, there are now two rooms where workers can come straight from what has come to be called “the pile” into the supporting atmosphere of an A.A. meeting.

The need for an A.A. presence manifested itself from the very beginning. Dorothy D., New York City Intergroup’s institutions chair, is a nurse who was working nights at the disaster site. She tells about running into a fireman who was a member of her group, and as the word spread, meeting and sharing with other A.A.s among the work crews. She started taking literature to work every night to distribute to the workers, and describes one rainy night when she and several other sober alcoholics climbed into an empty bus and had a meeting. She says, “I noticed a change in them simply because A.A. was there.”

Within two weeks of the collapse of the twin towers, the General Service Office heard from a Red Cross official, who had received many requests from labor union shop stewards for an A.A. meeting near the cleanup site. A G.S.O. staff member phoned Dorothy D. and also got in touch with Richard S., Southeast New York area’s Cooperation With the Professional Community chair, and the two service workers met with Red Cross personnel to find a way to establish meetings in these difficult conditions.

They faced real organizational challenges. Starting a

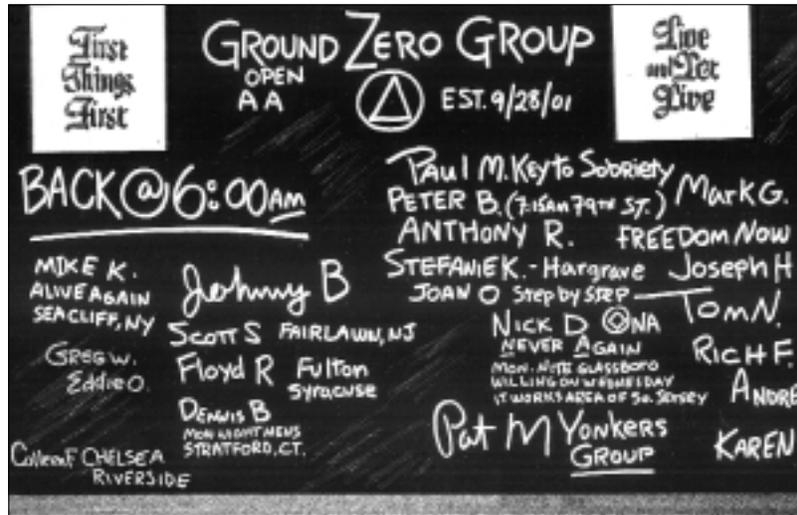
meeting in a disaster area is vastly more complicated than the proverbial “coffeepot and a resentment,” and A.A.’s tradition of cooperating with other organizations is vital. In many respects, the task was similar to that of taking meetings to prisons or other institutions, for not only is Ground Zero designated a crime scene, but the cleanup is volatile and extremely dangerous. A.A.s who volunteer must follow the stringent rules and regulations established to maintain safety and security in the area. Only people with photo ID badges are allowed on

the site, and members who are responsible for the two A.A. rooms must travel to Red Cross headquarters in Brooklyn to apply for badges, which need to be renewed every few weeks. Dorothy and Richard coordinate the work of other volunteers, relaying names and other information to the Red Cross as the first step in the certification process. They

estimate that about 50 people will be needed to keep the two rooms open.

Throughout, Red Cross workers have been generous with their time, their help, and their understanding of A.A. principles. The first order of business was finding a meeting room that would be readily accessible but also ensure anonymity. The A.A.s were assigned a room on the second floor of a Red Cross respite center at a university, which provides meals, sleeping quarters, and other services for cleanup crews. It is far enough from the center of activity to protect anonymity, and identified only by a circle and triangle on the door. Signs posted throughout the area invited “friends of Bill W.” to come in, and word of mouth helped spread the news that A.A. was there. A week or so later, because getting from one side of the “pile” to the other can be hazardous, the Red Cross provided a second room, at a nearby hotel on the south side of the disaster area.

Richard S. believes “just the fact that the room is there is the important thing,” and describes it as a “cross between an alkathon and a hospitality suite.” At the university, two A.A. members are there 24 hours a day, working rotating 6-hour shifts, and the goal for the hotel is also to provide a round-the-clock presence. G.S.O., New York Intergroup and some of the A.A. volunteers have donated literature, as well as Steps, Slogans, and other material (which have been discreetly placed so they are not visible to the casual passerby).



Some workers have also started putting stickers (the circle and triangle or one of the slogans) on their hard hats, so they can recognize each other during the long days and nights.

