

Gratitude Month Can Last All Year Long

Many in the Fellowship define the three stages of learning and growth as "I came. I came to. I came to believe." But as letters that arrive at the General Service Office from around the world indicate, there may be another stage: "I came to express gratitude for my sobriety by giving it away." And although November has long been set aside as Gratitude Month here in the U.S. (October in Canada), it's clear from their sharing that an overwhelming number of A.A. members—along with many of our professional friends—find their own special ways to say thank you the whole year long.

Francine A., Antelias, Lebanon: "We give thanks that our sobriety is not affected by the problems we face here. . . the lack of facilities that are so much taken for granted in our countries of origin. We are in great need of Big Books in French, English and Arabic, which we cannot afford as our group is still small. But the greatest challenge is receiving these books without their being stolen at some point or, if they do get here, in freeing ourselves from paying the taxes and duties. Also the telephone, a utility of so much importance for our beginners, doesn't work properly, and it is next to impossible to contact each other between meetings. But all is not so dark after all. We have two new members and are working with the magazines and making contact with a few doctors—we have great hopes for our future. All in all, we are very much alive and full of hope that, with the help of God, we can help the many sufferers here."

Angel P., New York State: "The enclosed check is from my own pocket, to help our [correctional facility] group and keep it going in a positive direction. Not everyone in these places are creeps who are going to be continuing hurting when they get out. Some of us are struggling to turn our lives around. We begin the process in here ourselves, and also by reaching out. Please help.... P.S. Did you notice that my name and the stamp [of an angel] on the envelope seem to match?"

Fr. Abraham Purayidathil (nonalcoholic), Maharashtra, India: "I would like to introduce myself as a missionary of the Sangli Mission Society in the Kolhapur District. It is a matter of great encouragement and satisfaction that your organization has been a rich resource of guidance, help and light for a number of organizations

dealing with problems related to alcohol and drug abuse."

Terry W., Aurora, Illinois: "I'm writing to thank A.A. and, in particular, a lady who works at your office. For years I tried to stop drinking and never could for longer than two months. But since the lady answered my letter and sent me a copy of the Big Book, I have been going to meetings and have a sponsor. My whole life has changed for the better, and my family and myself thank the lady."

Yvette R., Salt Lake City, Utah: (translated from Spanish) "More than two years ago I wrote you for help, thinking I was the only one with my kind of problem. In desperation I explained how in May 1994 the police knocked at my door to let me know about my husband's being arrested on a DWI. Now I can tell you that after his first three months in jail, my husband stopped drinking, and later he was released. He has been sober ever since in A.A., and I have found help for myself in Al-Anon. From the bottom of my heart, muchas gracias."

Rich B., North Bend, Oregon: "I want to say thank you to A.A. today for my life and for that of my family—my wife, son and daughter—all of us alcoholics in recovery. I know what it is to sleep in a doorway on Skid Row, and I know the past 18 years of sobriety are more than I would ever have wished for. Enclosed is a birthday check for Charlene. I want the hand of A.A. to be there for all who may need it—and some might even turn out to be among my five grandchildren. We have been given our lives back by A.A. Now we want to help keep A.A. itself alive for all the other alcoholics who need help."

Like Rich, many alcoholics celebrate their A.A. anniversaries by sending in a gratitude gift to G.S.O. for its



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world services—usually \$1 for each year of sobriety. One Canadian group follows this Birthday Plan by collecting contributions from members on a voluntary basis throughout the year, or until the number of dollars matches the members' total years of sobriety. On the group's birthday, the money collected is sent to G.S.O. as a birthday contribution.

Gratitude is easily converted into action, individual or group. Some A.A. groups hold topic meetings on the subject of gratitude, send money to the A.A. entity of their choice, or donate the A.A. Grapevine to someone homebound or in prison. Other groups may decide to make beginners kits available and spend time stuffing envelopes with a meeting book, an address book and pencil, a copy of *Living Sober* and a couple of A.A. pamphlets. Individual A.A.s may invite a sponsor or sponsee to lunch, or start a Step or Traditions meeting where there's a need. Or they may make it a point to greet newcomers and out-of-towners who show up at their home-group meetings.

It's a serious-sounding, high-dignity word, gratitude, but the fact is that its close companions are humor and joy. As A.A. co-founder Bill W. observed early on in the Big Book (p. 132): "Outsiders are sometimes shocked when we burst into merriment over a seemingly tragic experience out of the past. But why shouldn't we laugh? We have recovered, and have been given the power to help others." What greater cause could there be for rejoicing than this?

Site-Review Committee

A G.S.O. Site-review Committee, consisting of trustees, delegates and G.S.O.'s general manager, has been appointed by General Service Board chairman Jim Estelle (nonalcoholic). The committee is charged with the responsibility of completing a review of the current site of the General Service Office. Their findings will be reported to the General Service Board.

Albuquerque Groups Get Up Close and Financial

The fiscal crisis is out of the living room this 24 at the Central Office of Albuquerque, New Mexico, but for sure it's still lurking in the kitchen, making continued vigilance vital.

Explains an article in the February 1996 issue of the central office newsletter "Pass It On": "Our financial condition was dismal over the past few years . . . with an average loss of \$200 a month causing the balance to drop from a healthy \$6,990 at the end of 1993 to \$925 in two years."

All kinds of Band-Aids were tried, but nothing worked. Then suddenly, in a matter of months, an influx of support erased the accumulated '95 losses and, in fact, has produced a small net surplus for the year of more than \$800. How did such a dreary economic picture lighten up so quickly?

According to Duke D., central office coordinator, "the central office steering committee had been working for three years to turn this downward spiral around—talking about it at intergroup representative meetings and bringing it to the attention of the groups. One of our problems, however, was that we were preaching to the choir. We list about 400 groups in the schedule but less than a third of them had contributed to central office." The committee switched gears, Duke notes. "We let our need be known to each and every group we could contact. It worked. We started to receive contributions from groups we had never heard from before. Additionally, those groups that had regularly contributed now dug deeper into their pockets."

Expressing "appreciation for the work of our groups and individual A.A.s in pulling the central office out of the red," Duke voiced his hope for continuing support. "If all 400 groups gave just \$5.00 a month," he said, "most of our money problems would go away."

On a strong note of caution, the "Pass It On" article points out that "the central office is not yet out of the woods. Our checking account still contains less than half of what our balance was three years ago, and our prudent reserve would cover less than three months' worth of expenses. Unless the groups continue to provide support through increased contributions, the central office will slide back into \$200 a-month deficits in no time."

