

# FINAL REPORT

## NORTHEAST REGIONAL FORUM

JUNE 2~4, 2017  
MARS, PENNSYLVANIA

LAST NAMES OF CLASS A (NON-ALCOHOLIC) TRUSTEES  
AND NON-ALCOHOLIC EMPLOYEES ONLY APPEAR IN THIS REPORT

Dear A.A. Friends,

Please mark your calendar for the next Northeast Regional Forum, which will take place in Tarrytown, New York May 31- June 2, 2019 at the Westchester Marriot Hotel.

A.A. World Services, Inc.  
c/o General Service Office  
P.O. Box 459  
Grand Central Station  
New York, NY 10163  
(212) 870-3120  
Fax: (212) 870-3003  
E-mail: [regionalforums@aa.org](mailto:regionalforums@aa.org)  
G.S.O.'s A.A. Website: [www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org)

# CONTENTS

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Introduction .....                        | 1  |
| Workshop Reports .....                    | 2  |
| Full Forum<br>Presentation/Workshop ..... | 8  |
| Presentations .....                       | 11 |
| Past Trustees' Sharing .....              | 21 |
| Closing Remarks .....                     | 27 |

# INTRODUCTION

The 2017 Northeast Regional Forum was held in Mars, Pennsylvania. Registration for the Forum was **413**. This included **282** members attending their very first Forum—many were welcomed at the Forum Orientation on Friday evening. In addition, the Northeast Regional Forum marked the **202<sup>nd</sup>** Regional Forum since its inception in 1975.

# WORKSHOP REPORTS

7:00—9:00 p.m.

## **“Supporting Grapevine: From Your Story to Service” (Executive Editor/Publisher: Ami B. / Reporter: Don B.)**

Each workshop participant was asked to brainstorm about the kind of articles **they** would write for the special NERF jumbo edition of the Grapevine. Participants came up with enough ideas for over four regular issues. Topics covered a wide range of experience and interests:

- “Imperfect sobriety”;
- “A.A. in Africa, circa 1990s”;
- “Making amends”;
- “Maintaining a spiritual routine away from home”;
- “White-knuckle sobriety”;
- “The importance of humor”

Suggested titles included: Not My Father’s Sobriety; Finding True Love Through Service; The Power of Example; Jail With and Without A.A.; and Forgiveness — the Ultimate Gift.

Each person was encouraged to write a personal story from the heart that paints a picture for the reader. Therefore, workshop members were asked (and answered): Where were you? What did it look like and feel like?

People can submit written articles of any length or an audio story up to 7 minutes long. Anyone can be an instant expert on the Grapevine by simply reading or announcing the information from one of the Grapevine cards about subscription types and prices, book offerings, how to support the Grapevine, the Grapevine App., the 4 Seasons of Service initiative, the Daily Grapevine Quote, or Grapevine eBooks. The Grapevine Today newsletter (on the back is La Viña Hoy) describes everything you need to know to be a GVR (or RLV). You can also support Grapevine through the Carry the Message initiative, by buying an anonymous gift subscription certificate and giving it to your area chair or to the Grapevine office to pass it on to an alcoholic in need (as in a correctional facility). This can be done by any individual, group, intergroup, district, area or other service committee. We can all go out and spread the word about all the great things the Grapevine has to offer as a tool for sobriety.

## **“Carrying the Message into Correctional Facilities” (Moderator: Dale R. / Reporter: Alex W.)**

The workshop attendees discussed two questions: “What is corrections correspondence?” and “How do I get a correction committee up and running?”

In response to the first question, members shared their experience, strength and hope and gave several examples where information about corrections correspondence could be found, such as the A.A. pamphlet Corrections Correspondence, and A.A. Guidelines on Corrections Committees. Members shared that you could write to G.S.O. and get connected with inmates (incarcerated for at least six months) two regions away. Members shared that there are currently 6,800 active relationships at present, and members can with any jail that is interested throughout U.S. and Canada. It was noted that the First National Corrections Conference is to be held in St. Louis in November 2017.

In response to “How do I get a corrections committee up and running?” members shared much experience, such as: Utilizing cluster-based workshops; starting the committee with a person willing to do the “legwork”; remembering that members must operate under prison’s rules; recognizing that sponsorship and mentorship are very important; and making sure that enough people are involved, since it is easy to get burned out if enough people are not helping. Others shared about the importance of remembering that it is an A.A. meeting; not making promises that can’t be kept; and countering the frustration of “red tape” with the question “what is my sobriety worth?” Workshop attendees agreed that people who are serious about their sobriety are most often willing to go through discomfort in order to do this kind of Twelfth Step work. One member said, “Fear abates once you know what to expect” and reminded all that, after all, it is a meeting.

Another member shared that doing this work is part of a process, and members would do well to keep in mind that an A.A. performing this type of service work will be entering into a maximum-security prison. In doing so, certain rules may apply, such as taking a TB test and attending a five-hour orientation. Many dedicated people in A.A. do corrections work. Experience showed that success came from starting slow, and doing the work a little at a time. Finally, another member shared that sponsorship is a very important element in corrections.

### **“Service Sponsorship” (Moderator: Mark N. / Reporter: Michael S.)**

The workshop attendees discussed two questions:

*Is a service sponsor necessary and what is his or her role?*

In response, members agreed that a service sponsor is necessary. However, a service sponsor and a recovery sponsor can be the same person — it is not necessary that they be two different people, although that is an option. Some members said that The Service Manual only takes you so far, but a service sponsor can talk about specific situations. A service sponsor needs to be knowledgeable about our Traditions and Concepts and can guide the member through The A.A. Service Manual Combined with Twelve Concepts for World Service, and the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions.

The second question discussed was: *What works and what doesn’t in service sponsorship and should they have served in your role before?*

Workshop attendees responded that a service sponsor does not need to have held a sponsee’s service position before. In addition, it was generally felt that the gender of the sponsor doesn’t matter in service sponsorship, but an important quality in a service sponsor was that he or she knows how to find information and can show their sponsee how to find it. Some members felt it was necessary for a service sponsor to push his or her sponsee to go to forums and conventions, such as NERAASA and NERF, and to go through The Service Manual, as well as provide guidance navigating through the Concepts and Warranties. Another member said, “Service sponsors gently nudge and do not push” and make sure the sponsee stays connected to his or her committee.

### **“Spirituality” (Moderator: Bob R. / Reporter: Jim T.)**

Discussion in the workshop on spirituality focused on some various sabotages of emotional sobriety. Participants shared how previous life tragedies or negative experiences with organized religion can make the idea of turning to a Higher Power for help hard to swallow. These members talked about how the “gift of desperation” brought them to A.A. and how they learned to walk through the pain and finally recognized tears as healthy and feelings as beautiful. Members acknowledged the importance of literature, sponsorship, and the fellowship found at meetings as helpful to many who find their individual path to emotional sobriety. One member said that the idea on page 55 of the Big Book — that “deep down in every man, woman, and child, is the fundamental idea of God” — led to finding a Higher Power after 5 years of sobriety. For another, the writings in “Emotional Sobriety: the Next Frontier” was crucial. Another referenced page 116 of the “Twelve and Twelve” to illustrate how personal spirituality was found: “We discovered the best possible source of emotional stability to be God himself.”

Those with long-term sobriety reported that emotional sobriety had not been linear — that sober life included periods of darkness and intense tragedy. Another acknowledged that the support of the Fellowship, continuous step work, and an active life of service in A.A. helped to maintain sobriety through the most difficult of circumstances.