The two A.A. rooms are places to rest, to talk, to meditate, to call a sponsor on a cell phone. Richard commented, "The guys just need to be there, in the atmosphere of a meeting. Their whole demeanor changes after they've been there a few minutes." Many workers bring food because they have only a short lunch or dinner break. Typically, the men (as well as a few women) will come in with the day's work on their minds, but quickly relax into just talking A.A.. When enough people show up, someone will usually say, "Let's have a meeting."

Dorothy D. reports being tremendously moved when, on the day the first scheduled meeting took place, one of the men wrote on the board: "Ground Zero A.A. Group, established September 28, 2001." Because cleanup crews work long hours with few breaks, the schedule of "formal" meetings remains flexible, and times are set at the workers' convenience. The format varies. Literature — *Daily Reflections*, the Twelve and Twelve, or the Big Book — often provides the topic, and sometimes one of the men will offer to qualify.

Whether impromptu or scheduled, meetings are always a mix of people, for there are numerous A.A.s from outside New York among the firefighters, police, and other workers. Many have traveled long distances to help, taking time off from their jobs or using vacation time, simply to be of service. New York City Intergroup has provided meeting lists for out-of-towners who can manage to attend regular meetings, with special listings for new locations for downtown groups displaced by the devastation throughout the area.

A.A.'s future at Ground Zero is full of uncertainties. No one knows how long the cleanup operation will continue or what form it may take in the days and weeks to come. Space in the area as a whole is already at a premium, and it is possible that A.A. can lose its first meeting place when conditions get back to normal. Questions abound, but one thing is absolutely certain: suffering alcoholics have reached out for help, and the hand of A.A. is there.

Note: In the days and weeks immediately following the WTC disaster your General Service Office received hundreds of cards, letters, faxes and e-mails sending A.A. love and support from all over the world. Some A.A. groups sent cards with the signatures of the members. All at G.S.O. are deeply touched and grateful for this outpouring of concern. We are all well; none of our employees had family members lost, although all New Yorkers knew people at the scene. Thanks to all.

Committees Clarify Roles and Goals In Northeast Ohio

Last summer the Northeast Ohio Area invited all of its service committees to a "Brainstorming Workshop—Potluck Style" on August 12. Explains delegate Tina H.: "Our committees are hardworking entities, but we'd discovered that in some cases, much of what one was doing tended to overlap the efforts of another—in fact, the chair of one committee acknowledged that it was clueless about what the others were doing. This meant that in trying to carry the message, we were not making the best use of our resources."

The workshop was attended not only by area committee members, Tina says, "but by people such as our immediate past delegate Bob McK., who now serves as area archivist, some district committee members and general service representatives, and other concerned A.A.s. Not all the committees showed," she notes, "but the show went on, and afterward word of it spread."

Ron J., chairman of the area's Committee on Cooperation With the Professional Community, and Martina S., who chairs the Public Information Committee, both noted that their members were often reaching out to the same people—among them health professionals, the clergy and court officials—and needed to communicate and collaborate more closely to avoid overlapping their efforts.

A similar situation has existed between the work of the Treatment Facilities and Correctional Facilities committees, Tina points out. "We have 37 adult prisons in Ohio and as many as 15 of them are here in the northeastern part of the state. Many A.A. newcomers in treatment centers are also on parole. So upon their release from treatment, whose job is it to help ease their transition into mainstream A.A.? It has been suggested that the C.F. and T.F. committees form a common subcommittee to tend to this important need—to make sure that no needy alcoholic falls between the cracks, yet at the same time avoid duplication of responsibilities." She stresses that "in every way the work of our service committees is supported by our intergroups in Akron, Canton and Cleveland. They frequently show us the way and do a remarkable job."

Ample food for thought at the Brainstorming Workshop was provided by the potluck repast. "Almost everyone brought something," Tina reports. "We feasted on chicken wings, pasta casserole, strawberry shortcake, triple-chocolate layer cake—you name it. We worked hard and ate hearty." So successful was the workshop that "another one is being planned for next spring," she says. "As we suggested in our flyer inviting people to

share their experience and ideas at the first workshop, let us heed what Dr. Bob told the Fellowship in his last talk: "We understand what love is, and we understand what service is. So let's bear those two things in mind."

Julio E. Is a Welcome Addition To G.S.O. Staff

Just as the General Service Office staff members were doing their biennial rotation rock this fall—relinquishing current positions, packing up personal effects and moving on to other offices, other tasks—a new member "rotated" in from the Fellowship at large: Julio E., of New York City, whose first assignment at G.S.O. is on the Correctional Facilities desk.

