

Around the world, many recognize this time of year as a season of giving. For those of us fortunate enough to have been guided to Alcoholics Anonymous, our season of giving is all year round. Every twenty-four hours invites us to pass on to others what was so freely given to us, and to rejoice in the gift of our sobriety.

May the New Year bring you many opportunities to give and receive through the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous.



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■ Holiday Gift Ideas

Are there copies of *Box 4-5-9* on your group's literature table? If not, a subscription to A.A.'s newsletter (10 copies each of 6 issues, \$6.00) provides a year-long gift for your home group.

If you are stuck for gift ideas for sponsor or sponsees, perhaps they do not yet own *Experience, Strength and Hope* (B-20, \$8) the anthology of stories that were dropped from the First, Second and Third Editions of *Alcoholics Anonymous*. This volume also comes in a boxed set with the Fourth Edition Big Book (B-11, \$14).

For years now, subscriptions to the AA Grapevine (as well as La Viña) have been a popular gift and one that may be "passed on" to local institutions committees throughout the year.

A favorite from the Grapevine is *The Language of the Heart* (\$10; softcover \$8.95), and for a small and inexpensive stocking-stuffer there is *The Best of Bill* (gift edition, \$6.95; softcover \$4.95).

Most of these items may be ordered from G.S.O. or through your local intergroup or central office. Grapevine books and other items are available by contact-

ing the A.A. Grapevine: Grand Central Station, Box 1980, New York, NY 10163-1980.



■ Second Call for Spanish-Language Stories

Spanish-speaking members of Alcoholics Anonymous are invited to send their stories to the General Service Office in New York for consideration for inclusion in a new edition of *Alcohólicos Anónimos*.

This request for Spanish stories was printed in the

Oct./Nov. *Box 4-5-9*, and letters were sent to all intergroup/central offices (U.S./Canada), Spanish districts, and all Spanish-language G.S.O.s. However, to date we have not received any manuscripts. Please remind members of your group, district and area of the proposed new Spanish edition and the need for stories.

The aim of the trustees' Literature Committee is that the stories in the new edition reflect the broad range and diversity of A.A. members today. As stated in the preface to the Big Book, "All changes made over the years in the Big Book... have had the same purpose: to represent the current membership of Alcoholics Anonymous more accurately, and thereby reach more alcoholics." This same thinking applies to changes being made to the Spanish version.

The Literature Committee will review submissions according to these guidelines:

- Stories must be in Spanish, typewritten, no longer than 3,500 words (approximately 14 pages), and double-spaced.
- Deadline for receipt of manuscripts is September 1, 2005.
- The words "Spanish Third Edition" should be written on the outside of the mailing envelope and on the first page of the manuscript.
- Author's full name and mailing address should appear on the first page of the manuscript.

The General Service Office will protect the anonymity of the authors, who should keep a copy of their stories in their own files.

Manuscripts should be mailed to: Literature Coordinator, General Service Office, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163.

■ Update for A.A. Directories

Starting in January 2005 a reminder will be mailed to all delegates, area chairs and area registrars advising them that it is time for the annual Group Updates to the A.A. Directories. Our Area Download Application (MS Access) will be available for the area registrars to bring their area records up-to-date. Deadline for all information is May 2, 2005.

Please post *Twelve Tips on Keeping Your Holiday Season Sober and Joyous* (page 10) on your group bulletin board.

■ Five Veteran Employees Keep G.S.O.'s Mailroom Humming

Among the work done on behalf of A.A. at the General Service Office in New York, none may be more important than that of the mailroom.

Today's mailroom staff is the smallest in decades, just five veteran (nonalcoholic) employees, each with over 20 years of tenure. They work in a large room crammed with the books, pamphlets, videos, tapes, and myriad other material of the A.A. program.



A fresh delivery of material sits piled high in the mailroom. To the right, along the wall, some of the shelving holding foreign literature can be seen.

From this vantage point, they have witnessed A.A.'s growth. Foreign literature, for instance, which years ago was contained in a small cabinet, now fills floor-to-ceiling shelving that runs across one whole side of the room. The mailroom also handles more French literature in the wake of the closing of the Montreal office — Services mondiaux des AA — two years ago.

About 15 years ago, when G.S.O. moved from Park Avenue South to Riverside Drive, the mailroom and shipping operations were combined, and the revamped operation moved into smaller quarters. Meanwhile, the number of workers in what were the mail and shipping departments declined through attrition. The result is that the mailroom has had to squeeze in more and more material, and to handle a bigger workload with the same number of employees.

"It seems sometimes that everything begins and ends with the mailroom," says Aubrey Pereira, mailroom supervisor. "Requests for material or information come through this department in the mail, and later we send out the responses to those requests," he says.