### **“Serving as G.S.R. (General Service Representative)” (Moderator: Peggy M. / Reporter: Maureen M.)**

The workshop attendees discussed the G.S.R. experience and described it as the “voice of the group and voice for the group.” An important facet of a G.S.R. is relaying information to the A.A. group. Two questions were discussed:

1. *What do I do as a G.S.R.?* As a G.S.R. you are the voice of the group. A G.S.R. takes concerns to the district or the central committee. He or she is a link between group and the Area and District. A G.S.R. is responsible to listen and distill information into understandable terms and then convey it to home group members. A G.S.R. also must keep both the group and the district informed. A G.S.R. can vote at the Area level. One workshop member said, “Being a G.S.R. opened up my A.A. world. A.A. is part of a larger circle.” A G.S.R. is a “guardian of Traditions.” Also, it was shared by some members that a G.S.R. should foster his or her replacement. A question was raised regarding the amount of time in the A.A. program that a G.S.R. should have. In response, some members suggested that two years was a good amount of time, but each group is autonomous and there is no “time” requirement.
2. *How do we generate enough enthusiasm to get others involved?*
  - Take the time and effort to orient new G.S.R.s (i.e. training);
  - Put on G.S.R. workshops that rotate around an area;
  - Discuss the need for a service sponsor;
  - Use the information contained in The Service Manual as topics for meetings;
  - Learn as much as possible so that I can stay informed and do a good job, thus making it more attractive to others
  - Find a strong home group that knows the Traditions
  - Do not shy away from controversial topics at a business meeting

### **“How to Keep Service Work More Interesting” (Moderator: Sue W. /Reporter: Tammie E.)**

Workshop attendees were asked two questions in regard to an ever-present question — how do we keep service work interesting? The first question, “*What can I do to make service work more attractive at my home group and my district?*” garnered many answers from members, such as:

- Lead by example (I may be the only copy of The Service Manual that another may see);
- Show enthusiasm (get jazzed and smile!);
- Reserve complaints and other difficulties for a service sponsor or other trusted servant;
- Educate group members about the importance of service work on a personal level, as well as for the good of A.A. as a whole;
- Utilize pamphlets, encourage questions, provide answers and fellowship;
- Express a positive attitude, share about benefits of service to sobriety and incorporate these benefits into our personal stories at the podium;
- When asking for help, ask for specific help – do not make generalized calls for help or assistance.

In response to the second question, “*How do we keep them coming back to service?*” workshop attendees had many suggestions, such as:

- Practice the true spirit of rotation, leave positions vacant until someone new steps up;
- Encourage newcomers to ask questions — make them feel welcome and needed;
- Create an environment that values service;
- Compliment service workers on a job well done;
- Encourage and educate about service sponsorship;
- Hold an orientation on service positions;
- Whenever possible, travel together;
- Show gratitude!!

### **“Supporting La Viña: From Your Story to Service” (La Viña Editor: Irene D. / Reporter: John B.)**

Discussion around the need of LV and GV working together, organizing bilingual workshops and events that celebrate and support LV and GV magazines in our region. Also, there was a conversation about the spiritual value LV and that the fellowship should focus on the spiritual value of the magazine.

### **“Young People in A.A. and General Service” (Moderator: Jason R. / Reporter: Jonas B.)**

Workshop attendees discussed the role of young people in A.A., as well as in general service. Members acknowledged that while some older members might feel envious when they come into contact with young people in A.A., the general consensus of this workshop was that young people in A.A. are enthusiastic, willing and helpful. Most of all, young people in Alcoholics Anonymous are just regular, run-of-the-mill alcoholics, like anyone else in A.A. It was felt that there shouldn't be a divide between young members in A.A. and older members. It is crucial to encourage young people in A.A. to get involved in general service. By simply asking them to show up or to help out at an area conference, you not only help A.A. as a whole, but you also introduce young people to general service. Ultimately, it is up to young people in A.A. to

reach out for general service, and for people already in general service to reach out to young people.

**“Accessibilities: Making the A.A. Message Accessible to All” (Moderator: Walter E. / Reporter: Hank K.)**

Four main topics were discussed among workshop members regarding the accessibility of A.A. meetings. First, members discussed “What is our responsibility to those with accessibility issues?” In response, members replied that since A.A. groups are autonomous, each must decide their own level of responsibility. Groups invite problems if accessibility is claimed, but is not a fact. Members agreed that guidance from G.S.O. was needed.

Second, workshop attendees discussed the possible accessibility issues associated with mental health problems. Members agreed that there was difficulty predicting what these accessibility issues might be. Furthermore, the desire of sufferers to serve was difficult to gauge and central to the issue. A.A., it was acknowledged, does not treat sufferers, but maintains a desire to remain open to all possibilities in carrying the message of recovery.

Third, members discussed the possibility of barriers created by a reliance on digital communication. Members acknowledged that “snail mail” was needed, but that the cost of large mailings was a barrier. Young people, it was noted, hadn’t even considered it as a problem.

Finally, workshop members discussed the presence of service animals at A.A. meetings. Members thought that there might be a need for an announcement at the start of a meeting stating that the animals present were not pets, but were working.

**“Bridging Differences to Carry A.A.’s Message” (Moderator: John K. / Reporter: Margie S.)**

Workshop members discussed the topic: “Bridging Differences to Carry A.A.’s Message.” First, the group discussed how to integrate the older and younger generations. It was stated that young people were raised electronically and that makes for some differences. Members agreed that it all boils down to respect on both ends. Attendees said that the old-timers know many things, “But we are losing those people with 7-17 years of sobriety in our district. Where did they go?”

The workshop group also discussed, “*What are some methods of reaching out to its diverse communities?*” In response, members referenced what Bill W. said of Dr. Bob — that he (Bill W.) needed Dr. Bob more than Dr. Bob needed him. Workshop members said, “We need to remember that for any community. We must make sure everyone is welcome.” Sponsorship can mean we go after them — “in our bilingual district, the third meeting of the month at a Hispanic meeting is bilingual. We provide interpreters. Even if these things fall on deaf ears, I am practicing a spiritual program and I have to carry the message wherever I go.” Members had success with inviting diverse communities to events: “There are prejudices on both sides, so we need to give people time to warm up.” The group closed with a reminder for all: “The newcomer doesn’t have to relate to me, I have to relate to him or her.”

**“A.A.’s 7<sup>th</sup> Tradition: How Money and Spirituality Mix” (Moderator: Paul K. / Reporter: Steve S.)**

At the start, the workshop’s moderator shared the long form of Tradition 7 with workshop attendees. In discussing how money and spirituality mix in Alcoholics Anonymous, the group focused on two questions. First, the members were asked to share their experience, strength and hope in answering the question: “*What should 7<sup>th</sup> Tradition money be used for and not used for?*” In response, members shared three main points: “First, we collect 7<sup>th</sup> Tradition money at home group and we pay rent, buy supplies, donuts, coffee, keep a prudent reserve, send G.S.R. to service events, and send money above our prudent reserve to district, area, intergroup and G.S.O.” In addition, the group should make the decision where the money gets sent and in what proportions — not the treasurer. Second, do not use 7<sup>th</sup> Tradition money for anniversaries, coins, or other things that do not carry the message. Pass a separate basket for “other” expenses. Third, 7<sup>th</sup> Tradition money can be used to buy Grapevine subscriptions in order to send them behind the walls.

The second question the group focused on was: “*How do we support A.A.’s 7<sup>th</sup> Tradition beyond the basket?*” Workshop attendees had several responses to this query:

- The Preamble says that we should support the Fellowship by cash in the basket and service;
- We talk about the 7<sup>th</sup> Tradition and we carry the message about where our money should be used;
- We get financial information on service entities and base splits on that;
- Members can leave a legacy gift to G.S.O.;
- We can pay for our delegate to go to the General Service Conference

**“Cooperating with Professionals About A.A.” (Moderator: Jeff B. / Reporter: Lisa S.)**

The workshop members met and discussed two questions regarding cooperation with professionals about A.A. The first question asked attendees to consider: “*What is the role of the C.P.C. Committee how does C.P.C. work to engage professionals in the community?*” In response, workshop members shared several answers:

- Visit town’s chamber of commerce for any professional events and ask if they would like an A.A. booth;
- Contact universities and medical schools and offer to bring residents/nurses to an open A.A. meeting;
- Place literature at mental health kiosks;
- Publish a list of open A.A. meetings that professionals can attend;
- Print C.P.C. business cards with C.P.C. contact information to give to professionals regarding how they (or another professional) can contact A.A.

The second question discussed by the group was: “*What’s the difference between an area C.P.C. chair vs. a district chair and how does C.P.C. work at the district level?*” In response, the workshop group shared that an area chair attends monthly meetings to report what is going on at the district level. The district chair works with groups to encourage participation on the district committee to engage professionals locally. Finally, the area chair will meet with the district in order to set goals and focus on particular professions, i.e. doctors, clergy, law enforcement and legal professions.