Although born in New York, when he was 7 Julio returned with his family to their native Santo Domingo, the Dominican Republic. "My parents and brother, my only sibling, were not alcoholic," he says, "but one of my favorite uncles was—poor Manuel died from complications of alcoholism." Julio remembers that he had his "first drink at 12 or 13" and joined A.A. at 26. "But I took the Steps and sponsorship and suggestions cafeteria-style," he notes ruefully, "and when I arrived in Manhattan a couple of years later, I thought 'the hell with it' and picked up the first of many more drinks to come. I also drifted into drugs and often made a spectacle of myself."

Then, on a dour winter's day, Julio says, "I hit a spiritual and emotional bottom, and only then did I receive the gift of desperation. I asked a coworker, whom I knew to be sober in A.A., for help. She took me into a meeting room—one like meeting rooms all over the Fellowship—and I was relieved to be back in the only place I'd ever found hope. I marked my sobriety date from that night, February 1, 1993. Since then I've done everything in A.A. I was asked to do. No more cafeteria-style highs-and-drys—it was full-fare sobriety from then on." The two Manhattan groups Julio has found most meaningful to his sobriety are Buena Voluntad (Good Will) and his home group, Carlyle.

Armed with a Licenciatura—a B.A. in psychology—that he had earned in Santo Domingo, Julio began working in the substance-abuse field. Before coming to G.S.O. in July, he was on the staff of a South Bronx residential drug-rehabilitation center for women with children. "Last January," he recalls, "I was working, going to meetings, doing my thing, when my sponsor Bob R. mentioned that G.S.O. was looking for a new staff person. I'd gotten used to following Bob's suggestions, so I

faxed in my résumé, just before the deadline for applications, but really didn't anticipate a response. My astonishment at the chain of events that brought me to G.S.O. still hasn't worn off. I am grateful for this chance to be a part of the General Service structure, and overwhelmed by the friendliness and helpfulness of everyone here."

During Julio's first months at G.S.O., Eva S., now on the Group Services desk, will be in touch with Spanish-speaking correspondents in the U.S./Canada, a responsibility that gradually will become Julio's and will stay with him even when he rotates into a new assignment. Letters in Spanish from other parts of the world will be answered by Bill A. on the International desk.

"What I appreciate most about my work in Corrections" Julio observes, "are the letters that come in from A.A.s and other alcoholics behind walls, many of them penned in Spanish. I am touched by the trust of these people who are reaching out for help, often for the first time, and I identify with them when they speak of feeling hope for their lives at last. That is just how I felt when I came to A.A., sick and broken in spirit. Hope, as so many of us A.A.s have found, is a great antidote for depression and fear."

Japanese-Speaking Group Takes Off in Northern California

The first Japanese-speaking group in Northern California started up in a church in Mountain View, about 40 miles south of San Francisco, on May 27. The five members present at the meeting settled on the name Shimpo Group, says Doug G., a founder of the group and recording secretary for the Northern Coastal Area, "because shimpo means 'progress,' and that's what we're all hoping for. We also decided that once we entered the meeting room, we would use only Japanese out of consideration to any Japanese-speaking newcomers who find their way to us."

The long threads of several seemingly unrelated happenings led to the formation of the fledgling Shimpo Group, and they go all the way back to Doug's eighth-grade school days, which he spent in Tokyo as an exchange student. He learned to read and write in Japanese and became fluent in the language, an ability that would serve him well years later when a company he worked for in California transferred him to a small town some 100 miles west of Tokyo. "That was when my drinking really took off," Doug acknowledges. "But once back home, living in New Jersey, I hit bottom and in October 1987 joined Alcoholics Anonymous. Ten

months later I returned to California.”

Seven years later a trusted servant from Northern California encouraged Doug to start a Japanese-speaking meeting in the Silicon Valley. “Numerous Japanese companies had offices there,” Doug notes, “and, I also, knew of colleagues caught for drunk driving who had been mandated by the courts to attend A.A. meetings, only to be transferred back home to Japan without ever having heard the A.A. message. I knew there were approximately 250 A.A. meetings in Japan at the time, including those for women, young people and online.” Thinking back, Doug shakes his head: “All this concerned me greatly, but I was heavily involved in A.A. service—as I am now—and couldn’t seem to summon the time or motivation to start a meeting from scratch.”

