

MARGENSER

Fostering Unity and Carrying the A.A. Message in Area 29 MARYLAND GENERAL SERVICE

View From the Bottom of the Triangle

Ron M., Area 29 Delegate

During the week of April 27, 2014, with honor and great pleasure, I represented Area 29 at the Sixty Fourth (64th) General Service Conference in Rye, New York. I thank all of you for this opportunity. The theme of the Conference was "Communicating our Legacies – Vital in a Changing World."

This opportunity and experience is one that will remain with me forever. The challenge to discuss and mold the future of Alcoholics Anonymous with the other 132 attendees was certainly life changing. Copies of the preliminary proceedings and results are available for those who wish to review them. A more comprehensive Conference Report will be available for distribution soon. A brief overview and some of the more salient and pertinent information will be presented here.

I was assigned to the "Agenda" Committee. Our challenge was to determine the theme and discussion topics for next year's General Service Conference. The theme of the 2015 General Service Conference will be "Celebrating 80 Years of Recovery, Unity and Service – The Foundation of Our Future." The presentations and discussion topics will focus on: "Our Common Welfare through Gratitude in Action," "Diversity in AA – Our Heritage of Inclusion," "Inventory – Looking Back to Move Ahead," "Safeguarding our Traditions through the Evolution of Technology," and "Safety and Respect, Practicing the Principles Begins in our Home Group."

All of the committees met separately to focus on their specific assigned topics, then the entire Conference joined together to discuss, vote on and decide how to proceed with the

proposed items. Some of these were decided upon quickly, while others suffered long and arduous discussion. Thanks to the effort and work of Don B., our Area 29 Secretary, we have a consolidated list of the disposition of all of the items brought to the floor at the Conference. These items fall into one of these final specific categories:

**Advisory Actions of the 64th General Service Conference

**Additional Committee Considerations

**Recommendations that did not result in Advisory Actions

**Floor Actions that did not result in Advisory Actions

All of the items discussed at the General Service Conference are the result of submission by members of AA. It is important to note that they can be submitted more than once for consideration. Currently, the Regional Panels in Area 29 are meeting to review their previous submissions and discussions for possible modification and/or resubmission.

Our society (both general and in AA) is in a state of constant flux. It is imperative that we stay abreast with our changing world so that Alcoholics Anonymous remains alive and well by way of constant vigilance and participation at the annual General Service Conference.

Each year at the Conference, all of the new Delegates are given the opportunity to make a two minute presentation about their Area. The following was my offering:

"Due to the ever continuing population creep it was recently
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MARGENSER STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The Area 29 MARGENSER newsletter is published to foster unity and facilitate communication among AA members, groups, districts, and intergroups within the Maryland General Service Area. The MARGENSER aims to be instrumental in carrying the AA message. This quarterly newsletter seeks to publish AA-related material, including personal stories of experience, strength, and hope. Material will be reviewed by the MARGENSER committee chairperson or by a member of the committee. Nothing published in the MARGENSER should be thought of as a statement of Area 29 or AA policy. Finally, publication shall not constitute endorsement by the newsletter itself, Area 29, intergroups, districts, local groups, or AA as a whole.

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necessary to re-district the Area from 47 to 34 districts. This required the combining of several districts. Area 29 serves in excess of 1000 groups by way of a well structured corporation known as "Maryland General Service Inc" which meets each year with five assemblies and four committee meetings. There are 19 separate committees serving the various needs and responsibilities required to carry our vital message. Each year Area 29 hosts two conventions offering the opportunity to hear various speakers and participate in AA workshops. Area 29 has 10 intergroups

which pursue their long-standing activities which interface comfortably with Maryland General Service to provide a unified service structure. Maryland General Service supports a Mini Conference which is designed to help prepare the delegate for the General Service Conference. Area 29 is divided into six panels with each assigned two agenda topics. These panels meet independently with Area 29 members to discuss their agenda topics. After completing their discussions a few weeks prior to the General Service Conference, the Area 29 Mini Conference convenes. The panels come together with the dele-

gate to report on decisions made on the assigned topics. During this reporting period other members of the Area are provided an opportunity to participate and question the decisions of the reporting panel. This process allows the delegate to gain an overall and broad view of the opinions of Area 29, providing the delegate with the group conscience of the Area and arriving at the General Service Conference well prepared. The delegate then provides a "Report Back" within a few weeks which allows the Area members to be an integral part of the General Service Conference. ▲

The Never Ending Story

Bill H., Area 29 Alternate Delegate

"The Never Ending Story" was the name of a movie that my two daughters loved when they were children. The plot is inconsequential, but the title hits the point of this article right on the head.