# FULL FORUM PRESENTATION/WORKSHOP

**Safety in A.A.—Susan M. R.**, Delegate Panel 66, Area 12 Delaware (Presentation)

My name is Susan and I am an alcoholic. My sobriety date is December 7, 1987. My home group is the Dawn Patrol, which meets daily at 7:00 a.m. in the Westminster House in Newark Daily. Stop in, the coffee is ready! I have a sponsor and I sponsor other women. I have a service sponsor and I am the service sponsor for both men and women. I have been involved in service at the group level and beyond. I currently serve as Panel 66 Delegate for Area 12 Delaware and I serve on the Conference Corrections Committee. Today I have been asked to share on a topic that is important to me: “Safety in A.A.”

What if you attended your first meeting after passing through a gauntlet of gawkers and into a smoke-filled room where an unbalanced member climbed up on the table and threw his bayonet at the wall whenever he disagreed with a share? Would you come back? Would you be able to get through the next 24 hours? Would you hear the message of hope and know of a life beyond your wildest expectations?

I entered such a room after a suicide attempt where, as a non-smoker, I coughed for 60 miserable minutes. There was no greeting, no meeting list, no hand reaching out, no First Step. No one explained the different types of meetings. No women surrounded me. When the unbalanced member climbed up on the table frequently and threw his bayonet into the wall, no one reassured me that I was safe. No one took the unbalanced man out of the room and asked him to change his behavior or held a separate meeting for him. This was a noon meeting. I would return home to struggle through another day, unable to cope by using alcohol. My mother, desperate to help, would ask, “What did you learn today?” How could I tell her I learned to sit on the same side as the unbalanced man because he would throw his bayonet in the opposite direction? I could not tell my desperate parents that. So, after 90 interminable days, I told them A.A. was not for me. Why didn't the group act to protect its new and vulnerable members? Why didn't it provide a safe and welcoming environment? Why didn't it fulfill its primary purpose?

What happens when a predator comes in the rooms and triggers a PTSD response in a 65-year-old newcomer when he repeatedly requests she call him? What happens when this same man goes to commitments in the name of the group and approaches young girls in treatment centers? Perhaps they have burned personal bridges and his offer of “housing” after treatment looks pretty good. What happens to these women? What response does the group take to protect them? What happens when a group is torn apart as a result of being threatened with suit or with removal from the property or intergroup listing — not from the property owner or the intergroup, but from the accused predator who feels he has been lynched?

My group goes through so many opportunities to learn from mistakes each time we wrestle with what to do when the unity of the group is threatened — what to do when the men don't see what might be alarming to women; what to do if laws are broken and someone must break anonymity and call the police. In a 1969 letter, Bill W. recognized that “we cannot exclude those who disturb meetings or seriously interfere with the functioning of the group ... but we can ask them to quiet down or go elsewhere or to come back when they are better able to

participate.” We now live in a different world. It is easy to ban someone, but how do we protect the vulnerable newcomer yet still allow someone who may be causing the problem to find the help they declare they need when they say, “My name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I am an alcoholic”?

I do not know if any of you out there relate to any of these issues, but they have happened in my group since 2011. I looked for guidance by calling New York. They told me each group was autonomous to work through its own issues. There was no experiential guidance to be found online, except for a page from the G.S.O. in Australia that defines “predatory behavior.” Can you imagine that a cookie mom pushing her product repeatedly during a meeting was identified in the list of potential predators?

What we did was use a group inventory, taken from page 29 of the “A.A. Group” pamphlet, P-16. What we did was ask the sitting delegate to come do a districtwide workshop on safety. He pointed us to the Fall 2011 *Box 4-5-9* article on safety and A.A., which helped us be proactive as individuals and as a group. We have developed a plan: We greet newcomers and we provide them with a newcomer kit, a Big Book, a meeting list with phone numbers, a temporary sponsor list and the pamphlet “Questions and Answers on Sponsorship.” If someone in the meeting is disruptive, we surround the newcomer and explain. If the disruptions continue, we ask for changes in behavior. We do all of the things that did not happen in my first 90 days. We try on a continuing basis to use the Traditions to handle all issues of group relations so that all — the still sick and suffering, the oldtimers, the passersby, the dabblers where I pray the seeds are sown — all can come in to a kind greeting, to a cup of coffee and to know that hope for an incurable disease is found here. We have learned case by case when to act patiently with tolerance and love and when to take action — legal or otherwise. We discuss who does what so all members find the hope for recovery in the rooms of A.A.

Since the paucity of material providing guidance in 2011, there is a wealth of material available now. Areas and the experience of the fellowship have been proactive and willing to share. The G.S.O. has responded to our need with new guidelines, SMF-209, “Safety and A.A.: Our Common Welfare.” We placed these on the both front page of our website, [www.Delawareaa.org](http://www.Delawareaa.org), and on our new phone app. I suggest to groups that they should begin the discussion now. Knowledge of our shared experience using the Traditions is the starting point of safety. We want the hope of recovery always to be found in our groups, and we need to discuss the issue and possible solution as events are occurring to learn for the next time and the time after that.

Thirty-five years later, if my mother asked, “What did you learn today?” I hope I could say there is something special, safe and welcoming about this group. I hope I could tell her in A.A. I can recover.

**“Safety in A.A.” (Moderator Rich P. / Reporter: Jason R.) (Workshop)**

Safety in A.A. remains an important issue to the Fellowship as a whole. However, the issue is complex, and safety risks and inappropriate behavior appear in many forms. Identifying predatory behavior is considered one of the most serious issues. Group members actively attempt to isolate persons – both predator and victim – to address the behavior in a swift manner, while taking into account both A.A. Traditions and applicable laws. Yet challenges remain in the group’s and the individual’s comfort with and knowledge of methods to handle such situations, primarily because each situation is slightly different. The recent service material from A.A.W.S. has aided in overcoming this barrier. It is crucial that this information continue to be disseminated not only by the delegates, but by all members.

Safety issues also extend into challenges with disruptions in and immediately outside of meetings, as well as with off-color, insinuating and insulting language. These issues, while as serious as predatory behavior, may be accepted or overlooked due to lack of knowledge of the Traditions or modern norms. Like all safety issues, they occur irrespective of age or gender. But the general consensus is that the institution of business meetings and group inventories and the general willingness of persons to speak up to note the negative impact of these behaviors can stem the problem. Trust in the group conscience, a loving Higher Power and our Traditions can ensure our Fellowship continues to strive to make A.A. a safe place to find recovery.

# PRESENTATIONS

## Financing A.A. Services into the Future—Linda J., Delegate Panel 66, Area 29 Maryland

Part of our quest today is to recognize the inherent challenges that lie ahead. We hear A.A.'s financials were favorable in 2016 and we are apt to rest on our laurels. Yet, is there time to stop and look for a trend? No, the collective “we” must keep up the momentum. The spiritual principle of self-support is a multifaceted concept that has been a topic of discussion and debate throughout the history of A.A. Members in the 1950s took A.A.'s success for granted and weren't worried too much about its future. Spiritual apathy and indifference were real threats to our future then and are clearly evident, if not more apparent, today, some 67 years later.

Bill wrote in *A.A. Comes of Age*, “Let's begin with my own sponsor, Ebby. When Ebby heard how serious my drinking was, he resolved to visit me. He was in New York; I was in Brooklyn. His resolve was not enough; he had to *take action* and *spend money*. ... Right then and there, Ebby established the principle that A.A. in action calls for the sacrifice of much time and a little money.” In spite of the great increase in the size and the span of our fellowship worldwide since that visit, at its core it remains simple and personal. Each day, somewhere in the world, recovery begins when one alcoholic talks with another alcoholic, sharing experience, strength and hope. The spiritual nature of the Seventh Tradition begins right after we walk in the rooms freely because we want to be here. When I am vested in the process, spiritual traction begins and I become willing to give whatever I can to keep A.A. here for the future.

Dr. Bob said our Twelve Steps are simmered down to “love” and “service.” We understand that love. In *A.A. Comes of Age* Bill describes “A.A. service [as] anything whatever that legitimately helps us to reach fellow sufferers. ... Without its essential services A.A. would soon become a formless, confused, and irresponsible anarchy.” I am eternally grateful for our predecessors. The gift of A.A. would not have been here for us if those folks had not met the challenges head-on with real solutions. I am responsible to continue that momentum.

