

Homebound—But Not Alone or Away From A.A.

Every Thursday evening a handful of A.A. women with names like Carla, Marie, Janis, Peggy, Lois and Susan drop what they're doing and head for a small studio apartment in midtown Manhattan. There, as the hands of the clock point straight up at 6 o'clock, they settle informally around Beth K., smiling out from her armchair, and open a meeting they call Hope.

It came about in spring 1999 when, after a severe fall, Beth was no longer able to get out to meetings, and some of her A.A. friends decided to carry the message to her.

Each week members take turns chairing the hour-long meeting. Basically a closed discussion often centering on a topic picked from *Daily Reflections: A Book of Reflections by A.A. Members for A.A. Members*, it morphs about once a month into a Step meeting. In the beginning the group did not pass the basket, but now does. To date it has collected about \$350 and sent contributions to the New York City Intergroup and G.S.O. Future donations are earmarked for the Southeast New York Area as well.

The members have celebrated job changes and promotions, engagements, retirements and A.A. anniversaries. They have supported one another through cancer, diabetes, depression and a slip. Basically a women's group, Hope nonetheless has welcomed a male A.A. in a wheelchair. Says Lois: "Beth's appreciation of the Hope meeting invariably lifts my spirits. I see how she personifies the Serenity Prayer—accepting

what she can't change, changing what she can for the better, and somehow knowing the difference—and it makes a positive impact on my own life."

Noting that Beth, now 50 years sober, has enhanced her sobriety not only spiritually but substantively, Lois relates that she "is a font of intriguing A.A. history. For instance, she told us about her fourth anniversary celebration when [A.A. co-founder] Bill W., who was there, told his story over a cup of coffee. She also has reminded us that the word *sponsee* wasn't used by the oldtimers; they spoke instead of their *pigeons*."

Susan says the group's name "mirrors our hope for another sober day and a spiritual connection that grows stronger with time." She adds that when Thanksgiving or another major holiday curtails the meeting, "a member arranges to take dinner to Beth, and at Christmas one of us sets up a little tree in her room." Sometimes, Susan adds, "if I'm out of town and can't make the meeting, I'll call in on my cell phone just to let everyone know I'm with them in spirit, and for sure I am."

For Beth, Thursdays are very special. "There's a sense of anticipation in the air," she says. "My aide gets the room neat and clean, and I feel good just thinking about all that's to come." What she especially loves about the Hope meeting, she says, "is the humor. The women don't treat me like an 80-year-old shut-in. They kid unmercifully—for instance, if my dress has slipped off one shoulder, someone will remark, 'Beth, doing your femme fatale thing again?' Each person brings something different to the meeting. There's a melding of hope, help and love that creates great energy in my little place—the kind one finds in A.A. meeting rooms everywhere."



Box 4-5-9 is published bimonthly by the General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115. © Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 2002

Mail address: P.O. Box 459, Grand Central Station,
New York, NY 10163

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

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

‘Lost’ Someone on Your Amends List? Maybe The Internet Can Help

One day in 1989, as an A.A. two years sober and working his way through the Twelve Steps, Bob K. of Concord, California, made a list of all persons he felt he had harmed and “became willing to make amends to them all,” as suggested in Step Eight.

“Since I was still being defensive,” he remembers, “my then-sponsor Peter told me to make three lists: one of persons to whom I would be willing to make amends immediately; another of those to whom I’d make amends only ‘when pigs fly’; and the third of the ones I absolutely would never make amends to. Peter took one look at my lists and of course had me start with the third when I came to Step Nine: ‘Made direct amends to such people [we had harmed] wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.’”

Twelve years flew by, and by last spring Bob had only two names left on his original amends lists. “Thanks to a lot more recovery in A.A.,” he says, “both names had moved up to the first list. But there was a problem—I couldn’t find them. One of the two men listed has an unusual last name, so I thought it would be easy to locate him. I searched during my travels in California and New York, but no luck. Both of them seemed to have drifted off the planet.”

Then last April, Bob relates, while working with a fellow A.A. on his Fifth Step, I mentioned the difficulty in finding these men. My 20-year-old sponsee Nikki K., who was five months sober at the time, ran with the information. On his own initiative, Nikki found the fellow with the unusual last name after an hour or so’s search on the Web. I was pleased but then, surprisingly (to me), I got cold feet when it came to actually calling him.”

The amend Bob wanted to make was of a financial nature. “Back in the ’80s, just months before I came into A.A.,” he recalls, “I was an accountant. I’d go out at noon and drink my lunch, then return to the office—

often broke, I’d help myself to the petty cash and not remember to put it back. So this amend to my boss, who at the time regarded me as a protégé, was a difficult one to contemplate.” Three weeks later, “with no excuses left,” Bob summoned the courage to call. “I apologized for the heartache I had caused him,” Bob says, “and explained that I was not that kind of person anymore. He in turn was receptive and understanding and talked openly about what had happened in his own life during the past 20-odd years.”

The amend was a long time in coming, Bob observes, “but well worth the work and the wait—it cleared up the past.” And there have been positive spinoffs, he reports: “For one thing, my sponsees could see the Eighth and Ninth Steps in action. They saw me make my amends lists, hesitate about tackling them, then swallow my fear and take the plunge. Seeing Steps Eight and Nine worked up close seemed reassuring and helpful to their own recoveries.”

Like most of his experience with the Steps, Bob adds, “years of baggage were lifted from my shoulders. As it says in the Big Book in the chapter ‘Into Action’ [page 83], ‘The spiritual life is not a theory. *We have to live it.*’ And in being painstaking about righting the wrongs we have done, ‘we are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness.’ I have found it to be so.”

What about that other amend on Bob’s list? Smiling, he says, “It’s an ongoing thing, like the whole A.A. program.”

