



FINAL REPORT
NORTHEAST REGIONAL FORUM
JUNE 7-9, 2013
CROMWELL, CONNECTICUT

Dear A.A. Friends,

Please mark your calendar for the next Northeast Regional Forum, which will take place in Albany, New York, May 29-31, 2015 at the Albany Marriott.

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

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
WORKSHOP REPORTS.....	3
PRESENTATIONS	9
PAST TRUSTEES' SHARING.....	20
"CLOSING REMARKS"	24

INTRODUCTION

The 2013 Northeast Regional Forum was held in Cromwell, Connecticut. Registration for this Forum topped at 582. This included 369 members attending their very first Forum—several who were welcomed at the Forum Orientation on Friday evening. Sunday morning included a session for first-time forum attendees, followed by sharing from past trustees.

WORKSHOP REPORTS

La Viña: The La Viña Rep and More—Bringing our Message of Hope to Alcoholics (Moderator: Irene D./Reporter: Maria E.) The workshop members talked about the necessity and benefits of the magazine for recovery and the life of the Fellowship. They commented that La Viña articles improve one's mood and help forge a connection to other human beings and other areas where Hispanics live. La Viña articles are the expression of recovery and bring with them the benefit of identification. La Viña is a useful tool to maintain sobriety and can save somebody's life. It is important therefore, to learn why some subscribers do not receive the magazine —e.g., distribution problems and why some subscribers who receive the magazine do not read it. The issue of *responsibility* in connection with the magazine was also discussed —i.e., *individual responsibility* is seeking information about our disease; *group responsibility* is electing a La Viña Representatives and providing them with information about how to do his/her service work; and *area responsibility* includes hosting La Viña events. Persons who do La Viña service should encourage members to write their stories for the magazine and teach A.A. groups that the magazine is all of our responsibility. La Viña can be carried to institutions —e.g., federal prisons by first speaking to institution directors. Sometimes Hispanic trusted servants cannot visit institutions because of documentation problems, but a solution could be to ask English-speaking service people for help in delivering La Viña to those institutions.

Communication in A.A. (Moderator: Yvette N./Reporter: Theresa N.) The workshop members discussed that good communication flows up and down the triangle and listens more than talks. Good communication invites, but does not broadcast. To disseminate communication to groups we can visit groups and introduce ourselves. We can also bring information in the form of gifts, such as flyers for an upcoming event, workshop, or Alcathon and we can congratulate groups on their anniversaries. We can also create newsletters to invite members to action. Keep newsletters short; add poems, jokes, service stories, events, workshops and Alcathons in a calendar. We can also do phone work, redact phone numbers and post-online and deliver online messages. We can have share-a-days and have lots of them. Plan district sharing days with help from the area. Ask area officers and Intergroups to attend the share-a-days. Invite individuals to speak on future topics, language, special needs and education barriers, best practices and sponsorship at share-a-days. Always include people, and never exclude anyone.

The A.A. Service Manual: A Guide to our Basic Service Principles and Procedures (Moderator: Mike D./Reporter: Altti P.) The workshop members talked about ways to stimulate interest in general service. They suggested attracting members into service enthusiastically with a positive attitude. Highlight that we are attracted to sober service because it works and provide good examples of sobriety. Stress life or death and the need to

give back. Curiosity is an opportunity to offer the spectrum of service opportunities. Share the 3 Es *Education, Enthusiasm and Experience*. Communicate the Three Legacies. Dispel the idea of politics by attractively promoting the best examples of sobriety –i.e., doing service with joy and keeping spiritually fit through 12th Step work. Offer and attend Tradition and Concept meetings with guest speakers who share their experiences in service. Offer many functions to get people involved. If it serves the group then members will participate. Grab enthusiastic newcomers. Young people are enthusiastic about service because it offers self-examination. Accompany new General Service Representatives (GSRs) into service. Offer district events (Food and Fun). The Long Island Committee invites District Committee Members to events in rotating counties (Food and Fun). Events recharge our service batteries!

The workshop members also discussed how to sponsor newcomers into service using the Service Manual. The Service Manual tells us that giving back is how we achieve sobriety. Schedule a day or weekend with a service sponsor to read and discuss the manual. Seek a service sponsor who has a service sponsor. If sponsees are not interested or happy doing service work, there are other options for committee work. Offer service opportunities to match the individual. Let go of those who won't hear the message. Newcomer's fears are reduced when they can relate to real life situations. Sit down with new GSRs and read one page of the Service Manual per day until complete. Play Trivia games using the Service Manual and Daily Diary on Traditions and Concepts topics. Use "A.A. Comes of Age" and the Twelve Concepts and Traditions as an introduction to the Service Manual. Repetition is needed for retention. At district meetings discuss one concept a month and ask GSRs to bring the concept back to groups for continued discussion. Concept issues that arise at assemblies should be brought back to service sponsors with questions. Utilize past delegates as a resource. One member reported that people took him/her to all kinds of service events before they knew what was going on and later they just started doing it. This is how that member stayed sober. Introducing new people to events is an example of being responsible.

Speaking at Non-A.A. Meetings (Moderator: Linda K./Reporter: Jeff B.) The workshop members discussed what should be considered when speaking at non-A.A. meetings -e.g., trade shows, church organizations, professional organizations, schools, Al-Anon, etc. First, attraction, not promotion is rule No. 1. Stand discreetly behind the booth and answer questions in layman's terms. Dress appropriately. Always keep in mind that we may be the only Big Book that people will see. Always convey that you are not representing all of A.A. but your own experience of the program. Convey what A.A. is and what A.A. is not – only using your personal story to affirm what you are conveying about the program. At professional meetings, talk more about what the program is and is not and how we can help their patients and members. Be prepared and know the material. Be prepared to answer questions about recovery, membership, self-support, sponsorship, etc. Tailor what you share, both through materials and discussion, to your audience -e.g., at Al-Anon, don't share A.A. history (they know it), rather, share the recovery. Refer those with inquiries to other support areas if we are not the correct group -e.g., Gamblers Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Al-Anon, etc.

The workshop members also discussed how to protect anonymity when speaking at non-A.A. meetings. They suggested never giving out last names unless it is absolutely necessary. Do not give out personal information. Instead of speaking in your district, go a short distance away. Pictures should not be allowed of the people at the booth. The booth itself could be photographed but be careful about showing other's photographs. Ask people to respect our Traditions and not take our pictures. Do not mention the name of A.A. if press, radio or film is

involved. At the same time, don't be too anonymous. Be guided by Dr. Bob who said "If our communities don't know how to find us, we're not doing our job."

The A.A. Home Group—Where it All Begins (Moderator: Linda M./Reporter: Michelle S.)

The workshop members discussed that service starts in the A.A. Home Group. Through it you learn responsibility. Besides, living up to commitments gives us a sense of self-esteem and helps keep us sober and accountable. One member asked if we can have more than one Home Group. The consensus was that if you are a member of more than one Home Group, you should be willing and able to participate and do service in both groups. However, when it comes to matters of informed group conscience, vote only in one group. One group equals one vote at county and area levels. Choose only one group in which to celebrate an anniversary. The workshop members also discussed "Rotation vs. non-Rotation." A position must be vacant in order to fill it. Service is a privilege and as such it is our responsibility to share the wealth. If some people do too much, others will do nothing. Don't hold positions hostage. Failure to rotate stagnates the growth of Home Groups.

Anonymity in the Digital Age (Moderator: Ken T./Reporter: Michael Y.)

