

# **FINAL REPORT**

## **PACIFIC REGIONAL FORUM**

### **SEPTEMBER 14-16, 2012**

### **FAIRBANKS, ALASKA**

Dear A.A. Friends,

Please mark your calendar for the next Pacific Regional Forum, which will take place in Boise, Idaho at the Double Tree Hotel Boise-Riverside the weekend of July 11-13, 2014.

#### **HOW TO CONTACT US:**

A.A. General Service Board  
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. Web site: [www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org)

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

## **CONTENTS**

<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>WORKSHOP REPORTS.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>PRESENTATIONS.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>PAST TRUSTEES' SHARING .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>“CLOSING REMARKS” .....</b>	<b>17</b>

## INTRODUCTION

The 2012 Pacific Regional Forum was held in Fairbanks, Alaska. Registration for this Forum topped at 197. This included 102 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

**The Grapevine/La Viña Representation: A Wonderful Service Opportunity (Moderator: Tom M./Reporter: Tom M.)** *How to get started as a new Grapevine or La Viña Representative?* The new representative can attend La Viña Committee meetings at the district level or a G.S.R./La Viña orientation at the area level. They can call the Grapevine office, go to the website, register, and receive a Grapevine packet and once registered make a request for additional literature through the website. They can refer to the Grapevine and La Viña representative pamphlet. Although Grapevine does not track subscriptions by district, a list of Zip Codes can be submitted to obtain subscription totals. Team up with a Young People's groups for added enthusiasm. *How does a Grapevine/La Viña Representative respond to the Statement "Grapevine is not A.A.?"* Use the A.A. Grapevine Statement of Purpose found in each magazine. Use the advisory action published in each issue that explains continued approval of the Grapevine. Read the service piece "Conference Approved Literature" on the eAA.org website.

**Are We Providing a Safe and Welcoming A.A. Meeting Place? (Moderator: Ken M./Reporter: Jan H.)** *On Safety:* Suggestions for safe meetings include having the lighting on and around the meeting location. Have a buddy system before and after the meetings. Be aware that some people are afraid of dogs (or maybe they are allergic). If someone extends a hand in greeting, know that they are setting personal boundaries, and don't go in for the hug. Make it clear to newcomers that men work with men and women work with women and then demonstrate it. Note that women can be predators too. Be aware that the men's working with men and women working with women is heterosexism. That "rule" may not be appropriate for everyone. Call it what it is "predication", "harassment", "intimidation", etc. Stop repeating bad behavior as "13<sup>th</sup> Stepping" because it minimizes what is happening. Old timers should not condone "Oh, he is harmless". The newcomer does not know or feel like it is harmless. Talk about what's going on. We hold our trusted servant's accountable for their behavior. Why would we accept anything less of our homegroup members? *On Welcoming:* Celebrate diversity and inclusiveness. Hire an interpreter and provide child care if the group has the financial means to do so. Consider larger meeting rooms. Be sure visitors get local meeting phone number lists. Have newcomer reps (one woman and one man) who are responsible for welcoming, answering questions, giving schedules and phone numbers, etc. Set an example. Don't talk during readings. Think about how a visitor or newcomer perceive chatting, cross-talk, saying the Lord's Prayer, A.A. acronyms, shouting "Who are you?" if someone forgets to identify themselves.

**Tradition One: Our Common Welfare (Moderator: Marcus F. /Reporter: Danielle A.)** *How do we practice Tradition 5 within our groups keeping the focus on our Primary Purpose?* Approach newcomers with tolerance and love them. Let the newcomer know that the emphasis

is on alcoholism. Work to educate the group and secretaries/chairs (possibly increase minimum sobriety). *How do we carry the message in and through General Service?* Carrying the message is exactly what General Service is all about. If it's not about carrying the message, it's none of our business. General Service makes 12<sup>th</sup> Step work possible. The message is broader in General Service.

**The General Service Representative (G.S.R.): Linking the Group with A.A. as a Whole**  
**(Moderator: Byron F./Reporter: Barbara D.)** There is a lack of knowledge about the General Service Office and it's involvement in Carrying the Message. There is a misconception that G.S.O. and General Service work is for the business types. Groups may not be interested in A.A. as a whole. Condense the information from the General Service Conference, Pacific Region Alcoholics Anonymous Service Assemblies (PRASSSA) and forums. There is too much information and members tune out (i.e., conference material/area motions/emails). Wallace from Barrow, U.K. stated that he saw and read the first Big Book at age 8 in his father's village home. General Service is who brought that book to his father and gave him his sobriety. Be enthusiastic as a G.S.R. and bring materials/pamphlets/budgets, etc. to group business meetings.

**Love and Tolerance in the Home Group and in General Service (Moderator: Eden L. /Reporter: Erin T.)** *How to deal with disruptive behavior (in homegroup and in General Service) and not avoid it by playing the "love and tolerance" card?* The common welfare message needs to be heard. If groups are affected by the behavior it must be addressed. Talk to them with love and tolerance. Take them outside and teach and befriend them. Violent drunks? Call the cops. Ask them not to come back until their behavior changes. We need to learn love and tolerance. People not showing up for commitments. People with mental illnesses. Safety in A.A. is an issue and must be protected. Leaders lead and people with experience share. *How do we best respond when experienced members get loudly upset by newcomers not doing things right (i.e., introducing themselves as an 'addict' rigidity in A.A.?)* Lead by example. Don't serve at group level and higher without having knowledge of A.A. Talk at A.A. meetings. Trust God, pray and learn. Teach. Sponsorship. Share experience. Newcomers' listen. Not exclusive. One-on-one talking with people who know nothing about A.A. Also important to hear "What it was like" in the group conscious. Ask old-timers "Why do you feel that way?" Let it be tolerance. Respect old-timers by understanding, forgiving. Don't gossip. Tradition One. We are responsible.