Opening for G.S.O. Staff Member

G.S.O. staff people are members of Alcoholics Anonymous who carry out specific assignments and correspond with A.A.s on all aspects of recovery and service. Additionally, they represent the General Service Office at A.A. functions throughout the U.S. and Canada and provide the primary staff support for the General Service Board.

Applications are now being sought for a G.S.O. staff member. Excellent writing and communication skills are required. A minimum of six years’ sobriety is necessary; A.A. service experience will also be a consideration, in addition to the applicant’s willingness to relocate to New York, if necessary. This opening will occur later this year, due to the retirement of Susan U. after 27 years at the General Service Office.

Qualified members may request an application form by contacting: Staff Coordinator, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, N.Y. 10163. Applications will be accepted up to June 1, 2002.

Literature Chairpersons Can Make a Big Difference

“We, of Alcoholics Anonymous, are more than one hundred men and women who have recovered from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body. To show other alcoholics *precisely how we have recovered* is the main purpose of this book.” So began the Foreword of the First Edition of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, printed in April 1939. This milestone marked A.A. becoming a Fellowship with its own basic text and program. Our Big Book continues to be a primary tool for carrying the A.A. message of hope to *any* alcoholic who wants to stop drinking.

Since 1939 A.A. literature has expanded through Conference-approved publications to more than 275 different books, pamphlets and audiovisual material. How well are we doing in using these publications to insure the clarity and simplicity of what we share with newcomers? Are we utilizing our basic printed message in our own group’s meetings? And, are we, as A.A. members, sharing, one-to-one, about the “solutions” we have found in A.A. literature?

To assure that our members are aware of what A.A. literature is available, the 1986 General Service Conference decided to encourage groups to appoint literature chairpersons. The 1986 Advisory Action reads: “In an effort to strengthen our network of ‘literature representatives’ to ensure that A.A. literature is available at meetings, as well as catalog order forms for books and cassettes that individuals are likely to want, it is suggested that groups appoint literature coordinators.”

A growing regard for the importance of A.A. literature to the recovery of each and every member has given rise to a renewed emphasis on district and central office literature representatives, as well as area literature committees. The results are indicated in the fact that G.S.O. is now in touch with over 440 active literature chairpersons. When we learn of an addition to this growing list, the new literature chair is sent a welcoming letter and other information on A.A. publications. These trusted servants also receive updates in occasional “news and notes” letters from the G.S.O. literature desk, as well as periodic information on new items from the Publications Department.

Ordering A.A. Conference-approved books and pamphlets from the General Service Office or the local intergroup, and making sure that they are properly displayed at meetings is just one aspect of the literature service. Says Ben V., past chairperson of California San Diego/Imperial Area’s Literature Committee: “We provide service-oriented literature displays for all kinds of events, including district assemblies, forums and workshops. We keep our group representatives apprised of

what is A.A. Conference-approved literature and what isn’t. We flag new publications or audiovisual material issued by G.S.O., explain bulk ordering procedures, and much more.”

The active committee also acts as a clearing house for comments and suggestions regarding proposed changes in A.A. literature and audiovisual material. This information is given to the area assembly and delegate who, in turn, pass it on to the trustees’ and Conference Literature Committees, thus insuring that all A.A. members have a voice in the decision-making process.

It is our experience on a daily basis that A.A. literature helps us fulfill the challenge of providing “love and service” to alcoholics that Dr. Bob left to the Fellowship as his legacy. The following is sharing on a successful activity at monthly district literature committee meetings:

“At each of our monthly meetings we have discussed literature. What a concept! We have picked a pamphlet or a book for a topic and shared ideas. This discussion has led us beyond the book or pamphlet to Steps, Traditions, A.A. and life. It has taught us that all parts of life and A.A. are interconnected.

“We had a lot of discussions about the Fourth Edition before its release and I’m sure we’ll have many more because of the new stories.

“The new pamphlets — ‘A.A. for the Older Alcoholic—Never Too Late’ and ‘Can A.A. Help Me Too — Black/African Americans Share Their Stories’ have both been talked about, and like most special purpose pamphlets, we had both pro and con opinions. The best part about discussion is that it lets people become aware of literature that is available.”

Some groups and district literature chairs in other areas have joined with other literature reps to host workshops or sharing sessions on a particular aspect of our Fellowship. An afternoon of sharing on our history, as written in *A.A. Comes of Age* or *Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers*, is one idea that works well. Another was a district’s hosting an A.A. afternoon of videos or films such as *Hope: Alcoholics Anonymous, Young People and A.A.* or *Carrying the Message Behind These Walls*.

Particularly heartwarming are instances of oldtimers in this service position who reach out to newer literature chairs to share what they are doing that works.

If your group wants to join the G.S.O. literature network, they can write to the literature coordinator for information on signing up to link themselves to this important sharing.

Celebrating the Life of Vinnie M., G.S.O.'s Publications Director

Friends, family and co-workers were saddened by the sudden death on December 7 of Vinnie M., G.S.O.'s director of publications. An integral part of the office for nearly a quarter of a century, Vinnie served as a staff member for eight years and had been director of publications since 1985.

A resolution of the A.A. World Services Board at its February 2002 meeting "gratefully acknowledged her life and service," singling out Vinnie's creation of a "new, multi-faceted and extremely efficient Publications Department," her "exceptional professionalism and ongoing contributions and support in carrying the A.A. message through the development, translation and distribution of U.S./Canadian and international A.A. literature," and most recently her role in the publication of the Fourth Edition of the Big Book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*.

Translations of A.A. literature into an ever-expanding list of languages and dialects increased exponentially during Vinnie's tenure. Under her leadership, G.S.O. established a consistent overall translations policy and put in place a high standard of quality controls.