Annually, about 75,000 pieces of mail are delivered to the mailroom, and about 62,500 are shipped out.

Part of what helps the mailroom staff operate efficient-

ly is that they have worked together for so many years. The men know each other's job assignments and can chip in as needed to cover during vacations or when the workload for one of the men becomes more than he can handle.

The mailroom is a scene of constant bustle, with courier services delivering and picking up packages, phones ringing, label and postage machines humming away, and a constant stream of G.S.O. employees dropping by with requests of one kind or another.

"We work well together; that's how we have been able to survive," says Aubrey, who has worked in the mailroom for 22 years. He points to his trip to the International Convention in Minneapolis in 2000 as opening his eyes to the full dimensions of A.A. "Before that I didn't completely appreciate what our work meant to so many people. I just didn't realize how big A.A. really is," says Aubrey.

Keeping up with the constantly increasing inventory of A.A. material is a challenge. There now are about 700 different items in the mailroom, including pamphlets, books, Guidelines, and other material. "Keeping track is an awesome task," says Frank Smith, assistant supervisor, who during his 24 years at G.S.O. has worked under five general managers.

Material is divided into four main groups: English, Spanish, French, and all other foreign languages. It is then organized according to item numbers.



The mailroom staff, from left: Joe Moglia, Frank Smith, Aubrey Pereira, Ronnie Shelton, and Bill Heinitz — 140 years of service.



Ronnie Shelton works the meter machine in processing some of the few hundred pieces sent out every day on average by the mailroom.

In addition to being able to put their hands on an item, the mailroom staff must be alert to books or pamphlets that are in short supply. “It’s important to keep an accurate running inventory,” says Aubrey. “You can run out of something without realizing it.” If that happens and there is no supply in the warehouses, then an item remains unavailable until it goes back to press.

There was a time when the mailroom/shipping department at G.S.O. handled all requests for A.A. literature. But that was decades ago, when the Fellowship was much smaller. Now A.A. leases space in a huge warehouse in Kansas City, Kansas, and another in the greater Toronto, Canada area. These repositories ship out orders sent to G.S.O. by intergroups, central offices, or individuals from around the world.

“We do about 20% of the orders, the smaller ones, and mainly on the East Coast,” says Aubrey. The mailroom also accommodates “walk-ins,” local A.A.s who drop by G.S.O. to buy relatively small amounts of material.

Throughout the year the mailroom takes on various projects, among them sending out material for Regional Forums, which they do at least six times a year. Like everything else about A.A., this task has grown prodigiously. “It used to be we would fill one box. Now it’s 30,” says Frank.

The (nonalcoholic) staff assistant on the Regional Forums assignment, Ivy Rivera, says the men in the mailroom do “absolutely excellent work.” There is a mountain of material for the Forums, including display literature for corrections, public information, and the other assignments. Having this material organized and clearly labeled on its arrival at the Forum is key. “Because they do such a good job, I can just take it out of the box and put it on the table,” says Ivy.

Another very busy time for the mailroom is prior to the annual General Service Conference in April, when the

mailroom sends out the reams of background material to Conference members.

The mailings of *Box 4-5-9*, *About A.A.*, the *LIM* and the *Quarterly Report* — once handled by G.S.O.’s mailroom — now are mailed by the printers that produce these publications. “These mailings have gotten so huge, we can’t handle them,” says Aubrey. “It’s a matter of space and manpower,” he says.

Technology has enabled the mailroom to do more with less. Writing out waybills for courier services like UPS and Federal Express is a thing of the past, for instance, with that job now done electronically. And when the G.S.O. order department relays a shipment request to the mailroom, labels for the packages are printed out from a shared database.

The mailroom employees say they get satisfaction knowing that theirs is a job that touches people. Ronnie Shelton, who has worked at G.S.O. for 31 years, says, “I look at what I’m doing here at work as more than just a job. What we do here is helping someone to do better.” The A.A. members who visit G.S.O. from all over the world stop by the mailroom as part of their tour. “People are always thanking us for the work we do,” says Ronnie.

Bill Heinitz, who has worked in the department for 25 years, says “knowing that everyday you’re doing something that can make someone’s life better is the fulfilling part of the job.”

The mailroom staff member with the longest tenure is Joe Moglia, who has worked there for 38 years. Joe is the only current G.S.O. employee who met Bill W. Hanging



Joe Moglia, the G.S.O. employee with the longest tenure, wrapping and loading parcels on the conveyor belt behind him.

on the wall outside the mailroom is a photo of Bill standing in the middle of one of the previous G.S.O. mailrooms, amid tables stacked with A.A. literature.