The workshop members talked about the benefits and dangers of the Internet, social media and contacting others through email. Taking photos in meetings and posting them on social media is not appropriate and may put A.A. members at risk of losing their anonymity in the workplace and/or in their private life. Password-protecting email before it is sent and refraining from using A.A. lingo and slogans on social media are some of the steps we can take to help protect our anonymity. The workshop members came to the conclusion that it is everyone's duty to help carry the message and share their experience on anonymity in the digital age to those who might not yet understand the dangers. Some expressed they don't use email or social media at all through the Internet.

The second topic discussed by the workshop members was the benefit of the Internet and social media and how both can be used as tools for good. Skype and online meetings can help break the ice for those who might be afraid or not able to attend a face-to-face meeting at first but are encouraged to attend face-to-face meetings later. The ability to find meetings in an area and even have a map and the distances between home and meetings is a great tool of the Internet. Facebook is another tool to use with 'secret' groups and private messages to help channel the message of A.A. One member shared an experience he had with orchestrating a 12th Step call through Facebook in another state at a late hour. The Internet is challenging and, like social media, press and film, it is something we are still working on to figure out.

Grapevine: The Grapevine Rep and More—Beginning our Message of Hope to Alcoholics (Moderator: Ami B./Reporter: Carol A.)

The workshop members reported that the Grapevine is an extension of the Fellowship for newcomers, travelers, researchers and sponsors. It is relevant, colorful, easy-to-use, especially on-line and it carries the message. The workshop members discussed how to find Grapevines for new groups. There is a registration form to order Grapevines. District Grapevine Reps can meet with group Grapevine Reps and together visit groups that have no Reps. The workshop members also discussed how to support workshops, presenters and contributors. It is okay to use your voice in your language. Have online smart-phone workshops such as "What's on your Mind" from A.A. Grapevine.org and show the website on a smart-board projector, providing digital recording for seven minute-sharing opportunities at events. Show how promotional items and calendars are

created and where the complementary materials, order forms, Grapevine catalog, and information cards can be obtained. Give out information about the progress of the AAGV audio program. For the calendar, photo selection and captioning contests were discussed.

How Are We Carrying our Message?—Group Inventory (Moderator: Craig W./Reporter: Chris S.) The workshop members shared numerous methods of carrying the message and how to inspire others. Groups have a handbook, websites, group conscience (monthly, quarterly and bi-annual) meetings, annual inventory meetings and ad-hoc group follow-up meetings to discuss how they are carrying the message. Groups ask for help and members facilitate discussions. Group inventories have become trendy and each member is encouraged to participate. “The A.A. Group” pamphlet and Grapevine Traditions checklists are useful tools to help with inventories. Groups that conduct inventories are healthier than groups that do not. General sharing from the Service Manual is a useful attraction. The workshop members also discussed the usefulness of doing inventories regularly. They commented that pain during the inventory creates willingness and being all inclusive is the key. Remember also that *principles over personalities* is important. The facilitator should have experience. The General Service Conference last took their inventory at the 2013 Conference.

Cooperation Without Affiliation—Signing Court Slips at Meetings (Moderator: Justin E./Reporter: Seth T.) The workshop members discussed how we can better inform people mandated by court about what A.A. is and is not. Courts themselves can be better informed through orientations done by area committees using related A.A. Guidelines and Conference-approved pamphlets/literature. One-on-one discussion with newcomers after meetings is helpful to share their A.A. experiences. The workshop members also discussed how to deal with disruptive people who are mandated to attend A.A. Announce group guidelines related to conduct before meetings; hold court slips until the end of meetings; have chairs firmly enforce these guidelines; and speak to the person after the meeting if there is a problem.

Serving Alcoholics With Special Needs (Moderator: John D./Reporter: Laura B.) The workshop members discussed how to define special needs and issues of communication as a solution. The lack of representation by groups at district levels is a problem. Special needs is a group issue. Awareness needs to be raised to issues. For example, ask “is a meeting truly handicap-accessible, including bathrooms?” Keep this in mind when choosing locations for meetings and events. Have an open mind in working with special need members –e.g., accessibility issues, language can be a barrier. One area has literature in many languages, but how do they let their groups know this? Lighthouse International has resources for blind people. Perhaps we could get Big Book copies in Braille from there? Don’t talk down or treat special needs differently. One member commented that “What I think ‘they’ need” is usually wrong. Personal experiences can be the best teacher. Sponsorship can play a role in helping sponsees be sensitive to special needs.

Self-Support—Where Money and Spirituality Mix (Moderator: Steve O./Reporter: Dale S.) The workshop members discussed how money and spirituality mix. Only around forty percent of groups are paying for 100% of the services. Participate in our own recovery. Educate your group on funding the service entities. We have a responsibility to utilize the funds collected properly. The members also discussed how to tactfully get group members to contribute. For example, read and explain the Green Card, share information on the birthday plan and on online contributions. Lead by example: if you are putting more than \$1.00 in the basket, others

may follow. Participate in the 7th Tradition no matter what the contribution. Explain the need to adjust for inflation.

Sponsorship—In Recovery and In Service (Moderator: Rose S./Reporter: Denise B.) The workshop members discussed how a service sponsor is someone who teaches us to reach out our hand to the next alcoholic. They are a powerful example of service. They are someone who lives the Traditions and Concepts in their lives and not just in A.A. Service sponsors keep us guided through our service commitments. They also keep us on the track with following through on commitments. The members also asked about how to pick a recovery sponsor. Some felt a spiritual nudge towards a person. Or they see in a person what they want. Recovery sponsors also lead by example and may have a perspective that we don't have. They can also take us through the Steps. The workshop members talked about how to change sponsors. The discussed that sponsors may be changed by keeping an open mind. Say thank you for their service and part ways gracefully. In general, it is very vital to recovery to utilize both recovery and service sponsors along with all the other aspects of the A.A. program.

A.A. and Advancing Technologies (Moderators: Greg T./Brouck H./Reporter Blaine B.) The workshop members discussed the structure of A.A. websites in the region. DelawareAA.org is the oldest A.A. website in Delaware. And is the key link to finding meetings in Delaware, the U.S. and Canada. It also features links to Intergroups, calendars of events, online registration for events, GSO for online contributions, PSAs from archives, a portal for eBooks and audio tapes (crediting GSO on the site). There is a service manual specific to the Delaware assembly online in .pdf format so it is downloadable and printable for visitors. In Pennsylvania there is a commitment locally to keep the website simple by not connecting databases, etc. There is a link to a map of eastern Pennsylvania that shows where meetings are located and there is a link to the PA Intergroup schedule page (similar to GSO's website). By keeping their website simple, members without a lot of website experience can rotate into this position. In New York the Central Office controls the website and paperwork. They receive feedback from delegates asking them to stop sending them flyers; and others will say that they must have the flyers emailed because they cannot access the website. At quarterly meetings people have asked to opt out of a mailing to save funds on distribution. Since help is in networking with other A.A.s who may have similar problems and each group is autonomous, the distribution of information is challenging. Furthermore, addressing problems as they arise is difficult when the Webmaster is on extended vacations. In Maryland there is a Webmaster, but no website chair (no active committee). Emails are forwarded to blind districts but names are not posted. Services are provided for the groups and members and committees in general service, etc. Website bylaws were created. A handbook is now posted on the website (took 1.5 years to create). A discussion of whether or not to post minutes is now occurring. In Rhode Island people are creating websites for the Rhode Island State Convention, Central Service, etc. They have discretion over the website, but there is a Webmaster who may or may not be a voting member of that committee.