**A.A. Grapevine—Today! (Moderator: Ami B./Reporter: Diane M.)** *How is the Internet changing the Grapevine?* Print, digital and audio are now being used. We try to make it easier for everyone. "Take away corner" of little statements that resonate. Add "Did you know..." little take aways with facts and quotes. We need shorter pieces today. Grapevine play-scripts are available. Add "What's going on in General Service?" in the Grapevine. There are standing columns, i.e., sponsorship in magazine Singleness of Purpose. Readers can put together your selections. "RSS: Real Simple Syndication is sent to you. Some prints are too small. Can the Grapevine be on an "AP" to be read on an I-Phone? Over 1,500 original stories in Spanish have come in for La Viña. A.A. groups could sponsor a Spanish group by sending La Viña. A book on Sponsorship is coming out in March. La Viña has not broken even yet and needs greater money subscriptions. When someone writes a story, they subscribe and continue to do so. It becomes their magazine. The best writers are alcoholics. The art is in us.

**The Home Group—The Heartbeat of A.A. (Moderator: Linda M./Reporter: Cheryl N.)** *What is the responsibility of the homegroup?* We need to make sure doors are open and meetings are on schedule, even on holidays. Try to insure the homegroup is safe and welcoming for newcomers and visitors. Participate in business meetings. Do service. Attend meetings regularly. Come early and stay late. Educate the homegroup members about General Service. Uphold the Traditions. Participate in the 7<sup>th</sup> Tradition. Make service sound inviting. *How do you define a home group?* Where we have a voice in the collective conscience of A.A. We have commitments in homegroups. *What is the difference between a group and a meeting?* A meeting is not a part of the General Service structure. The whole a group has a voice and a vote in the district and area via their General Service Representative. *How do you choose a homegroup?* Only game in town. Choose a group that is active in service and participates in the General Service Structure. We want what they have. We want to connect with them. Contribute to the General Service via the pie chart. Learn through sponsorship.

**Sponsorship in Recovery and Service—Passing It On (Moderator: Brian M. /Reporter: Jo P.)** *How does a sponsor motivate and encourage a sponsee?* Sponsorship is a 50/50 relationship. We agreed the key ingredients in the relationship are energy, enthusiasm and knowledge on the part of the sponsor and willingness to learn and grow on the part of the sponsee. Most of us learned from our sponsors how to be a sponsor and passed that on to our sponsees. Although we have sponsors who are our primary guides and mentors, “it takes a village” and we can learn from everyone in our meetings. *What is the role of a service sponsor?* Unlike “recovery sponsors” service sponsors can be either gender. We can ask service questions of anyone in service. Mostly we choose someone who is or has been active in service – often this is the same person who took us through the Steps and can also take us through the Traditions and Concepts. Not as much (frequent) contact as with sponsor. Service sponsorship and help service sponsees keep their egos in check.

**Rotation in A.A.—Principles before personalities (Moderator: Ken S. /Reporter: Sharon G.)** *What are Area policies on delegates standing for their offices?* The service manual suggests delegates not get back into the service structure. Some areas ask past delegates to perform other non-elected roles, such as newsletter, facilitate G.S.R. and/or D.C.M. sessions. *Where is rotation written about?* The A.A. group pamphlet has two paragraphs. It is also discussed in “A.A. Comes of Age.” There is additional consideration language in the 2012 Conference Report to add “rotation” language to the Service Manual. Additional consideration language, that Grapevine adds language that past Delegates be Grapevine Reps. *How do we let go and not be a bleeding deacon?* Become an elder statesman. It is the responsibility of the person rotating to properly pass on the position by explaining the job, and then get out of the way. We don’t “own a position”. Rotation keeps egos in check. Service from humility is spiritual service and ego is political. As soon as you really know how to do your position, it is time, to rotate.

Some service positions are hard on families. Need to avoid burnout. Rotation keeps it fresh.

**Cooperating with the Professional Community in your District and Area Moderator: Lela M. / Reporter: Kelley M.)** *How successful are we in doing C.P.C. work?* Our fellowship needs to do more, it’s a continuous process. We need more A.A. members willing to be mentored into C.P.C. service. Reach out to our own professionals and talk with them. Works well using tools provided from G.S.O. including C.P.C. kits, literature, Grapevine magazines and the A.A.

website (AA.org). *Why or why not? What more can we do?* Contact training schools for health professionals. Don't forget law enforcement, probation, courts, and clergy. Communication between C.P.C. committees and other service entities allows sharing of best practices and helpful insight. C.P.C. work in districts and Areas costs money for tables at conferences, literature, so we need appropriate budgets. We don't do this alone.

## PRESENTATIONS

**Seventh Tradition—Communicating with the Fellowship**, Jeff S., Delegate Panel 62, Area 92 Washington East

My name is Jeff and I am an alcoholic. My home group is the Alpine/Bavarian group in Leavenworth, Washington. I serve as the Washington State East Area 92 Delegate, and as the Chair for the Finance Committee at the General Service Conference. My topic today is: Seventh Tradition—Communicating with the Fellowship. In my approach to this topic, I've considered many things. Some of my first thoughts concerned what you would think about listening to something as boring as finance. Or rather, "This guy is the Finance Chair, this better be good!" I think I'm no different than any of you in the struggle to help raise funds to pass to the General Service Office, your area, your district or your home group.

Here's what I know, a fact that has always been present in Alcoholics Anonymous: we have always struggled in our finances, even from the very beginning. Have we ever gotten the whole membership to contribute to G.S.O.? The answer is a resounding "NO"! In my humble opinion, this is as perplexing now as it was to Bill W. back when the grand plan included each member contributing a single dollar each year. Today, the estimated cost is \$6.32 per member to pay for the services at the level of G.S.O. I also know that I am likely preaching to the choir!

At this early point, I would imagine that you might be thinking: "Come on, get with it. Tell us the answer!" When I look in the mirror each morning, I remind myself that I am not God. For good measure, I also remind myself that God doesn't think he is Jeff! In all honesty, I don't know the correct answer. I know many solutions, none of which work every time in every instance. The old saying about watching a person live a sermon instead of listening to one certainly applies here. In other words, we set the example in thought, word, and by deed. Setting the example does work. However, in my own experience, at least in the money department, it takes years!

