

# About AA

## Nonalcoholic Trustees Open A.A.'s Windows to the World

*Our debt to those who do not share our disease but willingly share our problems is immense.*—The A.A. Service Manual, p. S114

### Reflections from Class A (nonalcoholic) Trustees

"Historically, professionals have often received the message of A.A. from their nonalcoholic colleagues on A.A.'s General Service Board," says former Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee John Hartley Smith, M.D., of Vancouver, British Columbia. "Through the early years they have included 'trusted servants' the likes of writer Fulton Oursler, attorney Bernard Smith and the physician Leonard V. Strong; and in our own time, as dedicated a slate of trustees as any you can find, in an impressive array of professions."

John Hartley recently completed nine years of service on A.A.'s 21-member board. "In my experience," he says, "we nonalcoholic trustees bring to A.A. the perspectives of others in our various areas of expertise, from medicine and the health care professions to law, religion and finance.

Optimally, and frequently communicating as one professional to another, we open windows to the outside world and facilitate the kind of understanding and cooperation that ultimately saves and rehabilitates tattered lives."

Here John observes that Class A trustees also serve as a link between A.A. and medical schools, various helping professions, the courts and other agencies and organizations. "As nonalcoholics," he says, "we need not maintain personal anonymity at the public level, so we are free to be photographed and to use our full names wherever we go. Of course, as a great Class A trustee, the late Dr. John Norris ["Dr. Jack"] said at the first open A.A. meeting I ever attended, 'The best Class A trustee looks like an alcoholic, whatever that is . . .,' and to tell the truth, I myself am flattered to be mistaken for a recovering alcoholic! Certainly, as a trusted servant I've taken more from A.A. than it's received from me—sincerity, a spiritual way of living, humility, the way to place principles before personalities, and more. One hears about these things but seldom has an opportunity to see them practiced on a daily basis."

In A.A.'s early days, the number of nonalcoholic trustees on the board exceeded the Class B (alcoholics) by one. "Just in case!" noted A.A. co-founder Bill W. in the November 1951 issue of the A.A. Grapevine magazine. At the time, circa 1938, he explained, "none of the alcoholic members of the new board were sure they could stay sober. Who, then, would look after the money if all the drunks got drunk?" As time passed by and both the Fellowship and its individual alcoholic trustees accrued some solid sobriety, the balance

changed; today the General Service Board numbers 7 nonalcoholic trustees, who serve six-year terms; and 14 alcoholics, serving four years. The chairperson, W. J. (Jim) Estelle, Jr., is also a nonalcoholic, which has been the custom.

### One Professional to Another

"One of our most interesting assignments as Class A trustees," says John Hartley, a public-health and occupational medicine specialist, "is helping to carry the A.A. message to various parts of the world. In 1988, as chairman of the trustees' Committee on Cooperation With the Professional Community (C.P.C.), I was privileged to be part of a team traveling to Russia; and just last year a small group of us flew to Cuba—an alcoholic trustee, two members of the General Service Office staff, one of them fluent in Spanish, and I—to offer friendship, sharing and literature to the 25 or so active A.A. groups in that country."

In Cuba socialized medicine is a mammoth umbrella covering all 11 million inhabitants from birth to old age. So, while A.A. in Cuba has a rudimentary general service board, it receives considerable support from government agencies. "The Cuban professionals" John says, "had all kinds of questions: How can A.A. in the U. S. and Canada function on its own, without help from the government or the private sector? How do I as a physician work with A.A.? Is it really true that trustees aren't paid?" [Yes, it's true.]

"My main function," says John Hartley, "was to enhance understanding and cooperation between A.A. and the doctors (especially psychiatrists), medical students, social workers and other health-care professionals in the polyclinics where most of the A.A. meetings are held. They felt free to be candid with me and to accept the veracity of my input, coming from a professional point-of-view.

As a nonalcoholic trustee, John notes, "I feel that I can interpret some aspects of A.A. to the community. What may make instant common sense to an A.A. member, such as the Fellowship's adherence to a Tradition of self-support that calls for returning hundreds of thousands of dollars in contributions to senders who are not A.A. members, often draws a stare of disbelief from the most sophisticated outsider.

"Dr. Jack Norris, for years the associate medical director of the Eastman Kodak Company in Rochester, New York, was always urging us to 'sponsor your doctor'—or lawyer,

clergyman, police chief and any other professional who'd listen. In Cuba, and Russia too, I felt that he would approve, because that's just what we were doing, each in our own way."

Although he rotated off the board in May, John still goes "anywhere I'm asked to speak about A.A." and sometimes can be seen accompanying a health professional to an open A.A. meeting. He feels that he is effective in talking to his colleagues—"they don't like to show their ignorance with nonprofessionals but will with me"—and is particularly pleased when addressing medical students. "That's where physician education about alcoholism and recovery in A.A. must start," he says, "in the medical schools. Toward that end I'll do anything I can in order to help the sick alcoholic. Because there but for God's grace go I."

