

About AA

The A.A. Grapevine: Voice of A.A.s in Every Stage of Recovery

Magazine Mirrors A.A. in Action

In 1944, when A.A. was struggling to survive and cooperation with the professional community was just beginning, the first issue of *The A.A. Grapevine* came to life. Over the intervening 42 years, more than 27 million copies have been circulated to a list that presently includes more than 123,000 alcoholics and professionals working in the field of alcoholism.

From its inception, the *Grapevine* was seen, by late A.A. co-founder Bill W., as "the monthly mirror of A.A. in action — always the same in principle, yet ever growing and ever finding better ways of doing and thinking on new fronts."

Toward this end, every issue is designed to help recovered alcoholics, newcomers and oldtimers alike, to share their experiences in living sober. Their stories explore how they cope with problems of depression, anger, resentment, pride and other stresses of daily life. The magazine is concerned less with past drinking than with the ongoing process of recovery — the majority of readers ask for articles on the Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions, and other tools and principles of A.A.

Through the pages of the pocket-size *Grapevine*, which is mailed to 78 foreign countries, A.A. members gain a wide-angled view of the Fellowship. Many have found it a lifeline in bridging the difficult gap between the treatment center or correctional facility and the A.A. program. For those who are incarcerated or who have no access to an A.A. group, it is quite literally a "meeting in print." Wrote one incarcerated member in the July 1985 *Grapevine*: "I anxiously await each month's issue. Quite often, when I am reading it, my eyes fill with tears, for I feel that newfound hope deep inside."

Over the years, the *Grapevine* has mirrored the changes in A.A. and has reported news from the field of alcoholism. Articles from as far back as 1945, for instance, on topics such as "the sleeping pill menace" and "goof balls," have application for the '80s. Today, special issues focus on dual addiction, young people, the family after sobriety, and other subjects of immediate relevancy.

Grapevine pages are laced with humorous anecdotes and cartoons that help A.A.s to laugh at themselves and with each other. There are occasional articles by doctors, counselors, humorists and other friends of A.A., but most *Grapevine* stories are written by members of the Fellowship. Submitted manuscripts are evaluated by all members of the editorial staff.

For professionals who endeavor to help alcoholics, it often is not easy to grasp the concepts and purposes of A.A. without reading its literature, much of which originated in the *Grapevine*. Articles first published in the magazine have been developed into pamphlets published by A.A. World Services, Inc. Many of the personal stories in the Big Book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, first appeared in the *Grapevine*. And its pages have carried articles by such visionary figures as Dr. Harry Tiebout, the Rev. Sam Shoemaker and Bernard Smith — not to mention the correspondence between Carl Jung and Bill W., which the *Grapevine* has printed four times, beginning in 1963.

In discussing the character of the *Grapevine*, at the 35th General Service Conference of A.A. last year, editor Ann W. caught its timeless essence: "The *Grapevines* of the 1940s were the mirror of A.A. in the process of transition, from an inexperienced group of ex-drunks (often flying blind) to a unified Fellowship with tested guiding principles. The *Grapevines* of the 1980s reflect a Fellowship in the throes of coping with success brought about by adherence to these guiding principles. Yet the specific problems remain much the same — differences between the needs of newcomers and oldtimers, drugs and pills, our relation to the alcoholism field, and anonymity."

A Meeting in Print . . .

For professionals who treat or counsel alcoholics but don't have the time to go to A.A. meetings, the *Grapevine* can and does serve as a meeting in print. Since the articles are written by members and edited very little, the reader obtains a first-hand sense of the author's progression in recovery. As one counselor puts it, "Reading the *Grapevine* enables me to participate vicariously in the A.A. experience. As a result, I am better able to help my clients."

Another counselor says: "By exposing myself to the stories of well alcoholics — knowing what it was like, what happened, and what it is like now with them — I am far more understanding and knowledgeable when it comes to providing guidance."

Because every issue of the *Grapevine* includes the Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions, Serenity Prayer, Preamble and Responsibility Declaration, the professional gains a clearer picture of the A.A. program in action. An unexpected dividend for one physician has been "the ability to get in touch with my feelings about alcoholics and also to stimulate my personal growth as a human being. I've discovered that there is a lot to

be gained by trying to incorporate the Twelve Steps of A.A. into my own life. Recently, I've realized that by reading the stories of alcoholics who have literally gotten their lives back in A.A., I have been able to make contact with my spiritual self."

. . . Now Available on Tape Cassettes

At a nursing care center in Ohio, the *Grapevine* is a sound that breaks the isolation barrier. Says the director of the chemical dependency unit: "I don't know what we would do without the two *Grapevine* tape cassettes 'Not for Newcomers Only.'"