Some would say that the well-informed make sound decisions. I know many of us have tried to pass along budgets, costs, impacts, threats of loss (i.e. the loss of La Viña or a degraded Grapevine), and financial figures. How was any of that received at your home group level? In my own home group, these discussions are not met with joy, and at best are listened to with patience and tolerance. Do all the members show up for group business meetings? Again, in my own group, only about five to eight members out of forty show up. Yep, there's a large elephant in the room and no one really wants to talk about it at the group level.

The Trustees Finance Committee has offered some talking points that came from solicitations from areas, work the A.A.W.S. Finance Committee has done on this topic, and suggestions from A.A. members in the development of these. There were actually twenty-one points, and I offer a few here as an example and the one the Finance Committee added at the General Service Conference:

- Due to inflation, a dollar in the basket will no longer pay the bills the way it once did.
- A.A.W.S. is selling fewer books, as is everyone in publishing. Literature accounts for approximately 57% of our income.
- Currently, only about 42% of A.A. groups and A.A. members contribute to G.S.O.
- Our contributions provide financial support to facilitate Bill's vision of carrying the message worldwide.
- We must remind members of the member birthday contribution envelope.
- We may not have dues, but A.A. is not free.
- Are there A.A. entities that have large sums of money on hand?
- Do groups make it a practice to read the green card at meetings?
- How does your group inform new members about the importance of our Seventh Tradition responsibility?
- Additionally, we must ask ourselves: "What is the value of your sobriety?"

I had some random thoughts while writing this paper. If 33% of the people in A.A. have ten years of more continuous sobriety, how much money would that generate in birthday contributions? I took an average sobriety in that statistic of seventeen years (figured on folks between ten and twenty-five years) and applied it to the number of members. This came to 456,950 people, which means that the dollar value of those contributions would have been \$7,768,161!!! That's three times the shortfall in the costs to run our G.S.O. Then, I thought, what about a green can, one that we set aside for additional anonymous donations for G.S.O. alone? I began to wonder if every group had a G.S.R. that knew about the shortfall of dollars at the various service entities. Does any of this ring a bell for you?

It seems that nothing written, whether it be from G.S.O., the delegate, the chair, the treasurer, or anyone else, has much effect on contributions. When I speak about money or finances, it seems that for a short time, funds appear. Am I able personally to reach all 430 groups in my area? The answer is no, not directly. The driving time and cost to do that is prohibitive as it is in other areas. Yes, the information can be passed to the D.C.M.s and G.S.R.s at area meetings and assemblies. I don't know about all of you, but my area suffers from a lack of participation. Generally, less than a quarter of the groups send a representative to an area assembly. (That's at least been my experience over the last ten years of service.) Can these folks pass my experience along to their groups and districts? I can't answer that question, but I do have hope and faith that the message is passed.

In closing my presentation, I thought it would be good to tell you a short piece of my experience at the General Service Conference. I have always understood the value of my contributions to G.S.O. and understood the principle of the spiritual value. I didn't really feel that spiritual connection until I heard our friends from India speak at the end of the conference. As you know, we had visitors that were allowed to observe the General Service Conference in action. What I heard and observed was the amount of gratitude they had for A.A. They were thankful for the hand of A.A. reaching out over the thousands of miles across the world, as it

saved their lives and the lives of countless others. So I got it! My hope is that others will hear this small story of what our “spiritual dollars” really do. Will you help?

### **“Carrying the A.A. Message” Keith M., Delegate Panel 61, Area 69 Utah**

Experience and observation suggests that the way we as members of Alcoholics Anonymous carry our message of recovery has changed over the last seventy-five years. This should not be seen as alarming or particularly unusual, as some change is inevitable. However, I believe that our program of recovery as outlined in our basic text, the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous, was spiritually inspired and as close to perfect as any document that exists. I also do not believe that the disease of alcoholism has changed dramatically over the last half century. So part of my question is: Should we be changing what worked so well in the past? Turning our attention to Chapter Seven in our basic text, conveniently titled “Working with Others,” Bill and the boys were very clear on why we need to carry our message: “Practical experience shows that nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics. It works when other activities fail. This is our twelfth suggestion: Carry this message to other alcoholics! You can help when no one else can. You can secure their confidence when others fail. Remember they are very ill.”

The next passage speaks to the rewards not just of being sober, but of having a life with new meaning. We are told loneliness will vanish and we will have a host of friends. This sounds pretty good to me. The next paragraph helps find the alcoholics: “Perhaps you are not acquainted with any drinkers who want to recover. You can easily find some by asking a few doctors, ministers, priests or hospitals.” Once the drunk is found, there is an incredible passage on the top of page ninety that tells us what to do next: “When you discover a prospect for Alcoholics Anonymous, find out all you can about him.” This includes patterns of behavior, his problems, his background, his knowledge of his condition, and his religious leanings. We are likely all familiar with the rest of the chapter, which provides specific suggestions on how, when, and which part of our message we carry to our prospect. There are a few suggestions on page ninety-six which appear to be rather rare in today’s world: “He may be broke and homeless. If he is, you might try to help him about getting a job, or give him a little financial assistance. . . . Perhaps you will want to take the man into your home for a few days.” A brief review suggests that early times were focused on complete altruistic willingness and a desire to go to any lengths to investigate the prospect and carry the message.

My early personal recovery in rural Utah was pretty different from what is outlined in the Big Book, but also somewhat similar. The sponsor of my early years was Max Y., an old school Twelfth Stepper. My education began sitting with my sponsor at his kitchen table, where we read the Big Book and he shared dozens of Twelfth Step stories. These stories included successes and failures, humorous anecdotes and tragic endings. After four or five months, I was invited along on Twelfth Step calls, not as a participant, but as an observer. Gradually over the next few years I began participating, first with Max and another member, then just with Max. About half or maybe a third of these Twelfth Step calls would end with us transporting the prospect to a detox facility. In our rural setting these trips were anywhere from 230 to 600 miles round trip, with lots of time for discussions about recovery. I recall at least twenty-five to thirty of these trips in my first half dozen years of sobriety. Not all of these prospects got or stayed sober, but I did.