The Never Ending Story is the Regional Panel process. We start at the beginning of the calendar year, convening 6 regional panels around Area 29 to prepare our Delegate for the General Service Conference in New York. The 6 regional panels were responsible for 12 agenda items that were on the GSC Agenda. We met in April at the Mini Conference and informed our Delegate of the results of each panel. These results represent the combined effort of AAs around Area 29 to express the group conscience of this Area.

The Delegate went to the GSC the last weekend in April, then reported back to the Area in mid-May the action and non-action items of the Conference. The process is done and everyone is happy. Whoop Hoo!

No, No, No, No, NO. The fun has just begun. The individual regional panels

will meet again, hopefully in late July and early August, to share the report back to the panel and compare the actions and non-actions with the suggestions from that particular panel.

If there are any questions concerning the Agenda Items assigned to that regional panel (and any questions at all, for that matter, dealing with AA), these questions are written down, reviewed and returned back to the Delegate or Alternate Delegate for action or follow up.

The regional panels will also discuss any new Agenda Items or problems. Some of these questions may be able to be answered on the Area level or by a phone call to the New York General Service Office. If the problem or question is unanswered, we will prepare the item to be placed on the Agenda of next year's General Service Conference.

In September or no later than early October, the regional panels should meet again to formulate all new questions, to create possible new Agenda Items and to assure that all lingering questions from the last GSC are satisfied. All new

Agenda Items must be completed by December to meet the January cut-off date.

The regional panels should also try to disseminate their efforts to all DCMs and GSRs so that the entire fellowship is up to date.

In mid-December, the Alternate Delegate will take the 12 Agenda Topics and shuffle them around so that each regional panel will have two new topics for discussion and dissection.

Remember, regional panel members, you have all of Area 29 at your disposal for help. This includes your Delegate, Alternate Delegate, Area 29 Officers, Past Delegates, Mentors, current Area Chairpersons and a bevy of people in the New York General Service Office. Try to use the resources you have within our Area first, then if necessary have your Regional Panel Leader call New York for the tougher questions.

Then, the new calendar year is again upon us and the process continues. So this process is truly "A Never Ending Story." ▲

THE MARGENSER IS YOUR NEWSLETTER

The Margenser Committee welcomes submissions. We are here to serve you. Submissions should be no more than 750 words and about service or recovery. Please include your first name, last initial and home group. Email all correspondence to Margenser@marylandAA.org or mail to Maryland General Services, PO Box 13457, Baltimore, MD 21203. The submission deadline for the next issue is Oct. 20, 2014.

REACHING OUT TO THE "DARK DISTRICTS"

Many of our neighbors do not actively participate in Area 29, nor are their voices heard within AA as a whole. We encourage you to reach out to those districts without active GSRs or DCMs, sharing your experience of service beyond the home group and carrying the message one-on-one. Area 29 welcomes your ideas on how we can best do this and offers our support.

“It Works – It Really Does”

Is This the Right Theme For Our 30th Fall Convention?

Victor K., 2014 Fall Convention Chair

The 2014 Area 29 Fall Convention will be held Friday, October 31st through Sunday, November 2, 2014 in Hunt Valley, MD. We have a packed schedule and the committee is really excited about what is in store for you.

We have six speakers from five different states; an Old Timers Panel; six very well planned workshops, including an All Timers Panel; delicious meals; tons of new activities; two dances; and highlighting the weekend will be a great Banquet on Saturday night.