The workshop members also discussed whether web-committees are ad-hoc or standing. One workshop member said web-committees should be standing committees and the chair of the Area should be the chair of the web-committee, since the area chair works closely with Intergroup. One website can serve both the area and Intergroup. Another workshop member talked about how Webmasters can predate standing web-committees and how committees can slow website development and progress. Another workshop member talked about how

Intergroup and area conference committee members don't do much together, though they talk often. This member was on two ad-hoc committees to create separate websites for the area and Intergroup. Since then a website committee has functioned at the area, but not at the Intergroup. It is a fairly functional "gatekeeper to what goes on the website." The Webmaster at the area level is tasked with maintaining both the area and Intergroup –i.e., post events calendar, minutes, reports, etc. In another area, the website committee is only laterally related to the general service structure. The area has a central service that was created several years before the general service structure was formed.

The workshop members asked if we are trying to build something at the GSO-level –i.e., something to pass down to people to use at the group level as their conscience dictates. This model sounds like a service position where the Webmaster would be a delegate-at-large who would attend the General Service Conference and impart A.A. knowledge. Another need at the GSO-level is search engine optimization for A.A.

One workshop member commented that he is an A.A. World Service ad-hoc committee member and has had the privilege of taking his technology experience in Silicon Valley to service in A.A. Another workshop member commented that there were 3 eTech team members present at the workshop, all of whom are professionals who have worked in technology at different companies. They argued that the Fellowship is missing a model for technology communications. They asked other workshop members to join them at their Intergroup, Area and District levels to talk about their guidelines, best practices, how they utilize technology and the repositories that are needed. Another workshop member talked about the high cost associated with using SharePooint as a repository database. They asked if there was any other software to use to build a repository. It was suggested to make available a video presentation on database repositories so eTech members do not have to travel and new tech service positions could easily learn about anonymity and compliance information. It was also suggested that training in online technologies be made available at our conventions.

How can we as areas or Intergroup push out information to the Fellowship about events, instead of waiting for people to come to our websites?

People can take back discussions and feedback to web-committees. Right now conversations and decisions on how to best use technology are being discussed and decided outside of committee meetings. Debtors Anonymous has recently adopted a technology committee as an advisory body to its General Service conference. Another workshop member reported that the dilemma is that in business, a group of people who are informed would be selected to consult on topic. However, in A.A. we are autonomous. That seems to have caused us to get to a success point where we are paying for our success. Special workers may be not be rotating as often and software is retired and can't be backed up anywhere, etc. We see these as common business problems and would like some informational mechanism to determine our responsibilities and how we form committees in our structures and our Traditions? Have a group of people come together to discuss this.

The workshop members also discussed that technology is broader than just websites and may include many things –e.g., how to use email, third-party services and Facebook that seems to get to people first. Mobile apps can show where meetings are available within a 10-mile area

in our region. Maintaining the maintenance and guidance on these services usually falls to a Web Committee. There is a real need for knowledge in the Fellowship about how to “safely” stretch technology knowledge across the fellowship, including A.A. virtual meetings and meta-meetings to carry-on Fellowship work over the Internet. The workshop members also talked about their concerns about compromising anonymity when members use the Internet. One member reported that they had not checked their email for six months and were appalled to find that their name and email was distributed by a friend’s daughter to her contact list. Other members reported that there are published A.A. Guidelines for the Internet. They are produced when people ask a question about our experience on the topic. It was agreed that this is starting place for providing information and guidelines on the use of the Internet in A.A.

PRESENTATIONS

“The Spirituality of Anonymity” Patricia M., Delegate Panel 62, Area 61 Rhode Island

Hello, my name is Pat and I am an alcoholic. I am presenting today on “The Spirituality of Anonymity.” Obviously, anonymity plays a central role in our Fellowship. The importance of it is clear from lessons learned from those that came before us.

Tradition Eleven states that “Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films.”

Tradition Twelve states that “Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.”

In Bill Wilson’s last message he said, “Anonymity has two attributes essential to our individual and collective survival; the spiritual and the practical. On the spiritual level, anonymity demands the greatest discipline of which we are capable; on the practical level anonymity has brought protection for the newcomer, respect and support of the world outside, and security from those of us would use A.A. for sick and selfish purposes.”

One of the original rationales for maintaining anonymity was to protect our young membership. In his discussion of the Twelfth Tradition in *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, Bill said: “[I]n the beginning, anonymity was not born of confidence; it was the child of our early fears. Our first nameless groups of alcoholics were secret societies.” But Bill went on to add: “Our growth made it plain that we couldn’t be a secret society.”

We maintain personal anonymity at the public level for a variety of reasons: we are based on attraction rather than promotion; we do not have a “face” of A.A.; there are no special alcoholics who represent us; we need to protect our program from those who would use it for their own devises; it is a practical measure; and if the public face of our program were to relapse it could reflect badly on us.

It is important to note, however, that anonymity within our program can be detrimental. We remain anonymous publicly, but we are not anonymous to each other. I want the hand of A.A. always to be there, for myself and the next sick and suffering individual seeking help. We are responsible to make ourselves available and that requires letting people know who we are. Our

literature cites our founders on this subject. On page 241 of *As Bill Sees It*, Bill states “In some sections of A.A., anonymity is carried to the point of real absurdity. Members are on such a poor basis of communication that they don't even know each other's last names or where each lives.” From *Dr. Bob and the Good Old Timers*, page 264, Dr. Bob said there were two ways to break the anonymity tradition: by giving your name at the public level of press or radio, and by being so anonymous that you can't be reached by other drunks.

Anonymity is commonly defined as the quality or state of being unknown or unacknowledged. I believe that the “unacknowledged” portion of the definition is where spirituality is inherent. There have been times when I had particularly frustrating experiences with my service commitments. I'm sure that is not a difficult concept for many of you. One time, when I was complaining about how much I do for A.A. and nobody was suitably appreciating all of the sacrifice I made, the gentleman I was dating, also in recovery, said to me “There is no limit to what we can accomplish if we don't care who gets the credit.”

Admittedly, when he said that I wanted to punch him. This was not what I wanted to hear! I wanted to hear him agree with me that I was terribly underappreciated. He did have a point though. I had to look at my motives for performing service work. Once I could actually come to grips with the fact that I was doing this because I owed A.A. for my life and I wanted to give back, I started to really understand the spiritual aspect of anonymity. It was the metaphorical slap in the face I needed to reset my motivations and expectations. I was not doing this for credit or acknowledgement (although admittedly a pat on the back would have been nice); I do what I do because I can. It is, for me, the next right thing.

Once I heard the expression “There is no limit to what we can accomplish if we don't care who gets the credit,” I wondered where it came from. That gentleman who helped put me in my place became my husband, but despite my love and respect for him I knew he did not coin it. Investigation turned up variations credited to several folks, including our 33rd U.S. President Harry S. Truman, Coca Cola C.E.O. Bob Woodruff, our 40th President Ronald Reagan, and Al Grieshaber, Jr., a gentleman who I cannot identify. In keeping with the spirit of the quote, I guess it doesn't matter who actually said it. All I know is that, for me, it sums up the spiritual nature of anonymity.

I read in a newsletter of All Addicts Anonymous that anonymity becomes a truly altruistic and spiritual principle only when consciously used by a spiritually awakened person as a means of self-denial, or as a policy of putting God first and keeping ego subordinated. It is this kind of anonymity that keeps a sober alcoholic from taking personal credit for his or her recovery. It discourages showing off and bragging—those faults that in the old, pre-A.A. days so often preceded an inglorious relapse into drunkenness. And this higher type of anonymity works therapeutically against the temptation, never absent from any organization, to place upon personalities—founder figures, charismatic figures, or governor figures—the reliance which by rights should be reserved for God alone.

I would like to close with something Bill wrote in the January 1946 issue of the Grapevine: “The word anonymous has for us an immense spiritual significance. Subtly but powerfully, it reminds us that we should always place principles before personalities; that we should have renounced personal glorification in public; that our movement not only preaches but actually practices a true humility.”