Then, one night in April, he told his story at a meeting that was then opened for general sharing. Remembering, Doug says “a fellow named Aki commented that much of Japanese society doesn’t understand about alcoholism, but that thanks to A.A., which he had learned about in treatment, he’d been sober a few months. Aki was the first Japanese A.A. I had met in the Bay Area. While he was sharing, I pulled out a business card and scrawled on the back in Japanese, ‘Please call me. I have a Japanese Big Book for you.’ I handed him the card and saw his face light up upon reading my note. After the meeting we talked again and were joined by Greg H., who divulged that he too spoke Japanese. Suddenly the words of our Third Tradition came to mind, ‘. . . Any two or three alcoholics gathered together for sobriety may call themselves an A.A. group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation.’ Then I knew the time had come to start the long-discussed Japanese-speaking group.”

Today the Shimpo Group is “trudging,” Doug observes. “To let people know it exists, I created a flyer to put up in local Japanese supermarkets and places of worship, with permission of course. In Japanese it says simply: ‘Are you concerned about your drinking? Try Alcoholics Anonymous.’ The name of our group and the time it meets appear in smaller print, and a map is included. I have to visit the supermarkets weekly to repost the flyers, in line with their one-week time limit, but it keeps me in service. We also place a short public service announcement, free of charge, in the local Japanese weekly newspaper.”

Soon after the group was started, Doug adds, “we learned that our treasurer, Greg H., and his Japanese wife would be traveling to Japan on vacation. Greg arranged to visit Tokyo and make our first contribution toward the literature that JSO had kindly sent us. The money came solely from our Seventh Tradition basket and was an expression of gratitude from just a few of us. It is in the basket that money and spirituality mix!”

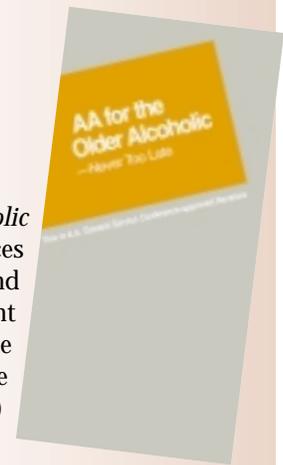
New From G.S.O.

This fall G.S.O. has released two pamphlets directed to special population groups, that were approved by the 2001 General Service Conference.

- “*Can A.A. Help Me Too? Black/African Americans Share Their Stories*” offers a bridge to the A.A. Fellowship for those newcomers who may be reluctant because of the mistaken notion that A.A. is not for them. (P-51; 40¢)



- “*A.A. for the Older Alcoholic — Never Too Late*” replaces “*Time to Start Living*,” and relates the stories of eight men and women who came to A.A. after age 60. Large print. (P-22; 40¢)



Grapevine Welcomes Seasoned Hand Des T. As Executive Editor

In selecting Desmond T. to serve as executive editor of the Fellowship’s international monthly journal, the directors of the A.A. Grapevine have looked to a long-sober member and past general service trustee (1988-92). “My entire adult academic and business life has been centered on the communication of ideas,” he says. “Writing, editing and publication project management have been the cornerstones of my professional career. Where better to put my experience to use than in the service of the Grapevine, which is written by alcoholics for alcoholics and consequently gives me the opportunity to move in ever-widening circles of A.A. service.”

“When I think of the Grapevine, so often referred to as our ‘meeting in print,’ ” Des remembers, “I think of how I’ve carried a copy in my briefcase for the past 30 years. I would be in a strange city, perhaps tired, frustrated and feeling lonely—then I’d open my briefcase, and looking up at me would be the latest issue of the Grapevine. Invariably, on these occasions a sense of tranquility washed over me—the same feeling I got in my first year at Manhattan’s Mustard Seed Group, when I said I was six months sober but had a compulsion to drink again and people in the room shared their experience, strength and hope and helped me stay away from a drink one more day.”

Des officially started his new job in September. He wholeheartedly concurs with A.A. co-founder Bill W. who called the Grapevine “our biggest and best means of communicating current A.A. thought and experience in staying sober, in hanging together, and in serving.” (*Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, p. 31) “The Grapevine has been an integral part of my own life for years,” says Des, who was a director on the Grapevine Corporate Board from 1984-92 and chairman in 1989—and as executive editor will again be a director on the board.