“It Works — It Really Does” is the theme for our 30th Annual Area 29 Fall Convention, taken from page 88 of our Big Book “Alcoholics Anonymous.” It’s a great theme...maybe.

At the March Area Assembly in

Carroll County, the Area took a bold step and voted, by 2/3 majority, to move the convention to The Hunt Valley Inn in Hunt Valley, Maryland. In addition to the change in venue come some other changes.

Hmmm...maybe “Change” should have been the theme? These changes include: changes in the layout, change from a 4 day to a 3 day event, changed meals, changes in travel plans, changes in the taste of the coffee (not always a bad thing) and other positive changes we had never thought about.

Last year the Fall Convention had 472 attendees. **This year we need more.** The Area (that’s you) voted to move the convention and now we need to step up and support our decision. Wait... “I Am Responsible”...

that might be a better theme.

Please, register for the convention; register for the meals, especially the banquet; register for a room at the hotel; share a room; and purchase a sponsorship registration. There are a number of different ways to support the convention this year. Grab a flier, use the QR code, or just go online at www.mgsconventions.org and please register today.

We need to walk the talk and be responsible for our own convention. This is going to be a great time. The committee is hard at work doing their part, the hotel is working to do their part, God will do His part. If you do your part we will no doubt find that “It works-It really does.” Now that sounds like a strong theme! ▲

Dealing With Fundamentalism – on Either End of the Spectrum

Bob C., Antiques Group, New Market, MD

In an oft-quoted statement, Bill W. warned that A.A.’s destruction, should it occur, will originate from within. In his *Grapevine* essay on A.A. leadership, Bill wrote, “God gave us a considerable capacity for foresight, and he evidently expects us to use it.” Together, these two bits of wisdom suggest that we possess the capacity to foresee the seeds of our destruction, making preventative action possible. Put simply, healthy self-inventory can prevent future heartache.

As A.A. nears its first centennial, we continue hammering out many questions with implications for our future. One such question concerns not so much how we treat each other when we disagree about A.A.’s nature, but rather: *How far will we take our sense of ownership of A.A. when we find ourselves in disagreement with each other?* This begs the topic of disunity within A.A. – informal “parties” with which some individual members identify.

In recent years, various “movements”

have sprung up *within* A.A. On one hand, some members seek to define others by historical criteria: Several years ago in another part of the country, I was asked whether I am “Akron A.A.” or “New York A.A.” More recently, and locally, I’ve heard members say that the “real” A.A. follows the religious leanings of certain early members (who would have been aghast at the suggestion) and that if I don’t agree, then I’m not fully legitimate. On the other hand, I recently attended one meeting in Area 29 where a member was rudely shouted down, and other meetings where members’ shares were directly “walked” upon, because they used the words “God” or “prayer” – words “forbidden” by group conscience.

We might expect occasional behavior like this, at least behind closed doors. A.A. will always have outliers. All populations do – as A.A.s, we had a head start in the “outlier” department. But a serious danger to our survival arises when we

banter our fundamentalism before the general public, which is all too easy in the public forum of the World Wide Web. Nowadays, anyone can register a website and post personal opinions about what A.A. is, isn’t, should be, or shouldn’t be, for the entire world to see, opening A.A. up to public controversy. This currently happens on both ends of the “fundamentalism spectrum.” With a couple of keyword searches, one can locate numerous websites stridently arguing for “what is wrong with A.A.,” “why what A.A. ‘used to be’ was better than what it is today,” or “why what A.A. is now is so much worse than what it ‘used to be.’”

The danger has less to do with the content (which, as a spectator, I find oddly interesting) as with the public display, which can drive off newcomers, disenchant middle timers, and dishearten old timers. In recent years, a more disconcerting attitude has arisen on publicly

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(*Dealing with Fundamentalism...*) continued from page 3... available websites, one of, "I'm right, you're wrong, and if you don't like it, you should get out." This amounts to claiming the A.A. name for our own agendas, with obvious implications for A.A.'s survival.

