

*Gratitude is just about
the finest attribute we can
have, and how deeply
we of A.A. realize this...*

*Together, we count and
ponder our blessings of life,
of service, of love.*

Bill W.
December 1970

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

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Note on anonymity: From time to time in this publication full names and/or pictures of G.S.O. employees, Class A trustees and other nonalcoholics are used. The anonymity of A.A. members is maintained, as they are identified throughout by first name and last initial only.

■ Participation in American Sign Language Takes Regional Forums to a New Level

As part of G.S.O.'s ongoing effort to make participation accessible to all, American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters are now available by request at all Regional Forums. At the recent West Central Regional Forum in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, two interpreters were on hand, enabling the two Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing (HOH) members in attendance not only to understand the speakers, but also to share their own experience, strength and hope: one of the two shared that the interpreters improve the experience for everyone, because without them, hearing members would be “missing out” on everything their fellow Deaf/HOH A.A.s have to offer. Attending her first Regional Forum, Maria Morales-Lamm, G.S.O.'s Meetings, Events and Travel Assistant, noted, “I think it was eye-opening for everyone. The reception was very enthusiastic!” Michele Grinberg, chair of the General Service Board, closed the session with the Serenity Prayer in English while the two Deaf/HOH A.A.s signed alongside her at the podium.

G.S.O.'s Meetings, Events and Travel Department Supervisor Ivelisse Rivera, who has been attending Regional Forums for 25 years, was very moved by the event, and added that she hopes the event will “spark more participation” by Deaf/HOH members. At present, Deaf/HOH members may request interpreters at any Regional Forum simply by emailing regionalforums@aa.org. G.S.O. Staff are seeking to increase awareness of the service and ask that members pass the word along.

Meanwhile, other efforts to improve accessibility for Deaf and HOH A.A. members are underway at G.S.O., where several Staff and personnel are currently taking classes in ASL onsite. “The seeds for the idea were planted at the 2015 International Convention in Atlanta,” Staff

member Sandra W. explains, “where we had the highest attendance of members from the Deaf Community, and one of the Friday night keynote speakers was a Deaf member — both of which left an indelible impression.” Taught by Deaf instructors from a local school over the course of seven weeks, the immersion-style class is already an “amazing experience.”

“Wouldn't it be great,” Staff member Patrick C. added, “if one day the tours of the G.S.O. could be led by a member of the team who could communicate the experience through ASL?” With time and continued attention, Staff hopes to bring this idea to fruition as part of G.S.O.'s continuous effort to ensure that A.A. is accessible to all.

■ Renovation of the G.S.O. Archives Office

On September 29, 2017, G.S.O. undertook renovation of the Archives area, including an expansion and reconfiguration of staff workspaces. The renovation entailed making room for four cleanly designed, wood-veneer-topped workstations and an enlarged area for G.S.O. Senior Archivist April Hegner. In addition, because cabinets no longer block the south-facing windows, natural light fills the office space and spills into the exhibition area. Meanwhile, thanks to clever planning in the exhibit area — including the addition of a half-wall and new cabinets — there is now more wall space for exhibits despite the loss of floor space in that section.

Visitors to the Archives will also notice a pair of new archival-quality cabinets for displays of sensitive ephemera and three-dimensional objects, as well as the wood-veneer reception desk where Assistant Archivist Noela Jordan greets visitors. Plans are afoot to install an educational, interactive audiovisual display in the back corner.

Archives Director Michelle Mirza is very happy with the results. “Our dedicated Archives staff of six — five full-time and one part-time — really appreciate the spaciousness and light. We're all excited and pleased with the new layout. It feels less cramped, and the layout creates a more practical work environment. And the exhibits look better than ever.” In early November, the Archives hosted an open house for G.S.O. staff and Grapevine employees in the newly reconfigured space — a gathering that coincided with the 42nd anniversary of the opening of the Archives.



■ Passing the (Digital) Basket

About two years ago, Stephen H. assumed the service job of treasurer for the Ninth Avenue Group, a well-attended meeting in Manhattan. The Ninth Avenue Group meets in two different locations in the Chelsea area, with three meetings apiece on Monday and Wednesday evenings, and nine meetings on Friday night — a total of 15 meetings a week.

Stephen says, “It was a cash-intensive job. I would ask everyone to funnel money to the Friday night meetings, where I would collect all the envelopes, but 15 envelopes is a lot of money to keep track of until you can get it into the bank.” And that was only part of it. “You still had to tally up how much money came from each meeting and keep a detailed spreadsheet in order to make treasurer’s reports.”

An active treasurer, Stephen did what he could to streamline the process. He arranged for online bill paying in the group’s bank account so that group expenses — like rent for the church and contributions to G.S.O., the area and intergroup — went out automatically. Lots of groups do this, but Stephen went a step further. At a Ninth Avenue Group business meeting, he suggested that the group pass a digital Seventh Tradition basket alongside the actual one by employing the mobile payment service Venmo. After a group conscience, it was agreed that they would.

The group took this step not just because of the problem of keeping track of money from 15 different meetings, Stephen says. “So many people just are not carrying cash anymore. They use cards or mobile devices. You look around the room during a meeting, and they pass the basket on because they literally don’t have any physical money on them. We wanted to find another way for people to contribute.”

Area 45 delegate Andrew L. came to the same conclusion a year and a half ago at his southern New Jersey home group, the Monday night Lifeline Group. “People use cards for everything — coffee, newspapers — almost nothing is too small.” After a business meeting, the Lifeline Group agreed to try a digital payment platform, in this case PayPal, as a way to increase contributions from the cashless. The process has been successfully incorporated into the meeting itself. “As the basket is being passed,” Andrew says, “the treasurer gets up and stands by the coffee. And if you want to contribute that way, you go back there and he swipes your card with the card reader. You get sent an electronic receipt. It’s very quick.”

Digital contributions themselves are nothing new in A.A. In 2010, G.S.O. launched its Contributions Online system, a web-based Internet application that allows both groups and individual members to make recurring contributions to the U.S./Canada General Service Board

of Alcoholics Anonymous via credit card or e-check. And now, many A.A.s feel that reaching for your smartphone during the Seventh Tradition break at your home group will in the future be as natural as pulling a couple of bucks out of your pocket and depositing them in the basket.