What I see today in my home group is different. I recently polled the members of our home group, and there has not been a Twelfth Step call done by anyone in the group during the last three years. A couple of the members with over ten years of sobriety admitted that they had never been on a Twelfth Step call. It appears to me that the most common way we carry the message today is by waiting for the prospects to come to our meetings. Most of the time we jump into action only after they arrive. We try to make them feel welcome by providing meeting lists, telephone lists, beginner literature packets, and offers of sponsorship, all very passive behavior on our part. We seem to expect these prospects to take all the action. There are times when all we learn about them is their name. I do not see us, as a Fellowship, "finding out all we can about them." Hopefully the prospect is desperate enough to return to another meeting, get a sponsor, work the Twelve Steps, and then wait for a new prospect to walk through the meeting door, to carry the A.A. message.

I ask for your thoughts and prayers for loving guidance as I trudge along our spiritual path into the fourth dimension. May we all walk in beauty as we pursue our happy, joyous, and free lives in the Fellowship of the Spirit.

**"Addressing Disruptive Behavior in Meetings"** Chase B., Delegate Panel 62, Area 58 Oregon

Good morning. My name is Chase B., and I am an alcoholic. I am currently serving Oregon Area 58 as their Panel 62 Delegate. My topic today is "Addressing Disruptive Behavior in Meetings." (*Reaching into pocket for phone*) Excuse me, I need to grab this call real quick. (*Speaking into phone*) "Hello, this is Chase . . . listen, I am in the middle of a meeting, let me call you back . . . actually I am just at a meeting, no one will care if I text real quick . . . ok, cool, catch you later." Wow, wasn't that disruptive?! True, it's a bit unrealistic to imagine a speaker answering their phone from the podium, but we do see folks answer and chat as they go outside to take the call! My thought is, even if our rapidly changing culture includes all sorts of disruption and distraction, we really ought to try to rein it in during A.A. meetings. Can a brother get some sponsorship advice here?

So what exactly *is* disruptive behavior? The dictionary offers one very interesting definition. *Disrupt: to interrupt the normal course or unity of*. Whoa—they said unity . . . the U word . . . isn't that a sacred word around here? Sure it is! Unity is the ultimate showstopper in AA; I think our first Tradition even warns us that personal recovery *depends* on unity!

Disruption could include chit-chat or cross-talk in a mild form, with fist fights and threatening, violent behavior as more extreme examples. A list may include but would not be limited to: cell phones, whispers, drug deals, shouting, chanting, unruly children, unruly adults who *act* like children, court card holders trying to make a break for it, flirting, book throwing, knitting, discussion about knitting, texting, fiddling with Bluetooth gadgets, phone chargers, asking for phone chargers, newcomers on bended knee, proposing to another newcomer (yes, I really have seen that!), drunk people, stoned people, romantic break ups, romantic make-ups, even applying makeup . . . we could increase the list ad infinitum!

I had fun with that last part, and wanted you too as well, so I didn't include some of the really disruptive stuff lest I trivialize it. We all know about these behaviors and actions, and they can kill alcoholics, sometimes before they even have a chance to recover. Yes, we are talking about violence, predatory behavior, and other sickening conduct. Although we are typically a healthy, unified fellowship, we are largely civic in nature, and our culture of confidentiality and anonymity, when coupled with the easy access to physical contact, can create a slipstream that can allow both sick members and nonmembers alike to roam among us with questionable conduct.

Sometimes this type of conduct can persist largely undetected for extended periods of time. Invariably, disruptive behavior often catches the attention of the fellow group members. In mild examples, like texting, the behavior is sometimes tolerated, which, in my opinion, can have a far-reaching impact on the overall vibe and tone of the group—after all, in a meeting where anything goes, eventually, no one goes! More often than not, the milder disruptions do get addressed by the group, and are typically mentioned in the opening readings or by responsive and alert meeting secretaries that have been well sponsored. The more extreme behaviors, from what I have observed, can really strain the group members as they try to use love and tolerance, while still keeping good boundaries—not always easy to do.

So what can we do? When I looked for specific guidance about dealing with disruption, I noticed that other fellowships have done a stand-up job addressing topics about disruptive conduct at the group level. Both Overeaters Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous publish pamphlets that address these topics specifically. However, upon closer examination, the solutions offered can be found, of course, right here in A.A.

Let's look at Tradition Two, which states that "For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern." The Twelve and Twelve offers some insight in the opening paragraph of the essay on Tradition Two. Here, Bill writes that, "[N]o A.A. can give another A.A. directive and enforce obedience." So if the individual cannot act alone along these lines, then, in my view, the solution to anything that disrupts the group is the group conscience itself. This, of course, means that the group needs a conscience related to some of these topics. Sometimes we need to experience painful moments, both individually and as a group, in order to grow from them.

If a group regularly takes an inventory, or meets in a business or group conscious meeting on a frequent basis, it will better be in a position to provide a safer, more inviting meeting place. If a group is willing to talk to each other about the various challenges it faces, it will likely be in the best position possible to address questionable conduct in its midst. It is in this climate that core group members can volunteer to help out in tough situations. Ultimately, the common welfare of the group must prevail over any individual, and the day may come where the group, acting together, may choose one or more members to tactfully break the news to a disruptive member that they will need to leave the meeting or group, and return at a later time, if at all—all the while reminding the member that they are not being removed from A.A., as that ultimatum is in no member's power, but that the group's unity makes it necessary to take this step. The members may even choose to assist the disruptive person in finding and attending an alternate meeting.

I am sure there are a lot more things to be disrupted by these days than ever before in A.A., but I am hopeful that the best solutions today are the same as they have been since the infancy of our movement—practicing these principles in all our affairs. Yes, this is the tenet of our Twelfth Step, but it also serves as a reminder that it is our collective responsibility to use the tools that gave us each new life as we keep our fellowship safe for those among us, and those yet to come.