“The Benefits of Doing Service Work” Keith D., Delegate Panel 62, Area 48 New York/Hudson/Mohawk/Berkshire

Hi, my name is Keith D. and I am an alcoholic. My sobriety date is February 6, 1993, and my home group is the Keep It Real Group. We meet on Wednesday nights at 7:00 p.m. at the Reformed Church in Bloomington, NY. Stop by if you are ever in the area, we would love to see you. I have a sponsor and I am a sponsor. I currently have the honor of serving as the Panel 62, HMB Area 48 Delegate, and serving on the Grapevine Conference Committee.

I would like to start by thanking Julio for extending a loving invitation to share with you today. The topic I will share on is “The Benefits of Doing Service Work.”

Having just celebrated my second decade of sobriety and entering into my second year of service as a delegate, I have been reflecting on the earlier part of my recovery journey. After sharing at my home group one night, an old timer suggested that it was time for me to take my inventory. I had a step sponsor at the time, but he never talked to me the way this gentleman did. In a nice and loving manner he said that I was an ego driven person and needed to start working the Third Legacy of our program. I recall his opinion that all I did was take from the program and that I was not giving anything back. That night when I went home I called my sponsor. Much to my dismay he agreed with the other guy; something needed to change. Of course it took time for things to change, but it began to happen.

As I prepared for my presentation on this topic, I thought of a section in “Doctor Bob’s Nightmare” found in the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*, pages 180-181. Dr. Bob wrote, “I spend a great deal of time passing on what I learned to others who want and need it badly. I do it for four reasons:

1. Sense of Duty.
2. It is a pleasure.
3. Because in so doing I am paying my debt to the man who took time to pass it on to me.
4. Because every time I do it I take out a little more insurance for myself against a possible slip.”

When I set out on my Third Legacy journey, the reasons listed above were not on my mind, but I wholeheartedly feel them today.

That being said, I would like to share a couple benefits that I have received that were very profound for me. The first one is the gift of being able to get out of my comfort zone. I can remember around ten years ago I was sitting at a NERAASA (North East Region A.A. Service Assembly) talking with Bobby F., our Panel 56, Area 48 Delegate. I was giving him a hard time because he was asked to go up in front of the assembly and he was very nervous. He responded by saying “Don’t laugh pal, some day you will be up there.” I laughed at the time because there was no way, with the fear that I carried, that serving as a delegate would ever happen. Sitting in the back of a room was an old habit of mine; it felt nice and safe. Service opportunities presented themselves, and over time I was able to work on those fears. The fact that I am sharing with you today as the delegate for Area 48 is evidence of a huge change in my life as a result of service work.

The fear of being up in front of a large assembly was not my only challenge. As a D.C.M., I sometimes felt like a person with a bull's-eye on my forehead. I learned that even though our program is spiritually grounded in principles of mutual respect and love, people do not always act with respect and love. It was very disconcerting to me that folks in service were not treating each other kindly. I saw that sometimes we treated those in long-term service with less kindness than the new person who was new to the service structure. This behavior prompted me to ask someone to be my service sponsor. That person helped me to better understand the thirty-six principles of our program. I also developed a thicker skin that helped when dealing with the diverse people in our service structure. Today, I believe in Concept XII, Warranty VI, which is found on page seventy-two of *The A.A. Service Manual*. It states "Therefore we expect our Conferences will always try to act in the spirit of mutual respect and love—one member for another." It further states "that no action should ever be personally punitive."

After connecting with a service sponsor, I also began to incorporate the principles of the program into the rest of my A.A. life. Getting up in front of a dozen to hundreds of people in an A.A. assembly allows me to feel okay outside of my comfort zone. At a moment's notice I can be subjected to a last-minute business meeting for work and not freeze up because I am full of fear. Since I have practiced in my service commitments being in front of people, those situations are not as intimidating as they used to be. What an incredible feeling of freedom this has given me both in and out of the rooms.

With each service position, I was subjected to more and more readings from our literature. This remains a tough task for me even today. Reading has never been a favorite pastime for me, and my retention is rather poor. The lower I go down the triangle the more literature I've had to read. It is now less scary to read things like the Big Book, the Twelve and Twelve, *A.A. Comes of Age* or *The A.A. Service Manual*. The task of reading all the background material for the last two Conferences was even less daunting! I learned that when I read something over and over the information begins to stick.

One of my favorite readings is the St. Francis prayer. This prayer has been an invaluable tool for me along this journey. It allows me to put myself in other people's shoes, thus relieving me of being judgmental and uncaring towards them. It also helps me put the needs of others in front of my own.

That old timer that told me that I would never be able to get out of my own way unless I gave back what has been so freely given to me continues to remind me of the Third Step Prayer from page sixty-three of the Big Book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*: "God, I offer myself to Thee—to build with me and to do with me as Thou wilt. Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Thy will. Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Thy Power, Thy Love, and Thy Way of life. May I do Thy will always!"

There are more gifts too numerous to mention. I know without question that I would not be where I am today without being involved in service. Day-by-day I am growing into the person God had intended for me to be, and I am eternally grateful for it. All I had to do was suit up and show up. What Dr. Bob says is true for me as well; it truly is a pleasure.

Thank you for allowing me to serve. My name is Keith and I am an alcoholic. Thank you.

“The Future of the Grapevine: Print, Audio and Video” Bob C., Delegate Panel 62, Area 29 Maryland

My name is Bob C., Delegate Panel 62, Area 29. I was privileged to serve on the Grapevine Conference Committee for the two most recent General Service Conferences. My presentation assignment today is “The Future of the Grapevine: Print, Audio and Video.” Let’s frame this around a piece of non-Conference-approved literature that suggests that an understanding of *yesterday* and *today* is required before we can start musing about *tomorrow*.

About *yesterday*: Bill tells the Grapevine’s genesis story in a December 1946 article titled, “What is our A.A. Grapevine.” The magazine was started in mid-1944 by “several newspaper-minded A.A.s who thought we needed a monthly periodical.” They boot-strapped it up on their own, and “at the end of a year they found their paper in national distribution.” The trustees, when asked whether “the groups would like to have this periodical,” agreed to incorporate The A.A. Grapevine in 1946. Bill concludes that the Grapevine grew naturally out of a need, just “like the A.A. book, the Central Office, and the Foundation,” and quotes an early staff member, saying “We think that The A.A. Grapevine ought to become the ‘voice of Alcoholics Anonymous,’ bringing us news of each other across great distances . . . , always mindful of our sole aim to carry the A.A. message.”

Like any living entity, the Grapevine has changed some since. Bill W. calls it “our principle newspaper” in Tradition Nine (Long Form) and used to communicate with the Fellowship for the next quarter century. Some members tell me that after Bill’s “graduation” in 1971 the Grapevine’s content changed markedly. I’m no authority on GV content B.B. and A.B. (“Before Bill” and “After Bill”), but leaving that as an open question for *you*, that pretty much brings us up to *today*—when that early staffer’s sentiments are still reflected in the Grapevine’s Mission Statement, which defines the Grapevine’s primary purpose as “To carry the A.A. message . . . through its magazines, websites, and related items, which reflect the experience, strength, and hope of its members and friends on topics related to recovery, unity and service.” This language reflects that the Grapevine started as a magazine, but now it’s a diverse portfolio of Twelfth Step and sobriety-maintenance tools, through the sale of which it strives to be self-supporting.

From that perspective, what might *tomorrow* hold for the Grapevine? First, let’s talk about the elephant in the living room: Is the Grapevine still needed? My experience says that if this service can help a reasonable minority of newcomers at a reasonable cost, and continue to provide a vast and dynamically updated resource library to members like me who from time to time write presentations based on history or principles, then the need is unquestionably real.