Helping chart this largely unexplored territory is James O., chair of the tech committee at San Francisco/Marin intergroup (officially known as the Intercounty Fellowship of A.A., serving both San Francisco and Marin Counties). He began to explore using mobile payment platforms about nine months ago, he says, because of a “personal pain point. I just don’t carry cash on me these days, and I regularly forget to bring any to a meeting.

So, at our monthly business meeting at intergroup, I mentioned that someone should look into the idea of digital contributions. Of course, that someone turned out to be me.”

James formed a digital contributions working group at SF/Marin intergroup to explore the idea. “Ultimately, we realized that what we wanted to do,” he says, “was to produce a document that answers a lot of questions — a user’s guide for any group that has the need, want, interest or desire to implement a digital contributions solution at their meeting.”

That document can now be found on the SF/Marin intergroup’s website at www.aasf.org/digitalcontributions. It guides potential users through the pros and cons of six different platforms (Venmo, Paypal, Square Cash, Tilt, Txt2Give and GiveByCell), each of which would be tied in to the group’s bank account. “We don’t endorse one platform over another,” James says, “so as not to break with Tradition Six. It’s up to groups to decide for themselves.”

James and his working group felt that Venmo was the best fit for them. It was decided to put digital contributions to a three-month test, both at James’s home group (which agreed to the trial) and at the monthly business meeting at SF/Marin intergroup. The main concern people had with using mobile platforms was anonymity. James explains that anonymity is not an issue: your Venmo payment (and most payments made via other mobile platforms) is simply made to the name of your group. (Venmo does not provide your name to third parties for marketing purposes.) But people had other worries. Could their accounts or identities be hacked or stolen? Well, possibly, but that can happen to any user of any credit card or to anyone who shops or banks or even browses online. Would a meeting treasurer have access to people’s account numbers? No. Would a treasurer have



access to the cash that was deposited (usually once a month) by Venmo in the group's bank account? Yes, but treasurers already do with regular cash-only meetings. (Many, in fact, still use their own personal bank accounts for group business.) And one advantage of Venmo and other mobile payment platforms is that multiple admin users can be set up for additional oversight.

After three months, both the SF/Marin intergroup business meeting and James's home group decided to keep the electronic Seventh Tradition indefinitely. "It has been running at my home group for nine months," James says. "Mobile payment contributions represent one-third of our overall contributions, with 10 to 20 percent of our meeting attendees contributing that way. We have a time in the meeting agenda where we talk about the Seventh Tradition and announce, 'If you prefer to contribute digitally, you can find the group name on Venmo and contribute that way.' That's all it takes."

Maury P., office manager at SF/Marin intergroup, emphasizes that the digital contributions are meant "to supplement the basket, not supplant it." In order to fur-

ther spread the word about their experiment, James and Maury took their research to a workshop at the National A.A. Technology Workshop and have asked their intergroup reps to make sure groups are aware of it. "The idea is that groups who want to do this don't have to reinvent the wheel every time," Maury says.

And how did the digital Seventh Tradition work out for Stephen H., the treasurer surrounded by piles of cash at the Ninth Avenue Group? Well, Stephen has rotated out of the treasurer job at this point, but digital contributions are announced as an option at every meeting. Most of the money is still cash in the basket, but people tell him they like the idea of a second option, and a minority are using their smartphones to pay.

Many expect that minority to increase across the Fellowship in general as the electronic Seventh Tradition becomes more common. It does seem to be the wave of the future. As the Area 45 delegate Andrew L. puts it, "Look at it this way: Would you rather live with the Jetsons or the Flintstones?"

It's something to think about.

■ Building a Better Bridge

Bridging the Gap (BTG) has been performing a vital function for decades, helping newly recovering alcoholics to navigate that "slippery" place between the doors of prisons, treatment centers, rehabs, detoxes and outpatient programs and the door of an A.A. meeting. BTG is a program in which members volunteer to be temporary contacts and introduce newcomers to A.A. Marty C., treatment chair for North Florida (Area 14), has reinvented the wheel when it comes to this crucial program. The ingenious idea he has set in motion did not come from brainstorming at a board meeting or musing in a think tank but rather, as is often the case for Marty, sitting on the couch and relaxing after a long day's work.

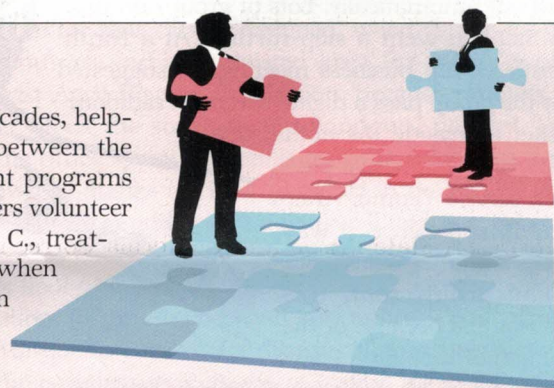
For some time, Marty had been frustrated with the two BTG forms (Inside and Outside) and the sluggish procedure of processing those forms: it sometimes took up to a month before a connection was made between an A.A. volunteer and an individual released from prison or an institution. Marty's idea was simple, even obvious: What if there were some resources already available that a lot of oldtimers didn't readily consider — namely, technology?

Marty immediately contacted his area website chair, Steven N., who was instrumental in putting Marty in touch with the webmaster for the Area 14 website. After working with Steven and the webmaster, a much faster connection can now be made in BTG. On the "Documents" page on the Area 14 website, visitors can find several forms under the BTG pamphlet. An important improvement is that the BTG forms for A.A. volunteers (Outside) and Patients/Inmates (Inside) are now in a fillable PDF format. Email links for Marty and the corrections chair are provided so the forms can be filled out online and sent directly to them. They, in turn, email them to the A.A. or intergroup office in the town where it is needed.

In September, at the National BTG Weekend in Minneapolis, Marty shared this innovation with anyone who would listen, and learned during the weekend that there is indeed a lot more underused technology available that can support and enhance Twelfth Step work. Marty urges everyone involved in BTG to go to their area webmaster and learn how to implement a system similar to the one in Area 14. He also suggests visiting the Bridge the Gap weekend website, btgww.org, where, with a simple click, anyone can receive a password and access the digital library, which contains forms and literature developed by other A.A. committees.