**“Facebook, Social Media, and the Tradition of Anonymity”** Jeryl T., Delegate Panel 62 Area 09 Mid-Southern California

I love A.A. and owe it more than just my life. And because I am a member in good standing of Alcoholics Anonymous, the lives of most of the people I come into contact with are also affected by A.A., and they don't even know it. It is my job to see that our Fellowship is here for each and every person who looks for it in the future. Whether we want them or not, Facebook and social media are tools to carry the message to the person who is still sick, who may not be reached otherwise. The question is, though, how do we utilize these mediums and still maintain our tradition of anonymity in the use, education, and reception of these valuable outlets to the world?

A.A. has always gone where the potential alcoholic is. Grapevine was created to carry the message to the soldiers overseas during the Second World War. Our books, pamphlets, and newsletters make sure that anyone looking for recovery through Alcoholics Anonymous will know it is available with just a little effort. Television, billboards, public transportation marquees, radio; we are even present in schools, churches, hospitals, and institutions. We have P.I., C.P.C., H & I, and Corrections Committees. Meetings online, remote communities meetings; we probably use carrier pigeons for all I know! In fact, we change the appearance of our literature to stay current with the times and try our best to attract young people to read it. (Examples include “What Happened to Joe?”, “Too Young?”, and, of course, “It Happened to Alice”.)

Each new edition of the Big Book was created to make more current the stories where each member tells in their own words how he or she developed a relationship with God through the utilization of the principals of A.A. Can social media allow the same type of communication? Probably, but we have to be careful. A meeting online or in person—are they the same thing? A phone call, text message, or email—are they the same thing? Facebook or . . . well, nothing really compares. There is still nothing like one alcoholic talking to another alcoholic.

So, I don't believe the question is really whether we move with the times or not, as much as it is how we move into the times. When reading was the main source of information exchange, we had a book. Soon after we did some radio programs. When television came along, we did public service information spots. We made films for informative purposes. We have created Web sites to more quickly and uniformly inform the potential sufferer and our membership. All of these strides came with some pain, but quickly turned into being great assets for Alcoholics Anonymous, and so will the media of the future.

I believe the biggest part of this presentation will be on the tradition of anonymity. Anonymity in regards to the speed and power of today's social media vehicles; once we push, “send”, it can't

be taken back. We tend to take the newcomer and beat them in the head with the Big Book and steps, then send them off to work with another drunk. I believe that we often do this without spending enough time talking and teaching each other about the traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous, especially anonymity, to the degree that their importance now requires. What is the message we send to our youth, when we don't educate them to what was given to us in our early days, and usually in not so kind a fashion?

I believe Facebook and other social media definitely has a place here in Alcoholics Anonymous. I just hope we don't go blindly or carelessly into this new frontier. Our traditions are constantly compromised by members who participate in some of the exchanges that happen on the site. First and last names, full face pictures, implied or actual affiliation, advertising meetings and events, denoting sharing and events from a meeting in public, broadcasting A.A. milestone celebrations, overt admissions of participation in "recovery events". These are some opportunities that we need never engage in, as the spirit of anonymity reminds me that it is our duty as members in good standing to safeguard against misrepresentation and even representation of our beloved program in public.

In typing the words *Alcoholics Anonymous* in the search engine of Facebook, I was lead to countless pages of members associated only because they claim "employment" at Alcoholics Anonymous; yes, they say the work at A.A., with full names and faces on the pages. I stopped counting at 160 listings, especially after I recognized twelve people from meetings in my area who also listed they were a part A.A. (along with other names like Buddy Light, Cerveza Chela Beer, Alchy Hall, Cerveza Cristal, Bud Weiser, Earl Hours Carryout, Captain Jack Sparrow, Jason Levy's-Liver, Jesus X Christ, Sip Happens, and, of course, Bill Wilson to name a few). There was an endless catalog of treatment and recovery entities listed as well. There was also related search information for topics like "Leaving an Alcoholic", "Enabling an Alcoholic", "Behavior of an Alcoholic", "Dealing with an Alcoholic", "Symptoms of an Alcoholic", "Definition of an Alcoholic", "My Husband is an Alcoholic", "Characteristics of an Alcoholic", not not a single page that was actually on Alcoholics Anonymous.

Now, because I don't understand all these mechanisms and gadgets, should I condemn them? Or should I remind these young alcoholics how we traditionally do our business? Should I welcome their energies with an open mind and a watchful eye, or just shut my mind to the possibilities that maybe these tools could better carry the message to the sick man who may not get it otherwise? Maybe I should be on the other side of my personal judgment, and look to be helpful.

We need to be careful of crossing the line between attraction and promotion. Bill himself, rejected all impulses to turn A.A. into a personality cult, and set up a system of governance for the organization designed to safeguard against it ever degenerating into one: the A.A. traditions.

The future is here, and we don't want to miss this opportunity to engage the future of A.A. in our present, but we need to have confidence in our trusted servants to devise ways to continue to carry the vision of our forefathers dreams that A.A. would be here and available for all for as long as God would have us. Our anonymity is still our greatest ally. It allows us all to remain right sized and helpful, while carrying this life saving message through any means possible to the man, woman, teen, and child who suffer from this hideous disease.

Thank you for allowing me to participate in my recovery, and speak on this subject.

**“Is General Service Still Relevant to the A.A. member at the Group Level?”** Tom M., Delegate Panel 62, Area 08 San Diego Imperial

“Most A.A. members are primarily interested in their groups, in their own sobriety, and in helping other drunks one-on-one. And that is as it should be. . . . Some stimulator is usually needed to get the attention of A.A. members—to show them that service can add a rich dimension to their sober lives and Twelfth Step work and that their participation is vital to the future of A.A.” (*The A.A. Service Manual*, p. S23).

I can tell you some things that are *not* stimulators to my home group: the latest structure and guideline motions from the area assembly, the latest debate on updating our computer software, or the latest discussion on our budget process. I’m not fond of it myself. If general service is not relevant to the A.A. member at my home group then I have myself to blame, because for too long I’ve talked about issues the group has no interest in. I’ve been driving them out of the meeting.