But for now, it concludes, "if you dial (505) 266-1900, you will still hear, 'Alcoholics Anonymous, may we help you?'"

Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions in American Sign Language

“As we completed the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* in American Sign Language,” says Eileen G., the staff member assigned to this project, “we believed that without a Higher Power we would be asking ‘How did we get here from there?’”

Some years ago, the Big Book was made available in sign language, following the customary procedure of taping an English-language script into ASL and that’s how the process began with the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*. All were delighted to have the same signer/actor/text interpreter, Alan R. Barwiolek, a profoundly deaf person, who signed the Big Book videotape. (In keeping with A.A. Traditions, the signer cannot be an A.A. member, since his face appears on screen.) Alan’s signing of the Big Book had been greatly praised, so G.S.O. was grateful to have him back for the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* taping.

Soon after the project began, however, it became apparent, through the help of the production supervisor, Tony Allicino (nonalcoholic), that trying to follow the usual technical procedure was not going to work. The *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* text presents, in Bill W’s own words “... an explicit view of the principles by which A.A. members recover and by which their Society functions. A.A.’s Twelve Steps are a group of principles, spiritual in nature....” The text of the Twelve and Twelve is, as we know, replete with spiritual and metaphysical examples, and abstract ideas and metaphors, all of which presented a tremendously difficult translation-interpretation challenge for the on-screen signer to contend with in front of a camera using a teleprompter.

Everyone concerned brainstormed, and began to help solve the problem by bringing in another signer, Alan Champion (nonalcoholic), to create an ASL script, a translation of the text into videotape, to be a translator/studio interpreter. When this ASL video script was completed, it was fed directly into a teleprompter, thus becoming a videoprompter for the on-screen signer. In this way, Alan Barwiolek was able to work directly from a script in his own visual language to create his on-screen interpretation of the text. Alan (who, coincidentally, was known as Al B.) is wonderfully expressive on camera, wearing his blue denim shirt, and lighting up the screen. As he signs on-screen, the text in English is displayed, and the voice of another nonalcoholic, Philip E. Giambaresi, is heard reading the text.

Final work on the project entailed a thorough and ongoing review, that is, word-by-word of the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* for the whole team; a tap-

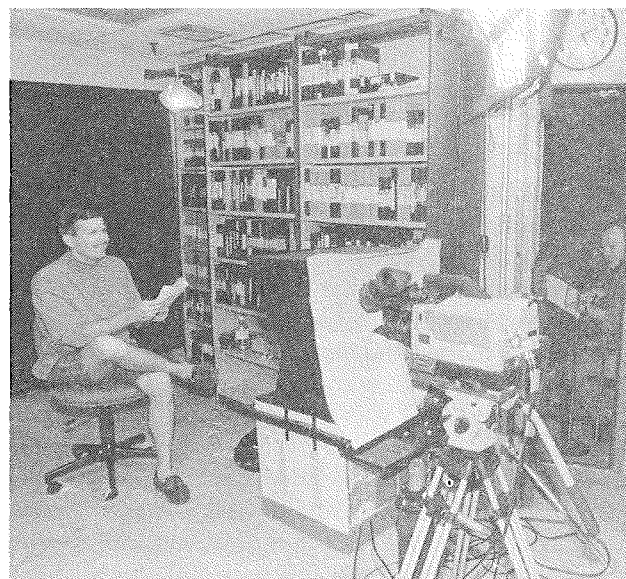


Photo taken in 1992, during a break in the video taping of the Big Book in ASL. Al B. sits before camera; Phil Giambaresi is in the soundproof recording chamber.

ing of an ASL video script at G.S.O., and then the studio taping, voicing and captioning. Al B., deaf from birth, working with the other Alan and Phil, both hearing persons born of deaf parents, and with A.A.s and the video technicians of National Audio Video—who were so knowledgeable, patient and helpful.

The “common bond” was the team’s complete enthusiasm for the project, surmounting the challenges presented by the text, and by the sad knowledge that Al B. was battling a serious illness. An experienced professional in his fields, Al B. demanded and got the best from himself at all times. He was totally dedicated to the project, and repeatedly instrumental in helping everyone else reach higher, and strive for the best over the hundred or more hours of intense work on the video. At the same time, everyone had great fun working together. And, of course, there were some hilarious “outtakes.” When it was completed, everyone knew that the very best had been done to provide and maintain the spiritual integrity of the text, while making the signing as clear as possible to the deaf and hearing-impaired alcoholic.

Three weeks later, Alan R. Barwiolek (Al B.) died suddenly. The *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* in ASL was one of his substantial contributions, through his professional ability and his “heart,” to Alcoholics Anonymous and especially to the deaf and hearing-impaired alcoholics, both A.A. members and still-suffering alcoholics looking for our beloved A.A. Society.

The *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* video (VS-3) is a set of five cassettes, \$35.00. An order form for this set, as well as for *Alcoholics Anonymous* in ASL (VS-1), \$38.00, is enclosed with this issue of *Box 4-5-9*.

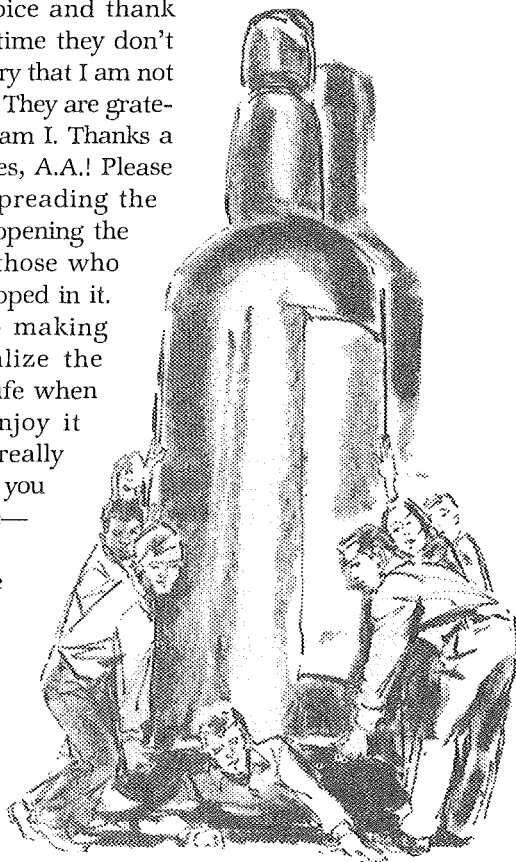
Outside the Bottle Life Is Brand New

Rosendo T. has been in A.A. for four years, and he still rejoices daily over the “miracle” changes that sobriety has wrought in his life. Writing from his home in Santo Domingo, the Dominican Republic, he says, “I was a very heavy drinker, which cost me good jobs and friends and conflicts with my relatives as they tried to keep me from the bottle. I’d drink and think I was the strongest man in the world, that nothing could stop me. I got into many fights all around. I was losing my health, my sanity, everything.”