Many translators are volunteer A.A. members with no special training, and past general manager George D. recalls Vinnie's "exceptional sensitivity in working with A.A.s in other countries, especially those where the Fellowship was new." He recalled especially "her intuitive ability to understand their particular needs, without ever seeming to represent an American 'big brother.'"

Vinnie grew up in West Islip, Long Island, and earned a journalism degree from St. Mary's, the sister school of Notre Dame. After college, she moved to New York City and worked as a production manager for two magazine companies. She got sober in October 1972, became an active member of the Murray Hill Group in Manhattan, and later joined the Lenox Hill Group. She was hired as a General Service Office staff member (the youngest ever) in 1977, and when it became clear in 1985 that the growing publishing operation needed to be organized as a separate department, Vinnie's special expertise made her the logical choice for the job.

Beyond the professional Vinnie, though, colleagues at G.S.O. recall what her longtime friend Lee H., until recently G.S.O.'s human resources director, described in a tribute as a "bright, animated, fun-loving Vinnie, appreciative of life, who left her mark on all she

touched. Creative and forthright, she could always get to the heart of a matter and sum up in a few words what had to be done. She possessed an enviable ability to laugh at, rather than surrender to, the absurdities of life, and an amazing ability to make us laugh, too, at life's madness with Irish wit." True humor springs from a deep love of the object of the joke, and Vinnie could poke fun at people, places and things she loved – including some A.A. customs and practices – in a way that brought not just a laugh, but a deeper understanding.

Throughout her life, Vinnie remained close to her parents, two brothers, and two sisters, and took great pride in relating the accomplishments of eight nieces and nephews. She was extremely proud of her Irish heritage. A family trip to Ireland several years ago prompted her to study the roots of the clan, looking up distant relatives, visiting sites important to the family's history, and following up with more research after she got home.

Vinnie loved to travel, anywhere and everywhere. She enjoyed opportunities to represent G.S.O. abroad, whether working on a translation project or other A.A. business, and spent many weekends and vacations exploring new places. Despite her Irish roots, the destination of choice was most often Paris. She visited the City of Light probably two dozen times over the years, delighting in showing its attractions to friends, and on a trip just before her death, she realized a dream – attending a performance at the acclaimed Paris Opera House.

It is generally the little things that emerge as our most cherished memories. A.A. as a whole will remember Vinnie's contributions to the development of literature around the world. But friends and colleagues are more likely to recall an exciting new book she lent or borrowed, a museum (or perhaps a whole country) they explored together, an evening spent listening to "corny music" or watching a cop show on TV, sharing a fabulous meal at an out-of-the-way restaurant. Vinnie loved fine dining – past staff member and good friend Sarah P. recalls her saying once, "I never met a meal I didn't like."

Early in January Darlene Smith, (nonalcoholic) staff assistant at G.S.O., put a box of chocolates on the reception desk and e-mailed all employees: "It is now a month since Vinnie was taken from us so suddenly. Her sense of humor and sharp convictions are sorely missed. As my tribute to Vinnie, there's chocolate at the reception desk." Vinnie, a chocolate aficionado, would have loved it.

Reminder— Deadline for Directory Information — May 1, 2002

Just a reminder for area registrars, delegates, or the trusted servant who handles group information in your area: If you haven't already returned your group information printouts, please remember that the *final* deadline for inclusion in the directories is May 1, 2002.

Printouts, corrected to show up-to-date group information and returned to G.S.O. by the areas, will be used to produce the 2002-2003 A.A. Directories: Eastern U.S., Western U.S., and Canadian. These confidential directories list groups and contacts; delegates and trustees; central offices/intergroups/answering services; and special international contacts.

A.A. Is Everywhere— Do You Know How To Get in Touch?

Traveling A.A.s often rely on A.A. directories to find meetings at their destinations. An excellent resource for A.A.s on the road is the pamphlet-sized list of Central Offices, Intergroups and Answering Services in the U.S. and Canada (F-25). This list is available, free of charge, from G.S.O. These listings provide the numbers and addresses of local A.A. services which have meeting information available. Since these listings do not contain personal information, they are also useful for professionals wanting to provide A.A. information to their clients or patients. The Intergroup/Central Office listing is also available online at G.S.O.'s Web site, www.aa.org, and includes links to those intergroups and central offices for which we have a web site address.

The Eastern U.S., Western U.S., and Canadian A.A. Directories list A.A. groups for which G.S.O. has contacts. The group name along with contacts and their phone numbers are listed in these *confidential* directories, which are available to A.A. *members only*. These directories are especially handy for those A.A. members stopping in small towns or isolated areas where no intergroup/central office exists. The directories, updated annually in July, are available at a minimal cost from the General Service Office.

Dr. Bob's Daughter, Sue W., Was Close to 'The Good Oldtimers'

Suzanne "Sue" Windows was 17 years old in June 1935 when her father, Dr. Bob S., and Bill W. met in Akron, Ohio, where A.A. began. Although not an alcoholic, she witnessed firsthand the early days of the struggling Fellowship. Says her close friend Don B.: "Sue adored her dad and her mother, Anne, and when they were gone committed herself wholeheartedly to preserving their memory." She became so much a part of A.A. that when she died on February 9, just six days before her 83rd birthday, many friends and associates assumed she was a member.