Understanding this about myself, I realize that I have fallen back on something that comes naturally to this alcoholic: the bait and switch technique. Give them something they are interested in and connect it to why we exist as a meeting.

At the General Service Conference this year the public service announcement “Tengo Esperanza” was approved, and \$40,000 was authorized for distribution and for tracking its frequency of play. “Tengo Esperanza” is a P.S.A. produced by the Spanish-speaking A.A. community and marks the first time the General Service Conference has approved a culturally sensitive P.S.A. in anything other than English. Here we are seventy-seven years into the history of A.A. and we’re just now making this decision. That is not a criticism! It shows that there are still parts of the population we have not yet reached out to. We know that there are places without active Spanish-speaking A.A., but we suspect there are Spanish-speaking alcoholics living there. Maybe this P.S.A. will make a difference in the lives of alcoholics living right in our own cities.

When I report a story like this to my group I am trying to make a connection between the Seventh Tradition contributions sent off to New York and lives saved right here at home. It shows them there are things their Seventh Tradition contributions can do in New York that can’t be done here and helps them to understand why we send some of our money to G.S.O.

Most of my group members are interested in service issues related to the Big Book. Linking the sixty-seven current translations of the Big Book to the costs related to general service is one of my favorite bait and switch tactics.

At the general service conference in New York this year, many delegates met one of the General Service Trustees from India. He recently sent an e-mail to update delegates on the spread of A.A. in India and told the following story:

A famous Indian celebrity by the name of Aamir Khan hosts a weekly television show that highlights social issues in India. Recently he focused on alcoholism and invited a local A.A. member to tell his story on the show. During the broadcast the A.A. member's face was pixilated to protect anonymity while he spoke and the A.A. hotline phone number was displayed on the screen. During the first five minutes the hotline number received 12,000 phone calls, which temporarily overwhelmed the phone system. During the period that followed this program, July 1<sup>st</sup> through August 15<sup>th</sup> of this year, the hotline received 250,000 phone calls. As a result, A.A. members are now traveling in areas of India.

The reason I tell this story to my groups is to connect their Seventh Tradition contributions to the decision to translate the Big Book into Hindi, one of two dominant languages in India (the other being English). This decision cost a substantial amount of money which comes from group Seventh Tradition contributions and took a substantial amount of staff time, whose well-deserved compensation also comes from group Seventh Tradition contributions. The seeds of the Fellowship we now share internationally with India were planted when that decision was enabled by the money collected when the basket is passed at a meeting.

Sometimes I hear that groups really aren't interested in a Spanish-language public service announcement or international A.A. news, but using our Fifth Tradition it can be demonstrated that there is something bigger than their own group that is at stake. Through the efforts we make to inform the public about where alcoholics are located who can be brought to the doors of our meetings, A.A. members can engage in vital Twelfth Step work.

General service is only relevant to the A.A. member of my home group if I take the responsibility to find ways to inform them and provoke their interest. If I don't take that responsibility seriously then I may be denying individual members or entire groups the privilege of participating in A.A. service and in A.A.'s future.

**General Service Board Update Report:** Ward Ewing, Class A (nonalcoholic) Trustee, General Service Board Chairperson

I don't need to tell you that we are in a time of change. We hear concerns about anonymity in our digital age, about dual addiction and our singleness of purpose, about the need for A.A. to reflect a more diverse population, and new means of communication. That we are in a time of change raises questions about how Alcoholics Anonymous should respond to these times while maintaining our message of spiritual recovery.

One of the most important actions we of the General Service Board undertook last year was taking our inventory. We added an extra day and a half to the 2011 October Board meeting for this and then followed up with a weekend meeting in January of this year in Atlanta. The primary concern that arose from the inventory revolved around the Board's use of time. It was felt that too much time was spent on what could be termed as "management" issues and not enough time was spent on larger, strategic issues that the Fellowship and the Board face.

One of those larger, strategic issues regards income and print publishing. As we are all aware, the move from print to electronic publication is well underway. Some of you may also be aware that much of the income for the General Service Office comes from the sale of literature

and all the income for the Grapevine comes from sales. This is a problem. Since 1995 we have drawn almost 1½ million dollars from the Reserve Fund to support losses to the Grapevine. I am pleased to report (as you just heard) that under the leadership of Ami Brophy, the Grapevine has balanced its budget and ended last year in the black and has a positive budget for the current year.

As a result, we are not in a crisis, but we do face a complex, long-term problem that requires serious and thorough study. Both AA Grapevine and A.A.W.S. are projecting deficits [losses] in 2013 and beyond. These projections are educated guesses about what our numbers would look like if we [The Boards and The Management] did nothing to change. This is a Call to Action; I do not view it as a sign of weakness.

As a result of the projections, the changing nature of how people buy and use literature in the digital age, the G.S.B. sent a proposed motion to the Conference. Conference approved an advisory action supporting the General Service Board's move to examine the two Service Boards as they provide services, produce literature and magazines, and support websites.

The G.S.B. will study the legal structures as they currently exist to see if some sort of change or changes is worth undertaking. Any proposed changes will be presented to Conference next year. The concern is for A.A. to be ready to meet its future – financially stronger, more unified and better connected to the fellowship.

Please be assured that whatever changes might be recommended, as long as the Fellowship wants it, the Grapevine will continue to be published!

The times are changing, and we must adapt to our times and I promise you, everyone on the Boards and in management is working to find the changes that best serve the Fellowship and keep A.A. strong!

## **PAST TRUSTEES' SHARING**

**Madeleine P.**, past Pacific regional trustee, 2006-2010

Many times, at forums, we talk about whether or not we are friendly – are there cliques? I guess there are two sides to every story, but my experience is that I've been in service and I've felt as if I were on the outside of the circle. When I came into Alcoholics Anonymous, I realized that the only social skill I had was alcohol. I realize that I still fail in my attempts to make sure I greet everyone the same. I believe being a society of peers is very important — no one is better than anyone else in A.A.