Born and raised in New York City and environs, Des, a Phi Beta Kappa graduate, holds a B.A. and M.A. in classical languages (Greek and Latin) from Catholic University of America and Manhattan College, respectively, and an M.B.A. in marketing from Fordham University. He recalls that his social drinking “accelerated after college. I knew of A.A., and while teaching in New Jersey I even brought in a member to speak to my students, but I didn’t think what he said applied to me, just to ‘those alcoholics.’ Then one day, while working as a media buyer and account executive for a major corporation, I passed out in the office of a large advertising agency. Later I had to ‘fess up about my drinking to my boss, who gave me a choice: ‘Go to A.A. or lose your job.’ I went to A.A.”

Des notes that “it took years for the program to sink in. I still didn’t think of myself as an alcoholic—I was too smart for that. When I read the Twelve Steps listed on those beige-colored window shades at meetings, I said to myself, ‘They’re a piece of cake, except maybe Step One—that could be a problem.’ Steps Two through Twelve all contain strong spiritual elements, something I was comfortable with as a consequence of my strong religious background. I felt that I could deal with those Steps proactively. Step One, however, was something else again, and it took all kinds of help—sponsorship, meetings, phone calls—before I surrendered.” That was in April 1973, and Des has been sober ever since. He stays close to the program and the people, he says, and attends meetings most frequently at the Carlyle, Gotham, Serenity East and Citicorp groups in Manhattan.

For 25 years he headed a company specializing in corporate communications and tried to practice the principles of A.A. in his business as well as personal affairs. “For instance,” Des explains, “through large group meetings as well as ‘drop by the office’ one-to-one sessions, I incorporated the spiritual principles of the Steps and Traditions into the business environment in order to empower both recovering alcoholic and nonalcoholic employees. It worked very well.”

He believes strongly that one of the best ways A.A. carries the message is in the pages of the Grapevine and feels it “is doing dynamite work on its Web site [www.aagrapevine.org]. Both the present-day and archival material posted are powerful tools of recovery and have been helping to carry the A.A. message to alcoholics all over the world. As executive editor, I want the Grapevine to be only an arm’s length away whenever anyone, anywhere reaches out for help.”

Thanks largely to the principles of A.A., “which I strive to use in all my activities,” Des says, “I have an active and rewarding life out of the Fellowship as well as

BOX 459

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in." Between them he and his wife, Janelle, whom he met and married in A.A., have five children and 10 grandchildren. As a trustee of a spiritual center at a major university in New York, he has participated in developing spiritually based seminars for business people and recovering alcoholics. His interests are wide-ranging: "I love reading, working out and playing, singing and composing songs on my guitar—and going to Knicks and Yankee games with my sons and friends," he reports. "I also enjoy Broadway shows and concerts. I've experienced what Bill W. called 'a new life of endless possibilities [that] can be lived if we are willing to continue our awakening, through the practice of A.A.'s Twelve Steps.'" (*As Bill Sees It*, p. 8) With a smile Des adds, "Bill wrote that in the Grapevine."

2002 Regional and Special Forums

Regional Forums strengthen the Fellowship's Three Legacies of Recovery, Unity and Service, by providing an opportunity for A.A. group and area representatives, as well as any interested individual A.A.s in a particular region, to share experience, strength and hope with representatives of the General Service Board and G.S.O. and Grapevine staff members.

Special Forums are designed for remote, sparsely populated or urban areas.

These weekend sharing sessions enhance and widen communication, and help spark new ideas in better carrying the message through service work.

Mailings regarding each Forum will be sent to G.S.R.s, area committee members, delegates, and central offices and intergroups, approximately three months ahead of time. The final Forum in 2001 will be a Special "Hispanic" Forum, December 8-9, Atkins High School, Austin, Texas. In 2002 Regional Forums are planned as follows:

- *Special "Inner City"* — March 23-24: Congress Plaza Hotel and Convention Center, Chicago, Illinois
- *Special* — May 25-26: Hotel de Montagnais, Chicoutimi, Quebec
- *Western Canada* — June 7-9: Ramada Hotel, Regina, Saskatchewan
- *Pacific* — July 12-14: Holiday Inn, Phoenix, Arizona
- *Eastern Canada* — September 27-29: Fredericton Inn, Fredericton, New Brunswick
- *Southeast* — November 15-17: Huntsville Hilton Hotel, Huntsville, Alabama

Holiday Gift Ideas

Many A.A.s will no doubt be giving and receiving copies of the new 4th Edition Big Book this holiday season.