But we have a choice. This problem won't be fixed in a top-down, "institutional" manner. The Web is here to stay, and individual members will behave as they will. But each of us owns our own lives. Only a multitude of principles-based members speaking in unison will make those uncomfortable who would appropriate the A.A. name for personal agendas. By crying "foul" regarding fundamentalism on either end of the spectrum, we can and must stem the influx of polarizing issues into these rooms.

A.A.'s overall truth is like a glass table top: Smash it with a hammer, take each sliver as a separate member, and the truth of the real table top is shared by all the

pieces. No single piece embodies the whole truth, but each conveys some facet of it. An observer can appreciate the global truth only by beholding the entire collection of fragments through a mystical spiritual lens that lets all the pieces tell their stories in simultaneous coherence. In my experience, that "simultaneous coherence" remains a mystery. Within the limited scope of human awareness, reassembling all those pieces in an articulable way, giving each its perfect weight, is impossible. The best we can do is to approximate that truth by talking it to death as we strive toward an informed group conscience, and then voting – each with our own imperfect truths, contributing equal weight toward the group decision, in which all faith must reside.

Concerning A.A.'s future, let us remember this most underrated aspect of open-mindedness: An unconditionally loving acceptance of our brothers'

and sisters' beliefs, thoughts, words, and actions is required to keep A.A.'s doors open wide enough for all to enter. While representing ourselves as A.A. members, we must forget questions of the afterlife and the non-existence of the same. Our primary purpose is to help drunks out of the hell of alcoholism so they can consider such "outside issues" on their own time – if they are so inclined. As A.A.s, we must recognize that such outside issues represent a slippery slope toward claiming A.A. for our own ends. Let us stay off that slope entirely, practicing both in and outside of the rooms what Bill W. calls "mutual respect and love."

[Suggested discussion topics: (a) Consider the Long Forms of Traditions Six and Ten, focusing on why "the A.A. name" may be our most valuable asset. (b) In the Long Form of Tradition Six, what is the difference between "cooperation," "affiliation," and "endorsement"?) ▲

On the Road With the Workshop Committee...

Linda J., Workshop Committee Chair

The Workshop Committee has been very busy traveling the Area this year!!! We have conducted workshops in 12 Districts on local, group, and service topics such as "What Is a GSR," "Service Beyond the Home Group," "History of AA," "Spirituality," "Anonymity and Sponsorship," and "Safety in AA," as well as workshops about the General Service and Grapevine offices.

We have been attending District meetings all over the Area to offer assistance on potential workshop topics and speakers and to provide literature as

appropriate. We are available to attend your District, Group, or Committee meeting to assist as well.

Keep an eye out for some fantastic workshops being planned for the Fall, including job fairs coordinated with several Committees of Maryland General Service (MGS) and local District committees and/or intergroups—including Treatment, Public Information, Website, Finance, and Archives—all in an effort to further educate our service workers to better carry the message of Alcoholics Anonymous.

The Workshop Committee stands ready to assist any group, District, or MGS Committee in setting up and running AA-related workshops. The committee can provide all or some of the speakers necessary to coordinate a successful AA workshop. The response for workshops has been tremendous, and there is always a need for others to share their experience, strength, and hope. We'd love to have folks join our committee – please contact Linda J. at workshop@marylandaa.org. ▲

MARYLAND GENERAL SERVICE AREA 29 2014 CALENDAR

Area 29 Assembly; Hosted by District 11 District 13's Echo Park Weekend www.aawv13.com to register	August 16, 2014 August 22-24, 2014	Cecil County, MD Cabins, WV
District 40 Workshop District 9 Picnic, Christmas Tree Park Friends of Bill W. Run/Walk hosted by Baltimore Intergroup	August 23, 2014 August 23, 2014 September 27, 2014	Frederick, MD Manchester, MD Druid Hill Park Baltimore, MD
Area 29 Fall Convention www.mgsconventions.org to register	Oct. 31-Nov. 2, 2014	Hunt Valley, MD

Are We Losing Our History?

Morgan J., Archivist

I have had several friends in recent years pass on to the Big Meeting in the Sky, and they left us without telling their story or what A.A. was like when they came in and what has changed over the years.