In sobriety, we have been charged with being responsible and paying our own way. Are we self-supporting personally and corporately? Does someone else solve our personal financial woes? Are we in A.A. looking for others — say, the General Service Board — to solve the corporate financial woes of our operating corporations? It is in taking responsibility that real freedom and the enduring satisfactions of life are found. A.A. gave us the power to choose not to drink. It has also given us the freedom to be responsible for ourselves. As we become more responsible personally, we are also free to be responsible for our share of A.A. Collectively, we are A.A., and unless we accept this responsibility we all lose A.A. Strange paradox, wouldn't you say?

The spiritual principle of self-support enables us to accomplish our primary purpose of carrying the message without interference or financial dependence on outsiders. Self-support reaps unity. Without unity, there is no common welfare and ultimately no A.A. The message is clear. Each day I must ask what I can do for the person who still suffers, and then show up and take an active part in the Fellowship. I challenge each member to be a link in the chain of A.A. and

communicate the financial requirements to provide the necessary services we are requesting. These costs are a collective obligation that rests squarely on all of us. Bill wrote in *The A.A. Service Manual* that if service is really needed, “then maintain it we must, or fail in our mission to those who need and seek A.A.” Our support of services actually amounts to recognition on our part that A.A. must function in full strength everywhere and that we are all going to be responsible to foot the bill. A.A. either lives or dies — it is not just for 40 percent of the collective conscience of A.A. to fund all the services.

With each new day that God graces us we should ask ourselves if we are keeping these Traditions alive, both in our personal lives and within the Fellowship. Have we done enough to educate our membership on the total value of the Seventh Tradition? What are we doing to stimulate action? Is my gratitude demonstrated through my participation in service or has it become a mere habit? I take the Seventh Tradition as a personal challenge. Not only do I have a recurring contribution, I also put money in the basket in each meeting. Taking action, giving freely of my time and energy at all levels of the service structure, is a vital piece of demonstrating my Seventh Tradition responsibility.

As we continue to look toward supporting the future of Alcoholics Anonymous, are we asking the right questions to motivate all of our membership? If yes, then why are we not self-supporting and covering the costs of the many services we are requesting? If no, then what should the questions be? We need to question ourselves and not the Fellowship. “Ourselves” is two million people, and “the Fellowship” is one entity. At the end of the day, it is our responsibility to keep the services available for the unborn child destined for the doors of A.A. My friends, let us continue to seek new and exciting ways to finance A.A. services into the future. I am convinced from experience that if we cast the net a little further each time we communicate the problem and participate in the solution, then his needs will always be met for the services.

If we recognize the need for the services, then we are duty bound to insure their funding into the future. Let’s not break the link in the chain of the spiritual handshake that is reaching out and touching the still-suffering alcoholic. It is up to us to lead by example, just as Ebby did when he put money into the payphone and the turnstile, establishing our principle of self-support through his own contributions to carry the message to Bill. By contributing in our own sobriety, we support the future of Alcoholics Anonymous.

In closing, I want to say A.A. has saved my life — how could I not give back? How about you? Thank you for allowing me to serve.

## Remembering Our Primary Purpose in Service—Gene W., Delegate Panel 66, Area 28 Maine

Our Fifth Tradition states, “Each group has but one primary purpose — to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.” Are we fulfilling our primary purpose at all levels of Alcoholics Anonymous? This is probably the most important question any of us A.A.s, from the newest member to the eldest of the elder statespersons, can ask. In a Grapevine article from February 1958, Bill W. wrote: “Our first duty, as a society, is to ensure our own survival. Therefore we have to avoid distractions and multipurpose activity. ... Sobriety — freedom from alcohol — through the teaching and practice of the Twelve Steps, is the sole purpose of an AA group. ... If we don’t stick to these principles, we shall almost surely collapse. And if we collapse, we cannot help anyone.”

To understand what will happen to the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous if we fail to follow our primary purpose we only have to look at the Washingtonian movement. The movement began in April 1840 when a group of drinkers at Chase’s Tavern in Baltimore took a pledge not to drink. Through their weekly meetings speakers told their stories of what it was like, what happened and what is like today. Within five months their membership included 1,000 reformed drunkards and 5,000 who weren’t sure. Through their promotion of taking the pledge, reliance on a higher power and support of alcoholics helping each other they grew to 100,000 drunkards and 300,000 common tippers in less than four years. Members were sure that their movement could help with other issues facing society. Influential men started to control the movement and promote causes other than sobriety. They started endorsing prohibition of alcohol, affiliating with institutions and engaging in theological and political controversy. This and their carnival tactics of promotion led to their destruction in 1848, and with it went the hope for the thousands of drunks of that day.

Adhering to our primary purpose is vital for both A.A.’s survival and help for those suffering from alcoholism. As individuals we can carry the message a little bit and our groups can do a great deal more. But there are many things our groups can’t do but that still need to be done if the A.A. message is to be carried to every corner of this country and of the world. This is done on different levels of service and in many different ways.

As individuals we carry this message to alcoholics. Through our groups we have greater opportunities to encounter those who suffer from alcoholism. Our groups are part of districts, which provide a place to share and solve group problems. Intergroups/central service offices provide vital local services including answering phones, publishing local meeting lists, selling Conference-approved literature, responding to inquiries about A.A. and more. Areas elect a delegate who represents their voice at the General Service Conference in matters that may affect A.A. as a whole. The area committee deals with all kinds of service problems concerning groups and the carrying of the A.A. message into institutions and to the public, to name a few. The General Service Conference operates year round and meets once a year to discuss items of concern, suggestions for literature, overall policy and other matters affecting A.A. as a whole. They are the link between the groups and the General Service Board (G.S.B.). The G.S.B. consists of 21 trustees, who are concerned with everything happening inside and outside of A.A. that may affect the health and growth of our society. The board receives recommendations from the Conference, deals with questions of A.A. policy and exercises a generalized type of supervision over the A.A. Grapevine, A.A. World Services and the General

Service Office. Each of the aforementioned A.A. entities support our primary purpose directly or indirectly and provide invaluable services.

Any of these entities can be distracted from supporting our primary purpose. This might be due to concern over the addicts and people with mental illness attending meetings; litigation of various sorts; misinformation in the press and on social media platforms; problems regarding money; bleeding deacons trying to control A.A.; lack of participation in general service; lack of qualified leaders; strong controlling personalities and agendas driven by ego.

Perhaps we are consumed with counting things such as the quantity of members, number of groups, how much money we have or how many pieces of literature we are selling. Maybe we are distracted by judging the commitment of our leaders or the general lack of interest in our fellowship. We may be consumed by fears — that we don't have enough money or enough members, or that members aren't following our Traditions.

How many times have we sat in a service meeting and people argued about a few dollars or couldn't agree on what kind of coffee to buy? Perhaps there was a personality that was prejudiced against people of certain sex, color or nationality. Maybe there was an error or oversight in the use of Roberts Rules of Order in the conduct of a meeting, or someone was acting as a wordsmith with an agenda item on the floor. All these behaviors can deter people from participating in general service. Perhaps they leave and don't return. We must look at our own behaviors and ask what we personally are doing to make service attractive so that people will be excited to return to a general service meeting.

We need to be always mindful that it is our responsibility to reach out to that alcoholic that still suffers and give them hope of a better way of life. Our actions must be guided by asking ourselves a single question when making a decision: "Will this help the alcoholic?" It is what we do today that will ensure that A.A. will be here for the alcoholic who has yet to be born. It is our responsibility as members of Alcoholics Anonymous to keep in mind and to remind others how important it is to keep our activities aligned with our primary purpose. We need to choose our leaders with care and not elect someone based on personality. These are the people that we expect to protect the future of our society and keep us focused on supporting our primary purpose.

May we reflect with ever-deepening conviction that we shall never be at our best except when we conform only to the primary spiritual aim of A.A.: that of carrying its message to the alcoholic who still suffers from alcoholism.

**Attraction Rather than Promotion in Public Information—Bill W.**, Delegate Panel 66, Area 48 Hudson/Mohawk/Berkshire New York

Several years ago when I was an alternate D.C.M. we had our area's Delegate's Day of Sharing, the pre-Conference meeting. I was the recorder for the table discussing public service announcements (P.S.A.s) and our discussion was going along nicely — except for one member at our table. He was D.C.M. for another district and his viewpoint was totally different from the viewpoints of everyone else. He was opposed to all P.S.A.s. He felt that all P.S.A.s were promotion and he was firm in his opinion. When we gave our reports to the assembled area I turned the floor over to him so that he could present his minority opinion and he was vocal; in his opinion, P.S.A.s are active attempts to promote the program of A.A.