Prior to this new system, Marty received about five BTG requests a month. Since using the new website, Area 14 is now providing 40 to 50 "bridges" per month, making it clear that everyone has greatly benefited from this simple and effective adjustment to the BTG program. Marty has also observed that using technology not only improves efficiency, but it also allows members to reach out to more alcoholics throughout the Fellowship, and hence promote unity.

In their cups, alcoholics always seem to be dreaming up heroic solutions to perplexing problems. In sobriety we sometimes learn, as Marty did, that the answer is often right in front of us — we may just need to sit on the couch, take it easy, and let it in.



■ In the Rooms Behind the Walls

For decades A.A. has been carrying the message to sick and suffering alcoholics in places where those struggling with the disease of alcoholism are unable to attend meetings, or even leave the actual premises in which they reside — including hospitals, detoxes and rehabs, as well as prisons, which are the most challenging for outsiders to gain access to. Corrections departments have stringent rules and require extensive paperwork including background checks and medical scans for “civilians” who wish to enter a correctional facility on a regular basis. What can further hamper bringing in meetings is that many prisons are located in remote areas, resulting in considerable travel times and lessening the likelihood that volunteers will be willing to make the trip. The result is untold numbers of men and women who have never had the opportunity to hear the A.A. message firsthand. The good news? There is a solution.

Karen C., chair of the Northern California Hospital and Institutions Committee (NorCal H&I), has come up with a proposal that would help make the message of Alcoholics Anonymous available to many serving time in remote facilities. Karen confirms that even with the cooperation of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) and the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP), it is still a struggle to find enough volunteers to serve these faraway communities. “This has been especially true of Corcoran State Prison, Pelican Bay State Prison, High Desert State Prison and California Correctional Center at Susanville, as well as the Federal Correctional Institution at Herlong.” Karen goes on to say that she feels it is a tragically missed opportunity at Corcoran, which houses one of the largest correctional substance abuse rehabilitation programs in the world. Although recent visits to these facilities by trusted servants in the area were greeted enthusiastically by both staff and inmates, the effort to get A.A. members to do service at these locations over the years has met with negligible results due to the significant costs of time and money involved in traveling several hours to and from the prisons.

The solution that NorCal H&I proposes is that, in lieu of onsite visits, A.A. meetings be conducted by video conference at prisons in remote locations. Volunteers would be well-established members of the H&I committee who would go through the standard clearance procedures required by CDCR as well as NorCal’s thorough orientation process. These experienced volunteers would lead meetings in the same way as they would “in the rooms,” but would do so offsite in a private location. While face-to-face A.A. meetings still present the ideal method of carrying the message of recovery, this resolution would be the next best thing. An additional benefit to CDCR is that it could alleviate some of the problems inherent in having civilians physically on the premises. Of course, funding is an issue in implementing this technological initiative, but it is hoped that departments of correction may see that the long-term benefits would outweigh the short-term costs.

The H&I Committee is committed to working intensively with the CDCR in resolving issues of implementation and are eager to roll up their sleeves and get to work. The initial concept would involve having the cleared A.A. volunteers check in electronically at a local parole office and then get patched into a selected CDCR facility video console in a room where interested inmates could congregate. Karen is encouraged by indications of strong support from the California Division of Adult Parole Operations (DAPO) as well as the CDCR. The greatest difficulty in actualizing the committee’s proposal is implementing a technology infrastructure. Many prisons already have intranet access (a private space available only to prison inmates and staff), but security concerns regarding Internet access (open to the outside world) need much more consideration.

Despite the challenges, there is immense potential for creating a radically expanded method of carrying the message of recovery. Prisons that have been unable to conduct A.A. meetings with support from the outside could potentially be conducting multiple meetings every week.

When asked if there was a need for technology to carry the message of recovery into prisons, Nancy McCarthy, Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee on the General Service Board, stated it simply: “Yes. There is a need.” At a recent conference for the American Correction Association in St. Louis, she spoke with a number of prison wardens and superintendents who were “concerned that they couldn’t get anyone into their facilities because of their remote location,” and that even when A.A. volunteers were willing, some were not cleared due to criminal records. She observed that video conferencing would circumvent these issues as well as “lessen the movement within the facility.”

In addition to the possibility of video-conferenced meetings, there are other initiatives on other fronts using technology to bring the message of A.A. to remote and underserved communities. Some prisons are currently eliminating their paper libraries and bringing in kiosks and tablets for use by inmates. Nancy reported that prison officials she spoke with inquired about this technology as well. Rachel N., a volunteer at the Colorado Department of Corrections (CDOC), is investigating how the CDOC can gain access to Alcoholics Anonymous e-books for those seeking sobriety or already sober “behind the walls.”

Of course, any new technology is met with a wide range of responses. Some embrace it, others fear it. Some view it as a mind-numbing escape from reality and others as an invaluable tool for people to connect with one another. One of the first major technological inventions, the telephone, was not greeted with universal enthusiasm. However, in the early days of A.A., the telephone was a virtual lifeline to those getting sober.

One of the most compelling reasons to investigate the use of new technology as a part of A.A. service work in corrections — video-conferenced meetings, e-readers and

the like — is the ability to make, sometimes for the first time, a real connection with (very often) desperate people in distant places. Whether talking face to face or speaking on the phone with another alcoholic, attending an A.A. meeting in person or in front of a video screen, or reading the Big Book in print or on a tablet, it is still one alcoholic communicating with another, helping, one word at a time, to share the message of hope and recovery.

■ General Service Board Seeks to Enhance Communication

“A vast communications net now covers the earth, even to its remotest reaches... Nothing can matter more to the future welfare of A.A. than the manner in which we use this colossus of communication.” It’s hard to know what Bill W. would have thought about such things as the Internet, social media and the advance of technology, but it’s clear from his words in *The Language of the Heart* that communication — and how A.A. utilizes it — is vitally important to the welfare of our Fellowship.

The fundamental communication — the sharing between one alcoholic and another — is the building block upon which the Fellowship itself is founded. And our communications radiate outward from there, touching on communication at the group level and beyond — all the way through our service structure and out to those professionals and friends of A.A. who work with alcoholics themselves, and further still to the suffering alcoholic who may not yet have heard our message.