So if the Grapevine is needed, what forms might it take in the future? To cope with the decline of print media, Grapevine Management is proactively going after the future today, working with the General Service Office to practice cooperation and resource sharing. Fourteen Grapevine books and eBooks are now available online. I’ve used these books for my morning meditation during the past year, and the stories in them are cream-of-the-crop. Other initiatives include database sharing, expanded digital options, and the “Share and Connect” Project, designed to encourage participation and attract subscriptions. “Share and Connect” includes: recording your own article, in your own voice, to submit to the Audio Grapevine Project; posting anonymously on the Grapevine website; subscribing to Grapevine Online to receive the Five Weekly Stories or the Grapevine Daily Quote; perusing the online calendar, which contains 112 event listings for June; and sponsoring a newcomer as a Grapevine or La Viña Rep, both excellent ways to get started in general service work. Future ideas include something like

Instagram or Story Wheel, where one tells a story in just a picture, without extraneous text, or offering a web portal through which groups could “adopt an inmate” by buying a Grapevine subscription to be provided anonymously to a resident of a correctional facility.

Considering the future, a timely question is one of money and circulation. Grapevine has been in the black for two years running, but that won't continue if subscriptions keep dropping at a five percent rate. So, should the Grapevine accept contributions from members? That question won't be settled today, but it remains one we may consider again in the future. For the short term, may I suggest that we get rid of the “old idea” that the sky is falling whenever red ink appears on the Grapevine balance sheet? *Box 4-5-9* cost A.A. \$280,000 in 2012, and I'm glad we spent that money. So I try to remember that we provide a lot of services, of which the Grapevine is just one, and that it gets a lot of help from its subscribers, even in lean years.

Finally, let's consider the future of Grapevine's sister publication: La Viña grew by 8.6% from 2011-2012, and about half its budget is subscription-based. Under a 2001 Advisory Action, “as a service to the Fellowship,” the General Service Board provides the rest, and it's published using Grapevine infrastructure. Concern has been expressed about this commitment, but subscription and demographic trends alike suggest we'd better stick with the unity principle—stand together or fall separately. Rather than existential questions, the only relevant, constructive question about La Viña is the same one being asked about the Grapevine: How do we make it more useful and more available, so it will attract even more subscribers?

In conclusion, if we recognize the need for the Grapevine, then we are duty bound to ensure its future. That future involves not only print, for those of us who are getting longer in the tooth; it also means video (via the web) and audio (both for the hardwired and those who order their electronics “to go”). The Grapevine, and La Viña, in their dynamic manifestations, should be creatively adapted to emerging technologies for as long as the need for these services remains; as Bill wrote, if a “service is . . . needed . . . , then maintain it we must, or fail in our mission to those who need and seek A.A.”

Sources for this presentation include several articles in the A.A. Grapevine Digital Archive, the article “Evolution of the A.A. Grapevine,” *The A.A. Service Manual, Advisory Actions of the GSC of A.A.*, a 2013 Grapevine office presentation on the “Share and Connect” Project, and recent A.A.G.V. Board and Office reports.

“Safety in A.A.—Our Common Welfare” Cheryl L., Delegate Panel 62, Area 43

My name is Cheryl and I am an alcoholic. It is my honor and pleasure to serve as the Panel 62 Delegate for Area 43. I am delighted to be with all of you this weekend and to present on a topic that is of critical importance to us in A.A. today.

A.A. is not likely to be destroyed from forces outside of our Fellowship, but it may be destroyed by issues that come from within. Sadly one of those issues is predatory behavior that exists in our meetings; inappropriate behaviors exhibited by some of our members today that is sometimes referred to as “Thirteenth Stepping.”

When considering this topic, I first thought about what we mean when we say “Safety in A.A.” The 62nd General Service Conference addressed this topic in the workshop sessions held during Conference week. Three questions provided the framework for discussion and gave me much insight. The three questions were:

1. How can we make our home group a welcoming and accessible place?
2. How can sponsorship aid in keeping our A.A. meetings safe?
3. In keeping with Traditions, how would/does my group address matters that may arise? Those matters could include: conduct that disrupts the meeting, illegal activity, inappropriate behavior towards vulnerable new members, emergencies, etc.

When I reflect on these questions and my experience with this topic, I am able to say that safety in my A.A. home group means that the group is welcoming and accessible to all; that group conscience meetings are held to shine the light on this matter, and that members do not turn and walk away when action is needed. Safety within my locale means that sponsors are helping to keep newcomers safe and being direct about inappropriate behavior with those they sponsor. The awareness of safety concerns within my area has led to workshops, support, and information being provided to districts that request it. And, finally, when our Fellowship is grounded in the Traditions then all of A.A. is kept safe as groups, districts, and areas share their common problem and experience with the solution.

When contemplating this topic I reflected on experiences with both my first and my current home groups. At my first home group, I was encouraged to get involved in group activities, and this helped me to feel less lonely and vulnerable. At a recent group inventory in my current home group, we looked at questions taken from “The A.A. Group” pamphlet, and in small groups discussed ways in which we could make our group more welcoming and accessible. We’ve had problems with longtime male members targeting new female members in the past. One way we decided to help eradicate this type of behavior is by establishing a newcomer committee—a mix of men and women who offer fellowship during the break, rides to meetings, and information about our program and meetings in the area. When we help newcomers into the middle of the boat, they are less likely to fall into perilous waters!

Sponsorship is a key tool in dealing with disruptive behaviors of members who target newcomers. The A.A. Grapevine article entitled “Safe Haven” from the August 2009 issue speaks of a strong female sponsor who shared openly and honestly about members who could not be trusted. My own sponsor shared with me something that I could certainly relate to. Frequently when we enter A.A., we want to believe that everyone is practicing a program of recovery and as such, we trust everyone. As women, we may give out information that is asked for, like our phone numbers, marital status, and addresses, to name a few. It takes role modeling and discussion with a sponsor to learn about setting appropriate boundaries, identifying unacceptable behavior, and learning what behaviors do not have to be tolerated. For some, sponsorship can involve direct communication about the effects predatory behavior has on another human being; it could send them back drinking or worse, it could impact the group that they rely on for their sobriety; it could fracture the group and will certainly weaken them, and on A.A. as a whole. Our reputation as a helping organization could be tarnished and permanently destroyed.

Some may question taking a direct approach to stop predatory behavior, citing Tradition Three: “The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking.” It is important to make clear the distinction between A.A. membership and attendance at a particular meeting. Tradition One states: “Our common welfare should come first—individual recovery depends on A.A. unity.” If a member chooses not to adhere to the spiritual principles of our program, then the group must do what it needs to ensure that they are able to function. Patience and

tolerance are our code and all other avenues ought to be tried before a member is asked to not attend a certain meeting. An article in the Fall 2010 issue of *Box 4-5-9* stated that "it is always hoped that the individual member will see the difficulty as an opportunity for personal growth and will attend other meetings in the area in order to maintain his or her sobriety." Bill also accepted this idea. He wrote the following in a letter dated 1969: "This amount of charity does not mean that we cannot exclude those who disturb meetings or seriously interfere with the functioning of the group. Such people can be asked to quiet down, or go elsewhere, or to come back when they are better able to participate." Bill had faith that growth and good could come out of trouble. Asking a person who is violating our primary purpose in a harmful way to leave the group is sometimes the only way to make that person see where they need to change.

I am sure that many questions surface in your mind when faced with how best to handle these matters. This is a good thing, because the way to get those questions answered is by talking about them. Talk with your sponsor, trusted friends, and home group members. Participate in group conscience meetings, group inventories, and sponsored workshops on the topic. Read and study the Traditions and other A.A. literature that reminds you of our primary purpose and how best to live and work with each other. The answers will come if your own house is in order!