I recently picked up two CDs that had early A.A. history, and I have been fascinated to hear what it was like. One of these talks was from Jim B., recorded in 1957. In his talk he mentioned that there were only eight people in A.A. with more than six months of sobriety when the Big Book was published in April of 1939.

"We are trying to build up extensive

records which will be of value to a future historian....

"It is highly important that the factual material be placed in our files in such a way that there can be no substantial distortion....

"We want to keep enlarging on this idea for the sake of the full length history to come...."

— Bill W., 1957

The Archives Committee and Archivist are looking for a few good people in the Districts to start collecting our history. There are two avenues that anyone can take. The first is to assemble

your home group's history. If your group is new, all the better; start writing it down and keep it going. The other is to conduct long-timer interviews, which is a little harder to do than the first avenue but a lot more fascinating.

If you are even a little bit interested, please contact our Archives Committee Chair, Francis S., or myself, Archivist. We are looking forward to hearing from you soon.

"Whenever a society or civilization perishes there is always one condition present; they forgot where they came from."

— Carl Sandburg ▲

Recovery, Unity, and Service – A Framework for Future Change

Arnold R.

The "Big Book" *Alcoholics Anonymous* instructs the alcoholic that "PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE shows that nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics." It further instructs that "...if an alcoholic failed to perfect and enlarge his spiritual life through work and self-sacrifice for others, he could not survive the certain trials and low spots ahead."

Those of us who sponsor other members and/or participate in service to others at the home group, inter-group, District, or Area levels have likely experienced this type of giving as an integral part of our recovery program. These passages from the Big Book are not a theory. In other words, service is the secret. It is not only the secret for our own recovery but also for continuing our spiritual growth and improving our ability to face the bumps in the road when they come.

For quite a number of years now, I have been involved in the service structure of our wonderful Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous. I have had the unique opportunity of traveling around Area 29, meeting and sharing with many dedicated and service-minded AA members, and so often I have heard a particular phrase: "The

Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous must change to keep up with modern times and the problems of our society today."

When I entered the doors of Alcoholics Anonymous 32 years ago, I was a very sick, confused, negative, depressed, and lonely individual who needed and wanted help. Many hands reached out to me and made me feel wanted and comfortable in all the meetings I attended. For the first time in my life, I felt part of something. In a short amount of time, I was blessed with loads of friends, all with the same problem I had, coupled with a strong desire to do something about that problem. These recovering alcoholics were telling me how they got sober and how they stayed sober one day at a time, and I listened.

These same recovering alcoholics handed me two books: The Big Book and Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. The most important lesson I learned from these resources was that in order for me to enjoy a happy, peaceful, sober existence, I had to change – I had to change my attitudes, my way of thinking, and my habits. As a matter of fact, I had to change everything about me. This I attempted to do very slowly through the use and prac-

tice of the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous and the help of my sponsor and other recovering alcoholics. I learned that in order to like other people, I had to like myself; in order to receive all the benefits of the AA Fellowship, I had to give of myself. The Twelve Steps of the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous became the foundation for the new me.

In Step Twelve, on pages 124-125 of The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, we find this passage: "Service, gladly rendered, obligations squarely met, troubles well accepted or solved with God's help, the knowledge that at home or in the world outside we are partners in a common effort, the well-understood fact that in God's sight all human beings are important, the proof that love freely given surely brings a full return, the certainty that we are no longer isolated and alone in self-constructed prisons, the surety that we need no longer be square pegs in round holes but can fit and belong in God's scheme of things – these are the permanent and legitimate satisfactions of right living for which no amount of pomp and circumstance, no heap of material possessions, could possibly be substitutes. True ambition is not what

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(Recovery, Unity and Service...) continued from page 5...

we thought it was. True ambition is the deep desire to live usefully and walk humbly under the grace of God."

All this restructuring of myself was not done overnight. However, to my amazement, after several hundred 24 hours I was able to notice changes in me, and I liked the changes. What's even more miraculous is that the changing process for the better is still going on, and I pray to God it never ceases. All this I owe to a "Society of nameless drunks."