Born on Feb. 15, 1918, Sue was adopted at age 5 by Dr. Bob and Anne, who already had a young son, Robert Jr. (through the years a devoted friend to A.A. and an active member of Al-Anon). Only four months apart in age, the children were a puzzlement to school personnel, who didn't know Sue was adopted. To complicate matters, when their teacher asked them how old their parents were, Dr. Bob, then approaching 45, said, "Tell them we're 70." (*Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers*, page 36)

Sue remembered well the steady stream of alcoholics—drunk, sober and in-between—who trekked in and out of the two-story clapboard home at 855 Ardmore Avenue. All too often she got a whiff of Dr. Bob's pungent homemade remedy to counter his prospects' craving for whiskey—a wretched-tasting mix of tomatoes, sauerkraut and Karo syrup. As A.A. continued to grow, she recalled, "Bill and [his wife] Lois were often visitors at our home, and we loved to have them. . . . Dad often told me that, although he and Bill saw things from different angles, they never had an argument, and their two minds seemed to mesh in developing an intelligent program which they could present to alcoholics."

In 1941, 23-year-old Sue married Ernie G., A.A.'s fourth member. He was unable to stay sober and the union ended in divorce. Sue later married her high school sweetheart, Ray Windows, her lifelong partner until his death in 1989. "What was evident throughout her life," remembers Don, a past chairman of the Chicago Area who also has served on the Area Archives Committee, "was the love she had for the program her father, and her mother too, had helped bring about." Don notes that "Sue had the foresight to recognize and start saving early archival material, much of it now housed at Dr. Bob's home, Brown University and the Archives of New York's General Service Office—artifacts such as books annotated by

Bill W., the original coffeepot from which Bill W. and Dr. Bob helped themselves at their early meetings in Dr. Bob and Anne's kitchen, and more. So much A.A. history would have been lost were it not for this giving woman. And there is no way to measure the labor of love she put into the restoration of her family home."

Even when age and infirmities slowed Sue's pace, her sense of humor didn't quit, and, says Don, "she welcomed visits from A.A.s coming to hang out with one of the 'two oldest Al-Ateens,' as she and young Bob called themselves. A cat lover, she still took care of the scruffy strays that dropped in regularly for dinner, along with Gray, the old bobtailed scoundrel that lived with her. And she never stopped doing for Alcoholics Anonymous. She would autograph books about her family, such as *Children of the Healer: The Story of Dr. Bob's Kids*." Today Sue is where she wished to be: Her ashes are interred near those of her father, mother and beloved husband, Ray, in Akron's Mount Peace Cemetery.

A.A.'s Diamond Anniversary —San Antonio, Texas, 2010

San Antonio, Texas, has been selected by the General Service Board as the site for the International Convention celebrating A.A.'s 75th Anniversary, July 1-4, 2010. The board made its decision following site inspection trips to Detroit, Indianapolis and San Antonio — the three cities chosen for equal consideration by the 2001 General Service Conference.

The Conference also recommended that site selection for the 2015 International Convention begin 12 years out instead of ten, with a decision being made at the October 2003 General Service Board meeting. So-o-o-o-o here we go again. In August 2002 letters will be sent to area delegates asking if their areas would be interested in providing upwards of 4,000 volunteers as a host committee for the 2015 International Convention.

Gearing Up for the 52nd Conference

It happens every April—A.A.'s General Service Conference! This year's Conference will be held April 21-27, with the theme "Sharing the Steps, Traditions and Concepts." During Conference week, at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, New York City, Conference members will come together to discuss a host of issues and proposals affecting A.A. as a whole throughout the United States and Canada. The 133 members consists of 93 area delegates, the trustees, and G.S.O. and Grapevine directors and staff. This year's Conference coordinator is Warren S.; Yee Tully (nonalcoholic) is his valuable staff assistant.

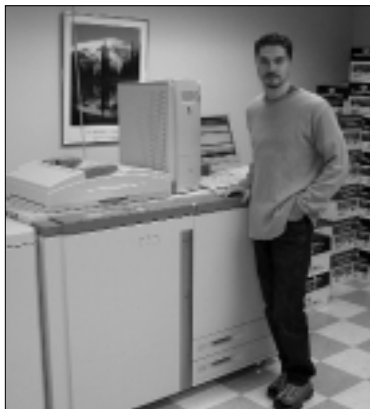
Here at G.S.O., Conference preparations begin in November with a mountain of behind-the-scenes work.

The Records department begins inputting the names, addresses, and other vital contact information for approximately 450 new (Panel 52) area officers.

Support Services gear up for a series of "cubbyhole" mailings that will supply anxious new Conference members with information and updates on how to prepare for the big event.

In February, the machines in the copy room run for hours as Miguel Rodriguez, Andre Washington and Shawn Bunkley (all nonalcoholics) go through 12 cartons (5,000 sheets each) of white paper and 2 cartons of colored stock, copying and assembling the background material for the various committees.

Just as the Shipping and Mailing department was recovering from the Herculean task of mailing out many of the orders and requests for the Fourth Edition Big Book — along comes the Conference crunch.



Miguel Rodriguez in copy room.



Joe Moglia, a 35-year employee, arranging background for mailing.



Bill Heinitz boxing and labeling background material.

Under the guidance of supervisor Aubrey Pereira (non-alcoholic) the five longtime employees compiled and mailed Communications Kits, background material and miscellaneous items for the January and February mailings. In order to make one deadline, the mailroom's Frank Smith, along with Joe Moglia, loaded over 100 boxes into



Background material.

Frank's car to be delivered to the Fed Ex office. Publications, one of the busiest departments during Conference season, has already begun the massive task of editing reports, guidebooks, and manuals and insuring that much of that material is translated into Spanish and French. Each year Publications, with designer/typesetter Daniel Brown (nonalcoholic) and the copy room team, put out, overnight, the miracle Early Bird Conference edition of Box 4-5-9. Information for this edition is gathered during the Conference and is made available in English, Spanish and French on the final morning of the Conference, an awesome task.

Last but not least is the man who orchestrates all elements of the Conference at the hotel. John Kirwin (non-alcoholic) selects menus, arranges for meeting rooms, oversees activities in the workroom with its computers, fax and copy machines, and other tasks too numerous to remember, much less report.