Since finding A.A., Rosendo says, “I have become a new man, totally different from the one with the bottle, and I have gained the respect of my family and coworkers. I know that damage has been done by all those years of drinking, but I am doing everything I can to make amends for whatever harm I’ve done in my relationships with others. I am taking care of my body, and I see life as a gift that God has given us and that we should maintain and enjoy. It is incredible how I didn’t realize the harm done to my body by drinking until after I stopped. Then I saw myself as I really was, right then—what was left of me, and what should still have been there that wasn’t there anymore.

“Today my parents, my brothers, other relatives and friends rejoice and thank A.A. every time they don’t have to worry that I am not home early. They are grateful, and so am I. Thanks a million times, A.A.! Please continue spreading the miracle of opening the bottle for those who are still trapped in it. Don’t stop making people realize the beauty of life when you can enjoy it sober and really know what you feel and see—and not through the dark glass.”

*from “The
Twelve Steps
Illustrated”*



Viewpoint

Our Prudent Reserve Can't Last Without Money in the Basket

A.A. is a spiritual entity, not a business organization. Therefore, explains Northern Illinois Area 20 chairman Dale G., its Prudent Reserve “is simply an amount of money set aside primarily to ensure that in time of emergency or disaster, the General Service Office would be able to carry on for a reasonable length of time—presently set to cover but not exceed one year’s operating expenses.”

In the summer 1996 issue of the newsletter “N.I.A. (Northern Illinois Area) Concepts,” Dale traces the course of A.A.’s Prudent Reserve over the years. In 1987, he says, “the General Service Conference made a recommendation (later affirmed by the 1990 Conference) that a Prudent Reserve for an individual group be based on local needs; and that a Prudent Reserve for central offices, intergroups and area committees preferably constitute one to 12 months’ operating expenses, again depending upon local needs.”

Now comes the first glimmer of what has proved to be a sticky wicket. “The 1988 Conference,” Dale reports, “recommended that a list of possible demands on the Reserve Fund be made available as a service piece, and that the trustees handle possible excesses in the Fund by using literature price reductions as the primary mechanism.

“In the list of possible demands on the Reserve Fund, it is noted that the Fund has made it possible for A.A. to be debt-free. The only obligations A.A. has are the General Service Office lease and the unfilled Grapevine subscriptions. G.S.O.’s move uptown in Manhattan and the 1995 International Convention deficit were absorbed by the Reserve Fund where operating moneys would not cover unexpected expenses.

“At the end of 1994, for the first time, the Reserve Fund exceeded the combined operating expenses; and as the ’88 Conference had directed, literature prices were effectively reduced by adjusting discount levels. The lower prices produced the expected losses, and more: By the end of 1995 the Reserve Fund had dropped under the optimum 12-month limit to 11.2 months.”

Unfortunately, Dale continues, “many in the Fellowship possibly misunderstood what was taking place and perceived that G.S.O. had too much money. As a result, contributions to G.S.O. began to drop and have continued to do so, falling from \$4.4 million in 1990 to \$3.7 million in ’95—a 16 percent decrease. In the

Northern Illinois Area alone, the percentage of groups contributing to G.S.O. plummeted from 51.4 percent in 1988 to 35.3 percent in '95, a 16.1 percent decrease. What this says is that out of the approximately 1,000 registered groups in the Northern Illinois Area, only 353 gave anything to G.S.O. during 1995. Yet most of the groups surely took advantage of the lower literature prices. Contributions, literature prices and the Prudent Reserve Fund are all interrelated."

The Prudent Reserve, Dale points out, "is composed of unfilled Grapevine magazine subscriptions, contributions in excess of expenses, literature income and interest earned on previous Reserve balances. Importantly, the only possible sources of income for G.S.O. are voluntary contributions from individuals, groups, districts, and areas; income from literature sales; and interest earned on investments and the Prudent Reserve. Now then, when the income exceeds the cost of providing services to the Fellowship and A.A. World Services, the Prudent Reserve will increase unless the literature prices are reduced. The objective, should the Fellowship ever become fully self-supporting, would be to provide literature at cost, or perhaps even on a no-charge basis as some is now being provided.

"The amount of voluntary contributions by everyone in the Fellowship is the determining factor. Today these do not even begin to cover the group services the Fellowship requests of G.S.O. In 1994, for example, the cost of providing services to the Fellowship, excluding publishing activities, exceeded contributions by approximately \$1.5 million. This has been so for some years.

"Of course, when contributions increase, it is possible to reduce literature prices and/or increase the Prudent Reserve. However, if the Prudent Reserve is close to the upper limit of 12 months' operating expenses, then either the operating expenses would have to increase or the literature prices must be reduced to keep the Prudent Reserve within the prescribed limit. Therefore, in order to reduce literature prices, and keep them reduced, contributions need to increase—significantly. Certainly G.S.O. has held operating expenses down. The reduced rent at the new office and other economies have contributed to lower expenses. It wouldn't be unreasonable, though, for operating expenses at G.S.O. to rise as time goes on. Just the cost of paper and printing has and will increase; this is true for everyone.

"If the Fellowship wants to have low literature prices, then voluntary contributions to G.S.O. need to increase, at least to the point where services to the Fellowship are covered by our support in the spirit of the Seventh Tradition. Passing the basket at meetings is our personal way of meeting our responsibility for the work of A.A., which begins and ends with us. Our contributions, however small, all count. They support the group, G.S.O. and all A.A. activities. It's a ripple effect

that has changed, and saved, the lives of alcoholics all over the world. As Bill W. would say, 'Let's make practical and spiritual sense.'"