“I remember when that photo was taken,” says Joe. Asked if he has any recollections of Bill, Joe thinks a minute. “He said we did a good job.”

International Conventions — Historic Occasions and All-Out Celebrations

Every five years, starting in 1950, thousands of A.A. members have gotten together over the Fourth of July weekend to celebrate A.A.'s beginnings and their own sobriety at one of the Fellowship's International Anniversary Conventions.

The city chosen to play host to the event — always in the U.S. or Canada — often gets into the spirit of the occasion. In Montreal, when 45,000 A.A.s roamed the city streets, the House of Seagrams figuratively shrugged its shoulders and flew its flag at half mast. Restaurants have “drinks menus” of soft drinks (at one Convention, an A.A. tried to order an alcoholic drink for his Al-Anon wife, and the waiter didn't want to serve him).

International Conventions today are primarily occasions for celebration and sharing, but the early ones marked events of great significance in A.A. history. In 1950, at our 15th Anniversary in Cleveland, A.A. members voted to accept the Second Legacy of Unity and the Twelve Traditions, and heard co-founder Dr. Bob speak for the last time (he died shortly afterward). Five years later, at the 20th Anniversary Convention in St. Louis, A.A. “came of age,” when the founders turned over the Fellowship's future to the members through the service structure and the General Service Conference (which met during the Convention). When co-founder Bill W. introduced the resolution accepting the Conference, he called it “one of the most solemn hours in which this society will ever live, for we are about to confirm its permanent structure.” (*Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, p. 224)

The Cleveland Convention was also notable for its impossibly low 1950's prices: registration was \$1.50; one of the more expensive hotels charged a top price of \$9 for a room; and if you were interested in seeing the Cleveland Indians, a box seat would cost you \$2 (or \$1.50 for reserved).

The Long Beach Convention five years later featured many of the nonalcoholics who so deeply influenced our history — Sister Ignatia, Warden Clinton Duffy, and Dr. Harry Tiebout among them. Providing entertainment at the Convention were Peggy Lee, Jayne Mansfield, Dennis Day, Buster Keaton, and Les Brown and his Band of Renown.

In Toronto in 1965, attendees joined for the first time in saying the Responsibility Declaration, written especially for the occasion. (See article page 8)

Our 35th Birthday in Miami was marked by a bitter-sweet moment when Bill W., terminally ill and not expected to appear, rose to speak at the Sunday morning spiritual meeting (he died the following January).

As the A.A. message has been carried throughout the world, the number of members who come to the party

has increased. From 1,000 members at Cleveland in 1950, attendance has grown dramatically: 5,000 traveled to St. Louis in 1955; 10,000 crowded into Toronto in 1965; in Miami it was 10,900; in Denver, 19,800; in New Orleans in 1980 we were 22,500 strong. By 1985, at our golden anniversary in Montreal, we nearly doubled the attendance to 45,000; 48,000 came to Seattle; and in 1995, a record 54,000 A.A.s gathered in San Diego for the largest-ever A.A. birthday bash. Five years later in Minneapolis, the attendance was 47,500.

The basic Convention format, established in 1960 at Long Beach, has remained generally the same. The weekend usually kicks off with an opening dance on Thursday night (in recent years there have been several, catering to a variety of tastes). The Big Meeting on Friday night brings everyone together for the first time. Since Denver, the Big Meeting has opened with the flag ceremony, during which members chosen by lot from each participating country carry their national flags past the cheering crowd.

When the early members described the first Convention as “international,” they meant simply that both U.S. and Canadian members attended, but at every succeeding Convention, more and more A.A.s from other nations have joined the festivities. Twenty-nine countries participated in the first flag ceremony. Since then, it has included 33 countries in 1980, 54 in 1985, 75 in 1990, 87 in 1995, and 86 in the year 2000. In Seattle (1990), A.A.s from several newly independent states of Eastern Europe brought the loudest cheers.

The celebrity line-up at the Long Beach meeting in 1960 started a tradition of reserving Saturday night for entertainment. That tradition lasted until 1995, when the San Diego Convention changed the format to make Saturday night an Oldtimers Meeting. The crowd of alcoholics heard the stories of 15 long-time A.A.s, picked at random from among 129 attendees with 40 or more sober years. And, of course, every Convention ends with the Sunday morning spiritual meeting.

While the major meetings are highlights of the program, each day



Front and Wellington Streets, Toronto.

offers a wide choice of panels and workshops on A.A. topics—and in almost every language. There are marathon meetings, large and small. In New Orleans, where the first true marathon meeting was held, a nameless drunk came in off the street, sobered up, and appeared in front of more than 22,000 supportive A.A.s on Sunday morning. He wasn't the first (or last) person to get sober at a Convention, but he must surely have been the most surprised.