For those who got their Big Book orders in early, another idea might be the biographies of A.A.'s co-founders: *Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers* (B-8) \$7.50; *"Pass It On," The Story of Bill Wilson and How the A.A. Message Reached the World* (B-9) \$8.00.

Some A.A. members report that they never see *Box 4-5-9*, so a subscription to A.A.'s newsletter provides a year-long gift for your home group. A bulk subscription of 10 copies each of 6 issues is \$6.00.

For years now, subscriptions to the A.A. Grapevine (as well as *La Viña*) have been a popular gift and one that may be "passed on" to others throughout the year.



You may also order all three *Best of the Grapevine* anthologies, Vols. I-III, for \$22.50 per set.

Most of these items may be ordered from G.S.O. or through your local intergroup or central office. Grapevine books and other items are available by contacting the A.A. Grapevine: Grand Central Station, Box 1980, New

York, NY 10163-1980.

Roundtable Seeks User-Friendly Ways to Enhance Group Sharing

In August a small group of U.S./Canada A.A.s met with General Service Office personnel to brainstorm ideas on how the sharing of computerized group records between the areas and G.S.O. might be made more user-friendly. The roundtable discussion was part of an ongoing dialogue with area records secretaries and registrars in a concerted effort to simplify, improve and speed up the process of contacting all groups and updating their information. Participants ranged from some with little or no computer savvy to those with in-depth programming expertise.

Explains roundtable participant Lilliana Murphy, (nonalcoholic) head of G.S.O.'s Information Services: "The way it works now is that a notice is sent each year to the areas asking for updated information on all groups listed with G.S.O. The data gathered forms the

basis of much of G.S.O.'s work, such as the publication of the A.A. Directories, published in time for the summer vacation season. Three directories, one each for Canada, Eastern U.S. and Western U.S., furnish information helpful to those who are traveling and looking for A.A. contacts at groups at unfamiliar destinations." A new computer system installed recently at G.S.O., Lilliana points out, "now permits us to introduce new systems that will make record-keeping more accurate and less cumbersome."

Commenting on the new system, Elaine Soroka (nonalcoholic) special projects manager at G.S.O., says that "last year a questionnaire was mailed to all delegates and area group record keepers asking for information regarding the types of hardware and software they currently used." More importantly, she adds, the questionnaire asked, 'What is it you need that we are not providing?' Basically, the responses we received from 43 areas indicated that they would like 'something' to replace the eight-year-old Delarea program now in use. Over the past years many areas have upgraded their computer equipment and many more record keepers are conversant with PCs, so the time seems ripe to look at structuring more sophisticated applications. But before we do, we want all the input from the areas that we can get."

Correctional Facilities

Letters Inside Out And Back Give New Meaning to Service

For Joe J., a member of the Institutions Committee of the Baltimore, Maryland, Intergroup, corresponding with an A.A. member in prison has made him "profoundly aware of two things: I am blessed to be able to attend meetings where and when I wish; and often the only salient difference between an A.A. member inside the walls and one outside is that the former got caught."

Describing his experience in the second quarter, 2001, issue of the Area 29 *Margenser Newsletter*, Joe says that some time ago he learned of the General Service Office's Corrections Correspondence Service (C.C.S.), through which A.A.s outside correspond with fellow members inside jails and prisons—and promptly joined. Soon after, he reports, "I received the name and

address of an A.A. in Southern California and wrote to him. At first our communication was tentative; I wanted to be of service but was unsure of how to go about it. I figured my new friend could hear more memorable 'war stories' in prison than any I could dredge up, so my letters have had a lot more to do with 'what we are like now' than 'what we used to be like.' I also share my experience in service."

Noting that "my A.A. friend and I usually exchange letters about twice a month," Joe relates that in May he was traveling and missed his turn. "When I returned home," he says, "there was a second letter in which my friend asked haltingly if I were still sober—and enclosed a self-addressed, stamped envelope to make it easy to reply! For me, guilt is a form of pain that is obeyed, so I doubt that I'll be missing any more turns at writing."

In another letter, Joe says, "I was reminded that it is difficult to get inmates to let down their guard and share at a level that makes recovery from alcoholism possible. I remember when I sat in an institution myself and looked at the Twelve Steps on a wall shade. I wanted to stay sober but decided that the only other human being who'd hear my Fourth Step inventory would be one about to move to the other side of the world—where he could be trusted to remain silent. So I understand that it's a lot to expect someone to trust enough to display 'deflation at depth' in a place where a show of weakness is a dangerous liability."