Then it's back to the office and regular routine — but only for a while. Like Christmas, the 53rd Conference will be here before we know it.

Opening for Two Class A (nonalcoholic) Trustees

The trustees' Nominating Committee asks that trustees, delegates and directors submit any names they deem appropriate as candidates for two Class A (nonalcoholic) trustees. Class A trustees are chosen from a variety of professional backgrounds, including doctors, lawyers, clergy, sociologists and educators.

The rotating trustees are Linda L. Chezem, J.D., of Indiana, a former judge who is now a professor at Purdue University; and Robert O. Miller, D.D., retired Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Alabama.

Please submit your candidates' professional resumés to the Secretary, trustees' Nominating Committee, General Service Office, by June 30, 2002.

Correctional Facilities

'Inside' Conference In Maryland Offers Blueprint for Success

Inside a maximum security prison in Jessup, Maryland, members of the Common Solution Group hosted a two-day conference last August. They did this together with an outside A.A. group of the same name and with the cooperation of the prison's warden and staff. "To my knowledge," says Bill H., a member of the Area Archives Committee who is also active in correctional facilities work, "this is one of the first conferences of its kind. But I assure you that judging from what I witnessed, it was only the first of many to come."

The idea for the conference, Bill explains, "came up more than two years ago at a retreat attended yearly by several members of the Common Solution Group in Columbia, Maryland. It was one of those brainstorming sessions that come out of meditation, love, fellowship and true spirituality." Working out the logistics and kinks of such an undertaking required a lot of patience, Bill recalls. "At best we seemed to take two steps forward and five steps back, and at worst we thought the conference would never happen. But it did, thanks especially to the leadership and drive of Jim C. and the outside Common Solution Group; and to Jay, the inside conference chairman, and his committee. We also had strong support from the Baltimore Intergroup, the Baltimore Hospital and Institutions Committee, our Area and the General Service Office in New York."

The theme was "There Is a Common Solution." The conference took place on Friday, August 17, from 6-9:30 p.m.; and on Saturday, August 18, from 2-9:30 p.m. "When you walked into the main area," Bill relates, "there was a homemade banner imprinted with the theme and name of the prison attached to the wall. In attendance were 50 inmates—40 men and 10 women—and approximately 20 people from the outside."

That first night, after enjoying pizzas, speakers from the outside Common Solutions Group qualified. Two workshops followed, one on "Spirituality," another on "Acceptance." On Saturday three in-house A.A.s told their stories. "They spoke with honesty and sincerity," Bill relates. "You could feel the love and compassion around you as they shared, and I saw several people dabbing at their eyes and reaching for handkerchiefs."

After the meeting workshops were held on "The Twelve Steps" and "Sponsorship." And then, says Bill,

“there came a catered sit-down dinner replete with steak, baked potatoes, salad, rolls, cake, the works.” If this sounds elaborate for a prison dinner, he adds, “remember, the hosts wanted this to be as much as possible like a convention ‘outside’ the walls.” The only snag of the weekend was getting the food in on time, Bill notes, “but the inmates, both men and women, took it in stride. They had come too far to mess things up with attitude this late in the game.”

Each person who spoke or conducted a workshop, as well as the outside sponsors and Baltimore H&I committee, were presented with commemorative plaques made by the inside A.A.s. Says Bill: “This convention was so great in every way, we already see it as an annual event.” Throughout the weekend, he emphasized, “the correctional officers—in fact, all the officers there—treated both the inside and outside A.A.s with respect and dignity. All together, we made it happen.”

In the Hat— Where Money and Spirituality Mix

Several years ago some committed A.A.s down in Broward County, Florida, reinvented the decades-old Birthday Plan—and thanks to its popularity they revitalized it again last fall with a colorful booth at the South Florida Area Conference in Boca Raton.

The Birthday Plan, explains Ildiko R., of Pompano Beach, Florida, “Is another place in the A.A. hat where ‘spirituality and money can mix,’ as our co-founder Bill W. put it. It provides a way for members to celebrate their personal and group anniversaries by setting aside a dollar or more for each sober year and sending it off to the General Service Office for A.A. services worldwide.”

Ildiko was part of the first A.A. group that started up in her native Budapest in 1987, and she carried the flag of Hungary in the opening ceremonies of the 1995 International Convention at San Diego. Eye-high in service most of her 20 years in A.A., she says that working on the booth has been “an A.A. family thing.” In 1997, she recalls, “I learned a lot from the efforts of my former sponsor Joyce K., who, with her husband, then South Florida delegate John K., and others on the area’s new Committee for the Birthday Plan, had put up a booth at the quarterly A.A. Assembly in Sarasota.” Then, earlier this year, Ildiko reflects, “when my sponsor and delegate Norma W. asked me to help her set up a similar booth in Boca Raton, she was

very ill. Knowing that her time with us was short, I wanted to make the booth the best it could be. When Norma saw it, she was so pleased. She died just three weeks later, in November.”

The booth was a winner, attracting the 600-plus A.A.s at the conference like a bright magnet. Under a banner with dancing gilt letters that spelled out “Birthday Plan” were candy, festive hats and whistles, and multicolored balloons flying — real-life versions of those pictured on nearby mounds of “giving” envelopes addressed to G.S.O. A flyer suggested, “Use the A.A. Birthday Plan as your birthday gift to Alcoholics Anonymous this year. You, as an individual, can support General Service. A penny a day for a year of sobriety—\$3.65 plus one dollar per year of your sobriety.” On a second flyer was a clear, brief history and more detailed description of the plan. Ildiko reports that

“people have responded well to the flyers, which themselves were a labor of love. Bruce W., Norma’s husband, researched the history of the Birthday Plan and Judy K. put it all together attractively on her computer. Several other A.A.s pitched in to help, too, and I was reminded again that what I can’t do alone, we can do together.”