It was just my luck that I had given him and two other A.A.s a ride to the assembly, so he sat next to me on the two-hour ride back and he talked about the issue the entire time. He was immovable in his opposition to A.A. having public service announcements. The discussion went in circles, with him coming back again and again to his central point: that the P.S.A.s were made by A.A. to encourage people to join the program and that as such they were examples of promotion and not attraction. The two other A.A.s in the back seat laughed for much of the trip home as we discussed the same ground over and over, never changing the other's opinion a bit.

The gentleman is not with us anymore; he died sober, a powerful example to all who knew him in his dedication to sobriety and to helping the next alcoholic. And he had a point. P.S.A.s are not the same thing as meetings. They are not the same thing as a Twelfth Step call. They are there to let the still sick and suffering alcoholic know that there is an alternative. Since public service announcements are there to let new people know about us, the question stands: Do they constitute a break of our tradition of attraction and not promotion?

I have given this a lot of thought over the years that have passed since that car ride. I especially have given it thought recently as my committee is public information. I am alternate chair. So exactly what makes something a case of promotion and what makes something attraction?

In the interest of full disclosure, I should also say that I worked in the marketing departments of several corporations when I was employed in industry. My title, twice, was promotion manager. So, I should be expected to know what promotion is.

Our literature does not go into a great deal of detail. The long form of Tradition Eleven says, "Our relations with the general public should be characterized by personal anonymity. We think A.A. ought to avoid sensational advertising. Our names and pictures as A.A. members ought not be broadcast, filmed, or publicly printed. Our public relations should be guided by the principle of attraction rather than promotion. There is never need to praise ourselves. We feel it better to let our friends recommend us."

If you think about it, this does not really help. It tells us to not have sensational advertising and to not praise ourselves, but it also allows us to have our friends recommend us *without* saying how to stop our friends from praising us. And what about non-sensational advertising?

So how do we recognize the difference between letting people know that A.A. exists, how A.A. works and what it does and does not do, and sensational advertising and pieces that contain self-praise and unjustifiable promises?

Perhaps recognizing when something strays from attraction to promotion is not unlike Associate Justice of the Supreme Court Potter Stewart's famous quote from 1964, in which he said about recognizing pornography, "I shall not today attempt further to define the kinds of material I understand to be embraced within that shorthand description ["hard-core pornography"], and perhaps I could never succeed in intelligibly doing so. But *I know it when I see it.*"

When I was writing advertising copy it was understood that while I should never actually *lie* about the product (as that was a definite no-no), I could, shall we say, *exaggerate* the benefits of owning it. There was the explicit message in all of the promotion that if you the reader or the viewer would give us — the company — money, we would in turn give you our product. And our product was then going to give *you* something in return, be it added wealth, added beauty, added prestige, added sex appeal or added joy. You give us money, we give you happiness. Now *that* I recognize as promotion.

To promote something is to put it ahead of other things. It is a method of saying, "our brand is better." To promote A.A., we must say that we are better than something else — that for your time and money A.A. will give you something in return. So the question then becomes, do our P.S.A.s do this?

The closing message in our P.S.A. "Doors" is simple: "If you have a problem with alcohol, contact A.A. It works." On the screen for our P.S.A. "My World" it shows the "blue people" and the words "Alcoholics Anonymous — We Can Help."

What kind of promotion is this? We can help. It works. We say, "*tengo esperanza*" — I have hope. Where are we saying anything about an exchange of money for prestige or wealth or power? Where is our boast along the lines of "buy us because our competitor is a fraud"?

In the foreword to the second edition of the Big Book it says, "Upon therapy for the alcoholic himself we surely have no monopoly." Our public service announcements do not violate this statement. They talk about hope, about a program that works and about help. Those are the words of attraction, not the hype of promotion.

## Extending the Hand of A.A. to the Newcomer—Joseph S., Delegate Panel 67, Area 47 Central New York

The “newcomer,” for this presentation, is defined as a person at their first A.A. meeting. Extending the hand of A.A. to them is an all-encompassing process that is based on the principals in our Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions and one that requires a coordinated effort of all the home group members. It does not start at the meeting-room door with the greeter’s handshake and a smile. It begins with the home group members and sponsors never losing sight of our primary purpose. At our group conscience meetings or at a group inventory we can ask: Are we doing all we can to welcome the newcomer? And the follow-up: What can we do better?

I could spend the remainder of my time reviewing a list of suggestions that groups can do to help welcome the newcomer. Our literature has that valuable information, which is a distillation of the shared wisdom and experience of many groups. It would make a good homework assignment for you or your home group. Instead, I am going to supplement that knowledge by speaking from my recent experiences with welcoming the newcomer, as I was a greeter at my home group. I recognize that my experiences might not apply to your home group for a variety of reasons, so please take what you can use and leave the rest.

Let’s return to the front door. The greeter is a service position in a home group that is responsible for arriving early and welcoming everyone to the meeting. An additional responsibility is to recognize who is a newcomer and to introduce them to some home group members before the meeting starts. If you were hosting a function at your home and welcomed someone at the door and they did not know anyone, would you not take the time to introduce them to some of the other guests? What kind of host would you be if you didn’t? Not a very good one. We know the state of “pitiful and incomprehensible demoralization” that the newcomer is in because we were once in the same condition. In a sense the newcomer is our future being born. Do we want them to sit alone and unrecognized before the meeting begins?

Sometimes the greeter is someone early in recovery and in their first service commitment. If you have been around awhile it is relatively easy to recognize a newcomer. A greeter that is early in recovery? Maybe not so much. In this case, members need to support the greeter. Some groups have written guidelines or a description of the greeter’s responsibilities. For other groups, the only guideline is the plaintive plea heard at a meeting: “We need a greeter.” I ask you, which one has a better chance of recognizing a newcomer? I think that if there were droves of newcomers coming through the doors to our meetings it would be safe to say we would have a much more heightened sensitivity as to how they are welcomed. But instead, they come in less frequently, in ones or twos. And because we are human, we tend to fall into the routine of what we always do at meetings. The setting up of the room, sponsors and sponsees conversing, someone helping another alcoholic or simply relaxing with a cup of coffee and enjoying the easygoing congeniality of the fellowship. It would be unreasonable to expect trusted servants to be on their toes and always in anticipation of the arrival of a newcomer. In fact, it would be counterproductive because it is unnatural. However, when the greeter recognizes a newcomer and introduces them to a home group member or members, they can stop what they are doing and completely focus on carrying out our primary purpose.

I am not here to tell you how to extend the hand of A.A. at this critical juncture. We all do the A.A. way through the prism of our own recovery and sobriety. However, from my experience, I can offer two suggestions that I think apply, both found in chapter seven of the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*, “Working with Others”: “At first engage in general conversation” and “don’t start out being an evangelist or reformer.” Sometimes keeping it simple by offering a cup of coffee is all the extending of the hand to the newcomer you need to do. Less can be more. Our shared experience has found that greeters or members that are overbearing can make the newcomer feel uncomfortable and put them on the defensive.

Also, it helps me to keep in mind that the newcomer is a like a person entering a foreign land — one in which they do not understand its customs or the language. For example, we have open meetings and occasionally a newcomer identifies themselves as an addict. Our group conscience is that we don’t stop the meeting to school them on our primary purpose or to suggest that they are in the wrong fellowship. At the scene of an accident do EMTs treat only certain types of injuries? We know that there is a time and place to discuss this with a newcomer, thereby benefiting the group and the individual’s recovery. In addition, our group is committed to providing a safe environment for all members, including newcomers. Unsafe behavior is handled in an appropriate manner.

During the meeting, we ask if there is anyone new to A.A. Together we vocalize a warm welcome to the newcomer. Some groups offer a 24-hour chip or coin. Our shared experience is that the newcomer should feel welcome to participate, but they should not become the focus of the meeting.

When the meeting has ended, two or three of the group members can ask the newcomer if they have any questions. A meeting list, a pamphlet or two and some of the members’ phone numbers can be sufficient take-home information for them. Information overload, we have found, can intimidate the newcomer. We don’t expect the newcomer to grasp a comprehensive understanding of the disease of alcoholism and the A.A. program of recovery at their first meeting. There might be an opportunity for the “meeting after the meeting” to discuss things a bit more. In any case, we thank them for coming and invite them to return.