I thank you once again for the privilege of serving and for loving A.A. the way that you do. I hope that this presentation has given you some food for thought and may motivate you to take a look at your groups with an eye towards safeguarding the newcomer and protecting our common welfare for today and for the future. I know that A.A. has given me a life beyond my wildest dreams and I want to do whatever I can to protect and preserve it for generations to come.

"A.A. 'Tool Kit' For Sponsors" Brian O., Delegate Panel 62, Area 31 Eastern Massachusetts

Good afternoon. My name is Brian and I am an alcoholic. I have a twofold disease which centers in my mind and is paired with an allergy of the body, and I work out my solution on a spiritual as well as an altruistic plane. Therefore, when asked to do something for Alcoholics Anonymous, I do it because I owe, I owe, I owe, and I'll never be able to repay you good people for the gifts I've received from the program and Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous you've shared with me.

The A.A. euphemism "tool kit" is a vague expression of everything we have to offer in our literature, meetings, conventions, and other shared experiences. Therefore, this regional forum is a tool in our kit to aid us in our recovery, unity, and service. Our General Service Office, here this weekend, has many tools they are gladly sharing with us so we may add to our kit. May we utilize these and others in helping the alcoholic one short block or tweet away from here that hasn't seen the light yet.

And isn't sharing our light, rather than hiding it under a bushel, the purpose and motive of developing and using our tool kit? Giving the hope we found in the gathering places of Alcoholics Anonymous to the newcomer, like the hope Ebby gave Bill across the kitchen table at his Clinton Street apartment. Ebby, fresh skinned and glowing, sowed the seeds of hope in Bill's mind during his darkest hours. It is this hope, perched in our souls and singing a tune with

little or no words, which guides us to the dawn. As we shed our sarcasm and cynicism the desire to light another's hope with ours grows into a ripple effect that changes the world.

My experience as a sponsor and sponsee is that A.A. as a way of life is the best tool kit for sponsors. (And by the way, anything I say here today is best to be checked by your sponsor, because he or she is probably right and knows more about your case than I do.) The tool kit contains (but is not limited to) the Twelve Steps of recovery as laid out in our Big Book and expanded upon in the Twelve and Twelve. My experience is that upon having a spiritual experience as the result of the first eleven Steps, I attempted to share this message to alcoholics and continue to practice these principles in all areas of my life. I then realized that I needed the alcoholic who struggles with this disease more than he needed me. In early sobriety I was told to draw an imaginary circle around myself and that everything outside the circle was none of my business. After going through this process, I realized that anything outside *and* inside that circle was none of my business. For if my entire will and life were turned over to the care of God, how could my life be my business anymore?

When I was having difficulty writing my Fourth Step inventory, my sponsor advised me to back up a step. As a result, I discovered that turning my will and my whole life to anyone was overwhelming for me. He explained in simple terms that my will was my mind, and since I was not using it right now he suggested I give it to God, along with my actions and behaviors, and to turn those over one day at a time. This is still the best kept secret in A.A.—the twenty-four hour plan. The promise of a New Employer and that He would provide for us what we needed, if we kept close to Him and performed His work well, were the gifts received from practicing and living the Third Step of our program.

Taking my nightly inventory before retiring, seeing where the fault had been mine, what instincts had been threatened, acknowledging my defects of character, a willingness to right wrongs, and following up with morning meditation produced a clear passage. The clear passage was this newfound way of life; the Twelve Steps were the tools to pass along to my fellow man. To keep my tools, it is essential that I freely give my life to others that needed it, and are in some way receptive. After some time exerting a continuous effort practicing the Eleventh Step I realized that “we are all One and that God's will for me was to place no false gods in front of Him and to help my fellow man became evident in my being.”

Action is the keyword here, and as the early pioneers were fond of saying, “Faith without works is dead.” The tool kit A.A. gifted me and honed on the whetstone of others' experience was so it could be utilized to serve others. For if the spiritual life is not enlarged by enhancing another's life the result would surely be fatal for the alcoholic.

Making myself available for presentations, chairing meetings, making coffee, participating in district, area, or committee work, sponsorship, praying, meditating, and practicing the spiritual principles of our program are the hallmarks of a solid A.A. tool kit.

If we keep on the firing line of life with the motives to be of maximum service to others, God will keep us unharmed. This is our Twelfth Step promise. And it can become our reality if we choose to assemble the A.A. tool kit for sponsorship and keep them sharp!

“How to Apply the Twelve Traditions in Service and in Life” Carmella C., Delegate Panel 63, Area 13 Washington D.C.

Good morning. My name is Carmella C., and I am an alcoholic. My sobriety date is January 29, 1995. I have two home groups: the Yeas and the Nays group and the Living Sober by the Book group. I am currently serving as Panel 63 Delegate, Area 13 Washington D.C. It is an honor and a privilege to serve.

As stated in the forward of the Twelve and Twelve, A.A.’s Twelve Traditions apply to the life of the Fellowship itself. They outline the means by which A.A. maintains its unity and relates itself to the world, the way it lives and grows. The Traditions teach us how to love each other. Through working the principles of the Traditions, we carry out the Steps in the world. We live in the solution, not the problem. We are united with each other in love.

At first, I did not think that I needed the Traditions in my life, at least not until I was in A.A. for a few twenty-four hours and I had to start living life on life’s terms. I was so angry with my boyfriend for not giving me the money he promised to help pay my mortgage, that I went whining to my sponsor. She suggested that we go to Tradition meetings on a regular basis. She suggested that I pull out the Twelve and Twelve, read the Seventh Tradition, and then call her back. Needless to say, she pissed me off and I did not call her back for a few days. I could not believe that she had the nerve to suggest that I be fully self-supporting, and that is where it all began. As life on life’s terms became a reality, I had no choice but to see how to apply these Traditions in my life and in A.A. service.

I was taught Traditions by my sponsor and my service sponsor, and also by participating in my group’s conscience and business meetings. Old-timers directed me, a newcomer, to the beginners meetings. It pissed me off, as I wondered how in the world did they know that I was a beginner; did my divisiveness show in my arrogant attitude and disposition? Of course, I took member’s inventories and gossiped. I have since learned how to be gentle with those who rub me the wrong way. Some of my closest friends in A.A. rubbed me the wrong way initially, which had nothing to do with them and everything to do with me. Having learned to respect all of A.A., I am informed about A.A. as a whole and try to pass on this information in a kind and gentle way without acting like the A.A. police. Our book says that selfishness and self-centeredness is the root of our problem. I have learned to place the common welfare of personal relationships ahead of my own personal needs.

“One ultimate authority”—you mean to tell me that I am not the boss of me and you? A loving God was a learned concept for me as I thought that I was damned and going to hell when I got here. “Leaders don’t govern”—what kind of foolishness is this? I was taught to trust the process. My first home group trusted me to make coffee and gave me the key to the church. I have learned to accept the group conscience even if it does not go my way. By following the guidance and will of God, as we understand him, I am able to participate in healthy loving relationships.

I am so glad that they dropped the term “honest” from our Third Tradition, as desire was all I had when I came to A.A. I used to judge A.A. members as winners and losers; now, I treat all people with love and kindness. Each of us should be autonomous except in matters affecting the other, our family, or society as a whole. I regularly practice this Tradition with my eleven

siblings. I no longer insist on there being only one right way of doing things; I now consider the welfare of my entire family. I learn from others behaviors when it is different from mine. I may be the only Big Book that some of my family members may ever read. I share the A.A. spiritual tool kit with my family members on a regular basis. I used to be the fixer, but now when they call the first thing I ask is "Did you pray?" Our primary purpose is to express the theme of love, loyalty, family, and unity in all that we do, and to share this knowledge freely with others.

