

MARGENSER

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

Delegates Corner: New Beginnings

Nancy B, Panel 60 Delegate, Area 29

You will hear this from me often over the next two years...I consider it an honor and a privilege to have the opportunity to serve Area 29 as the Panel 60 Delegate. When I came into Alcoholics Anonymous, it was never my intention to stand for Area Delegate, let alone get elected. My service sponsor reminds me that it is my responsibility to make myself available for all opportunities this program has to offer, and leave the rest up to God. I am willing to do that today. So this is a "new beginning" for all of us...those being served and those in new service positions.

As I write it is February 9, my sober anniversary in Alcoholics Anonymous. My heart is filled with gratitude for my life today.

The seated delegates are stirring. Over the past few weeks e-mails have been sent by several Panel 59 and Panel 60 delegates asking questions of all the other delegates. The last question I received was more of a muse I think... "Do some of you get the feeling that we are experiencing the calm before the storm?" Yes, I

continued on page 3...

Exercise Your Voice and Vote in A.A. as a Whole...Regional Panels and the Mini-Conference

Linda J, Panel 60 Area 29 Alternate Delegate

In April of each year elected delegates from the ninety-three (93) areas of the US and Canada meet in New York to discuss the business of Alcoholics Anonymous at the General Service Conference. And this year will be no different.

The 60th General Service Conference will be held in Rye, NY from April 17 -24, 2010. These delegates come together to discuss and take actions that will guide all the Groups of Alcoholics Anonymous as a whole.

Here in Area 29, we will prepare our Delegate, Nancy B., to discuss and vote the conscience of the approximately 1,015 groups by holding a weekend Mini-Conference. Leading up to the weekend Mini-Conference, Regional Panel meetings are held in six different regions throughout the Area. Each Regional Panel encompasses from six to ten districts of the 47 districts in Area 29.

The purpose of the Regional Panels is to help prepare the Area

continued on page 6...

Table of Contents...

<i>Delegates Corner: New Beginnings</i> ...1	<i>Keeping the Main Thing-The Main Thing</i> ...3
<i>Exercise Your Voice and Vote in AA as a Whole...Regional Panels and the Mini-Conference</i> ...1	<i>What Are You New? Well Yeah..</i> ...4
<i>Edwin Throckmorton Thacher</i> ...1	<i>MGS Contribution Information</i> ...4
<i>Self-Support: It's Not Just About Money Any More (and It Never Was)</i> ...2	<i>Maryland General Service 2010 Mini-Conference</i> ...5
	<i>Maryland General Service 2010 Calendar</i> ...6

Edwin Throckmorton Thacher April 29, 1896 – March 21, 1966 Part #2

Ron M, BYOB, Easton, MD

Arriving in New York Ebby was able to stay sober and along with Rowland continued to pass along the Oxford Group message. The concept of sponsorship was being formulated in principle but did not acquire its current name until much later. Ebby remained forever grateful to Rowland and always remained mindful of his efforts to carry the message. The Oxford's Group four absolutes of honesty, purity, love and unselfishness became the watchwords and foundation of Ebby's long term efforts to stay sober. It is reported that he was part of a group known as "The Brotherhood" which consisted of twelve men who ran the mission and helped other indigents who passed through the

continued on page 2...

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.

Self-Support: It's Not Just About Money Any More (and It Never Was...)

Bob C., Area 29 Treasurer

From time to time I hear voices (no, not *those* voices!) telling me that we speak too much of money at Area Assemblies and Committee meetings – that people feel beaten up about contributions from groups to the Area.

Talking about money (contributions) is always dicey, because no matter what words are chosen, somebody's going to feel like their toes were stepped on. And understandably, our sensitivities are heightened by the recession (and the accompanying high unemployment and underemployment). The resulting belt-tightening means some groups have had trouble just making the rent and keeping the coffee strong enough to suit A.A. members' discerning palettes.

One reason money was discussed frequently during the past two years is that since early 2008, MGS has operated under budgets that have decreased total budgeted cash assets by about two-thirds. In so doing, MGS has been operating closer to the zero line, and to maintain services, a 20% increase in contributions from groups was targeted for 2009. Much of the "money talk" was directed keeping us solvent and toward working toward the group contributions goal. During 2009, however, contributions from groups increased only marginally, in line with historical trends (which was actually very good for a recession year), but the 20% goal was far from realized.

In real terms, then, the groups have spoken, exercising what Bill called "the power of the purse": They want MGS to continue to function with a cash flow of about \$40,000/year, or \$2.70 per A.A. member. So that is where the 2010 budget was set (and approved by the GSRs, DCMs and other Area Committee members at the Area Assembly this past December).

Knowing where we stand now is a good thing:

- MGS has a budget that's "balanced" (reasonably expected income nearly equals budgeted expenses), and

continued on page 3...

*(Edwin T. Thacher...)*continued from page 1...

doors. Part of the Calvary Mission program was to make a personal surrender to their God and change their way of life. Ebby's surrender date (sober anniversary) was given as November 1, 1934 about a month before he visited Bill. (Bill's anniversary is December 11, 1934). There is some who believe that Ebby's more important surrender was when he decided not to drink the beer in his basement just prior to being sentenced. According to his own recollection he heard of Bill's troubles as he met various people in and around Wall Street and that led to his efforts to contact him. He remembers that after the meeting Bill walked him to the subway and stated that "whatever it was that Ebby had found he wanted it."