The Birthday Plan was conceived during a coffee break at the Oklahoma State Convention in 1954. Delegate Ab A. was



“inspired,” he later said, by fellow A.A. Ted R., who had “the great idea” that members might like to celebrate their sobriety by “giving it away to G.S.O.,” at the rate of a dollar a sober year, on their A.A. birthdays. Ab checked out the suggestion with members back home in Tulsa; the idea took hold and snowballed with spectacular results: Contributions to G.S.O. nearly doubled inside the first year. The concept spread quickly across the U.S. and Canada, and in 1956 the General Service Conference approved the Anniversary Fund Plan, whereby older members would remind other A.A.s of their responsibility to G.S.O.

Speaking at the A.A. state meeting in Great Bend, Kansas, in 1956, Ab explained, “The way we approach these oldtimers is this: We ask them how they would like to do a little Twelfth Step work with money. . . . We alcoholics are blessed with two birthdays: On the first birthday God gave us life and a soul, and we receive gifts. Along came old John Barleycorn and misjudgment, and we lost our soul; we lost it and we almost lost our life. Then this great philosophy of A.A. came along and through it we eventually found our soul, and for that we should give of ourselves in gratitude.”

In 1961 the trustees’ Finance Committee recommended the adoption or continued use of the so-called Birthday Plan. It took effect immediately, and many A.A. members began contributing annually a sum equivalent to the number of years they had been sober. That same year the desirability of a yearly contribution of \$3 per each member was reaffirmed. Two years later, in 1963, the Conference again emphasized the \$3 annual contribution, focusing on the nature of this contribution as an individual responsibility. And in 1973 the Conference recommended that the sum be increased to \$3.65, adding up to a sobriety gift of a penny a day.

Says Constance Ivy, nonalcoholic supervisor of the Contributions Department at G.S.O.: “We receive all kinds of wonderful messages of gratitude with the birthday contributions. One man sends in a complete calendar every December, with a shiny copper penny carefully affixed to the square for all 365 days of the year.” She adds that limits on giving—now up to \$2,000 a year from any one A.A. member—are stringently observed, in the spirit of A.A.’s Seventh Tradition of self-support.

But it was not always thus. In the fledgling years of the Fellowship, “do good” dreams of field workers, detox centers and halfway houses sent the founders, who were long on zeal but short of pocket, scrambling for funds. Then, in 1938, when A.A. was not yet 3, came John D. Rockefeller’s cogent remark that changed A.A. forever. He said that money, followed inevitably by disputes over power, property and prestige, “would spoil this thing.” And so, as co-founder Bill W. later

reported, in order to survive, “we realized we must, for the first time, ask the A.A. groups for assistance.” (*The Language of the Heart*, p. 64)

Says Constance: “Often someone outside A.A. will send a gift of gratitude, but it is returned because the Fellowship is self-supporting through its members’ contributions. What some people don’t know [and is noted in the G.S.O. pamphlet “Self-Support: Where Money and Spirituality Mix”] is that there is a limit to how much even A.A.s can leave the Fellowship in their wills. They may provide for a one-time gift of \$2,000, but no more. So we have to return larger checks all the time. The program is amazing in how it works.”

P.I./C.P.C.

By Cooperating With Drug Courts We May Help Ourselves Too

Drug courts were established to provide a therapeutic approach in dealing with criminal cases that involve offenders with a drug- and/or alcohol-related problem. In mandating attendance at meetings of a Twelfth Step program, reported Marilyn Roberts, director of the National Drug Court Program (N.D.C.P.), at a recent meeting of drug court professionals, “they generally leave the choice of which one to the person concerned.”

“This is where we in A.A. can be most helpful,” says Rick W., Public Information coordinator at the General Service Office. “By opening clear channels of communication with drug court personnel, we can help them steer offenders to the Twelve Step programs most appropriate to their needs. At the same time, close cooperation can help us A.A.s cut down on the disruptions at our meetings, sometimes caused by newcomers who just can’t identify with us because their problem is with drugs or some substance other than alcohol.”

In December Rick and fellow G.S.O. staff member Susan U. (whose assignment is Cooperation With the Professional Community), along with their counterparts at the Narcotics Anonymous (N.A.) World Services Office, participated at the National Drug Court Institute in Washington, D.C., with representatives of the National Drug Court Program and National Association of Drug Court Professionals. Their purpose: to further cooperation among these entities in an effort to slow the revolving prison door.

“These meetings,” Rick points out, “gave us a chance to share what A.A. is and how we cooperate yet do not

affiliate with the courts. Drug court professionals are seeking long-term sobriety for their clients, and the experiences of A.A. and N.A. show that it can happen. The professionals I encountered are familiar with our programs. They understand that A.A. and N.A. are separate fellowships, each with a different purpose, and are willing to work with us within the framework of each program's Traditions and principles."

The National Drug Court Program provides funding for drug courts in the United States, while the National Association of Drug Court Professionals acts as an advocate for the establishment and funding of drug courts; it also gathers and disseminates information to association members. The National Drug Court Institute, which provides a training series, holds more than 70 seminars a year for drug court professionals—judges, attorneys, counselors, parole officers and more. All three agencies function under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Justice.

"After it was explained that basically A.A. functions locally," Rick says, "we talked about the signing of court slips to verify offenders' attendance at meetings—which the individual group may decide to do or not do—and provided information about how A.A. members cooperate. We stressed the impact a large group of nonmembers showing up at a meeting can have on a group and offered some of the solutions to be found in the service piece 'Sharing Experience on Coping With an Influx of New Members.' Among the suggestions: Explain to alcoholic offenders that A.A. is not a punitive arm of the law; let them know what A.A. is and isn't, and that we have but one purpose: 'to stay sober and help other alcoholics achieve sobriety.'"