We know from our experience that the hand of A.A. that was extend to us when we were a newcomer is life-saving. It can lift a person out of the living hell of active alcoholism and into a sober life that is happy, joyous and free. It’s a powerful hand — a power greater than ourselves.

**Watching the Parade: How Do We Grow Our Fellowship?—Ken D., Delegate Panel 66, Area 61 Rhode Island**

I'm an alcoholic named Kenny. My home group is the 4th Dimension Group in Warwick, Rhode Island. It has been an honor and a privilege to serve as the Area 61 Panel 66 Delegate from Rhode Island. I served as the alternate chair of the Treatment and Accessibilities Committee at Conference.

It has been an incredible opportunity to be a part of the General Service Conference for the last two years. Being right in the middle of A.A. and surrounded by people who love A.A. as much as I do has been a life-changing experience. I came away from the Conference with a deep-seated faith that the future of A.A. at the general service level is secure and in good hands. The trusted servants who implement the national and global initiatives for A.A. continue to cast a wider and wider net, reaching more and more alcoholics worldwide.

It begs the question, then: Why has our membership leveled off or even begun to decline over the past few decades? When I came into A.A. with my tail between my legs almost 15 years ago I was completely broken. The insanity of end-stage alcoholism gave me a head full of resentments and I was driven by self-centered fear. The guilt and remorse I suffered due to my selfish, self-seeking actions caused an incomprehensible demoralization that took me right to the brink of the jumping-off point. Here I had only two choices: I could go on to the bitter end, blotting out the consciousness of my intolerable situation to the best of my ability, or I could accept spiritual help. Luckily for me, my ego and pride and dishonesty and denial had been beat down by the great persuader, alcohol. It beat me into a state of reasonableness and I surrendered to a power greater than myself.

But that didn't happen in a vacuum. The groups I attended in the beginning and the A.A. members God put in my path played a crucial role in my fate. As my mind began to clear, one of the first messages that sunk in was to get a home group and a sponsor and to pray. Providentially, the sponsor I chose did his job and steered me through the Twelve Steps, which saved my life. As I began to practice these principles, I began to treat the causes and conditions of my illness. The root of my problem, my selfishness and self-centeredness, slowly began to wane and my life got bigger. More and more I was able to get out of my own head and my own little problems and think about people other than myself. I also began to realize the importance of our group structure and the Traditions that guarded its safety. These guidelines, these Traditions, were a collection of personal sacrifices that I had to be willing to make in order to maintain our unity and to safeguard anonymity. Because the truth is, if I lose you guys, I am lost. But the only way I was able to be willing to make those sacrifices, to do anything that didn't serve me directly, was by having a spiritual experience — a personality change sufficient to overcome alcoholism one day at a time.

When I was two years sober my sponsor did his job again and tricked me into general service. As I served at the district and then the area levels, my appreciation for the ultimate gift Bill and Dr. Bob gave us back in the early 1950s grew by leaps and bounds. As I continued to practice the principles of our beloved Steps and Traditions, I was able to become a trusted servant with right motives that had nothing to do with power or influence. It takes a little ego to get into service, but it takes a whole bunch of humility to stick around. As I said when I began, serving A.A. at the Conference level within the guidelines of our Twelve Concepts has

been one of the most incredible experiences of my life. But I can assure you I would not be standing here right now if I didn't start with a good foundation of recovery through our Twelve Steps. Or if by some crazy set of circumstances I was still standing here, my motives would have been geared toward self-centeredness and I would have left a path of death and destruction behind me. I would not have served A.A., I would have served me.

Living in all three sides of our triangle — Recovery, Unity and Service — for several years has given me a life that is rich and full. It has enabled me to reach out my hand and help other alcoholics, many of whom have gone on to help other alcoholics. In the end, that is how I believe we must continue to grow our fellowship. We can throw the net out as far as we want, but if we can't keep them then we will ultimately fail. Over the years, I have "watched the parade" of faceless alcoholics who have come into our doors and then left without a solution. I cringe to consider their fate. I see many meetings in Rhode Island and throughout the country when I travel that don't mention the Steps or God at all. But it is the only recovery plan that A.A. has to offer. As a sponsor to newcomers, I believe my only responsibility is to share my experience, strength and hope with the Twelve Steps as they are outlined in the Big Book. Everything else is just interesting.

"But," as Bill said in "A Vision for You," "obviously you cannot transmit something you haven't got. See to it that your relationship with Him is right, and great events will come to pass for you and countless others. This is the Great Fact for us." And this, I believe, is still the key to our future growth. Thank you for letting me share.

# PAST TRUSTEES SHARING

**J. Gary L.**, past trustee (B) 2011-2015; A.A.W.S. Director, 2012-2015

At the 2013 General Service Conference, I was taken ill and spent most of the week in the hospital. Upon being stricken, I let my fellow trustees know what was going on and took a cab to the hospital. They showed up, soon after, to see how I was doing and ten would visit me off and on during the week. One in particular, my friend Clayton V., then the southwest regional trustee, took his time from the Conference to sit with me in the emergency room, to make sure I was being tended to, and then waited until I had been taken to a room. He then stayed with me through much of the evening to make sure that I wasn't going to go through it alone.

I repeat: The finest people I know are in Alcoholics Anonymous. And the finest people I know are in service.

**John Q.**, past trustee-at-large/U.S., 1989-1993

On Friday night, Dorothy went up to the mike and talked about an event in Bethesda, Maryland, in 1990, regarding the Swahili Big Book. I was the trustee-at-large/U.S. during that time. If you recall history, in 1990 (or thereabouts), the Russians were withdrawing from all of the Eastern-bloc countries. They were going back to their own borders and A.A. was coming alive in Eastern Europe. I was giving a report because I had just gone to the first-ever general service conference in what was then Czechoslovakia. Many countries were emerging and we were translating books and pamphlets into their languages. I finished my report, and then there was a man, as Dorothy described him, in African dress. He was a student from Kenya. He said to me, "What are you doing about Africa? What's going on in Africa?" I knew that in South Africa, we had just translated the book into Zulu and a few other dialects. He said, "No. What about the rest of Africa? Why don't we have a Big Book in Swahili?" Swahili is a language spoken by millions of Africans. It's their language. I said to him, as I've said to many others, "I don't know, but I will find out." So, at the break, I asked a staff member, and she told me how it was translated into Swahili, but it was a bad translation, so it was scrapped. We resurrected it, and two regional forums later, we had a new translation into Swahili. And that came about because of a question asked by one of you at a Regional Forum.

The other thing I have been privileged to experience is the International Literature Fund. I was fortunate to be involved in that since its birth. Back in the late 80s and early 90s, we had a shifting of contributions. As a result, literature prices went down and contributions remained stable. As a result, we found ourselves in a little bit of a hole for a couple of years. So, the chairman of the board, Mike Alexander, had all the trustees examine every line item on the income statement. How can we cut costs, make improvements, etc.? One of the items Mike examined was foreign literature assistance — and it was not an insignificant amount. Mike directed us, at our next World Service Meeting, to find out why the other countries weren't contributing. So, it fell to me to ask the other delegates why they weren't contributing. I thought long and hard about how I could make an appeal. I didn't want to insult these other men and women from other countries. How could I get them to rally around the flag and help the effort?

To this day, I do not know what I said, but I spoke from my heart. And it was a success. I looked at the other delegates, they looked at me, and they said, "We thought you guys just wanted to pay for it. We are willing to help!" And then the delegate from Australia said, "Why don't we create an international literature fund?" Two years later, at the next World Service Meeting, it was ratified. And now we have a fund administered and monitored by A.A.W.S. I was pleased to be involved in that process.

It wasn't very long ago, and I am sober nearly 40 years in December, but I still remember the days lying drunk in the gutter in lower Manhattan. To be here with you, in this capacity, as an A.A. member in good standing, and having served you in the capacity that I have, has been the thrill of my life.