Our International Conventions are far more than birthday parties. They are a chance for A.A.s from everywhere on the planet to expand their view of the Fellowship and reinvigorate their own sobriety. They are opportunities to let the world know that A.A. is alive and flourishing as a community resource, locally and internationally. We do this in part by disseminating information, but more importantly by offering thousands of individual examples of how A.A. works. A Montreal radio reporter was typical of many other nonalcoholics when he said that the city during the Convention had been “invaded by thousands of benevolent aliens. Wearing blue badges, they were wandering throughout the city, happy, smiling, and greeting passersby. The citizens of the city,” he went on, “had been touched by this strange new spirit and were smiling back and returning the greetings.”

Toronto will experience that “strange new spirit” again in July 2005, hosting our Convention for the second time. The Convention theme, “I Am Responsible,” echoes the high point of our 30th Birthday party 40 years earlier, when we first recited in unison the Responsibility Declaration, promising that the hand of A.A. would always be there for anyone, anywhere.

■ American G.I. Helps German Doctor to Help Alcoholics

Some 50 years ago a chance meeting between a German doctor and an American G.I. opened a window to sobriety that otherwise would have been denied countless alcoholics in that country. At the time, American members of the post-World War II occupation forces were holding A.A. meetings very discreetly in chapels on military bases because being an alcoholic was seen as sufficient cause to lose security clearance.

It was in this climate of secrecy that Walther H. Lechler, M.D., a nonalcoholic, started working in Munich as an acting contract surgeon with a battalion of U.S. Army engineers. Recently, writing to G.S.O. in English, Dr. Lechler recalls, “During my first days in the battalion, during sick call, came Staff Sgt. Robert “Bob” H. Assuming he is a client, I asked him, ‘What can I do for you?’ And this young N.C.O. [non-commissioned officer]

replied, laughing, ‘Nothing, but I may be able to do something for you.’”

Dr. Lechler continues: “This fellow proceeded to ask me, ‘Do you know of A.A.?’ I said I had never heard of it. Then he asked, ‘How would you treat alcoholics?’ I answered, ‘That’s simple. Lock them up. Dry them out. Let them go. They swear to me that they would never take another drink, but pretty soon they are coming back as revolving-door patients, mostly reckless socio- and psychopaths. . . .’ I added that my chief of clinics had told me, ‘You will always have alcoholics on your ward, but do not waste your time with them—take care of the real sick people.’”

Remembering, Dr. Lechler exclaims, “Can you imagine? This was exactly how I as a young doctor would deal with alcoholics. My chief of clinics also said, ‘If you ever open a practice, do anything to keep alcoholics away. They will mess it up.’”

Undeterred by the doctor’s response, Staff Sgt. Bob H. “not only left me some pamphlets,” Dr. Lechler says, “but also did something very, very important: He invited me to attend A.A., Al-Anon and Alateen meetings at our Army base. During my four years of service in the U.S. Army I attended many meetings, and they changed my view totally on alcoholism, the treatment of alcoholism and ideas then held by medical schools in Germany. However, the most important impact on me was that it changed my whole life totally. It would take many pages to tell you what happened”—and, he says, to express his gratitude to Bob H. who “today is a crab fisherman” in New England.

Unbeknownst to Dr. Lechler when he met Bob H., the first German-speaking A.A. meeting in Munich had been held about a year earlier, in 1953. By the 1960s a literature distribution center was operating, and a general service office had been organized by groups in what was then West Germany. And Dr. Lechler enthusiastically embraced the new wave of understanding and enlightenment about the effectiveness of A.A. in helping alcoholics to lead sober, productive lives; it was penetrating not just Germany but some countries in Eastern Europe.

First, Dr. Lechler relates, “I became a Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee in the growing German A.A. Thereafter I was appointed as a German delegate to the first World Service Meeting of A.A., where I participated at the unforgettable 35th sobriety birthday of A.A. co-founder Bill W. at the Hilton hotel in New York and also became acquainted at that time with Bill and his wife, Lois. A warm friendship was born that lasted until they departed forever, and I was privileged to be a frequent guest on my visits from Germany at their home, Stepping Stones, in Bedford Hills, N.Y.”

In conclusion, Dr. Lechler wrote, “Today I am again a Class A trustee at Intergroup Bavaria, in my home state. I want to thank you for the regular service of *Box 4-5-9*, through which I am always so close to you in A.A.”

■ In Memoriam Beth K.