Public Information

Cluing Our Friends In the Media to the Anonymity Tradition

The anonymity memo that the trustees' Public Information Committee sends out each year to the media is a tradition that began back in 1949 with the help of a worn typewriter and an often ornery mimeograph machine. Today, as befits the Computer Age, the lengthy '49 letter has morphed into a missive that is clear, crisp, compressed and featured on A.A.'s Web site (www.aa.org). Yet the message remains the same.

Explains this year's memo: "For many years, we in A.A. have appreciated the support we have received from our friends in the media. You have assisted in saving countless lives. We seek your continued cooperation in protecting the anonymity of our members at the public level." It goes on to ask that "in presenting A.A. members, you use first names only and do not use pictures in which their faces may be recognized." Enclosed with the memo is a Rolodex card, listing the name, address and phone number of the General Service Office and a few facts about the Fellowship for handy reference, as well as a postage-paid response card for those wishing to obtain more information about Alcoholics Anonymous.

Dated February 2002, the anonymity memo—written in English, French and Spanish—was released to a media list including close to 10,000 daily and weekly newspapers, magazines, and radio and TV stations in the U.S./Canada. Hopefully it will be seen, understood and heeded by managing editors, reporters, talk show hosts and many others, especially those handling stories about celebrities who happen to be in A.A.

Despite the blanket coverage of the memo and the vigilance of A.A. groups and individual members, anonymity breaks do happen—a number of them at the hands of well-meaning celebrities themselves who are eager to harness their fame (or notoriety) "to help other alcoholics like me." What is done about the hundreds of such anonymity breaks that violate the spirit of the Eleventh Tradition that occur yearly?

It has long been the consensus of A.A.'s General Service Board and General Service Conference that, because each group is autonomous, the responsibility for getting in touch with an A.A. member who has broken their anonymity at the public level is a local issue; it rests with the groups and service committees where the member lives. So, when an anonymity break is brought to the attention of G.S.O., the P.I. coordinator writes to the appropriate area delegate, recommending that a gentle reminder of the Anonymity Tradition be sent where it could do the most good. Only if the delegate so requests does G.S.O. write the actual letter.

Underscoring the importance of our Anonymity Tradition, the anonymity letter sent back in 1961 pointed out, "First, we know from experience that many problem drinkers might hesitate to turn to A.A. for help if they thought their problem might be discussed publicly, even inadvertently, by others. Then, too, we believe the concept of personal anonymity has a spiritual significance for us—it discourages the drive for personal recognition, power, prestige or profit. . . . Much of our effectiveness in working with alcoholics might be impaired, we fear, if we sought or accepted public recognition."

Calendar of Events

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

April

- 5-7—*Montgomery, Alabama*. Alabama/ Northwest Florida Area 1 Assembly. Write: Ch., 8121 Lillian Hwy #45, Pensacola, FL 32506
- 5-7—*Anchorage, Alaska*. Alaska Area Pre-Conf. Assembly. Write: Ch., 523 W. 8th, Anchorage, AK 99501.
- 5-7—*Omaha, Nebraska*. Second International Men's Conf. Write: Ch., Box 1704, Bellevue, NE 68005-1704
- 5-7—*Cincinnati, Ohio*. River Valley Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 30224, Cincinnati, OH 45230
- 5-7—*Seaside, Oregon*. 20th Annual North Coast Round-Up. Write: Ch., Box 63, Seaside, OR 97138
- 6-7—*Cape Cod, Massachusetts*. Third Annual Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 662, Hyannis, MA 02601
- 11-14—*Edisto Beach, South Carolina*. Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 156, Edisto Island, SC 29438
- 12-14—*Goodyear, Arizona*. 12th West Valley Round-Up. Write: Ch., Box 5495, Sun City West, AZ 85376
- 12-14—*Kailua-Kona, Hawaii*. 14th Annual Big Island Bash. Write: Ch., Box 390727, Kailua-Kona, HI 96739
- 12-14—*Rockford, Illinois*. NIA Spring Conf. Write: Ch., Box 1813, Rockford, IL 61110-0313
- 12-14—*Mashpee, Massachusetts*. Cape Cod Pockets of Enthusiasm. Write: Ch., Box 773, Mashpee, MA 02649
- 12-14—*Monticello, New York*. 37th SENY Conv. Write: Ch., Box 210-059, Brooklyn, NY 11221-0059
- 12-14—*Victoria, British Columbia, Canada*. 51st Annual Rally. Write: Ch., #8-2020 Douglas Street, Victoria, BC B8T 4L1
- 18-21—*Eureka Springs, Arkansas*. 26th Springtime in the Ozarks. Write: Trsr., 59 Leicester Drive, Bella Vista, AR 72714
- 19-21—*Missoula, Montana*. Spring Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 1233, Missoula, MT 59806
- 19-21—*Lincoln, Nebraska*. Spring Fling 2002. Write: Ch., Box 30691, Lincoln, NE 68503
- 19-21—*Erie, Pennsylvania*. Spring Conf. Write: Ch., Box 10443, Erie, PA 16514-0443
- 19-21—*Hunt, Texas*. Fellowship of the Spirit Conf. Write: Ch., 259 West Main Street, Suite 289, Kerrville, TX 78028
- 19-21—*Superior, Wisconsin*. 57th Annual Round-up. Write: Ch., Box 996, Superior, WI 54880
- 26-28—*Irvine, California*. 21st Annual H&I Conf. Write: Ch., 2345 W. Vancouver Dr., Anaheim, CA 92804