**Arnold R.**, past northeast regional trustee (B), 2003-2007, past GV Director, 2000-2007

I was brought back to Alcoholic Anonymous on June the 20<sup>th</sup>, 1982. Now, I share that I was "brought back" because my first meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous was in 1977. I was 25 years of age, and I didn't think anything that was going on here had anything to do with the things that I had going on in those days. When I got back to Alcoholics Anonymous in 1982, the people in my home group were careful to allow me to participate. When two years had passed in this home group, I remember going to our business meeting. I went to the men's room, came back, and I was G.S.R. I thought that that was interesting. But, as I looked around at the talent in that room, I thought, "Yes, they picked the right gentleman."

At my first area assembly in Waldorf, Maryland, in 1984, they were sharing and talking about this idea of "slip-signing" and how it was going to impact the groups in our area. And the area delegate, at the time, was able to chronicle that experience and send it to this General Service Office in New York that they were talking about. And I began to follow this process.

I was blessed to have people in our assembly who talked about the upside down triangle. In those days, there was gentleman who said that one of the things that the group did was to send dollars down to the bottom of the triangle to the trustees. In turn, the trustees would send back services that would help us carry A.A.'s message. As I continued to get sober and be involved in area service, I was elected to Panel 46 delegate to Area 29. At my first Conference, there was some talk about the Fourth Edition of the Big Book. Of course, I was against it. You see, there is some language in the preface to the Third Edition of our basic text that talks about the great increase in size and span of our Fellowship, though, at "its core it remains simple and personal." It goes on to further say, "Each day, somewhere in the world, recovery begins when one alcoholic talks with another alcoholic, sharing experience, strength, and hope." And I felt that since the Big Book was good enough for me, then we didn't need any Fourth Edition of the Big Book. So when, in 1997, the book was approved, I was there and I raised my hand because I had been given some loving praise from the area about my idea.

I rotated out as delegate in 1997. In the book of General Service Conference Advisory Actions, it is written that past delegates should be out championing subscriptions for the Grapevine. I took that very seriously, and my area was getting pretty sick of me. So, in 1999, the notice for Grapevine director came out, and the people of my area told me to put a little muscle in my mouth and apply for it. I remember it like it was yesterday. I got on a train in Baltimore, stood the whole way, and, as the train went through the tunnel into New York, I got to Penn Station,

and I thought, rather than catch a cab to the Crown Plaza, I would walk, because I wanted to stretch my legs.

That day, I got a chance to share things with some wonderful people who were serving our Fellowship and its Grapevine Board members and directors. I did not think it would ever happen to me, but it happened. I remember saying, "This Grapevine Magazine has carried the message to millions of people throughout the years." The pass along rate may be even greater than we know. These things intrigued me about how we can best carry this message. My focus was how best to do that.

After doing that for number of years, I was asked to serve as a General Service Trustee. I was able to see that A.A. not only needs members to serve, but we also need Class A (nonalcoholic) trustees. Elaine McDowell mentored me on the board and she always said that I needed to keep my eyes out for other trustees. So, when I rotated in 2007, I began looking around for someone to be a Class A trustee. Part of my responsibility is to ensure that we have that type of talent in our Class A trustees.

I went through life looking for the brothers and sisters that I have in Alcoholics Anonymous — this is the family that I choose. And I am blessed to have you. Thank you.

**Phyllis H.**, past G.S.O. General Manager 2009-2015; past pacific regional trustee (B), 2002-2006; past GV Director 2003-2005

Some of you may know that I am new to this region. After spending most of my sobriety on the Pacific Coast, I now live in Delaware. I like to say I was grown, not thrown, into anything in A.A. I was gradually brought along in service in A.A and I am thankful for that. No one ever said, "Oh, we don't have a G.S.R., so you've got to be it." I was in a home group that was very active in service and there were many people who were anxious to be G.S.R., and anxious to be the secretary, treasurer, or whatever of that group. So I was eventually elected G.S.R. — but I had to wait four years. I am grateful for that. I was taken along to district events and area events so that I could learn what service was all about and what happened in A.A. beyond my home group. My service sponsorship was my home group and my sponsor. At that time, my sponsor was also active in service.

I served as D.C.M. and I served the area in various trusted servant positions until I was delegate for the Washington area. I was on Panel 47. I was also part of the Fourth Edition of the Big Book approval, and, oh, what discussions we had then! I love the debate in A.A. Our group conscience is one of the most precious gifts we have. I have learned, from all my service, that I have a voice, and I may have an opinion or a belief — but I don't have the answer. It is all of us in that group conscience. There is no other organization like ours. Each time I see the group conscience exercised, and I see us guided by it, I think of what a miracle it is.

I served on Panel 47 and the Big Book was a big thing. That is when I learned that any item that comes before the Conference is seriously discussed. The Big Book was giant, but we also gave as much attention and time to three-ring binders. In A.A., we love to talk, we love to discuss, and we love to have opinions. It gives us time to really exercise our best behavior (or our worst behavior) and somehow come out at the top with the right answers. We have all

these principles in our recovery program, and then we bring them in to service, but sometimes they are left behind, and then the object or the subject or whatever it is in front of us becomes more important than bringing our principles with us into that discussion. Many times, with my sponsor, that has happened, because I was (and still am) just like everybody else — I can resist with my opinion or say, “this is the way it should be.” But, thank goodness, we go back to the group conscience.

Let’s encourage our C.P.C./P.I. folks to continue their vital work. I believe that our greatest challenge is communication, because we have to reach every generation. Within our small office, a number of people are tasked with the greatest responsibility — to listen with open ears to the whole Fellowship. We hear it through the Conference process, through Regional Forums, groups, and representatives of groups.

Finally, technology is so rich with Traditions and recovery, but the one thing it is missing is service. Our Three Legacies are always close to my heart and are a part of my recovery. If you are new, I encourage you to serve. I put my application for G.S.O.’s general manager in on the last day. I couldn’t have been more surprised when I was called by some past trustees and was invited to the first of several interviews and eventually got appointed. My heart is full — every single person in the G.S.O. is vital to A.A. and has the heart of A.A.

I still have a lot to learn, but I will quietly bring some people along and show them how to enrich their lives through service and by being a larger part of A.A.

**David E.**, past trustee (B), 2001-2005; past GV Director, 1997-2005

You know what? There is no position called “past trustee” — we are just “has-beens.” So, how do you get to be a past trustee? Well, I can tell you. I came into A.A. in 1982 — just before Christmas. A guy who was letting me crash at his house that night hauled me to an A.A. meeting. I didn’t know anything about A.A. They went around the room and said, “I’m so-and-so and I’m an alcoholic.” I still had two brain cells talking to each other. I thought maybe I should say that, that I am an ‘alcoholic.’ But I didn’t know if I was or not. Nobody had given me the secret password or handshake. So, I didn’t know. When they got to me, I determined that I was simply going to say my name was David and, “I’m here to check it out.” So, it came around and got closer and closer. I began to get tense. And then it was my turn in the circle. But instead of saying what I’d planned, I said, “My name is David and I’m an alcoholic.” And in that moment, all of that doubt, uncertainty, terror and fear just dropped away from me. I knew that that was the truth about me. I was an alcoholic.

After the meeting I stood up and waited. I had heard lots of stuff in the meeting about how the members helped each other and gave each other jobs, places to live, took care of them, fed them, and did all these things. So, I waited for the crush of people to take care of me.

But in those days, I had long hair down to the middle of my back, a scraggly beard that not only hadn’t been trimmed, it had crumbs in it from whatever I’d found to eat from the trash. I had been sleeping on the beach for some weeks. I reeked of urine and beer. No one came up to me.

But someone made an announcement about an alkathon the next day — on Christmas Eve. I heard there was going to be food and drinks and meetings. I said, “That’s where I am going.” Someone, in service, made that announcement. I think that saved my life, because I didn’t know what to do or where to go. Just a week before I had been thinking about drowning myself in the ocean because my life was over at 30 years old. I was a lost soul. I had nothing to live for. I came to A.A. that night. My journey, my life, has changed completely as a result of coming to a meeting.

I floundered for a while. I didn’t have any clue as to why I was still alive. I had a wife and child in Maine and a useless history degree. But one day I heard, for the umpteenth time, the reading of the A.A. Preamble that is printed in the Grapevine. I *really* heard it. It said that “Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.” I decided that if I could be of service to one other human being in my life and help them get sober, then my life would be worth living. I decided to learn as much as I could about Alcoholics Anonymous.