For some time, A.A.’s General Service Board has been focused on improving communication within the three corporations that serve the A.A. Fellowship (the General Service Board, A.A. World Services, Inc. and A.A. Grapevine, Inc.) and finding effective ways to communicate, both with the Fellowship itself and with the general public. The board has always sought to foster effective communication, and its focus has been on widening the doors of A.A. in order to help as many alcoholics as possible. The success of this effort, of course, depends upon how well A.A. operates and communicates as a whole.

In 2016, the board put forward a Strategic Plan, an important aspect of which was to conduct a comprehensive, organization-wide communications inventory to unify and enhance the effectiveness of our print, digital and media resources by incorporating improved communications into the ongoing operations of the three corporate boards, including each of its programs and services. In a general sense, a communications inventory is a comprehensive evaluation of an organization’s ability to send, receive and share information with various audiences, both within the organization and with key constituencies outside, to uncover strengths and weaknesses with the objective of improving future communications.

To this end, the board has engaged a communications

consultant to help conduct the inventory, with the scope of work to include an evaluation of communications among the General Service Board, A.A. World Services, Inc. and A.A. Grapevine, Inc., as well as a review of external communications among these boards and the Fellowship. Additionally, the inventory will extend to our relationships outside the Fellowship and how others may perceive the work that we do.

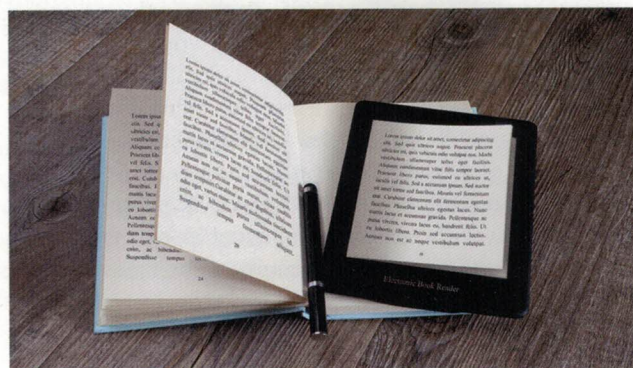
As Bill W. noted, the “colossus of communication” is ever widening and ever expanding, and in our efforts to carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers, taking a close look at the channels and the processes by which we communicate will benefit the Fellowship as a whole.

Additionally, and as part of the increased focus on communications, A.A.W.S. has begun the process of designing a new website. The process has been underway for some time, with a comprehensive review and evaluation of our current site and the selection of a vendor who will manage the development of the new design. The aim of the new design is to enhance the overall user experience; to develop the site’s search function; to create a sleeker, more modern and image-driven look; and to enhance search engine optimization so that people can find the site more readily.

Together, these two ongoing communications projects will be helping the Fellowship discover additional ways of doing and improving what we’ve always done — reaching out the hand of A.A. to the still-suffering alcoholic, wherever and wherever he or she may be.

■ Better, Stronger, Faster: E-books

Attend a few A.A. meetings over a few 24 hours and it becomes apparent that A.A.s do several things well. Listing the special skills of alcoholics would take far too much space in an article, but one trait is obvious: Regardless of where they hail from — big cities, small towns, remote mountaintops or tropical islands — A.A.s communicate often and creatively. Even newcomers to A.A. enthusiastically embrace the Fellowship and celebrate its simple and effective method of “one alcoholic talking to another.” In *As Bill Sees It*, Bill W. clarified this special quality: “From the beginning, communication in A.A. has been no ordinary transmission of helpful ideas



and attitudes. Because of our kinship in suffering, and because our common means of deliverance are effective for ourselves only when constantly carried to others, our channels of contact have always been charged with the language of the heart.”

Indeed, “communication” and “our channels of contact” have, in the past few decades, been anything but ordinary transmissions — we have A.A. meetings online, an entire A.A. library of audio files, and 11 titles of A.A. e-books (available in English, Spanish and French), which can be read on personal tablets and computers, e-readers and smartphones. For several years, A.A.W.S. has made 11 texts of A.A. available for purchase as digital e-books to be read on Apple, Kindle or Nook devices. For many, e-books are the preferred way to read: with an e-book, a reader can enlarge text, increase screen brightness, and carry around an entire library on one device. Did Bill W. envision these “channels of contact,” exactly? Your guess is probably as good as the A.A. sitting next to you. But one thing is for sure: A.A.s recognize the absolute importance of literature and the printed word to carry A.A.’s message of recovery and hope. When an A.A. (or anyone) can better read or more easily obtain any of Alcoholics Anonymous’s Conference-approved literature, service material, or Grapevine magazines and books, the odds are good that the message and miracle of recovery will be better carried and communicated. With that end in mind, the Publishing Department of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., has been carefully working to provide all A.A. e-books with many exciting new features. Of course, the text of the Big Book will not change — the changes are to electronic features only.

Ed Nyland, production manager at G.S.O., is in charge of updating e-books. According to Ed, the primary goal of these updates is to increase readability and make the e-books easier to navigate — a must for A.A.s who use the books, particularly the Big Book and the “Twelve and Twelve,” in A.A. meetings, study groups, and working with others.

Most e-book readers have noticed that in an e-book there are no page numbers. As Ed explains it, “A digital file can be seen as one long page that goes on and on and on. Even if it is paginated, as soon as you increase or change the font for easier reading (a popular feature of e-books), the pagination changes.” This is frustrating and confusing for many A.A.s — especially because page numbers are often used as shorthand to refer to the material printed on them. For example, many A.A.s mention “pages 62 and 63,” by which they mean Step Three as described in the Big Book. If your font is enlarged on an e-book, page 62 may have become page 134. Try following along with enlarged fonts in your e-book in an A.A. study group or with a sponsor — you may find it is not so easy!

These considerations have been paramount to the work invested in updating the e-books. Therefore, at the start of each chapter, readers can access a button that will instantly take them back to the previous chapter, the next chapter,

or the table of contents. In addition, using the buttons, a reader can go back to the actual page numbers — page numbers that match the original printed version.