- 26-28—*Galesburg, Illinois*. Spring Fling. Write: Ch., Box 1772, Galesburg, IL 61402-1772
- 26-28—*Galway, Ireland*. 45th All-Ireland Conv. Write: G.S.O., 109 South Circular Road, Dublin 8, Ireland
- 27-28—*Norfolk, Nebraska*. Spring Classic. Write: Ch., 1500 Bluff, Norfolk, NE 68701

May

- 3-5—*Oliver, British Columbia, Canada*. South Okanagan-Oliver Round-up. Write: Ch., Box 392, Oliver, BC V0H 1T0
- 3-5—*St. Petersburg, Florida*. Young at Heart Round-Up. Write: Ch., Box 76422, St. Petersburg, FL 33704
- 3-5—*Marietta, Georgia*. Spring Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 675452, Marietta, GA 30006-0011
- 3-5—*Albuquerque, New Mexico*. Ninth Annual Red Road Conv. Write: Ch., Box 9460, Albuquerque, NM 87119
- 3-5—*Greensburg, Pennsylvania*. 57th Laurel Highlands Conf. Write: Ch., Box 6, Bovard, PA 15619
- 3-5—*Oconomowoc, Wisconsin*. Area 75 Conf. Write: Ch., Box 5013, Waukesha, WI 53187-5013
- 9-12—*Ermioni, Peloponnese, Greece*. International Conv. Write: Ch., 156 Ippokratous Street, 11472 Athens, Greece
- 10-12—*Boise, Idaho*. Idaho Area Spring Assembly/Conv. Write: Ch., Box 696, Boise, ID 83701
- 10-12—*Dayton, Ohio*. Women's Workshop. Write: Ch., Box 1527, Dayton, OH 45401-1527
- 16-19—*Daytona Beach, Florida*. Spring Conf. Write: Ch., Box 214911, S. Daytona, FL 32121
- 17-19—*Rehoboth Beach, Delaware*. State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 1, Harbeson, DE 19951
- 17-19—*Clearwater, Florida*. Sobriety in Action Conv. Write: Ch., Box 2571, Pinellas Park, FL 33780-2571

- 17-19—*Tulsa, Oklahoma*. 61st Anniversary Conv. Write: Ch., Box 18415, Oklahoma City, OK 73154-0415
- 17-19—*Port Angeles, Washington*. Olympic Round-Up. Write: Ch., Box 1081, Port Angeles, WA 98362-0204
- 17-19—*Courtenay, British Columbia, Canada*. Comox Valley Rally. Write: Ch., Box 1337, Comox, BC V9N 7Z8
- 17-19—*Bakersfield, California*. XXVII Convención Hispana Estatal de California. Write: Ch., Box 3336, Bakersfield, CA 93385
- 23-26—*Louisville, Kentucky*. 45th ICYPAA. Write: Ch., Box 19312, Eastgate Station, Indianapolis, IN 46219
- 24-26—*Covington, Louisiana*. Spring Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 733, Ponchatoula, LA 70454
- 24-26—*Bellaire, Michigan*. Northern Inter Area Spring Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 1363, Gaylord, MI 49735
- 24-26—*Bloomington, Minnesota*. Gopher State Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 65295, St. Paul, MN 55165-0295
- 24-26—*Gander, Newfoundland, Canada*. 44th Annual NFLD/LABRADOR Service Weekend and Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 511, Gander, NF A1V 1W5
- 24-26—*Irving, Texas*. XL Asamblea Estatal Hispana. Write: Com. Org. Box 154535, Irving TX 75015
- 25-26—*Chicoutimi, Quebec, Canada*. Special Regional Forum. Write: Forum Coordinator, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163
- 30-June 1—*Puerto de la Cruz, Tenerife, Canary Islands*. XI Convivencia Regional Canaria. Write: Ch., Apartado 80, C.P. 38600, Granadilla, Canary Islands

June

- 7-9—*Akron, Ohio*. 67th Founders' Day. Write: Ch., Box 12, Akron, OH 44309
- 7-9—*Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada*. Western Canada Regional Forum. Write: Forum Coordinator, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163

Planning a Future Event?

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

Date of event: from _____ to _____, 19 _____

Name of event: _____

Place (city, state or prov.): _____

For information, write: (exact mailing address) _____

Contact phone # (for office use only): _____

Flip up this end of page - for events on reverse side

7-9—*Calgary Alberta, Canada*. Gratitude Round-up. Write: Ch., Central Office, #2, 4015 1st Street SE, Calgary AB T2X 4X7
14-16—*Ames, Iowa*. Spring Conf. Write: Ch., Box 1561, Ames, IA 50014
14-16—*North Conway, New Hampshire*. Area Conv. Write: Ch., 1330 Hooksett Road, Hooksett, NH 03106
21-23—*Mobile, Alabama*. Azalea City Jamboree. Write: Ch., 6427 Grelot Road, #1605, Mobile, AL 36695
21-23 — *Waycross, Georgia*. Okefenokee Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 403, Waycross, GA 31502
21-23—*Billings, Montana*. Beartooth Mountain Conf. Write: Ch., Box 23406, Billings, MT 59104
21-23—*Brookings, South Dakota*. Spring Conf. Write: Ch., Box 152, Brookings, SD 57006

July

12-14—*Montgomery, Alabama*. Alabama/ Northwest Florida Area 1 Assembly. Write: Ch., 8121 Lillian Hwy #45, Pensacola, FL 32506
12-14—*Wasilla, Alaska*. Area Assembly. Write: Ch., Box 321, Willow, AK 99688
12-14—*Phoenix, Arizona*. Pacific Regional Forum. Write: Forum Coordinator, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163
19-21—*Burlington, Colorado*. Area Assembly. Write: Ch., Box 603, Limon, CO 80828