My sponsor cautioned me about carrying the message instead of the mess. She insisted I read A.A. literature at both literature-based meetings and one-on-one with her. I try to carry the A.A. message to the alcoholic who still suffers and help the old-timers, as they too can be the alcoholic who still suffers. I am willing to explain to newcomers the limitations of A.A. help and not lend money. I used to play the big shot in my family by lending money to as many people as possible; I do not live that way anymore. I learned not to lend what I cannot afford to give away. I do not endorse, finance, or lend my name elsewhere, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert me from my divine purpose.

I no longer put one dollar in the basket today as I am conscious of how money and spirituality mix. I have become acutely aware of how important the treasurer's report is to A.A. business. I have seen the generosity of A.A. members come pouring into our Washington Area General Service Assembly, which has renewed my faith in A.A. remaining self-supporting.

I read the Twelve and Twelve each day, and I try to focus on one of the Traditions and apply it in my life. I help organize the 3:00 a.m. "Get on the Bus" trips to the General Service Office in New York and Founder's Day in Akron, Ohio, so that others in my area have the same opportunity that was afforded to me as a newcomer to see the literature come alive. I love the pamphlet "A.A. Traditions—How It Developed" and regularly use it with sponsees and at tradition meetings. I have a keen sense of personal responsibility and try to practice patience and humility in all my affairs. I have learned to love the spirit of rotation, and I rotate gracefully when the time comes.

I have learned to stay in my lane without swerving and do not have an opinion on outside issues; hence my name ought never be drawn into public controversy. I apply this Tradition at work on a regular basis, as God is the boss! I keep confidences to myself and am careful about throwing people's names around, even within the Fellowship. I am not ashamed about being a recovering alcoholic and place the common welfare of all A.A. members before my individual welfare. I do not even want to think about where I would be if A.A. disappeared. I have a personal responsibility to help A.A. maintain its singleness of purpose and I am no longer "an alcoholic and a _____" when I introduce myself at meetings. Recovery/Unity/Service is based on the Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions, and Twelve Concepts of Service. Another way of expressing the total program of A.A. is the phrase we use to identify our meeting: "Unity insures recovery through service."

In closing, I am sure that I breach these Traditions in subtle, perhaps unconscious ways, as I am human. I reveal my membership when it may help another person. When we ask God what we are to do, one day at a time, and then go about trying to do His will, we do not endanger our relationships. Love is an action, not a feeling. If you love someone, you treat them like you love them and serve them as an expression of God's love. When we love, we want to serve!

PAST TRUSTEES' SHARING

Mary Jane R., past Northeast regional trustee, 1995-1999

Mary Jane shared that she'd been both disheartened and encouraged during the Northeast Regional Forum weekend. "I think it's sad that not everybody attends a Forum. I know that it would answer so many questions and change so many perspectives." But, as many A.A.s do, she turned the focus back on her own actions, and asked herself, "But what did I do, in order to get the word out? I made some announcements and passed out some registration forms, but when people don't even know what you are talking about, that's not going to convince them to get in the car. Things like this refocus me, and when I get home, I want to do better at communicating about the things I have been so fortunate to be exposed to."

She continued, "I've also heard many comments this weekend about contributions, and it's always expressed in dollars and cents. But I think there is a lot more to contributing to Alcoholics Anonymous than just sending in a check or putting money in the basket. I believe I need to contribute more with my energy and time." Lastly, she encouraged all to take everything that was talked about over the weekend back to their group's business meeting. She said, "You'll do everybody a favor, because everyone is thinking similar thoughts. Work it out there — it's worth it. The group will grow stronger and be healthier." She recalled a friend's description of service as "the bonus route" because there are so many things to learn and grow from. To Mary Jane, that bonus route is filled with "learning and discovering and experiencing."

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

John Q. illustrated the far-reaching effects of questions asked at Forums. In 1991, at a Forum in Bethesda, he had just finished giving his report of what was going on in the world. "In the early 90s, the Berlin wall had just come down, the Russians had left Eastern Europe (for the most part), and A.A. was really blossoming — openly — in that region. So, I give my report, and afterwards the presenters answered questions. One of the attendees asked, "What are you doing in Africa?" And I said, "Well, I know in South Africa, they are translating the Big Book into Zulu and a few other languages. Another asked, "Africa is a very big continent, what else are you doing?" The coup d'état occurred when a young man from Kenya got up and said, "Why don't we have a Big Book in Swahili?" John answered that he did not know, but would find out. After the presentation, a staff member told John that an attempt made to translate the Big Book into Swahili, but it was not a very good translation, so it was shelved. "I think it is time to resurrect the project," said John. A year or so later, the Big Book in Swahili was published. "You see," said John, "it all came as a result of a question at a Forum. There is no such thing as a dumb question."

Lastly, John expressed three concerns: "First, I am concerned about the idea we are a Fellowship open to everyone regardless of their problem. I don't mean those of us with problems in addition to our alcoholism. I'm talking about people who have problems *other* than alcoholism. Those individuals come into our rooms seeking help, and many of our members feel that since we are good at alcoholism, maybe we can expand our horizons. I have a

concern about that. Secondly, I'm concerned about the feeling and perception by many that we no longer have to be anonymous at the level of press. Some think we don't have to be as anonymous as we once were because the stigma is gone. I think anonymity is misunderstood. Anonymity, to me, doesn't just mean not using my last name — and the Twelfth Tradition tells me it is a lot more than that. The third concern I have is about some of our rigidity in A.A., particularly regarding those who preach the Big Book. I think everyone should read the Big Book; it's the greatest tool we have. But I disagree with using it to tell newcomers, "Unless you do this, you're going to get drunk."

John shared the reason he expressed his concerns: "I have seven granddaughters, ranging between the ages of 5 to 12. Odds are that one or more of them are going to be in these rooms one day. I may not be around for them when they come in, but you may be and I want to make sure that you keep the doors open the way they were kept open for me and that A.A.'s program of recovery is exactly the same."

Tony T., past Northeast regional trustee, 1999-2003

Tony shared that the first thing he learned as a trustee was to trust in the committee process. It was the advice of his first service sponsor, a past delegate from Connecticut. Tony pointed out, "You are subjected to the committee process at any level of service — even starting out as a coffee maker because not everyone is going to like your coffee! Also, what is done or accomplished at a Conference can always be changed, modified, added to, or deleted. And that is also part of the process. I was also taught patience and tolerance—we have to have patience and tolerance to listen through the entire message."

John K., past General Service trustee 2001- 2005

John K. paraphrased an A.A. historian and said, "A.A. doesn't just embrace diversity; it celebrates diversity." He noted that the Third Tradition relates to us as individuals. He said, "It celebrates our diversity and keeps the door open for all kinds of people." He also noted "that there is a growing tendency to not only become rigid, but to become more and more specifically religious in some quarters of our Fellowship. I think we have to be cautious about that. When I was still drinking, I never went into a bar and asked somebody whether they believed in God or not. Although I blacked out quite a bit and I may not remember everything, I am pretty sure that was not a condition of my drinking with anybody." He went on to add, "The purity and integrity of our message is important. But our message should be the lives we lead, how we confront issues and challenges — a day at a time — how we solve them in a sober way and continue to be of love and service. This is the thrust of our most important message, and we live it, we don't preach it."