Joe's correspondent told him his A.A. group addresses this problem by using the Grapevine and its Spanish counterpart, La Viña, to generate topics of discussion. "Copies of both repeatedly change hands," Joe says, "which indicates that the magazines are much more widely read than circulation figures would indicate. Both of us were glad to see the Advisory Action of this year's General Service Conference stating that La Viña, which was started up in 1996 as an experiment, 'will continue to be published by the Grapevine and supported by the General Service Board as a service to the Fellowship.' La Viña has a demonstrated ability to spread A.A.'s language of the heart as it is passed from one alcoholic to another."

At G.S.O. the Correctional Facilities desk receives approximately 180 letters a month from inmates asking to correspond with A.A.s on the outside. The C.F. desk tries to fill these requests as quickly as possible, but still there is a waiting list. Weighing his own experience, Joe says, "I encourage everyone to participate in the C.C.S. program. Remember, you can be as anonymous as you wish. G.S.O. has guidelines to help in that regard and attempts to match A.A. members from different parts of the country. It needn't take a lot of time—and the rewards can come from the most unexpected places."

Twelve Tips on Keeping Your Holiday Season Sober and Joyous

Holiday parties without liquid spirits may still seem a dreary prospect to new A.A.s. But many of us have enjoyed the happiest holidays of our lives sober—an idea we would never have dreamed of, wanted, or believed possible when drinking. Here are some tips for having an all-round ball without a drop of alcohol.



1 *Line up extra A.A. activities for the holiday season.* Arrange to take newcomers to meetings, answer the phones at a clubhouse or central office, speak, help with dishes, or visit the alcoholic ward at a hospital.



2 *Be host to A.A. friends, especially newcomers.* If you don't have a place where you can throw a formal party, take one person to a diner and spring for the coffee.



3 *Keep your A.A. telephone list with you all the time.* If a drinking urge or panic comes—postpone everything else until you've called an A.A.



4 *Find out about the special holiday parties, meetings, or other celebrations*

given by groups in your area, and go. If you're timid, take someone newer than you are.



5 *Skip any drinking occasion you are nervous about.* Remember how clever you were at excuses when drinking? Now put the talent to good use. No office party is as important as saving your life.



6 *If you have to go to a drinking party and can't take an A.A. with you, keep some candy handy.*



7 *Don't think you have to stay late.* Plan in advance an "important date" you have to keep.



8 *Worship in your own way.*



9 *Don't sit around brooding.* Catch up on those books, museums, walks, and letters.



10 *Don't start now getting worked up about all those holiday temptations.* Remember—"one day at a time."



11 *Enjoy the true beauty of holiday love and joy.* Maybe you cannot give material gifts—but this year, you can give love.



12 *"Having had a . . ."* No need to spell out the Twelfth Step here, since you already know it.

Calendar of Events

Events listed here are presented solely as a service to readers, not as an endorsement by the General Service Office. For any additional information, please use the addresses provided.

December

- 8-9 – *Austin, Texas*. Special “Hispanic” Regional Forum. Write: Forum Coordinator, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163
- 8-9—*Aguacaliente de Cartago, Costa Rica*, X Conv. Provincial. Write: Com. Org., Edificio Villanueva 2º Piso, Oficina #4, Cartago, Costa Rica
- 24-26 – *Copperas Cove, Texas*. Fifth Annual Christmas Alkathon. Write: Ch., 403 Sunset Lane, Apt. D, Copperas Cove, TX 76522

January

- 4-5 – *Mesa, Arizona* Mesa Round-Up. Write: Ch., Box 814, Mesa, AZ 85201
- 11-13—*Montgomery, Alabama*. Alabama/Northwest Florida Area I Assembly. Write: Ch., 8121 Lillian Hwy #45, Pensacola, FL 32506
- 11-13—*Garden City, Kansas*. Southwest Kansas Conf. Write: Ch., 916 Davis, Garden City, KS 67846
- 11-13 – *South Padre Island, Texas*. Serenity by the Sea. Write: Ch., CL Box 4-26, South Padre Island, Texas 78597
- 11-13—*León, Guanajuato, México*. XXVI Reunión de Servicios Generales de la Región Centro Poniente, Territorio Norte. Write: Com. Org., Blvd. A. López Mateos N° 428, 1º Piso, Apartado Postal 5-78, León, Gto., Mexico
- 18-20—*Cienfuegos, Cuba* IX Aniversario de la Llegada del Mensaje. Write:: OSG, c/27, N° 156 entre L y M, Vedado, CP 10400, Ciudad de La Habana, Cuba
- 24-27—*Fort Walton Beach, Florida*. Twelfth Annual Emerald Coast Jamboree. Write: Ch., Box 875, Fort Walton Beach, FL 32549-0875
- 24-27 – *Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada*. 28th Annual Winter Conf. Write: Ch., 949 Beaverbrook Street, Winnipeg, MB R3N 1P2
- 25-27—*Kansas City, Kansas*. 20th Annual Sunflower Roundup. Write: Secy., 10604 Bluejacket Street, Overland Park, KS 66214