## Our Eyes, Ears and Public Image

When *Time* magazine wanted to put A.A. co-founder Bill W. on its cover, and just the back of his head at that, he declined with thanks. His reasoning: "For all I know, a piece of this sort could have brought A.A. a thousand members, possibly a lot more. . . . But the requirements of the piece would have tended to create a clear and colorful public image of me as a person. This would have created for the future, I am sure, a temptation in our power-driving people to get like pieces—presently with full names and pictures. . . . Therefore I declined the publicity, and I must confess, it wasn't easy."

Other honors and awards have come to A.A. as a whole, and when a public ceremony is in order, our nonalcoholic trustees have obligingly stepped into the spotlight on behalf of the anonymous membership, TV cameras and all. In 1983, for example, Class A trustee William Flynn, M.D., of McLean, Virginia, accepted the President's Volunteers Action Award from President Ronald Reagan at a White House ceremony. And in April 1994, nonalcoholic trustee Joan Jackson, Ph.D., of Bethany, Connecticut, accepted an award from the Volunteer Action Center of Greater New Haven on behalf of the Alcoholics Anonymous members who served as volunteers in the emergency room of the Yale New Haven Hospital for over 15 years. (A year later the same program received a presidential award, the highest one given for volunteerism. In announcing the award, the Points of Light Foundation said the A.A. volunteers' service was one of 28 chosen from 3,000 nominations nationwide.)

The first nonalcoholic woman to serve on the A.A. Board, Joan has an extensive background in the fields of alcoholism, sociology and anthropology. Serving as A.A.'s eyes, ears and public image is something she has done often and with satisfaction. "Whether it's a Senate hearing on treatment modalities for alcoholism, or accepting an award," she observes, "the nonalcoholic trustees can put on a public face, and we do."

Reflecting back on her active trusteeship, Joan says, "We Class A trustees come to the board without the conceptions that are so much a part of the thinking of A.A. members and Class B trustees. In trying to explain the A.A. program to us, they find it necessary to clarify their own thinking about everything they might have taken for granted. And coming from the outside world, we bring its perspectives to what we hear and learn and do as board members. For instance: Class B trustees often refer to their own thinking or behavior—especially when they're apologetic about it—as being 'so alcoholic' or 'just like an alki.' However, we Class A trustees have seen the same behavior or thought patterns rife among nonalcoholics we've known, often including ourselves, so we just think of it as being human, nothing more.

"Additionally, when problems pertaining to the outside world are under consideration, as in C.P.C. or Public Information, we nonalcoholic trustees can speculate about how the outsiders are likely to view the problem and how they might respond to a specific A.A. action. We can look at both sides objectively and so contribute perhaps to a really positive solution."

In the final analysis, says Joan Jackson, "I found that the more I put into A.A., the more I benefitted. My A.A. service has been one of the most meaningful, rewarding, and hard-working periods of my life. I'm grateful and wouldn't have missed it for anything."

## Board Welcomes New Trustees

Two distinguished Class A trustees recently joined A.A.'s General Service Board: Robert Oran Miller, bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, at Birmingham; and Arthur L. Knight Jr., of Lake Forest, Illinois, who retired last year from his position as president and CEO of Morgan Products Ltd., manufacturers and distributors of specialty building products.

Bob Miller is a 1960 graduate of Birmingham-Southern College. He earned a Bachelor of Divinity from Candler School of Theology, Emory University, in 1963 and was ordained a deacon in the United Methodist Church. In 1968 he completed a year of special studies at the School of Theology, University of the South, and was ordained deacon and priest in the Episcopal Church, Diocese of Alabama. A deputy to four general conventions of the Episcopal Church, Bob has served on the staff of Cursillo (Spanish for "short course"), where he taught a spirituality course to prison inmates, including one exclusively for inmates with AIDS. He is a trustee of the University of the South, which awarded him an honorary Doctorate of Divinity in 1991. As trustee he hopes to reach out to members of the professional community, particularly the clergy, who frequently "have an intellectual understanding that we're talking about an illness, but don't understand it emotionally at all." Bob says.

Arthur Knight brings strong business experience to the General Service Board. A graduate of Dartmouth College, he also holds an MBA from the University of New York at Buffalo. Before joining Morgan Products, Ltd., he was associated with Houdaille Industries, a diversified manufacturing firm, in several capacities, including the presidency of two subsidiary companies. He is active in retirement and serves on a variety of professional and civic boards. Last October, Art was invited to attend a weekend board meeting, which "really influenced me, in terms of saying 'yes, I'd like to serve if asked.' I sat, literally, from 8 in the morning until 10 at night, in every single committee meeting there was, to get a feel for the organization," Art says. "And I came away with a real sense of the intensity and the dedication of the people in the Fellowship to the Fellowship and to what they were doing. It was a moving experience."

## How Can A.A. Help You?

Would you be interested in having an A.A. presentation at one of your professional gatherings? Or would you like information about recovery from alcoholism in A.A.? If so, please contact the C.P.C. desk at the General Service Office, P.O. Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163. We welcome your questions, comments and requests.

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