When retired G.S.O. staff member Beth K. died on September 23, at age 83 and with 53 years of sobriety, many A.A. members felt as though they had lost their best friend. Says Beth's sponsor Lib S. (sober 59 years), "Beth attracted everyone, alcoholics in particular, because she truly did listen. She did this at a deep, nonjudgmental level that encouraged them to open up."

Curtis M., the first male staff member at G.S.O., is quick to agree. "Beth always had time for me," he says. "No matter how busy she was, she always found time to listen to my problems and suggest some very good solutions."

Beth joined the G.S.O. staff in 1959 and worked there for 24 years until she retired in 1983, after which she continued to give a helping hand at the office when asked. New York Intergroup bookended Beth's sobriety. When barely dry, she volunteered to answer the phones and soon became part of the Intergroup staff, staying until she started at G.S.O. And once retired, she returned to volunteering at Intergroup.

Says Susan U., a retired G.S.O. staffer and founding member of the Hope Group, which took a meeting to Beth's home for the past five years: "Our history will show that A.A. is infinitely richer because of the contributions Beth made to the people and the program, both tangible and spiritual, every day of her long life in sobriety."

■ 2005 Regional and Special Forums

Regional Forums strengthen the Fellowship's Three Legacies of Recovery, Unity and Service, by providing an opportunity for A.A. groups and area representatives, as well as any interested individual A.A.s in a particular region, to share experience, strength and hope with representatives of the General Service Board and G.S.O. and Grapevine staff members.

Special Forums are designed for remote, sparsely populated or urban areas.

These weekend sharing sessions enhance and widen communication, and help spark new ideas for carrying the message through service work.

Mailings regarding each Forum will be sent to G.S.R.s, area committee members, delegates, and central offices and intergroups, approximately three months ahead of time. On-line registration is also available. The final Forum in 2004 will be the Southeast Regional Forum, December 3-5, Executive West Hotel, Louisville, Kentucky. In 2005 Regional and Special Forums are planned as follows:

- *Special* — February 19-20: Hotel Gouverneur, Rouyn-

Noranda, Quebec

- *Northeast* — May 20-22: Holiday Inn by the Bay, Portland, Maine
- *Special* — August 19-22: Alaska
- *West Central* — September 30-October 2: Best Western Heritage Inn, Great Falls, Montana
- *East Central* — November 4-6: Houghton, Michigan
- *Southwest* — December 2-4: Embassy Suites Hotel, Rogers, Arkansas

Correctional Facilities

■ C.C.S.—Over 300 A.A. Members Need Your Help

Andy T. was concerned that he and the A.A. member-inmate he was about to correspond with through the Corrections Correspondence Service (CCS) would be unable to relate. Andy, three years sober in A.A., had never been to prison and never been arrested. "I was blunt about my background in that first letter," he says.

He wrote, though, that fear, anger, and resentment had haunted him, had dominated his life. It was clear from the response of the inmate that the same things dominated him.

Doing this service "has been great for me," says Andy, who is from Texas. He often travels for work three or four days at a time, usually not making meetings on these trips. He brings along the letter from his inmate correspondent, and he'll reread it and compose his reply. "The whole process keeps me sober, keeps me connected to the program," says Andy.

His inmate asked for help with the Steps. "He really worked them as best he could, though naturally he had trouble going into detail with Steps Four and Five," says Andy.

The inmate, who had already spent three years in prison, had gotten sober there after being in and out of A.A. for years.

"We never touched on why he was in jail, and we certainly found we had stuff in common. He spoke about his anger, for instance," says Andy. "He stayed focused on the program."

At the holiday season, Andy gave his correspondent a copy of *Experience, Strength & Hope*. As suggested by G.S.O., he purchased and had the book shipped through his intergroup to the correctional facility. "He was ecstatic. I got the feeling he wasn't expecting anything from anyone," says Andy.

Andy got the contact information on the inmate from G.S.O. in New York and followed the guidelines on this service as detailed in the flyer "Corrections Correspondence"

dence—a Special Kind of A.A. Service.” Andy used as his address his local intergroup’s P.O. Box, which is available to volunteers doing this service.

“I got the feeling he had been waiting a while for someone to contact him,” says Andy. In fact, G.S.O. has on file almost 300 male A.A. members in prisons across the country waiting for an outside male A.A. member to write them. The number has been slowly increasing each month.

Though there are 2,545 A.A. groups meeting in correctional facilities in the U.S. and Canada, many inmates have no A.A. meeting they can attend.

The Corrections Correspondence Service is restricted to the U.S. because money can be so scarce among the prison population that postage to Canada is too expensive. Canadian volunteers are urged to contact their local Correctional Facilities Committee for ways to be of service to the suffering alcoholics “behind the walls” in Canada.