The new features will look somewhat different depending on the e-book platform — Apple, Kindle or Nook. On an Apple device, for example, the new buttons will feature a pop-up bubble when the reader touches a footnote in the text. The text of the footnote will appear in the bubble. For instance, a reader of the Big Book on an Apple device reaches page 25 of the Big Book. On that page, a footnote references “Fully explained — Appendix II.” The pop-up bubble will make accessing the text in the Appendix easier and faster. Nook and Kindle versions will receive a similar, although not identical, update.

Although the Big Book and the “Twelve and Twelve” will be the first to receive the updates, all e-books (11 in all), as well as their French and Spanish versions, will receive the updates within the next year and will become available as each update is completed. As always, the new versions of the e-books are made available by A.A.W.S. and can be purchased through Apple iTunes, Kindle or Nook — depending on which device the user owns.

Want more good news? Anyone who has already purchased an older version of an e-book (any format) can receive these updates for free. Unfortunately, however, personal notes and highlights from the previous version will not carry over to the new version if the update is selected.

In *Twelve Concepts for World Service*, regarding the “colossus of modern communication,” Bill W. wrote, “Used unselfishly and well, it can produce results surpassing our present imagination.” It is hard to gauge just how many people throughout the years have said, after reading our literature, “Yes, I am one of them too; I must have this thing” (Big Book, p. 29). A.A.s everywhere share the hope that not only will alcoholics reach out for “this thing” once they hear the message — via e-book or any other medium — but that it will produce results well beyond our imagination.

■ Reminder: Résumés for Trustees Election due Jan. 1, 2018

Two new Class B (alcoholic) trustees — from the Pacific and Eastern Canada regions — will be elected at the General Service Conference in April 2018. Résumés must be received at G.S.O. no later than January 1, 2018, and must be submitted by delegates only.

The new Pacific regional trustee will succeed Joel C., of San Diego, California; the new Eastern Canada trustee will follow Richard B., of Terrebonne, Québec.

Please submit your candidate’s résumé to the Secretary, trustees’ Nominating Committee, General Service Office.

■ Canadian A.A.s Correspond with Inmates

The Corrections Correspondence Service (CCS) links A.A. members who are incarcerated with A.A. members on the outside so that both can share their experience, strength and hope with each other. For inmates, it's a way to get valuable guidance in staying sober through the A.A. program and a sense of the A.A. Fellowship. For "outside" members, it's a way to take part in corrections work even if they don't live near a facility. Many find it to be immensely rewarding service work.

Says David T., of Ottawa, Ontario, who has been involved in the CCS in Canada, "I know that not every corrections client has an A.A. meeting in their institution, and perhaps we can reach out and provide a contact that they can correspond with.

"I have been involved in helping to get this service started for Canada, and I usually start out by writing a new correspondent, explaining a little bit about my journey and asking him to write back and tell me a little about himself. I also explain that I know what it is like to be in a situation where you are trying to stay sober by yourself, and that I may be able to answer questions they may have about the program.

"We only talk about program-related questions, and I hope I am able to give them just a little bit of hope in their attempts to stay sober on the inside. I use my intergroup/central office address to receive my letters. This works well for those who are concerned about their anonymity."

This invaluable Twelfth Step service connects our friends behind the walls with outside members, allowing confined members access to the program and insuring that the hand of A.A. is always there. For more information, contact your district or area corrections committee or the Corrections desk at G.S.O. (corrections@aa.org).

■ "One Voice, Many Voices"

On December 3, 2017, the second Spanish-speaking Women's Workshop (SSWW) will be held in Pasadena, California, where Southeastern regional trustee, Yolanda F., will be featured as keynote speaker. The theme of the workshop, "One Voice, Many Voices," emphasizes how the voice of one member of an underserved or remote community represents many others, creating a ripple effect that can reach the still-suffering alcoholic in otherwise unreachable communities. Such communities are not confined to the far reaches of geography: right in our midst are populations that may be inaccessible for a variety of reasons — language, culture, age, gender or disability. And Spanish-speaking women significantly embody one of those populations.

Zoraida R., coordinator for SSWW, has observed four specific obstacles affecting sobriety in the Latina com-

munity: 1) Family members report feeling shame when a female admits her alcoholism, and so it is hidden; 2) many women find themselves in meetings with all male members and do not feel safe at times; 3) the few female members at meetings (sometimes referred to as "Queen Bees") are not always particularly welcoming to new women; and 4) at some male-dominated meetings, women are not allowed to chair or do service beyond the group level.

At the last SSWW, held in San Diego in August 2016, many women reported that they felt truly a part of the Fellowship for the first time. They were grateful that they were completely free to participate and that their voices were heard. Newcomers were welcomed and embraced by other alcoholic women. As a result, several new Spanish-speaking women's groups started up in California, and, for the first time in 50 years, in 2017 Hispanic women had a roundtable at PRAASA. Additionally, there is discussion in the area regarding the need for A.A. literature dedicated to Spanish-speaking women.

Topics of this year's SSWW will be "Spiritual Principles," "Sponsorship: Woman to Woman," "Spanish-Speaking Women in General Service," "Motherhood in A.A." and "The Queen Bee Syndrome," as well as a La Viña presentation and practical tips on how to form a Spanish-speaking women's A.A. group. The workshop promises to be invaluable for all participants, and though conducted in Spanish (with simultaneous translation for English speakers), the emphasis, as in all A.A. gatherings, is on *el lenguaje del corazón*.

■ La Viña: The International Journal of Alcoholics Anonymous

The idea of a Spanish-language publication modeled after Grapevine began in the late 1980s as a direct response to the fact that the Spanish-speaking Fellowship in the U.S. and Canada had grown exponentially in the previous few decades. For some time, Spanish-speaking members of A.A. in North America had wanted to be able to read and submit articles to Grapevine as original stories in their own language. And, while local bulletins and magazines — *AKRON 1935*, in Spain; *Compartimiento*, in Guatemala; and *Plenitud*, in Mexico, just to name a few — have appeared in Spanish-speaking countries over the years, these have generally been geared to their national service structures.