Are we truly still acting like a society of peers in our meetings? Is everyone walking through the door welcomed the same? Along those lines, is anyone who comes to general service welcomed the same? We talk about Tradition Four and the right of a group to be autonomous; every group has the right to be wrong. But I hope everyone realizes the tongue in cheek that Bill wrote that with. We do have the right, except when it kills people or alienates them from feeling welcome and a part of A.A. When someone walks into A.A. I want them to feel comfortable and to see that we are a society of peers. Do they see all walks of life? I think the best A.A. groups are the melting pots of our society. I know that as a delegate and even as a

trustee, we talked about dress codes for the conference – it shouldn't cost anyone money to serve Alcoholics Anonymous. I believe that if you cannot give a spiritual reason for that tradition with a little 't' or that custom, then perhaps you need to rethink it. Our critics can be our benefactors. I need to be who I am in these rooms and I should not expect anything different for someone else.

Anarchist that I am, I'd like everyone to get up, right now, and get out of those cliques by saying hello, giving a hug, or shaking the hand of someone you haven't met yet. Thank you.

**Ruth J.**, past Pacific regional trustee, 1986-1990

Julian R., one of our past regional trustees, shared something last week at area assembly. A bunch of us "has-beens" and "past everythings" were talking, and he said, "We past people are like the reference books, and the current people are the operating manual." I thought that was a pretty good analogy of what we are in Alcoholics Anonymous. But remember, the reference books are not opened as frequently as the operating manuals. The Grapevine seemed to be discussed frequently this weekend. From the perspective of those with older and not-so-acute eyes, we still like hard copy to read. Digital is not as easy for me to read. Also, I know we live one day at a time, but some of us like to plan two years at a time. Perhaps if the Grapevine calendars were two years, it would increase sales.

There seems to be a lot of confusion about the difference between a meeting and a group. We say our meetings aren't contributing, but meetings don't really have to contribute. Groups contribute. The group is the basic unit of Alcoholics Anonymous. Groups hold meetings. My group holds seven meetings a week, but every meeting doesn't contribute to something, we contribute as a group. Sponsors, when you take your sponsees through the Steps, take them also through the Traditions. I think it's important because we are missing a lot on the Seventh Tradition.

When I was serving as a trustee, I was privileged to see the pamphlet that Great Britain put out on self-support. They get 60-65% of their groups to contribute. It may not be a bad idea to look at their pamphlet and see why they are more successful than we are at sharing the concept of self-support. I would also like to echo what Madeleine said about being inclusive. With so many people sent to us, nowadays, I want Alcoholics Anonymous to seem like a friendly, open, safe place to be. If you are in the wrong place, there is a way to address it without being ugly about it. Most of these people haven't had a chance to know what they are, and they are not any happier to see us than some of us are to see them. I would far rather include one person in my closed home group who doesn't belong there, than to ever exclude one who did belong there.

**Greg M.**, past Pacific regional trustee, 1990-1994

Back when I served as trustee, it was felt that we were abusing our friends of A.A., our Class A trustees. They had a nine-year commitment, and no one ever talked to them about if they want to opt out early. So we changed the deal. Class A trustees now serve two three-year terms. And the chair went to four years. Now, some years later, I think our founders were probably correct in the original set up, and I think the chair only gets warmed up in the first few years of serving. I wish it were six. That's when the real fruits start to happen from the cohesiveness of

the board of trustees who stay with us a long time. I am not talking about the drunks. They need to go in four.

Life is full for me, and when I come through the doors of A.A., I settle down and take off the garment that is the outside world. In here it's different tempo. It's about love and service. And that is a slower timeframe. I see agendas at the Conference: 60 or 70 items. I heard many of you this weekend say "I'm on the road again" or "I'm doing this again." And I am reminded that this kind of love and service is an avocation, a hobby. It's something we do after we take care of our family and our business. I've been around long enough to see the disasters that happen when people try to meet the bar set by their predecessor. I've seen the divorces and job losses. The only thing we have to do every day is to ask for help not to drink. It is the same principle that should abide in everything we do.

I was a little disappointed to see some new language in the Service Manual that said if our trusted servants don't meet up to our expectations, we ask them to resign. What? Why would we do that to anyone? Why wouldn't we go to them and say, "What can I do to help you in your service?" We show up every day and do our best to find God's will for us and the power to implement it. And we slow it down so everyone can participate and be included. I am not trying to be heavy-handed, because I do believe that A.A. will be secure forever because it's based in love and service. I believe that that is the design of life and human beings and we have a special way of tapping into that source of power. And it is a power not within me, but of me, and it's a higher power.

## **"CLOSING REMARKS"**

Ward Ewing, Class A (nonalcoholic) Trustee, General Service Board Chairperson

This has been a wonderful Forum. The hospitality has been so warm and the participation very positive. Your sharing during the sharing sessions has been a true opportunity for learning and growth. I want to express my thanks to Lisa Copeland and all those on the planning committee. Thanks also to Julio and Ivy and all the Trustees, Directors, and the staff who came to be with you. This is my third visit to Alaska – I thank you for arranging such wonderful weather. More seriously, I thank you for the warm hospitality and caring you have given me and that you give each other. I / we have so much to be grateful for.

In these closing remarks I like to summarize what I have heard – I'm still a learner, and doing these summaries helps me remember what I have learned. And I learned a lot this weekend.

We've talked a lot about change. There has been an openness to change here that I have not heard in every forum. The world is changing and these changes are impacting our ability to carry the message – in positive ways as well as negative. As someone said at some other forum in the past couple of years – the telephone that Bill used that resulted in that first meeting with Dr. Bob was the new technology in 1935. Technology is not an evil. But it does bring change.

When we consider change in a program that has brought healing and new life to so many, the idea of changing anything produces anxiety. In the midst of change there are some things that

must remain constant. It is important for us – each of us – to sort out what can change and not damage our purpose and what must remain for us to pursue our mission effectively.