February

- 1-3—*Wichita Falls, Texas*. XVIII Reunión de la Zona Norte de Texas. Write: Com. Org., Box 1284, Arlington, TX 76004
- 1-3 – *Melbourne, Florida*. Spacecoast Round Up. Write: Ch., Brevard Intergroup, Inc., 720 E. New Haven Ave., Suite #3, Melbourne, FL 32901
- 1-3 – *Fredricton, New Brunswick, Canada*. 15th Annual Mid Winter Roundup. Write: Ch., 181 MacKenzie Avenue, Oromocto, NB E2V 1K5
- 8-10—*Bowling Green, Kentucky*. 51st State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 3570, Bowling Green, KY 42102
- 8-10 – *Columbus, Ohio*. East Central Region Conf. of Delegates Past & Present. Write: Ch., Box 2131, Columbus, OH 43216, Att: ECR Conference of Delegates.
- 14-17—*Denver, Colorado*. 38th Annual International Women’s Conf. Write: Ch., 12081 West Alameda Pkwy., #260, Denver, CO 80228
- 15-16 – *Whitefish, Montana*. Into-Action Weekend. Write: Ch., 536 Park Avenue, Whitefish, MT 59937
- 15-17 – *Little Rock, Arkansas*. 20th Annual Area 04 District 9 Winter Holiday Conv. Write: Tr., Box 26135, Little Rock, AR 72221
- 15-17—*Virginia Beach, Virginia*. 26th Annual Oceanfront Conf. Write: Registrar, Box 66173, Virginia Beach, VA 23466
- 22-23 – *Sikeston, Missouri*. 21st Annual Five Corners Conv. Write: Ch., Box 158, Sikeston, MO 63801
- 22-24—*Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*. 11th Annual NERASSA. Write: Ch., Box 10052, Pittsburgh, PA 15236-0052

March

- 1-3—*Fresno, California*. PRAASA. Write: Ch., Box 836, Fair Oaks, CA 95628-0836
- 8-10—*Yahualica de Gongalez Gallo, Jalisco, Mexico*. XXI Congreso de Area de Jalisco Centro. Write: Com. Org., Mexicaltengo N° 1238 S.J. A.P. Postal 1-76, Guadalajara, Jalisco, México
- 8-10—*Jekyll Island, Georgia*. 15th Unity Weekend. Write: Ch., Box 214911, S. Daytona, FL 32121
- 15-17—*Columbus, Indiana*. 49th Annual State Conv. Write: Ch., 967 North Ewing, Indianapolis, IN 46201
- 15-17 – *Toronto, Ontario, Canada*. Ontario Regional Conf. Write: Ch., Box #43189, Sheppard Centre RPO, 4841 Yonge St., North York, ON M2N 6N1
- 22-24 – *Newport, Rhode Island*. Rhode Island Conv. Write: Ch., Box 1058, Charlestown, RI 02813
- 23-24—*Chicago, Illinois*. Special “Inner City” Regional Forum. Write: Forum Coordinator, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163
- 28-30—*San Salvador, El Salvador*. XXX Conv. de Centroamérica y Panamá. Write: Com. Org., Apartado Postal (06) No. 132, C. Postal 001123, San Salvador, El Salvador
- 29-31 – *Ames, Iowa*. Aim for Ames. Write: Ch., Box 2522, Ames, Iowa 50010

Planning a Future Event?

To be included in the *Box 4-5-9* Calendar, information must be received at G.S.O. three months prior to the event. We list events of two or more days. For your convenience and ours — please type or print the information to be listed on the Bulletin Board page, and mail to us:

Date of event: from _____ to _____, 200_____

Name of event: _____

Place (city, state or prov.): _____

For information, write: (exact mailing address) _____

Contact phone # (for office use only): _____