All Over the World G.S.O.'s Family Stands In For Us A.A.s at Home

A.A.'s Legacy of Service, co-founder Bill W. explained in 1951, "is anything whatever that helps us to reach a fellow sufferer—ranging all the way from the Twelfth Step itself to a 10-cent phone call and a cup of coffee, and to A.A.'s General Service Office for national and international action." (*The A.A. Service Manual*, p. S7) For the trustees, staff and others in service at G.S.O., practicing the Third Legacy calls for thousands of miles of travel, both on U.S./Canada shores and in the approximately 144 other countries where A.A. exists. Says general manager George D.: "It's an extraordinary opportunity to strengthen our common bond with fellow alcoholics all over the world, to see the miracles that A.A. achieves even under the most adverse circumstances, and to share the collective experience, strength and hope of the New York City office wherever we are invited." Following are excerpts from the overseas travel logs of just a few at G.S.O. who've been there, done that:

In January, George flew to Christchurch, New Zealand, for that country's joyous 50th anniversary celebration. Approximately 700 enthusiastic A.A.s were on hand—a large turnout for that country, which has a population of about 4 million people. They gratefully recalled how their Fellowship began: In the capital of Wellington, Ian M., the drunken scion of an affluent family, had tried repeatedly to quit drinking, to no avail. One day in 1946, on sheer impulse he checked himself into a psychiatric hospital, where he read a *Reader's Digest* story about Alcoholics Anonymous. Impressed, he immediately wrote to G.S.O. in New York and received a letter and an edition of the Big Book, practically by return mail. Using the book as an instructional manual, Ian sobered up, sought out other alcoholics—and the Fellowship took hold.

Just before the Christchurch A.A. birthday party, George visited the general service office, in the capital of Wellington, which he says is making progress in carrying the message to the Maori and Pacific Islander communities in New Zealand. Afterward, George continued on to Australia where, as a guest of the board of trustees, he met with A.A.s in Sydney. He finished his whirlwind,

two-week trip in Melbourne, where he had been asked by the general service board there to share the experience of the New York office.

In April, Class B (alcoholic) trustee Larry N. and his wife, Gail, along with Joanie M., the G.S.O. staff member on the International desk, joined in yet another A.A. celebration: Ireland's golden jubilee, in Killarney, County Kerry. "The trip from the airport with Paddy R. at the wheel was delightful," Joanie recalls, "car trouble and all (the muffler ended up riding in the back seat with Larry and Gail)." Later, she notes, at a workshop on the Three Legacies, "Paddy spoke about Unity. He likened A.A. to a great ship steaming through a rocky channel, with the only hazards being pride, fear, ego, power, prestige, professionalism and anonymity breaks."

Several oldtimers reminisced about A.A.'s beginnings in Ireland: In 1946, Conor F., an Irish-born member living in Philadelphia, visited Dublin. Three years sober, he brought along four Big Books "just in case" and, armed with them, approached numerous hospitals, institutions and churches with A.A.'s message of recovery. Finally he interested a Dr. Moore, who took a copy of the Big Book to give to some of his patients. Just one of them was receptive: Richard P., who became the first sober member of A.A. in Ireland. "I was glad to find there was at least one alcoholic in Ireland," Conor later remarked. Continuing his efforts, he contacted *The Evening Mail*, which carried an interview and an ad that netted 30 replies from interested alcoholics. Consequently, on November 18, 1946, the first Dublin group met, with 15 in attendance.

This past April also found Class B (alcoholic) trustee Raul M. and G.S.O.'s Danny M., who is on the Spanish Services desk, in San Jose, Costa Rica, for the biannual Convención de Centroamerica y Panamá. Reports Raul: "Danny and I attended this fine event as representatives of the U.S./Canada General Service Board and G.S.O. The Costa Rican general service board were gracious hosts, and we were pleased to have one representative from Cuba participating in the meeting. Mexico has been sponsoring A.A. in Cuba, now three years old. There are about 30 groups, with some 300 members."

In June, Raul, Danny and Larry N. again took off—this time with Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee chairman Jim Estelle—for the Convención Nacional de Mexico, in Acapulco, attended by 23,000 people. Raul says that "more than 10,000 were in the main meeting hall, and 10,000 or more were outside in the wing terraces, where television screens carried the pictures and sound."

"According to Mexico's G.S.O.," Danny points out, "women account for barely 4 percent of group membership. Focusing on the issue, the Message to the Women's Committee encourages and supports the establishment of women's groups and meetings. With this option, more women are now regularly attending group meetings."

Early last spring, G.S.O.'s publications director Vinnie McC. traveled to Warsaw at the invitation of Poland's National Service Board. She met G.S.O. staff member Joanie M. in Vienna, and together they journeyed to a number of towns and cities in Slovakia, and then to Budapest, Hungary, where members were eager to help the Slovakian A.A.s set up a central office. This, Vinnie reports, "will be accomplished with enormous help from A.A.s in Budapest, Hungary, where A.A. is still very young—the first group was founded in 1968. Today in Hungary there are approximately 50 groups, stretching from Budapest to the Romanian border."

In the Slovakian capital of Bratislava, Vinnie met with U.S. Embassy personnel to discuss customs regulations related to literature shipments. Meanwhile, Joanie, together with several Slovakian A.A. friends including Michaela T., who served as interpreter, drove to Pezinok for an A.A. meeting at Psychiatricka Nemocnica, the women's inpatient treatment unit. "We visited with the female chief physician and two therapists, who then introduced us to 28 patients from the women's unit," Joanie says. "The A.A. meeting opened in the usual way, and we each shared some of our personal stories."

During attempts to stop or moderate their drinking, she notes, "more than half the patients had tried 'sobriety clubs.' Prevalent throughout countries with communist or socialist regimes, these clubs were established by state governments as meeting places for citizens with drinking or drug problems. Several said their only help came from therapy and medication, although they drank periodically. We sensed the depths of their despair and skepticism when, slowly, one patient after another spoke to us with candor, frequently asking questions about sobriety in A.A. One patient, Darina B., was scheduled for discharge, and with hope in her voice she asked how she could start an A.A. group in her town. We shared fully and promised to send her the Group Guidelines and some basic literature. Thanks to help from Michaela, our interpreter, Darina and I were able to talk about our tools of recovery—and to communicate in A.A.'s language of the heart."

'Good Skate'

From a U.S. Navy submarine somewhere at sea, Internationalist Larry B. writes, "I am still the only one in recovery on board," but his optimism—and humor—run high.

"The prospects are good for a couple of people," he reports cheerfully. "One fellow just received a DWI and another has an RBWI—Rollerblading While Intoxicated.