I was struck this weekend by the focus on carrying the message. Clearly one thing that must remain for us is this primary purpose of carrying the message to the alcoholic who still suffers. We talked about the importance of including fully the young people in A.A., about how to welcome the new comer appropriately, about being open to greater diversity, about 12<sup>th</sup> step calls, about the Grapevine and how to use it to share the message, and about appropriate use of electronic media. What inspired me this weekend – it was all focused on carrying the message.

Truth is, this is not only our primary purpose, there is ample opportunity to carry it out. The population of the United States and Canada is approximately 350 million people. 10% (to be conservative regarding those suffering from this disease) of this population is 35 million. In the United States and Canada there are just over 1.4 million members of A.A. This means for every member of A.A. there are approximately 25 suffering alcoholics still out there. The world population has just surpassed 7 trillion. 10% of the world population is 700 million. A.A. members throughout the world total approximately 2 million. Thus for every member of A.A. there are approximately 350 drunks out there drinking and dying. – ample opportunity.

Last December I attended a meeting of the World Health Organization regarding the “harmful use of alcohol.” There studies identify the “harmful use of alcohol” as the number one cause of premature death and bodily injury in the U.S. and Canada – and number three in the world (behind cardio-vascular and AIDS). The spiritual program of A.A. is the only program that provides long-term sobriety. We have a lot of work to do, and it is needed.

In this context, I would like to share a bit of my experience with intervention as a non-alcoholic professional. As you know, I served for 32 years as a parish pastor. In the beginning I was a fantastic enabler. Parishioners would call me at 2:00 a.m., and I would go talk with them about all their troubles while they drank their wine. I thought what a great pastor I am. Only there was a problem – in the morning they rarely remembered I had been there, much less what I had said.

Then when I began to be informed about this cunning, baffling, and powerful disease, I decided that I was the new savior of drunks. I knew the symptoms, I knew the solution (A.A.), and I would get those in trouble into the program. I learned (the hard way) that I am unable to do that. Information about the disease of alcoholism does not give a person who is suffering that spark of hope that will lead them to this Fellowship. Information is aimed at the head; hope comes when the heart is touched. And hearts are touched when the suffering alcoholic hears his/her story on the lips of someone who has been there and has found a new life. I learned that with a member of A.A. we could be effective. So I developed a more appropriate way. As a pastor, I would receive a call that someone was in crisis. I would call a friend in the program, and together we would visit the family. I would talk with the non-drinking spouse about the disease, and the friend would share his/her story with the suffering alcoholic.

I have been deeply involved with this Fellowship; I have grown spiritually and personally through this program; I am probably as knowledgeable about A.A. and alcoholism as any non-alcoholic; but I cannot carry the message; I cannot sponsor. Hope emerges in the still

suffering alcoholic when he or she hears their story on the lips of another alcoholic and sees a person who is sober, happy, joyous, and free. Spiritual growth and health comes to the new member through the collective wisdom of those who have been to hell and back. This is the only way that has ever worked effectively over the long term.

I am not that different from most professionals in the helping fields – doctors, lawyers, judges, nurses, counselors, clergy, and even the police. We want to be helpful. But if we are uninformed about the disease, we will be enablers – because that feels helpful. When we become informed, we need to develop partnerships, working together to carry the message. And you, the members of Alcoholics Anonymous, are the key. You can talk with your doctor, with your clergy, with friends who are nurses or counselors or involved in criminal justice. Share your story; we always communicate best by sharing. This is not breaking anonymity – besides they almost certainly know some of your history. Some – not all – will respond and begin a process of learning and growth that will make them better doctors, better lawyers, better counselors, and better clergy. We, the professionals see lots of drunks once our eyes are opened, and we are often called when the drinking results in a crisis. But without you, we cannot be very effective in getting the drunk to you. With you we can be far more effective.

I learned a couple of things last night in the workshop on working with professionals – important things. First: When you decide to talk with your doctor or other professional, be prepared. This is not for the first year of sobriety. You will be representing A.A. as a whole to her or him. Have information – a big book, pamphlets (not too many), the web site. If an initial conversation makes clear they are open, invite them to lunch and bring another A.A. friend. Believe me, this can be the most important conversation the professional has in her or his entire life.

And second: we need to let go of evaluating our success. Whether we are talking about sharing with a professional or making a 12<sup>th</sup> step call, we need to let go of our deep desire to evaluate. We take the action because there is a need – a need in the other to hear and a need in ourselves to carry the message. If our motivation depends on successfully intervening, then we will soon burn out. I thought Keith said this very well yesterday when he said, “I don’t know if that person found recovery, but I stayed sober.”

I go on too long; let me close. At the heart of this Fellowship is the purpose of sharing the message of hope with the still suffering alcoholic. We have one purpose - to carry the message. We have one criterion for membership - the desire to stop drinking. We have a powerful spiritual program that works - the only program that truly works for long-term sobriety. And we know how all of this works - by one drunk sharing with another the message of hope. By one drunk sponsoring another as he or she works through the steps.

The world is changing. We may have to do things differently. Clearly we need to find new ways to carry the message to the still suffering alcoholic. We may need to develop new ways of relating to and working with the professional community. We need to strengthen our 7<sup>th</sup> Tradition giving because there are some things we can do together that we cannot do separately. We may need to come to some new understandings about where the line is between promotion and attraction. We may need to be clearer about our understanding of anonymity. But one thing has not changed: Hope comes through one drunk sharing his or her story with another. It is the only way that works. And you, the members of this Fellowship, are

the ones prepared to share. If we keep our focus on our primary purpose, the future of A.A. looks very strong.

On a more personal note, I want to say how much I am enjoying my service. At every event I meet interesting people. And now that it has been several years that I have been a trustee, I see again those who are becoming good friends. This is a wonderful fellowship. And at every event I learn something, and I am given the opportunity to grow. When I went to my first A.A. meeting 36 years ago, I never dreamed I would gain so much from this program. I am a stronger, healthier, even nicer person because of the Twelve Steps and the support of this Fellowship. It is an honor and a privilege to serve you, and I thank you that you have allowed me to be part of you.

\*\*\*\*\*