La Viña, A.A.'s Spanish-language meeting in print, turned 21 this year, and its ability to connect Spanish-speaking members in the U.S. and Canada to each other and to the A.A. service structure has grown since that very first issue appeared in June of 1996. "La Viña has

become an important tool for Hispanic members to come together and share their stories,” says Irene D., the magazine’s current editor. “If you imagine the early days of A.A., when alcoholics were first forming groups and discovering others like themselves, that’s the service that La Viña facilitates.”

In 1991, the General Service Conference issued a recommendation that Grapevine begin publishing at least one article in Spanish every month. In 1995, the Conference gave its approval to a five-year trial run of a Spanish-language edition of Grapevine. Ames S., currently G.S.O. managing editor, was Grapevine executive editor at the time, and remembers how it all began.

“We did a pilot issue completely in Spanish and brought it to the International Convention in San Diego that year. At this point the proposed magazine had no name and consisted of Grapevine stories translated into Spanish. Along with the pilot issue, we passed out a form asking, ‘Is this something you would be interested in?’ And we received back quite a number of names and addresses of potential subscribers.”

At this point, Ames says, “it was time to give the magazine a name.” Wanting to echo the Grapevine theme, they came up with La Viña — the Vineyard. Jaime M., a Colombian writer, teacher and translator, was hired as the magazine’s first editor. In June of 1996, 7,000 copies of the initial issue came off the presses. La Viña was published on a bi-monthly basis, as it is today, and at first contained a mixture of stories translated from Grapevine along with a few Spanish-language originals.

Jaime M. recalls that he loved working at La Viña during his tenure there. “I was amazed at the number of stories that began to come in — from the U.S., from Latin America, even from Cuba. The magazine was especially valuable to prison inmates in these countries, who had little or no contact with A.A. literature. They would write and tell us that La Viña kept them sober.”

In 2001, the General Service Conference recommended that La Viña continue to be published by A.A. Grapevine, Inc., and to be supported by the General Service Board as a service to the Fellowship. As the result of this action, reaffirmed by the Conference in 2011, La Viña is unique in its hybrid status as it attempts to be self-supporting through the sale of subscriptions and content-related

items, with any difference in revenue and expenses provided by the General Fund of the General Service Board.

Hernán M., the magazine’s editor from 2001 to 2007, recalls how the magazine grew. “Hispanics were and are very attached to La Viña. They had really high subscription rates compared to the size of their population. When we asked them for support, they would respond.” There were challenges, of course, he noted. “Migrant workers didn’t stay in one place, so it was hard for their subscriptions to reach them; and overseas postal services don’t always work as well as we would like.”

At the same time, Hernán began to see that La Viña was a catalyst for the Spanish-speaking A.A. community in the U.S. and Canada — often separate from the main A.A. service structure and community — to come together. “When I started to attend A.A. events hosted by the Hispanic Fellowship, I realized the value of face-to-face communication in terms of carrying the message for Alcoholics Anonymous.”

Irene assumed the role of editor coincidental with the 2010 Conference’s request for spiritual parity between Grapevine and La Viña and the expansion of the magazine to 64 pages with a black-and-white interior and four-color cover. “When I was getting sober,” she says, “I didn’t even know that A.A. existed in Spanish until I got into A.A. in New York and my sponsor said to me, ‘You’ve got a solid foundation. Why not try some Hispanic meetings?’ I thought they were kicking me out! But it was then I realized there was a parallel part of A.A. similar to a remote community.”

Irene describes her initial days as editor as a wonderful journey that took her around the U.S. and Canada attending Hispanic A.A. events. Notably, she went to the annual National Hispanic A.A. Convention. (It was a letter from the National Hispanic A.A. Convention in 1986, sent to G.S.O., that requested a Spanish-language magazine.) “I began to learn how A.A. worked and how different the Spanish-speaking community in A.A. was. For example, 95 percent of the 125 stories submitted each month are handwritten. So then I understood how vital our writing workshops are. A.A. Hispanic members don’t write in solitude. The members come to the workshops, bring food and coffee, and the La Viña rep brings paper and pencils. Then members write as they become inspired. Their stories are the heart of La Viña.”



Irene is also impressed with the long distances Hispanic members are willing to travel for a workshop. “It’s not unusual for members to travel all night by van from Los Angeles to Denver to attend a La Viña workshop. It’s really a communal process.”

La Viña stories are changing, says the editor. “Now we get more and more Step and Tradition stories. La Viña has published a few issues on sponsorship and is getting more stories from women.” There is a cultural taboo for many Hispanic women about going to meetings and saying that they are alcoholics, just as in the early days in English-speaking A.A. in the 1930s and ’40s: to some, it means that they are loose women. “Yet I was one of the Hispanic women in A.A., and I wanted to hear from others,” says Irene.

“At first, there weren’t enough stories from women, so I translated some. I also called some female Hispanic members that I knew to submit their stories, and eventually La Viña published a women’s issue. Since then we have featured a special women’s section in every issue.”

Like Grapevine, La Viña is a link connecting one alcoholic to another. It connects isolated Hispanic communities in rural areas. It connects members in jails and deportation centers, who rely on La Viña stories to help keep them sober. And it connects others via its website. “We have a growing web presence for La Viña on aagrapevine.org/español with a dedicated landing page in Spanish. Members can download the La Viña service workbook and/or upload their stories. We have

a calendar of upcoming events to which members can upload their own events. As Hispanic members mostly use smartphones, La Viña now offers a free text-messaging (SMS) service to sign up to receive La Viña’s Weekly Quote as well as information about workshops, service opportunities, etc.”

What’s ahead for La Viña? “Looking toward the future,” Irene says, “makes me think about the early stories of Bill and Dr. Bob and the A.A. community then. I really see a parallel with La Viña — there is a huge community out there just getting to know A.A. and what A.A. does, and La Viña is a big part of that process. I’m happy to say that we have Paz P., a nontrustee director on the Grapevine Board from a Spanish-speaking home group and an executive editor/publisher who is fluent in Spanish with deep connections to the Hispanic community. Every morning, when I sit down to read the stories that are submitted, I say to myself, look at this, the program is working. We just have to extend our hands a little further.”

“We now reach 13 percent of the Hispanic membership as reported in the Membership Survey and have a closer relationship than ever with the fastest-growing population in the United States, demographically speaking,” Ami B., A.A. Grapevine, Inc. executive editor/publisher says. “We want to see the Hispanic A.A. community become even more connected to the A.A. community as a whole. La Viña is at the center of that effort.”