Anyone interested in this service can write to: Correctional Facilities Desk, General Service Office, Box 459, New York, NY 10163. The e-mail address is corrections@aa.org.

Andy’s correspondent has recently been released. “I’m kicking myself for not acting faster in getting another person to correspond with,” says Andy. “I hope more people do this; it’s a great service.”

■ Posters by A.A. Prison Groups Provide Link to the Fellowship

A.A. prison groups in North Carolina have been creating posters as a way of connecting with the Fellowship beyond the walls of their prison units.

The outside sponsors of the prison groups deliver the posters to the annual N.C. Correctional Facilities Conference, “Freedom From Bondage.” There the posters, with their themes of recovery, are put on display. Attendees are now in the habit of signing them with a note of encouragement. After the conference, the posters are returned to the prison groups. The conference was held for the 16th time last April, when 300 A.A. members from 13 states attended.

“We are trying to think of ways to get inmates to feel involved in A.A.,” says Greg B., correctional facilities coordinator for Area 51.

“Prison is a ‘me’ environment,” he says, “and we want to introduce them to the ‘we’ of the program,” he says.

Everything about the posters requires creativity, including the materials they use.

“Sometimes the inmates just scrounge together whatever they can find to make the posters — it depends on the unit and what it will allow,” says Greg. Sharp objects, he notes, “are out.”



Posters were brought to the N.C. State Convention for the first time last year. “We set them up, and as people stop to sign them we tell them about such things as corrections correspondence,” says Greg.

One poster was a 4 feet high by 12 feet long collage of drawings and photos from the Grapevine. “I got to look at it for a long time as I manned our table at the convention, and that poster was put together with incredible care and thought,” says Greg.

One prison group cut up paper bags that they glued to the poster board, and added drawings made with bits of charcoal.

The prison population in North Carolina is approximately 32,000, with conservative estimates saying 60% have alcohol or drug “issues.” The inmates are housed in about 75 prison units, of which about 13 contribute poster drawings to the “Freedom From Bondage” Conference.

A bit of competition has crept into the making of the posters, says Greg. “They want to know what the other prison units are doing.”

Working with the prison groups has been tremendously satisfying, says Greg, who gave his first qualification at a prison group meeting and now takes a meeting into a correctional facility every Monday night.

“These inmates are impressed that we show up week after week,” says Greg.

■ The Responsibility Declaration

Have you ever wondered why the Responsibility Declaration begins with “I” rather than “we”? In 1975, the General Service Office received a letter asking just that question, and the staff asked oldtimer Al S., who wrote the declaration for A.A.’s 30th Anniversary International Convention in 1965, to reply. Here is what he said:

“We wanted a statement that would be emotionally binding on the Fellowship, but without imposing any musts. I tried my hand at a flock of them, using the plu-

ral 'we,' but none of them came off because nobody — not even Bill or Dr. Bob — ever tried to impose any kind of a pledge on A.A. members.

"Finally, I hit on a simple solution. Write it in the first person singular, 'I.' Then it became a matter of individual choice. It sounded right — saying what we wanted to say about responsibility, but without institutionalizing it. . . .

"The idea that the 'I' might be the higher power speaking had never occurred to me until your letter came. I see nothing wrong with interpreting it that way if you wish. It certainly gives it a higher meaning than I had intended."

The Responsibility Declaration was introduced in July 1965 to the crowd of 10,000 A.A.s gathered at the 30th Anniversary International Convention in Toronto. The three-word phrase that begins it was originally intended simply to appear on the individual nametags for all participants, but Herb M., then general manager of the General Service Office, believed it was important enough to be the focal point of a special occasion. After co-founder Bill W.'s talk on Saturday night, the lights were dimmed, background music came up, and Herb announced a "simple ceremony. Taking part in it," he said, "are A.A.s from all parts of the United States and Canada. . . . Still others have come thousands of miles to represent fellow alcoholics in foreign lands, from as far away as Australia and South Africa, from Korea and Iceland, South and Central America. We have asked them to appear on this stage tonight and to recite with us the pledge that you will find on the back of your program. This states simply what we all feel."

Bill W. introduced the declaration, saying: "Under God's grace we are gathered in grateful remembrance of what he has wrought among us in the thirty years that are now gone down into A.A. history.

"We again rededicate ourselves to those vast responsibilities which the long future will hold for us all. As members, as groups and as a worldwide Fellowship, we pledge ourselves to the inspiring aim of ever-increasing growth, in spirit and in numbers.

"May we always deserve, and may God ever grant us the wisdom and the humility to walk in fortitude and in faith upon the wondrous path that he has long since revealed to us of Alcoholics Anonymous.