About this "Society of nameless drunks": Should their Fellowship change to keep up with modern times? I don't see why it should. It is my belief that our common disease of alcoholism and the symptoms of our disease (the way we drank, the things we did under the influence of alcohol, and our character defects) are no different in 2014 than they were in 1935. I still see that the best medicine for arresting the disease of alcoholism is sharing with another alcoholic and thoroughly following the path of the first 100 members of the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous as outlined in the AA literature.

While the basic tenets of our life-saving and life-giving program don't require any changes, I do see problems or situations that have created some controversies among fellow AA members in groups, Districts, and Areas and that may be the reasons for their thinking that changes are necessary. The following is only a short list:

- Is our message of recovery from alcoholism becoming diluted? For instance, should nonalcoholics be allowed to attend closed AA meetings, or should they seek help for their "other addictions" elsewhere?
- Should we as AA groups be signing proof-of-attendance papers at AA meetings?
- Should we as a Fellowship attempt to be a cure-all for the problems of the world?
- Should we as AA groups be displaying and selling non-AA literature at group meetings, which may possibly be implying affiliation with outside enterprises?

- Are we as AA group members allowed to express our individual opinions at group business meetings on issues affecting our groups?
- Do we allow well-meaning AA members to be all-powerful in dictating how groups should be run?
- Do we protect our individual and group anonymity at the level of press, radio, TV, and films?

These are just some of the concerns I have heard expressed in the past few years, which could probably be increased ad infinitum. I am personally convinced that all the answers to these questions can be found in our Twelve Traditions.

Practicing the Twelve Traditions to the best of my ability has become just as vital a part of my personal recovery program as practicing the Twelve Steps. The Steps teach me how to think and act. The Traditions keep my personal program of recovery simple, well-balanced, and healthy. Whenever I do a Twelve Step inventory of my personal recovery program, I also do a Twelve Tradition inventory, including questions such as the following:

- Do I share any concerns I have for the group welfare with other members of my group?
- Do I participate in group business and group conscience meetings whenever I can?
- Am I a good leader, serving my group according to the group conscience, and not making decisions and rules based on what I personally feel is good for the group?
- Do I encourage my group not to make decisions and carry out actions that may adversely affect other groups or AA as a whole?
- Do I encourage my group to cooperate but not affiliate or imply affiliation with outside entities?
- Do I notify the proper people when I observe an anonymity break at the level of press, radio, TV, and films?
- Do I support my group by contributing money to help the

group pay its expenses, thus enabling it to be self-supporting?

- Do I encourage my group to contribute extra group funds to the service entities within AA?
- Do I guide the people I sponsor in carrying the AA message of recovery as described in the AA literature?
- Do I encourage my group to stick to our primary purpose of recovery from alcoholism?
- When speaking at meetings, do I limit my share to my personal story on alcoholism and my recovery from alcoholism?
- Do I practice placing principles before personalities in everything I do?

If I can honestly answer yes to these questions, I know that my personal program of recovery from alcoholism is on the right track today. If I have to debate any of these questions in my mind, I know there is something in my thinking that is causing turmoil within. Most of the time, the solution has been to examine the Twelve Traditions again to allow my complicated mind to nurse my personal program of recovery back to health again, thereby allowing me to be of maximum service to those I would help.

The Twelfth Step speaks of practicing these principles in all my affairs while our Twelfth Tradition reminds me to place principles before personalities. In the one case the principles referred to are those of recovery, as outlined in the Steps, and in the other case the principles of unity, as presented in the Traditions. Yet, in pondering both practicing the principles and placing principles before personalities, there emerges a further set of values and attitudes that are outlined in Concept XII in the very specific form referred to as the Six Warranties. They have proven to be spirit-inspired standards that are evident in most service activities in the Fellowship.

In completing my inventory, I can utilize the Warranties as a check list to determine how far I have come in

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changing to become of maximum service to others:

- W1. Have I/We been a source of perilous wealth or power?
- W2. Have I/We maintained sufficient operating funds and prudent reserve?
- W3. Have I/We attempted to place/use unqualified authority over others?
- W4. Did I/We make all important decisions through the process of discussion, vote, and substantial unanimity?
- W5. Have I/We been personally punitive or an incitement to public controversy?