■ Safeguarding Anonymity in a Digital Age

There is a broad concern in the A.A. Fellowship that the explosion of social media in today’s world may cause A.A.s to lose sight of one of the primary tenets of our program: the Tradition of Anonymity.

According to Clay R., Public Information coordinator at G.S.O., the P.I. desk hears on a regular basis from alcoholics worried about the smartphones many of us routinely carry into meetings, conferences, conventions and forums. Callers voice their fears that the camera and video-recording software these phones seamlessly employ may be used to capture images and video that may find their way onto social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and the like, thus causing anonymity breaks.

“It should be the privilege of each individual A.A. to cloak himself with as much personal anonymity as he desires,” Bill W. wrote in *The Language of the Heart*. “His fellow A.A.s should respect his wishes and help guard whatever status he wants to assume.” Although the dis-



ease of alcoholism is better understood and accepted today than it was when Bill W. and Dr. Bob founded A.A., there can be a stigma attached, in particular for people whose employment concerns sensitive material or has a public component. This is one instance where anonymity breaks on social media can have serious consequences. Andrew L., an Area 45 delegate who has spent two panels on the Conference P.I. Committee, says, “I have a very public job, so I am very cognizant of being careful on Facebook. Yet I always have people in A.A. signing me up

for A.A. groups or wanting to link me to a private group, and I just can't do that. The way people are interconnected on social media, a mention of your name in association with A.A. ripples outward fast."

The Eleventh Tradition states, "Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films." However, a generation ago in A.A., not many of us had the opportunity to break our anonymity in a public fashion. "My own experience, when I got sober," Clay R. says, "is that no one had to tell me about public-level anonymity breaks, because I had no access. But one of the things that has changed in terms of the Fellowship is our understanding of anonymity breaks at the public level in social media. Remember, we have members joining A.A. today who have spent a considerable amount of their lives on social media. It's as natural to them as breathing. To us, as defined by the General Service Conference in 2013, social media is 'on the public level.' Newcomers may not understand this."

Since most of us (newcomers or not) are often the stars of our own personal social media shows on interconnected digital platforms, what constitutes a public anonymity break in this regard?

Jason R., Area 13 delegate, has given some thought to this. "Recently, I asked some of my service mentors what they thought of posting online something as simple as a Roman numeral to signify a sober anniversary. Nothing else. I was very surprised at their response. They thought something as simple as a number posted on social media was not in line with our Traditions. While only a few would know what it meant, the potential to comment and risk inadvertent 'outing' wasn't worth the post. While I disagree on the extent of the risk, I agree that I could probably find a better way to tell people about my anniversary." On the other hand, Jason had a recent experience where a friend asked him his opinion of posting a photo of himself and a fellow A.A. holding up their anniversary chips in celebration on a social media platform. His friend saw nothing wrong with it. What did Jason think?

"I told him that I would not do it. You can zoom in and see the circle and triangle on the medallion. I told him that not only could his followers see it, but possibly, depending on his privacy settings, an ever-widening network could see it as well. Ultimately, I think he took it down."

"Here's one of the things I think about anonymity," Andrew L. says. "I don't think we talk enough about how one person's anonymity, or lack of it, impacts the organization as a whole. You become a reflection of A.A. on social media to many people, like it or not. The Eleventh Tradition is designed to protect A.A. from its members. We can be dangerous."

One way to understand your goal in posting about program-related events on social media, according to

Jason, is to ask yourself, "What is my ultimate purpose? Is it self-promotion when I post something, even if only a limited audience will see it? When people talk about their anonymity, they are often talking about the Eleventh Tradition, but the Twelfth Tradition comes into play here as well. Am I practicing humility when I post on whatever platform? Am I placing principles before personalities, or just seeking as many 'likes' as I can get?"

To Clay R., the key to safeguarding anonymity on social media is education. "One of the things the Fellowship needs to adapt to is how to educate our new members on the importance of anonymity and how that is reflected in public media. As sponsors, we can educate our sponsees. As A.A. groups, we can take the time in our group announcements to underscore the importance of the gift of personal anonymity that every group offers to all of its members, and how we all need to respect that. And as A.A. entities — groups, districts, areas — we need to be more attentive to education via workshops and Tradition meetings as to why this is important."

Jason R. adds, "When you see an anonymity break, it's important to understand that you can't necessarily control it. My opinion may be that I wouldn't have done that. But my responsibility as a member of A.A. is to speak with other members of the Fellowship in a loving and tolerant way and accept that they may choose not to change. I cannot be the Traditions police."

With all the concern about social media anonymity breaks, the word is getting out. Many meetings, forums and conferences begin with an announcement along the lines of the 2015 International Convention's "Anonymity Statement," which began, "We respectfully ask that A.A. speakers and A.A. members not be photographed, videotaped, or identified by full name on audio tapes and in published or broadcast reports of our meetings, including those reports on the Internet." Despite the fact that people may believe "young people" are the chief offenders in regard to social media, the International Conference of Young People in A.A. (ICYPAA) also issues such a statement at its gatherings. There is also plenty of material at www.aa.org for people to read or direct others to on this topic, from A.A.'s Guidelines on the Internet to the General Service Conference-approved pamphlet "Understanding Anonymity."

One thing that sometimes gets lost in the controversy over social media and the Internet is how valuable they are as Twelfth Step tools. Alcoholics find A.A. through intergroup websites, chat rooms and online meetings. G.S.O. may soon start putting up PSA videos on YouTube (with comments disabled). Meetings have private email lists that alert members to changes in schedules or group events. Even Jason R. held his conversation about how best to proclaim an anniversary online via text. While we need to be vigilant about anonymity breaks, we also need to acknowledge our vastly increased ability to use social media to bring hope to suffering alcoholics around the world.