"In rededication, shall we join hands and repeat (*here the A.A.s on the stage joined hands and recited*): 'I am responsible. When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there. And for that: I am responsible' (*the cast raised their joined hands*)." As the ceremony concluded, "I am responsible" was recited in French, Spanish, German, Finnish, Portuguese, Icelandic, Korean, and Norwegian, then once more in English by the full crowd of 10,000.

Four decades later, as several thousand A.A.s from around the world are making plans to attend our 70th birthday party in Toronto in July 2005, its theme, "I Am Responsible," echoes that earlier occasion, reminding us of what the Fellowship has already accomplished, and of how much remains to be done.

■ Sturgis Group in South Dakota Ramps Up for Motorcycle Festival

When hundreds of thousands of motorcyclists converge on Sturgis, South Dakota (population 6,000) a week every summer, the Sturgis Group of Alcoholics is ready for them —or at least for the A.A. members among them.

Since about 1938, a rolling horde of motorcyclists from around the nation has descended annually on this area of the Black Hills for a celebration, usually in August. The number of bikers has reached 450,000 in recent years. "They take over towns for about 50 miles around," says Kathy S., a member of the local A.A. group.

In response, the Sturgis A.A. Group increases its weekly schedule of meetings to 35, from the usual four. "We coordinate with the church to keep our meeting space open every day from 7 a.m. until 10 p.m.," says Kathy.

The celebrating bikers can get loud, and the A.A. members among them appreciate the sanctuary of the church basement, where they can attend any one of five meetings a day. The group also provides breakfast for a suggested donation.

All meetings during Bike Rally week are open meetings. Twelve to 30 persons attend a regular meeting during the year at the Sturgis Group, but twice that many show up at meetings when the motorcycles are in town.

Some of these motorcycling A.A. members return year after year. "You often know the face, though you may not know the name," says Kathy.

For the last seven years, the Sturgis A.A. Group has gotten into the spirit of the week with a 100-mile motorcycle ride into Black Hills National Forest. The bikers break in the afternoon for an open-air A.A. meeting followed by a picnic lunch. This year 226 participated.

Getting ready for Bike Rally week requires months of planning, with lots of coordinating and much cooperation among members. Many A.A. members from other groups in the Northern Black Hills area help the Sturgis Group prepare for the motorcyclists. "It's a big effort and everyone involved works hard to cooperate so that we are all friends in the end."



Twelve Tips on Keeping Your Holiday Season Sober and Joyous

Holiday parties without liquid spirits may still seem a dreary prospect to new A.A.s. But many of us have enjoyed the happiest holidays of our lives sober—an idea we would never have dreamed of, wanted, or believed possible when drinking. Here are some tips for having an all-round ball without a drop of alcohol.



1 *Line up extra A.A. activities for the holiday season.* Arrange to take newcomers to meetings, answer the phones at a clubhouse or central office, speak, help with dishes, or visit the alcoholic ward at a hospital.



2 *Be host to A.A. friends, especially newcomers.* If you don't have a place where you can throw a formal party, take one person to a diner and spring for the coffee.



3 *Keep your A.A. telephone list with you all the time.* If a drinking urge or panic comes—postpone everything else until you've called an A.A.



4 *Find out about the special holiday parties, meetings, or other celebrations*

given by groups in your area, and go. If you're timid, take someone newer than you are.



5 *Skip any drinking occasion you are nervous about.* Remember how clever you were at excuses when drinking? Now put the talent to good use. No office party is as important as saving your life.



6 *If you have to go to a drinking party and can't take an A.A. with you, keep some candy handy.*



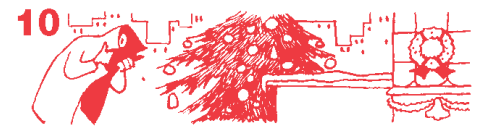
7 *Don't think you have to stay late.* Plan in advance an "important date" you have to keep.



8 *Worship in your own way.*



9 *Don't sit around brooding.* Catch up on those books, museums, walks, and letters.



10 *Don't start now getting worked up about all those holiday temptations.* Remember— "one day at a time."



11 *Enjoy the true beauty of holiday love and joy.* Maybe you cannot give material gifts—but this year, you can give love.



12 *"Having had a . . ."* No need to spell out the Twelfth Step here, since you already know it.

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.