John described how A.A.'s cofounders and early members stretched their spiritual comfort zone, and that, he said, is one thing we would do well to remember. Because, he said, "if the early members hadn't done just that, those of us in this room who are Catholic and Jewish probably wouldn't have found A.A. Those in the room who are women, gay, lesbian, or of a different race or color might not have found their way into A.A. If you read the literature, you will find that someone, at each turn, had to stretch their comfort zone and say, 'Getting the message to the alcoholic is more important than drawing lines of exclusion.' I think we need to keep that in the forefront — that is the charisma of our program." He shared a poll he had read

where 34% of Americans no longer identify with a religion, and about 20% of that number identify as agnostics. John said, “That’s where the alcoholics are and we have to make sure we are not turning our backs on them. Willie Sutton said he robbed banks because that’s where the money was, and we need to go where the alcoholics are, without fear. My Higher Power is a lot less afraid than I am, and neither of us are concerned that our integrity and spiritual program are going to be compromised by someone else’s different or even antagonistic type of spirituality. I think when we circle the wagons in A.A., as we do periodically do, we need to circle to them around all the alcoholics and not leave any out.”

David E., past General Service trustee, 2001-2005

David E., who recently relocated to the Northeast region, shared, “In the Pacific region, I was known because I wore a pink cap to all of the area assemblies and to the General Service Conference in New York. On it was embroidered “Easy Does It” — I really believe it’s important to wear principles above personalities. That’s why I wore it — as serious as the disease of alcoholism is, I cannot take myself so seriously that I run roughshod over the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous. I must take myself lightly.” David shared a little of his story with the A.A.s assembled: “My sobriety date is December 23, 1982. I had had enough. I went to a meeting and someone made an announcement about an alkathon the next day. I was homeless, sleeping on the beach, and I didn’t know where to go or what to do. But I went to that alkathon. There, I ran into people who were in service. I drank all their soda, I bummed all their cigarettes, ate all their food, and went to meeting after meeting. And you know what? I stayed sober. Then I went to the New Year’s alkathon. I got involved in answering the phone at Central Office. And then I got involved in my local district, and then the next year I got involved in the committee that ran the alkathon. I continued to get involved in service. I was told to hang with the winners — I thought they were the ones involved in those secret meetings. I asked if I could go to one of those secret meetings, and they said, ‘Sure, come on along.’ I found out it was a district meeting. Eventually, I was elected area chair and then delegate. Then I was asked to serve as a director on the Grapevine Board. Following that, I became a general service trustee. I was there when we voted to include a Spanish-speaking article in the Grapevine. And then that led to La Viña. I was there when we had the Big Book Fourth Edition subcommittee and I was there when it was approved. Being present for all these things has been a spiritual experience for me. Aloha ‘oe.”

Greg T., past General Service trustee, 1999-2003

“For me, recovery, unity, and service keep me focused on my home group. Bill W. and Hank P. founded my home group, the South Orange Group in northern New Jersey, in the fall of 1939. It happens to be the oldest A.A. group in the state of New Jersey. It’s also the fourth oldest group in the history of A.A. I didn’t know that when I stumbled down the steps of the Methodist Church for my first meeting. And I hoped they wouldn’t notice me but they did. In fact, they embraced me. Our group, to date, has produced five trustees. What does that mean? Not necessarily a whole heck of a lot, but it’s something I find very interesting and it helps connect me to service and to what has gone here this weekend, what’s going on right now, and to our whole Conference structure. It tells me that the history of Alcoholics Anonymous, The Traditions, The Twelve Concepts and of course, our Twelve Steps all originate in one way, shape or form from my home group and from each of our home groups. It is the inverted triangle that we see when we talk about General Service. Who’s at the top?”

It's the home group, comprised of members like us . My home group's business meeting is this evening, and I'll be able to report on the Northeast Regional Forum as a sober member of Alcoholics Anonymous, just for today."

George D, past trustee, 1978-1982

"The problem with speaking last is that everyone has already said all the important things. I was trustee from 1978 to 1982 and I worked at GSO for several years. So I have lots of experience, but no wisdom whatsoever. My program is dynamic and not static. In other words, the way I understand and live by the Steps evolves, it's continuous work; I haven't got it. And when I've got it, they can take care of the remains, I'll check out. I walked into my first A.A. meeting 58 years ago. It was a Young People's group. I don't remember being welcomed or anyone asking me if I was an alcoholic or if I had other problems. They just said, 'Hi, you're new? Sit down.' They said, 'See if you hear anything that can help you.' And I did hear things that I thought could help me. They didn't say, 'This is what you should do.' They said, 'This is what we did. And this is what worked for us and this is what didn't work for us.' I felt like they were inviting me to join a club as an equal.

One of the things I was thinking about this morning was that there was no fear in A.A. at that time. We weren't afraid of the wrong people coming into A.A. We weren't afraid of people reaching their own interpretation, or rejecting parts of the Big Book or changing what they thought it meant. It was up to the individual. We weren't really afraid of anything because we were too busy reaching out trying to help all these people that were flooding into Alcoholics Anonymous. I think that should be true today. We have nothing to be afraid of as long as we concentrate on helping the alcoholic who still suffers. And that's our main purpose. Let's not worry about what is happening in a group — if some people are going out in left field either it won't work and they'll go away or it will work and we'll learn something. Fear is not a good policy in Alcoholics Anonymous.

Finally, I think we ought to take a look at what we are telling the professional community and the general public. I talked to a woman who is a doctor — a psychiatrist. She has worked with addicts and alcoholics and I asked her about the professional and public perception of Alcoholics Anonymous today. And she said, 'Well, I know A.A. is a spiritual program, not a religious one, and I know it's not a cult, but there is an increasing perception with my patients that it is. I have to work very hard to persuade them that A.A. is not a religious cult.' Maybe we ought to think about that comment while we continue in our PI and CPC efforts."

John K., past General Service trustee, 2007-2011

"I didn't come to A.A. because I wanted to stop drinking; I came because everybody else wanted me to stop drinking. I think that that the people who preceded me this morning covered all the basics. I like words, I think we are all wordsmiths in Alcoholics Anonymous, but there is a book called *Came to Believe*, and on page 97 it has some things I think we should keep in mind. It says, "I sought my soul, my soul I could not see. I sought my God, my God eluded me. I sought another alcoholic and I found all three." I think that's what we have to do. I have ten children and twenty-one grandchildren. I want this program to be here forever. I appreciate the work that you have all done to make that happen. Thank you."

“CLOSING REMARKS”

Terry Bedient, Class A (nonalcoholic) Trustee, General Service Board chairperson:

“18 million people in the U.S. and Canada suffer from a life-threatening problem. Not drinking is not the solution. The solution is spiritual growth and application of the Twelve Steps in all areas of our lives. Spirituality includes service. Your presence here this weekend demonstrates your commitment to service and to growth along spiritual lines. This weekend, despite opportunities to the contrary, I believe we have all placed principles before personalities. It seems like we have all observed Rule #62, which is not to take ourselves too seriously. Look around; in this room you’ll see our future Concept Nine leaders. I hope each of you looks at your leadership with a sense of wonder and delight and joy.

I sense a great enthusiasm with our electronic media plans for Grapevine and A.A.W.S. At the same time, I am also reminded that fighting isolation is a key to ongoing sobriety. In today’s world it is easy to buddy up with a laptop or an iPod or a television instead of a real person. And that challenge faces all of us. This weekend, the spirit of gratitude has been alive and well. I have heard your discussions and I sense the serenity that comes from knowing we have been straight with ourselves and with those around us. Today, every successful recovery group in the world is modeled after your Twelve Steps. No other group in the world comes close to providing your kind of support to others suffering from a common illness. For those who are restless, irritable, and discontented, drinking is not the solution. And not drinking is not the solution. The solution, as you know, is spiritual growth through application of the Twelve Steps in all areas of our lives. Thank you for attending this Forum.”