At four months sober, I was hanging out at the local intergroup office. I read everything published by A.A. I read the Service Manual. I talked to my sponsor, he said, “You read the service manual? What kind of crazy person are you?” But I got active in A.A. There are all kinds of service in A.A. Everything we do that helps another alcoholic to achieve sobriety is service, it is not just general service.

The following year I was chair of the alkathon committee because I knew it had saved my life. I went into the general service structure and was elected D.C.M., area chair and then delegate. There were lots of controversies then, I remember the controversy surrounding merit pay and whether or not we should produce medallions. But that year we decided to include one article in Spanish in the Grapevine — we had been approached by Spanish-speaking members who had asked to be included.

I rotated out and went on my merry way. A slot came up for director of the Grapevine board and I applied but was not selected. The following year, another slot came up. I interviewed. They asked, are you sure you have the time? You live in Hawaii. . And I said, I am willing, I am willing to go to any length. So, I became a director on the Grapevine Board. I served eight years, four on the Grapevine Board and four on the General Service Board. That was a total 640,000 air miles between Hawaii and New York. Thank you for allowing me to serve.

**Bob W.**, past trustee-at-large/U.S., 2013-2017

I rotated six weeks ago, so this is my first forum as a past trustee. I was reflecting upon the day I got elected as trustee-at-large/U.S. — J. Gary congratulated me from his hospital bed. I saved that voicemail. I am still pinching myself that I ever got elected. I’ve had so much fun and experienced so many things. What did I do to deserve this?

I was an insecure drunk who couldn’t get out of his shell and do anything. When I got here, I thought my life was over. I was 23 years old. Now I get so excited about A.A. — and I have these socks that are all crazy colors. I see now that my life was just beginning. I always say that enthusiasm is the greatest ingredient in attraction. I saw it in people in A.A. and it made me want to serve. So, I stood up and I did it, because if they could do it, I could do it. I wanted that happiness.

As one of 21 trustees and serving our Board, I've watched Alcoholics Anonymous emerge around the world, and I've seen all that we do. I've seen the work of the dollars that we put in the basket and the work of the corporate boards A.A.W.S. and Grapevine, too. I've read and experienced the stories that are published in Grapevine about international events and happenings and the work that A.A.W.S. does in administering the international literature fund and all the literature translations. We are one A.A. — we are A.A. around the world. I believe the W.S. in A.A.W.S. is so important — we carry our A.A. experience and history from the U.S. and Canada to other countries and locales. I tried to serve in that capacity. I'd land on the ground and stand in front of 5,000 people in a huge auditorium in Japan and they start asking me questions, like "Why doesn't A.A. do research?" I answer all these questions, talk about Cooperation with the Professional Community, and then watch these countries embark on these kinds of services. Seeing that has been unbelievable.

There is still so much work to do. I have learned, through my time, that there are somewhere around 63 General Service Offices around the world and there is an A.A. presence in approximately 180 countries. That's generally what we say, but depending on a few factors, it could be a few more or a few less. And that always makes me wonder: What are we doing with that 63 — those who are a little more organized and connected into our world service structure? We need to identify and focus on these things — they are important.

I also ponder how we have been talking about the stagnating membership number in our Fellowship for so long — the past 25 years or so. If you think of the number of A.A. members in the U.S. and Canada (1.3 million) and those around the world (700,000 - 800,000), and then you think of the size of some nations, their population number, and the alcohol problems that we've heard shared from some A.A.s in some of these nations — it is so important.

Service, to me, is meant to stretch our personality, our recovery, and to push us into places that we didn't think we'd fit. I think I can speak for all of us — every one of us on the dais has felt unworthy when he or she got elected. I certainly did. I was a drunk from a little town in Western Massachusetts. Twenty-five years ago, I was hanging over a knife, ready to drop my chest into that knife. Instead, I had a moment of clarity, and in that nanosecond, I jumped in my car and checked myself into a mental institution. And so my journey began.

So, I hope you will all consider and remember: When you don't think that you can do it, you can. Always keep your hand in the air and serve Alcoholics Anonymous in whatever way you feel called to do, so that "when anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help," the hand of A.A. will be there. For that we are all responsible.

# CLOSING REMARKS

**Michele Grinberg**, Class A (nonalcoholic) General Service Board Chairperson

Has everyone had a good time? I sure have. Thank you, thank you, it's been such a joy to be here and to Yvette N. and to her wonderful, wonderful committee — thank you so much. And to our past trustees, many of whom I've had the privilege to serve with, and our staff and Ivy — Ivelisse — who is our guide; who keeps all of us on track and to Steve from the office. Thank you so much.

So, who am I? I am Michele Grinberg, just another Class A amateur who loves you, who loves what A.A. can do for the alcoholic. And, personally, who loves and practices the principles of A.A. in all my affairs. I've had an absolutely wonderful time this weekend. And I sure hope you have as well.

I see my primary job, when I come to Regional Forums, to be a good listener. And I've been listening and I've been taking notes. And I will be thinking a long time about many of the things I've heard. So, I thank everybody for their contributions this weekend. There is a tremendous wealth of ideas and experience here, and I've really benefited personally and professionally — and as your trusted servant — from what I've heard. Thank you, of course, for inviting us — the General Service Board, the A.A.W.S. Board, and Grapevine Board, as well as the G.S.O. and Grapevine staff — to come here. And to all my old and new friends in NERF, it is absolutely my pleasure to serve you.

So, I want to tell you just a few things that I've heard this weekend that I've kind of gathered into my brain. And for me, the theme of this weekend was 'Communication.' Thank you, Phyllis, you gave my talk. So, I heard all about communication, and I will tell you (not coincidentally, I don't think), that's a big piece of the strategic plan that the Board is working on — communication. So, I heard about communication when we had that absolutely — I thought 'fabulous' — discussion on safety in A.A. groups, which was a workshop of the whole. I thought that went very well. To me (just my opinion), it seems as though, perhaps, groups are coming of age in acknowledging where they can do better to make a meeting available to all who want it, while, at the same time, respecting that there are some problems out there — and there are some very troubled souls out there — who can have an impact that needs to be recognized and dealt with — however the group decides — in it's very, very informed group conscience about how to do it. And thank you, Linda, for that wonderful presentation. And, really, thank you to all the delegates for their presentations. They were excellent, I took notes on every one. Thank you. You have terrific delegates in the Northeast Region.

I heard a lot of communication about inclusion: whether it was delegates sharing, whether it was those of you who got up and shared at the mikes, whether it was the numerous requests to hear the yellow card. I loved it. Whether it was the workshops — I attended some excellent workshops (I went in and out I didn't get to everyone but I got to most of them), and though it may have been stated differently, to me it was about A.A. being available and welcoming to all, regardless, to all of us. I found all the discussion to be very robust, very thoughtful and at

the same time, to me, in the great A.A. spirit of kindness and gentleness and respect for each other. It was great.

I hope you will continue to share with each other about how to get the word out that A.A. is here, it's alive, and everyone is welcome — and how to practice that within your groups when those newcomers (or maybe returners) come in the door — very important.

Young People: I attended the workshop on that and heard so many good ideas about being kind and being encouraging and, you know, that's not just about young people, that's for each other. We want to be kind and encouraging. You all have been so kind and encouraging to me that I know how well it works, and I know what it does to the soul when you do it. Thank you.

So, communication, what's it really about? It's about sharing our stories — that's the foundational point of A.A. We share our stories. And then the miracle happens. You know, I've been asked how A.A. works, and you know what my answer is? I haven't a clue! But when people share stories, it works. Thank God.

So, I shared my participation in this Forum on Friday night by referencing the 2018 General Service Conference theme: "A.A. — A Solution for All Generations." I'm going to close by telling you I think this topic has two meanings — at least for me it has two meanings. One is tolerance and acceptance of all who seek the A.A. solution. (You've now figured out I love to quote Bill W.) In *As Bill Sees It*, he wrote "honesty with ourselves and others gets us sober, but it is tolerance that keeps us that way." Wow.

The other meaning for me is that A.A. is timeless and can be a solution for all generations to come, one day at a time. That means it's up to all of us who care about A.A. to keep A.A. strong for those future generations. Listening to you this weekend, I know A.A. is full of passionate and smart people who will work hard, do service, and keep the hand of A.A. out there. Thank you for a wonderful weekend. See you again.