December

- 3-5—*Louisville, Kentucky*. Special Forum. Write: Forum Coordinator, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163
- 30—*January 2—Goa, India*. 1st International Get Together. Write: Ch., 18(A), Sernabatim, Colva, Salcate, Goa 403708 India; www.aagoa.org
- 31—*January 1—WACYPAA #8* [Conferencia de Gente Joven/Area Oeste]. Write: Ch., box 34493, Phoenix, AZ 85067

January

- 14-16—*Biloxi, Mississippi*. 24th Annual Mississippi Gulf Coast Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 7373 Gulfport, MS 39506
- 14-16—*Puerto Vallarta, Mexico*. 3rd Annual Sobriety Under the Sun. Write: Ch., 827 Union Pacific, PMB 078-174, Laredo, Texas 78045-9452; www.aapvconvention.com
- 21-23—*Corpus Christi, Texas*. 51st Coast Bend Jamboree. Write: Ch., Box 482, 1220 Airline Suite 130 Corpus Christi, TX 78412.
- 21-23—*Mahnomen, Minnesota*. Wild Rice Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 203, Mahnomen, MN 56557
- 21-23—*South Padre Island, Texas*. Celebrating the Promises By the Sea Jamboree 2005. Write: Ch., Box 3844, Brownsville, TX 78523
- 27-30—*Raleigh, North Carolina*. 38th Tar Heel Mid-Winter Conference. Write: Ch., Box 18412, Raleigh, NC 27619; www.nccconference@nc.rr.com
- 28-30—*Blytheville, Arkansas*. 48th Annual Coon Supper. Write: Ch., Box 675, Blytheville, AR 72315
- 28-30—*Burbank, California*. 30th Annual SFV Convention. Write: Ch., Box 7610, Northridge, CA 91327-7610; www.sfvaa-convention.org

February

- 4-6—*Dellroy, Ohio*. Atwood Mid-Winter Conference. Write: Ch., 6414 Fordwick Rd. Cleveland, OH 44130
- 10-13—*Melbourne, Florida*. Spacecoast Roundup. Write: Ch., 720 E. New Haven Ave. Suite #3, Melbourne, FL 32901; intergoup@aaspacecoast.org
- 11-13—*Imperial, California*. 15th Annual Imperial Valley Round-Up. Write: Ch., 845 Commercial Ave. #1, El Centro, CA 92243
- 18-19—*Columbia Falls, Montana*. Into Action Weekend. Write: Ch., Box 83, E. Glacier, MT 59434
- 18-20—*Burlington, Iowa*. 15th Southeast Iowa Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 85, Keosauqua, IA 52565
- 18-20—*North Little Rock, Arkansas*. 23rd Annual Winter Holiday Convention. Write: Ch., Box 26135 Little Rock, AK 26135
- 18-20—*Virginia Beach, Virginia*. 29th Annual Oceanfront Conference. Write: Ch., Box 66173, Virginia Beach, VA 23466
- 25-26—*Sikeston, Missouri*. 24th Annual Five Corners Convention. Write: Ch., Box 158 Sikeston, MO 63801
- 25-27—*Honolulu, Hawaii*. Aloha Roundup 2005. Write: Ch., Box 88293, Honolulu, HI 96830; www.aloharoundup.com
- 25-27—*Kansas City, Kansas*. Sunflower Roundup. Write: Ch., 10604 Bluejacket, Overland Park, KS 66214
- 25-27—*Newton, Massachusetts*. 14th

Annual Northeast Regional Service Assembly. Write: Ch., Box 373, North Andover, MA 01875; neraasa2005@aee-mass.org

25-27—*Pattaya, Thailand*. 10th Thailand Roundup "Acceptance is the Key." Write: Ch., Box 1551, Nana Post Office, Bangkok 10112, Thailand; www.aathailand.org

March

- 4-6—*Lincolnshire, Illinois*. 2005 NIA Spring Conference—"Spring Into Action". Rite: Ch., Box 591, Lake Villa, IL 60046. Email: NIASpring2005@aol.com
- 4-6—*Newport, Rhode Island*. Rhode Island's 29th Annual Convention. Write: Ch., 52 Round Ave. 1st Floor Providence, RI 02907 Email: rhodeisland-aa.org/ricc/
- 4-6—*Rapid City, South Dakota*. 2005 West Central Regional Service Conference. Write: Ch., Box 533, Black Hawk, SD 57718-0533
- 11-13—*Brainerd, Minnesota*. Paul Bunyan Round-Up. Write: Ch: 1003 12th Ave. NE, Brainerd, MN 56401-3414
- 18-20—*Lincoln, Nebraska*. Spring Fling 2005. Write: Ch., Box 30691, Lincoln, NE 68503
- 24-28—*Manduran East, Western Australia*. Australian National Convention. Write: Ch., Box 3045, Manduran East, Western Australia 6210

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 _____, 20 _____

Name of event: _____

Place (city, state or prov.): _____

For information, write: (exact mailing address) _____

Contact phone # (for office use only): _____

Cut along dotted line, and post this page on your group's bulletin board



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