The patients in the unit range in age from 26 to 87. They have limited abilities and short attention spans. "Yet they can comprehend the tapes; even the severely withdrawn will listen, then talk about themselves perhaps for the first time." This second series of tapes, "Not for Newcomers Only," Vols. 1 and 2, is essentially a "beginners meeting" that covers the basics of sobriety.

"In our unit," the director relates, "the group therapy counselor will play a segment of the tape — the part on 'Resentment: Number One Offender,' for example — over a period of a couple of days. The group will listen quietly, getting more from what they hear each time, then engage in discussion. Invariably, one or two patients will insist, 'I don't have any resentments.' After listening awhile, they'll start to identify, open up and share their feelings."

The first *Grapevine* tape series, "Articles from Classic Issues," Vols. 1, 2 and 3, includes pieces chosen for their enduring significance and reprinted in the November "classic" issues of the magazine. All three tapes feature articles by A.A.s new and old in the program, co-founders Bill W. and Dr. Bob, and a few nonalcoholic guests — Dr. William Silkworth, Dr. Harry Tiebout and the Rev. Harry Emerson Fosdick among them.

According to Retha G., managing editor of the *Grapevine*, the tapes were developed initially as a service to the blind and handicapped, "and brought forth an overwhelming response from all over A.A. They are used as discussion-starters in meetings and provide traveling members with good meetings 'on the road.'" Like the *Grapevine* itself, she adds, the tapes are helpful to professionals working with newcomers.

Twelfth-Stepping With the *Grapevine*

From southern Wisconsin, Bob B., past delegate and present *Grapevine* committee chairperson, reports that efforts to furnish correctional facility inmates with copies of the *Grapevine* "have been highly gratifying."

In spring 1985, he relates, "we started project 'Count On Us,' by asking our 26 area districts if they would be interested in contributing subscriptions to the *Grapevine*. Our goal was 22 subscriptions — we wound up with 91! The magazine has been distributed mainly by sponsor contacts on our area corrections committees, and also through correctional facility personnel."

The men and women inside the walls use the *Grapevine* "to tide them over between meetings," he notes. "A number of them have written to express their appreciation."

This spring, "Count On Us" plans to distribute a questionnaire to correctional facility personnel. Some proposed questions: Is the *Grapevine* being used in your facility? Do the inmates take it back to their cells? Does having the *Grapevine* seem to make a difference in their outlook on life?

In Rhode Island, Jack S., former *Grapevine* representative and chairperson of the area *Grapevine* committee, relates that "we are providing 45 public and private secondary schools with *Grapevine* subscriptions." Some had been provided before, he says, "but with funds contributed by the young people's groups only. This is the first year the area groups have participated generally." In time, he adds, "we hope to have enough funds to buy *Grapevine* subscriptions for our correctional facilities and juvenile detention centers. But first, we want to get *Grapevines* into high schools and colleges."

In Idaho, as a result of liaison between the area *Grapevine* chairperson and members of the alumni association of a local treatment center, the *Grapevine* is being provided for newly discharged persons "to remind them of the opportunity for a better way of life."

Many individual A.A. members give a *Grapevine* subscription to their doctor, or "lose" a copy in the office of a doctor or other professional in the hope that it may help somebody. Others, after reading their copies, pass them on regularly. Says one A.A., who considers herself a beneficiary of this form of carrying the message: "As a relative newcomer, I soon began to look forward to each 'new' issue of the *Grapevine* with eager expectations. It was a period of my recovery in which I feel that I went to school on the A.A. way of life. The *Grapevine* was invaluable to me as an initial recovery tool. Now I use it as an aid in expanding my understanding and knowledge of what the program is about."

'Gray Pages' Report News Outside A.A.

Over the years, in response to reader requests, the *Grapevine* has printed excerpts from already published articles about alcoholism. This section, "About Alcoholism," is printed on gray pages to distinguish it from A.A. material.

Many items published in this section are contrary to A.A. philosophy; a "disclaimer" at the top states that they are there purely for information and do not imply endorsement or approval by A.A. or the *Grapevine*.

Over several months, *Grapevine* readers would find a diverse sampling of news and views in "About Alcoholism": a Health and Human Services report of a 1984 survey on drinking and drugging among the nation's high school seniors; an excerpt from the *U.S. Journal* about the way television soap operas portray alcoholism; news of the American Bar Association's new Advisory Commission on Youth Alcohol and Drug Problems; and a *Wall Street Journal* item on drinking patterns among female executives.

All tapes are available from the A.A. Grapevine. Write: Box 1980, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163-1980. Single tapes, \$5.50 each. Classic series, package of three tapes, \$15.00. Newcomer series, package of two tapes, \$10.00.