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. **Please note that we cannot attest to the accuracy, relevancy, timeliness, or completeness of information provided by any linked site.**

December

- 8-10—*Birmingham, Alabama.* Magic City Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 55103, Birmingham, AL 35255; www.magiccityroundup.com
- 28-31—*Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.* 21st WACYPA. Info: www.wacypaaxi.weebly.com

January 2018

- 4-7—*Melbourne, Florida.* Space Coast Roundup. Write: Ch., 720 E. Haven Ave., Ste. 3, Melbourne, FL 32901; www.aaspacecoast.org
- 12-14—*Mahnomen, Minnesota.* 16th Wild Rice Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 203, Mahnomen, MN 56557; www.wildriceroundup.com
- 19-21—*Puerto Vallarta, Jalisco, Mexico.* Sobriety Under the Sun. Write: Ch., Basillo Badillo 327, Puerto Vallarta, Jalisco 48380; www.aapvconvention.com
- 19-21—*Wellington, New Zealand.* 55th National Conv. Write: Ch., Box 2036, Wellington, NZ 6140; www.aaconvention.org.nz
- 26-28—*Hilton Head Island, South Carolina.* 38th Hilton Head Mid-Winter Conf. Write: Ch., Box 6256, Hilton Head Island, SC 29938; www.hiltonheadmidwinterconference.com
- 26-28—*Tyler, Texas.* XXXIV Reunión Zona Norte de TX. Write: Ch., Box 4445, Tyler, TX 75712; 34reunionzonanortedetexas@gmail.com

February

- 2-4—*Little Rock, Arkansas.* Winter Holiday Conv. Write: Ch., 1015 S. Louisiana St., Little Rock, AR 72202; www.winterholidayconvention.com
- 2-4—*Corpus Christi, Texas.* Coastal Bend Jamboree. Write: Ch., Box 6889, Corpus Christi, TX 78466-1000; www.cbjamboree.org
- 2-4—*Cebu City, Philippines.* 36th Philippines Nat'l Conv. Info: <http://aaphilippines-cebu.info/>
- 9-11—*Syracuse, New York.* Salt City Mid-Winter Round-up. Write: Ch., Box 367, Syracuse, NY 13209; www.saltcityroundup.com

- 9-11—*Trivandrum, Kerala, India.* Conv. near the Waves. Info: www.conventionnearwaves.com
- 15-18—*Phoenix, Arizona.* Internat'l Women's Conf. Info: www.internationalwomensconference.org
- 23-25—*Orange Beach, Alabama.* Jubilee Conv. Write: Ch., P.O. Box 724, Gulf Shores, AL 36542; www.gulfcoastaa.org
- 23-25—*Yuma, Arizona.* 5th Yuma Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 6722, Yuma, AZ 85366; www.yumaroundup.org
- 23-25—*Cromwell, Connecticut.* NE Reg. Svc. Assembly. Write: Ch., Box 1522, Farmington, CT 06034-1522; www.neraasa2018.org
- 23-25—*Danville, Indiana.* 65th IN State Conv. Write: Box 546, Indianapolis, IN 46206; 2018instatementconvention@gmail.com
- 23-25—*St. George, Utah.* 21st Dixie Winterfest. Write: Ch., Box 1715, St. George, UT 84771; www.dixiewinterfest.org

March

- 2-4—*Dearborn, Michigan.* March Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 390, Southfield, MI 48037-0390; www.march-roundup.org
- 2-4—*Sparks, Nevada.* PRAASA. Write: Ch., Box 27251, Las Vegas, NV 89126; www.praasa2018.com
- 9-11—*Lake Charles, Louisiana.* Lake Area Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 113, Lake Charles, LA 70602; www.aa-swla.org/lake-area-roundup
- 9-11—*Sydney, Nova Scotia, Canada.* 36th Mid-Winter Roundup. Write: Ch., 866 Grand Lake Road, Sydney, NS B1P 5T9; d9roundup36@yahoo.com
- 16-18—*Niagara Falls, New York.* Cataract City Conv. Write: Ch., Box 734, Niagara Falls, NY 14304; www.niagaraintergroup.net
- 23-25—*Lafayette, Louisiana.* Fellowship of

- the Spirit South. Write: Ch., Box 53312, Lafayette, LA 70505; www.fotssouth.com
- 23-25—*Charleston, West Virginia.* WV Spring Assembly. Write: Ch., 112 Courtney Dr., Lewisburg, WV 24901; www.aawv.org
- 23-25—*Qawra, Malta.* Malta's 12th EN Speaking Internat'l Conv. Info: www.aamalta.org.mt/convention/

April

- 6-8—*Watertown, South Dakota.* Area 63 Spring Conf. Write: Box 714, Brookings, SD 57006; www.area63aa.org
- 13-15—*Morehead City, North Carolina.* Crystal Coast Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 113, Morehead City, NC 28557; ccr@ec.rr.com
- 13-15—*Manchester, Vermont.* Area 70 VT Conv. Write: Ch., Box 24, Shelburne, VT 05482; www.aavt.org
- 20-21—*Taipei, Taiwan.* 3rd Lighthouse Taiwan Roundup. Write: Ch., No. 248, 7F Zhongshan N. Rd., Sec.6, Taipei City, Taiwan; www.aataiwan.com/lighthouse-group/
- 21-22—*San Fernando, Trinidad & Tobago.* 62nd Nat'l Conv. Write: Ch., LP #52 Rivulet Rd, Couva, T&T; aagsott@gmail.com
- 27-29—*Scottsbluff, Nebraska.* Panhandle Jamboree. Write: Box 1301, Scottsbluff, NE 69363

May

- 4-6—*Gulfport, Mississippi.* Gulf Coast Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 334 Long Beach, MS 39560; aasteplovers@gmail.com
- 4-6—*Great Falls, Montana.* Area 40 Roundup. Info: aaroundup2018@gmail.com
- 4-6—*São Paulo, Brasil.* Colcha de Retalhos Brasil. Write: Ch., Rue Albion 210 São Paulo, Brasil 05077-130; colchabrasil@gmail.com

Planning a Future Event?

To be included in the *Box 4-5-9* Calendar, information must be received at G.S.O. four 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 Editor: Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163 or literature@aa.org

Date of event: from _____ to _____, 20_____

Name of event: _____

Location: _____ CITY _____ STATE OR PROVINCE _____

Address to list: _____ P.O. BOX (OR NUMBER AND STREET) _____

CITY _____ STATE OR PROVINCE _____ ZIP CODE _____

Website or Email: _____ (NO PERSONAL EMAIL ADDRESSES)

Contact person: _____ NAME _____ PHONE # AND EMAIL _____