Seems he bladed down this big hill on base, sat down to rest and just passed out! Security found him, and because of his high blood-alcohol content and where he was doing his thing, they confiscated his skates and sent him to the base alcoholism counselors for evaluation. But he doesn't think he has a problem because all the people he drinks with, he says, 'always pass out someplace.'

Larry notes that, "as I write, we are currently 800 feet below the surface of the ocean and waiting to surface. We pull into Georgia tomorrow, and the hunt for A.A. will be on. I always get excited over meeting new people and possibly seeing some old friends." Meanwhile, he adds, he is never really alone: "As some A.A.s say up home in Connecticut, 'I don't know who God is but, man, I keep hearing Him, and He sounds exactly like my sponsor's gruff voice.'"

You Can Access A.A. Info In Three Languages

A.A. co-founder Bill W. observed in 1957 that "while word of mouth and personal contact have brought in many a newcomer, we can never forget that most of us are able to trace our chance for recovery back to our friends in communications." (*The Language of the Heart*, page 181) But visionary that he was, he still could not have dreamed that alcoholics by the thousands would learn about A.A. simply by punching a Web-site address (<http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org>) into their home computers.

Initiated in December 1995, the U.S./Canada Web site is already accessed more than 10,000 times a month, and the number is rising rapidly. The current contents, available in French, English and Spanish, include: "The A.A. Fact File," which gives an overview of the Fellowship and a brief history of A.A. in North America; locations and phone numbers of general service offices in other countries; and the pamphlet "Is A.A. for You?"

The ad hoc A.A. Web-Site Committee of the General Service Board is considering the possibility of listing U.S./Canada intergroup/central offices and answering services on the Web site. Additionally, a request has gone out to general service offices worldwide asking them to notify G.S.O. New York if and when they create their own Web pages. With permission, the committee reports, "the Internet user would then be able to link our Web site to that of the other G.S.O.s."

Another question under advisement: Should a generic e-mail address be included in the A.A. Web-site? The

committee and the A.A. World Service Board "are weighing the positive aspects of making information about A.A. available online against the impact that a generic e-mail address might have on the already heavy workload at G.S.O."

TLC for G.S.R.s In Northeast Ohio

Many a new general service representative leaves his or her first area assembly feeling confused and inadequate—which may be why, observes Ohioan Bob McK., so many "never return for a second go-round."

Says Bob, who serves as alternate Northeast Ohio delegate and chairman of his Area 54: "I well remember that feeling when I was a G.S.R. For years a number of us talked about holding an orientation session for new G.S.R.s, but it wasn't until three years ago that we did something about it." After much discussion of time and content, he reports, "we settled upon a 15-minute gathering to be held right after the area assemblies. It's brief, to the point and addresses the G.S.R.s' main areas of confusion and concern."



from "Inside A.A."

The way it works: "We hand out a simple G.S.R. Guide that tells what a G.S.R. is; how A.A. is broken down into regions, areas and districts; and what the function of the General Service Conference is. Included are some helpful hints, ranging from 'Get a service sponsor—someone experienced at the area level' to 'Get an alternate—you won't be there always and forever.' And then there's 'Rule 62—Not everyone will want to hear what you have to say; in other words, don't take yourself too seriously.'"

One page, Bob points out, "describes the function and activities of our area committees and includes a form the G.S.R.s can use to sign up for service on the one of their choice. We encourage all G.S.R.s to join a committee because that's where the real area work is done."

Additionally, he notes, "the new G.S.R.s are given a literature packet as they register for the area and for the General Service Office. It includes a map of Ohio, showing the layout of our districts."

The classes "have improved the return rate of G.S.R.s to the general assemblies," Bob reports. "But even if they didn't, we'd continue to hold them because we know that we leave a few members a little better informed about A.A. as a whole. We'll do just about anything to help attract the newcomer to this facet of A.A. service that has been so meaningful to us."

G.S.O. Staff Sees a Changing of the Guard

Two longtime members of the General Service Office staff—who between them chalk up nearly 40 years of service—opted for early retirement last summer and will be much missed. They are Helen T., who had the Group Services assignment; and Sarah P., on the Correctional Facilities desk, which is already occupied by new staff member Doug R.

"I enjoyed all the staff assignments," says Helen, a transplanted Chicagoan who joined the G.S.O. staff in September 1978. "Not being a person who likes change, I nonetheless found myself responding positively to the stimulation and challenge of rotation. It helped me to meet my own criteria, if you will, and sharpened my senses. With each two-year rotation, I wound up modifying what the person before me had done and in the process learned a lot about adaptability, among other things.

"Like the rest of the world," Helen noted, "technology has entered our Fellowship." During her 18 years she has seen changes in the way members communicate with the office. "At first, by letters and telephone (which is still the case), but faxes and e-mail have entered the picture. As a result, this job really kept you on your toes, and to some degree, I never felt the luxury of completion—unlike my pre-G.S.O. days as an operating room nurse, when you felt a case had been taken care of, at least for the foreseeable future.

"I am so grateful for the opportunities I've experienced working for the Fellowship," Helen says. "My life has benefitted in so many, many ways. Though I will miss being in the middle of what's going on, I look forward to becoming a member of a new home group in the Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, area. Though the door to my life at G.S.O. closes, I am excited about another one opening. I'm ready!" And so, she avows, is her miniature silver poodle, whose moniker is Jamie Lee "because of her long legs"

For Sarah P., who came to G.S.O. in 1975, "working there comprised the 21 most important years of my life." Like Helen, she never met a rotation she didn't like: "Each was my favorite while I was immersed in it. Best of all was working with people—I truly loved them all."

Born and raised in Cleveland, Ohio, Sarah says she "started taking geographic cures for her drinking while in college at Ohio University and wound up in New York City. For many years she made Brooklyn's Park Slope her home and was a regular at the Slope Open Discussion Group. In retirement she plans to live in Vero Beach, Florida, practically a stone's throw from several longtime A.A. friends.

Sarah feels keenly that "the work of A.A. is extraordinarily important. Being a part of the G.S.O. and Grapevine team was so rewarding. Everyone there is working on something vital that is in some way connected with helping alcoholics recover from a life-or-death illness. So it all has to do with carrying the message. There is a miracle happening every day, if not on my assignment, then on someone else's."