W6. Have I/We performed any acts of government (usurped any authority) and have I/We remained democratic like the society I/We serve in thought/spirit and action?

By equally combining the Twelve Steps, the Twelve Traditions, and the Twelve Concepts for World Service, I no longer work a fragmented program of recovery. Today I live a happy, healthy, well-meaning life filled with gratitude toward the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous.

As symbolized by the triangle in the circle of Fellowship, the gifts bestowed on me as a recovering alcoholic, known as the Three Legacies—the

Steps of *recovery*, the Traditions of *unity*, and the Concepts of *service*—have proved to be invaluable.

In a November 1951 *Grapevine* article titled, “*Services Make AA Tick*,” Bill W. writes, “By our Twelve Steps we have recovered, by our Twelve Traditions we have unified, and through our Third Legacy – Service – we shall carry the AA message down through the corridors of time to come.”

This article appeared in the magazine one month before I was born. I will be forever grateful for the vision it has provided as a framework for change to our glorious Fellowship these last 60-plus years. ▲

AA in the Media

How Public Information Affects Our Fellowship

Cate B., Area 29 Public Information Chair

Long before I attended my first meeting, I had my eye on Alcoholics Anonymous. I knew I had a problem and that it was only a matter of time before I, too, was one of the scores who introduced myself as an alcoholic in meetings.

In those years, I read about AA wherever and whenever I could. Books about alcoholism? Check. Online forums? Check. News articles? Check. Chat rooms? Double check. I also talked to people I thought might know a thing or two—my therapist and friends who previously dabbled in meetings. These experiences helped to shape my opinions of AA long before I walked into that meeting. What was the verdict? AA was a cult. Stay away. Fortunately, I hurt just enough that I was willing to walk into a meeting at the right time.

It has been a few years since I walked into that first meeting. In the intervening years, I stopped listening to those outside messages and said that they simply don't matter. This year, as Public Information Chair, I've returned to looking at AA in the media—in films, documentaries, and the news. Those same messages about AA I heard ten years ago are still being perpetuated. As a member of AA, I know some of them are misinterpretations, but some of them expose parts of the Fellowship and are downright critical.

What's been going on?

There have been pieces that talk about how sponsors sometimes discourage their sponsees to take prescribed medicine and doctors do not want to refer patients to AA as a result. A series of pieces that look at how violent offenders have used meetings as ways to find new victims. An article that says AA doesn't do anything to support family members of alcoholics. A piece that says people did not feel they could be anonymous in AA and need other alternatives to maintain the safety offered by anonymity.

Those things scare me, today, with a lot of experience in AA. If I were new, hearing any of those things, I don't think I'd want to come to AA. If I were a professional, I don't know if I would recommend my patient, parishioner, student, come to AA.

I believe it is our responsibility to look at what's being said about our Fellowship and look long and hard at ourselves. Is there truth in it? Is there anything we can do? In our sponsorship? In our conversations with our own doctors and religious advisors? In our relationships with our families? Are there changes that need to be made to our literature? To our presentations?

In how we approach a newcomer just walking in the door?

We are not going to stop all the naysayers. They will always be there. I'm not advocating that we should all begin a quixotic mission to correct every single comment. But I do believe we have to take our heads out of the sand and not ignore what is being said. We have to educate ourselves to know how to grow, change, and respond when directly confronted by these issues.

As it turns out, this isn't too dissimilar from what happens at GSO. In a recent conversation with a GSO staff member, they talked about keeping an eye on news clippings, books, and documentaries that are produced. They respond when issues arise. In the past year, they disseminated a letter in direct response to a documentary. This was also demonstrated at NERAASA during the Trustee's report. There, he spoke about articles and books that talked about AA in a negative light. Why should we, as trusted servants, be any different?

Monitoring is not just for those at the bottom of the triangle. Let's use this opportunity to educate ourselves and inspire conversation. Let's be the best fellowship we can be. ▲

MARGENSER

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