Many who attended A.A.'s 50th Anniversary celebration in Montreal—which Sarah coordinated—will remember her smiling face and gracious manner. And her colleagues and fellow workers at G.S.O. will always remember Sarah as the quintessential "team player."

Sarah's zest is shared in spades by her successor on the Correctional Facilities desk, Doug R., who assumed his post in June. Born in Passaic, New Jersey, and raised in neighboring Rutherford, he "came to Manhattan at 20 to be an actor, and lived in a \$45 a month apartment." Four years later he married an actress, Wai, and "we had two children, a daughter, Kay-Lin, now 22, and a son, Kai, who's 20. Doug supported himself and his family by working in the restaurant business. "Given a choice between liquor and acting, I chose the liquor—not too surprising in view of the fact that alcoholics run on both sides of my family. I had a grandfather who sobered up by himself. Because he had no program, no spiritual context for living like we have, he was full of rage, which he paced off for hours, like a caged animal, up in his attic."

Fortunately, Doug did not follow in his grandfather's uneasy footsteps. He found A.A. in July 1979 and has since enjoyed continuous sobriety. He was pursuing a master's degree in social work when the call came from G.S.O. and he is pleased to be exactly where he is today. "Anywhere from 130 to 200 letters from inmates cross my desk in the course of a week," he says. "Most of them contain requests for literature, or for assistance in obtaining prerelease contacts, or for help with meetings inside the prisons. Many are heartwarming in their newly awakened hope and cautious desire to be able to feel trust in someone or something—like A.A." Doug also is responsible for answering letters from A.A.s in the

southwest region. "It is interesting how many of these are concerned with matters related to the Traditions," he reports.

For Doug, "Working at G.S.O. is an opportunity given to me that is truly beyond my wildest dreams."

P.I./C.P.C.

So You Want to Form a Committee? Just Do It!

If you're anything like Cynthia H., general service representative of the Gratitude Group in Shelby, North Carolina, you see the need for a committee to carry the A.A. message into the community where you live, but when it comes to getting involved you're nervous about service—and "about what all those letters like P.I., C.P.C. and C.F. actually mean," she says.

A recovering A.A. since November 1993, Cynthia also is a home health nurse by profession. "Many of the patients I've seen have pancreatitis, severe anemia, renal failure and other conditions that often stem from alcoholism," she relates, "and even if the patients themselves don't exhibit any symptoms or signs, I've seen a family member or two who do. So it kept occurring to me that, without getting personal about my own recovery, I might be able to leave literature and let these people know that help was available in A.A. if they wanted it."

The problem: "In our district [15, in south-central North Carolina]," Cynthia says, "I couldn't figure out what to do. We had no committees on P.I. [Public Information] or C.P.C. [Cooperation With the Professional Community], so for a while I did nothing. Then last fall at the North Carolina General Assembly I met Valerie O'N., the staff member assigned to the P.I. desk at the General Service Office. I told her I wanted to start a P.I./C.P.C. committee but didn't know how to and, besides, was very nervous at the very thought. She chased away my doubts, gave me confidence and courage, sent a P.I. Workbook and other helpful materials, and suddenly all systems were GO.

"I went to a district meeting and asked for help from anyone at any level of service that could contribute—to join me in forming a committee. Word got around. A.A.s volunteered, first one, then another, and suddenly we'd put together a committee. It was off to a slow start; in fact we are still laying the groundwork by studying the Traditions. But it functioned amazingly well from the get-go, especially when you consider that we didn't even

have our first meeting, at my home, until this past August! There's a baker's dozen of us, including my terrific co-founder Evans B., and we're growing. Initially we asked the district for \$57 in funds and they gave us \$100. So we were able to purchase a literature rack and material from G.S.O., including the video 'Bill Discusses the Twelve Traditions,' public service announcements for radio and TV, assorted pamphlets and more."

Thanks to the efforts of the fledgling committee, Cynthia reports, "literature has been dropped off at libraries, courthouses, prisons, chambers of commerce, museums and schools throughout the district—and we have been gratified to find that the information is being picked up. Also, meeting schedules are in the newspapers now, and we had a booth at the county fair. None of this was too complicated to work out. For instance, when we were asked to participate in a seminar on alcoholism and chemical dependency at a nearby university, we just set up a card table, loaded it with literature and a couple of friendly faces and went to work. It goes to show that you don't have to be an expert to start a committee; you just need legwork, love and some help from your more experienced A.A. friends."

For Cynthia, service work "has been so much fun, and it has enriched every area of my life. My 16-year-old son, Adam, and his friends have formed a rock group, for instance, and they often meet at our house. Occasionally one or another will have a family problem with alcohol, and I'll sit with them and share the A.A. message and maybe some literature. Like our committee work and Twelfth Stepping as a whole, it just nails my sobriety for that day."

Treatment Facilities

Postcard From the 'Outside' Bridge the Gap

Bridge the Gap volunteers know from their own experience in recovery that A.A. works, but all too frequently they don't know if newcomers they've tried to help make the crucial transition from treatment to A.A. on the outside have managed to stay sober. Which is why a recent letter from Randy M., of St. Louis, Missouri, is especially heartwarming.

"It all started," writes Randy, "while I was in a treatment center operated by the Department of Corrections in Western Missouri. After one of our A.A. meetings during my last two weeks there, we were informed that we

could call a member of the Bridge the Gap committee in our hometown areas, and they would find someone to help us get to our first three meetings outside. Well, great, but at the time I didn't think I'd need any help after getting out. Just the same, I wrote down the phone number for the representative in my Eastern Missouri area.

"Lucky for me that I did have that phone number. Once out, I really needed to go to meetings for two reasons: First, going was a stipulation of my probation; and, second, if I didn't go, I knew I'd wind up where I started from . . . drinking and drugging . . . and right back in prison. Thank God for Bridge the Gap! I called my rep, who immediately put me in touch with an A.A. here in St. Louis. He helped me when I couldn't help myself—gave me a ride to a meeting, introduced me to the people there, and helped me overcome my fears."

Nearly two years have passed since that first meeting, and Randy says he is not only sober but very involved in the Twelfth-Step work of the Eastern Missouri BTG Committee "so that I can give back some of what I've been given. I'm free. I'm happy. And grateful to the Bridge the Gap program because it gave me my life in A.A."

Correctional Facilities

A.A. Service Makes A Big Difference

"We would like to commend the efforts of the local volunteers who help out at this prison group," writes Ken W. from Cresson, Pa. "Hopefully other facilities are as lucky as we are."

Ken, who serves as his Mountain Top Group's general service representative, explains the meeting format: "We have our closed discussion meeting every Wednesday evening. On Tuesday nights, we have a Step meeting in which we use the Twelve and Twelve, reading one Step a week. Going around, each person reads a section from the chapter, then we have open discussion. Our outside sponsor Harry G. chairs the meetings, and that works well for us. We get a lot out of the meetings."

The "other stuff, holding office and so forth," Ken reports, "is taken care of" as the A.A. Guidelines on Correctional Facilities [available from G.S.O.] suggest," he says. "We have local A.A.s who make all this possible, as the prison will not let us run a meeting on our own. The volunteers rotate coming out each week, so it

does not burden any one person too much. This works well for all concerned; No guards are needed to supervise the group—the outside volunteers and inmates handle all [A.A.] affairs. We like it that way. There is also a local group that helps us keep literature on hand. Thank you all in A.A. for being there! We appreciate it greatly!"

'Inside' and 'Out' We A.A.s May Be More Alike than Not

Some of the A.A.s on hand were already taking meetings into correctional facilities; others wanted to but were either shy or unsure of what to expect. All who came to the Corrections Sharing Session last October in Libertyville, Illinois, were attracted by the purpose of the workshop: "to inform, brainstorm, support and encourage." They were not disappointed.

The evening of sharing was sponsored by the Northern Illinois Area Corrections Committee. Reports immediate past chairman Steve S.: "We kicked off with short talks from the five-member panel, which included the program manager of the Lake County Sheriff Adult Correctional Division and four A.A.s seasoned in Corrections service.

Then came a question and answer period and a rush of sharing. Everyone who had ever taken a meeting into a facility had a moment of *dèjà vu* when attendee Brian S. commented, "There's a lot of similarities between the inmates and me. I'm reminded to look for the similarities and not the differences. When we drink, what we do and the consequences of what we do may be different. The feelings though are the same."

Randy K. told the assembled A.A.s that "after spending considerable time in jail myself, I can relate to the feelings of complete despair and tremendous fear of any kind of future. I can think of no better place to give it away so I can keep it." Beth U. noted that she is "blown away by the inmates' hunger to hear about sobriety and recovery. The level of sharing and honesty in the jail meetings is deep." And Tim F. spoke for many A.A. volunteers when he said, "During the jail meetings I am always reminded of the First Step, about the extent of our powerlessness over alcohol . . . and the tragic consequences of the unmanageability of our lives. At the end of the meeting, as I am buzzed through the various jail doors to the outside air, I always feel gratitude to my Higher Power and to the Fellowship of A.A. for the freedom I enjoy today."

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.

October

- 3-6—Amarillo, Texas. 50th Annual Top of Texas Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 412, Amarillo, TX 79105
- 3-6—Daytona Beach, Florida. Second Annual Daytona Fall Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 4911, South Daytona, FL 32121
- 3-6—Seattle, Washington. Sixth Annual National/Int'l. Native American Indian Conv. Write: Ch., Box 84824, Seattle, WA 98124
- 4-5—Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Vancouver Roundup. Write: Ch., 656 W. Keith Rd., N. Vancouver, BC V7M 1M6
- 4-6—Chase, British Columbia, Canada. Fourth Annual Roundup. Write: Ch., RR #1, Site 4, Comp. 7, Sorrento, BC V0E 2W0
- 4-6—Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada. Kelowna Roundup "Language of the Heart." Write: Ch., 2012, Stn. Rutland, Kelowna, BC V1X 4K5
- 4-6—Balibago, Angeles City, Philippines. First Fall Roundup 96-Philippines. Write: Ch., 9-29 Marcellus St., Diamond Subdiv., Balibago, Angeles City, 2009, Philippines
- 4-6—Crescent City, California. 10th Annual "Sobriety by the Sea" Rally. Write: Ch., Box 871, Crescent City, CA 95531
- 4-6—Wilmington, Delaware. Northeast Regional Conv. Write: Ch., Box 403, Middletown, DE 19709-0403
- 4-6—Pocatello, Idaho. Idaho Area 18 Fall Assembly. Write: Ch., Box 393, Pocatello, ID 83204
- 4-6—South Bend, Indiana. 13th Annual Midwest Woman to Woman Seminar. Write: Ch., Box 1631, Mishawaka, IN 46546-1631
- 4-6—Shanty Creek, Bellaire, Michigan. Eighth Annual Fall Conf. Write: Ch., 302 So. Waverly, Lansing, MI 48917
- 4-6—Troy, Michigan. Ninth Annual Tri-County Conf. Write: Ch., Box 7107, Sterling Heights, MI 48311-7107
- 4-6—Lincoln, Nebraska. Big Red Roundup VII. Write: Ch., 2840 S. 70th St., Ste. 127, Lincoln, NE 68506
- 4-6—Rochester, New York. 16th Rochester Conv. Write: Ch., 10 Manhattan Square Dr., Ste. D, Rochester, NY 14607-3997
- 4-6—Spearfish, South Dakota. Area 63 South Dakota Fall Conf. Write: Ch., Box 192, Spearfish, SD 57783

- 4-6—Fife, Washington. Western Washington Area Assembly. Write: Ch., Box 1105, Puyallup, WA 98371
- 11-13—Orillia, Ontario, Canada. 31st Georgian Bay Districts Conv. Write: Ch., 14 Simmons Cres., Barrie, ON L4N 3E5
- 11-13—Sudbury, Ontario, Canada. Northeastern Area Conf. Write: Ch., Box 311, Station B, Sudbury, ON P3E 4P2
- 11-13—Redding, California. NCCAA 49th Annual Fall Conf. Write: Ch., Box 1484, Rohnert Park, CA 94927-1484
- 11-13—Colorado Springs, Colorado. CCY-PAA '96. Write: Ch., Box 51166, Colorado Springs, CO 80949-1166
- 11-13—French Lick, Indiana. Back to Basics 1996 Roundup. Write: Ch., 321 Timberleaf Dr., Beavercreek, OH 45430
- 11-13—Davenport, Iowa. Area 24 1996 Fall Conf. Write: Ch., Box 133, Davenport, IA 52805-0133
- 11-13—Chanute, Kansas. Fifth Annual Southeast Kansas Conf. Write: Secy., 710 W. Euclid, Pittsburg, KS 66762
- 11-13—Lafayette, Louisiana. 13th Annual Cajun Country Conf. Write: Ch., Box 3160, Lafayette, LA 70502
- 17-20—Dalton, Georgia. Georgia State Pre-paid Conv. Write: Ch., Rt. 6, Box 2343, Ellijay, GA 30540
- 18-20—Manuel Antonio, Costa Rica. Second Annual Halloween Conv. Write: Ch., Apdo. #588, Alajuela, Costa Rica
- 18-20—Geneva, Switzerland. Big Book Study Seminar. Write: Ch., The Mont Blanc Bridge Group, Rue du Vieux Billard 21, CH-1205 Geneva, Switzerland
- 18-20—Puerto Penasco, Mexico. Rocky Point Roundup. Write: Ch., RPR, Box 5242, Scottsdale, AZ 85261
- 18-20—Fallon, Nevada. Lahontan Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 606, Fallon, NV 89407
- 18-20—Buffalo, New York. 55th Buffalo Fall Conv. Write: Ch., Box 127, Niagara Square Sta., Buffalo, NY 14202

Closed Meeting Topics From the Grapevine

For more detailed suggestions, see the pages noted.

November (page 51): A.A. members and the Higher Power.

- 24-27—Memphis, Tennessee. 22nd Annual Memphis Bluff City Fellowship. Write: Ch., Box 24831, Memphis, TN 38124
- 25-27—Duncan, British Columbia, Canada. Dist. 8 Cowichan Valley Rally. Write: Ch., Box 955, Duncan, BC V9L 2M2
- 25-27—St. Cloud, Minnesota. St. Cloud Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 125, St. Cloud, MN 56302
- 25-27—Bellingham, Washington. Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 28231, Bellingham, WA 98228
- 25-27—St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands. 10th Caribbean Conv. Write: Ch., Box 3435, St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands 0803
- 25-27—Flint, Michigan. 44th State Conf. Write: Ch., Box 42, Flint, MI 48501-0042
- 25-27—Greensburg, Pennsylvania. 46th Laurel Highlands Conf. Write: Ch., 60 Greenbrier, Pittsburgh, PA 15220
- 25-27—Staunton, Virginia. Virginia Area Committee Fall Assembly. Write: Ch., 606 Shawnee Trail, Winchester, VA 22602

November

- 1-3—Absecon, New Jersey. Eighth Annual Woman to Woman NE Regional Conf. Write: Ch., Box 3401, Cherry Hill, NJ 8034
- 1-3—Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. 52nd Annual Conf. Write: Ch., 505-365 Hargrave St., Winnipeg, MB R3B 2K3

Planning a Future Event?

Please send your information on December, January or February events, two days or more, in time to reach G.S.O. by October 10, the calendar deadline for the Holiday issue of Box 4-5-9.

For your convenience and ours — please type or print the information to be listed on the Bulletin Board page, and mail to us:

Date of event: from _____ to _____, 19 _____

Name of event: _____

Place (city, state or prov.): _____

For information, write: (exact mailing address) _____

Contact phone # (for office use only): _____

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

- 1-3—*Seoul, Korea*. Fifth International Conv. Write: Ch., Korea Nationals Intergroup, C.P.O. Box 1415, Seoul 100-614, Korea
- 1-3—*Catskill, New York*. 46th HMB Conv. Write: Ch., Box 1303, Kingston, NY 12401-1303
- 8-10—*Kelowna, British Columbia*. BC Yukon Area Conv. Write: Ch., 1171 Harvey Ave., Kelowna, BC V1Y 6E8
- 8-10—*London, Ontario, Canada*. Western Ontario Conv. Write: Ch., RR #1, 22429 Troops Road, Mount Brydges, ON N0L 1W0
- 8-10—*Goodyear, Arizona*. Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 446, Litchfield, AZ 85340-0446
- 8-10—*Durango, Colorado*. 4 Corners First Annual Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 717, Mancos, CO 81328
- 8-10—*Leominster, Massachusetts*. 33rd Annual State Conv. Write: Rgstr., Box 344, Westminster, MA 01473-0344
- 8-10—*Minneapolis, Minnesota*. 11th Annual Intergroup/Central Office Seminar. Write: Ch., 6300 Walker, Room 215, St. Louis Park, MN 55416
- 8-10—*Okoboji, Iowa*. Northwest Iowa Pre-Winter Rally. Write: Ch., Box 914, Spencer, IA 51301

- 9-10—*Riga, Latvia*. Conf. "Nobody is too Young." Write: Ch., Box 459, Riga, LV-1050 Latvia
- 15-17—*Salem, Oregon*. Oregon Area Quarterly Assembly. Write: Ch., Box 325, Monmouth, OR 97361
- 16-17—*Jamestown, North Dakota*. Buffalo City Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 102, Jamestown, ND 58402
- 22-24—*Tampa, Florida*. The Big Book Comes Alive. Write: Ch., Box 86703, St. Petersburg, FL 33738
- 22-24—*The Abbey in Fontana, Wisconsin*. Seventh Annual McHenry's Soberfest. Write: Ch., Box 213, Ringwood, IL 60072
- 28-December 1—*Omaha, Nebraska*. Great Plains Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 34222, Omaha, NE 68134
- 28-December 1—*Las Vegas, Nevada*. 30th Las Vegas Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 43177, Las Vegas, NV 89116
- 29-December 1—*Paget, Bermuda*. 1996 Bermuda Conv. Write: Ch., Box 178, Warwick, WK BX Bermuda
- 29-December 1—*Clearwater Beach, Florida*. Suncoast Conv. Write: Ch., Box 86703, St. Petersburg, FL 33738

- 29-December 1—*Diamondhead, Mississippi*. Gratitude Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 7851, Gulfport, MS 39507
- 29-December 1—*San Antonio, Texas*. "Pockets of Enthusiasm in S.A." Write: Ch., Box 17363, San Antonio, TX 78217

December

- 6-8—*Asheville, North Carolina*. Southeast Regional Forum. Write: Forum Coordinator, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163
- 27-29—*Joplin, Missouri*. Traditional Winter Holiday XVI. Write: Ch., Box 626, Monett, MO 6578

January

- 3-5—*South Padre Island, Texas*. Lower Rio Grande Valley Jamboree. Write: Ch., Box 5453, Brownsville, TX 78520
- 30-February 2—*Harvey, Illinois*. "We Are not Saints" Conv. Write: Ch., 15651 S. 94th Ave., Suite 382, Orland Park, IL 60462