During the next month Ebby continued his efforts at Calvary Mission and Bill was in the last days of his drinking. He eventually ended up back in Towns Hospital where he had his "Spiritual Experience" and all the while Ebby carried his message of sobriety to him on a regular basis. Apparently Ebby was a natural and was successful with instilling the necessary tools in Bill. It was from Ebby that Bill received the book entitled "The Varieties of Religious Experience". Although this book, written by William James (the father of American psychology), is credited for many things, it is reported that Bill gleaned three basic concepts or common denominators from all of the case histories a) calamity or defeat in some vital area of life, b) admission of defeat, and c) appeal to a higher power for help. After the hospital stay Bill and Ebby continued their efforts in working with other alcoholics in conjunction with the Calvary Mission and the Oxford Group. Their focus in working with alcoholics and having meetings at Clinton Street led to the Calvary Mission telling Bill and Ebby that only working with alcoholics was unacceptable. Bill and Lois left the Oxford Group in 1937. In Akron Dr. Bob eventually left the Oxford Group in 1939.

Ebby's journey in sobriety was not particularly smooth and without incident. In 1936 he returned to Albany and secured a job with the Ford motor company. In April 1937, on a trip to New York he fell off the wagon and stayed drunk for a long time. Of course this pattern is familiar to most alcoholics. For

extended periods of time between 1937 and 1954 Ebby was sober and drunk to the consternation and shock of the early members. It was well established that he suffered from fears and depression. Although this common for recovering alcoholics he apparently could not cope and slipped back and forth for many years. He believed that he needed to find the right woman and the right job in order to stay sober. For periods of time Ebby stayed with Bill and also Fitz M. in Anne Arundel County, Maryland. He also had a stay in New Jersey at Keswick Colony of Mercy for drunkards.

In June 1940 he ended up in Philadelphia, got drunk and was put in the Philadelphia General Hospital in the psych ward. After leaving there and the advent of WWII he worked for the U.S. Navy and stayed sober until he was released at the end of the war. A series of jobs ensued always ending with a slip. By 1945 Ebby was back in New York living with Bill and Lois and then working in the Grapevine circulation department. From the late 40's to 1953 Ebby bounced (crawled) around New York from place to place taking advantage of any and all friends, especially Bill. Ebby routinely was enabled by Bill who still considered him his sponsor.

In 1953 Bill went to Texas to visit Searcy W. who had been sober since 1946 and had started facility working with drunks. Bill was impressed and requested him to take Ebby in as a patient. After a lot of plotting and finally getting Ebby's agreement the message from Texas was to send the Yankee SOB down here. After a shaky start he was to stay sober for nearly seven years, well into 1961. During that period, with Bills help and funding he attended the 1955 and 1960 conventions receiving recognition for his past efforts. There was even a Thacher Fund established in New York to help Ebby with his bills. In spite of that he held a resentment against Bill and Dr. Bob feeling that he alone should receive credit for starting A.A. While in Texas he had a relationship with a lady named Chloe and a day after her death in September 1961 he was again on the bottle. For the next number of years he moved from one facility to another ending up on May 30, 1964 at McPikes Farm in Saratoga Springs run by Margaret and Mickey McPike. He stayed sober for the last few years and died in a hospital near there on March 21, 1966. ▲

(Self-Support...) continued from page 2...

- It has a prudent reserve equivalent to an average three-month MGS cash flow (quite limited according to A.A.'s financial literature but clearly in line with our "corporate poverty" principle).

Our present ability to make these clear statements may allow us to emphasize the non-monetary aspects of Self-Support this year more strongly than in the recent past. And what aspects would those be?

Specifically, we could emphasize fulfilling our Primary Purpose at the Area level, using our *human* and financial resources to take on projects such as the following (not an official list; rather, simply projects from past years that make good suggestions):

- Place more Big Books (English and Spanish) into our local libraries to be stolen by prospective A.A. members;
- Insure A.A. is available to all (regardless of special needs);
- Communicate with professionals, correctional institutions and treatment centers around the Area to maximize our members' usefulness in helping the

still-suffering alcoholic; or

- Maximize public information about Alcoholics Anonymous through vectors like the public service announcement that brought me into these rooms.

The beginning of a new year and a new Panel in General Services is a good time to recognize that *Self-Support isn't just about money any more – and it never was!* Self-Support, from the Seventh Tradition's perspective, has always been at least as much about human resources as about dollars and cents, and often it's meant more than that.

In A.A.-speak, "human resources" has to translate as "member resources," since we are entirely a member-supported society. In 1941, "entirely member-supported" meant that to cope with the thousands of inquiries about A.A. that resulted from the Jack Alexander article, our fledgling New York office set up a massive member-supported (and spouse-supported!) effort to answer every letter with a personalized, typed response. And in 2010, being entirely "member-supported" means that to implement programs like those suggested above to help reach alcoholics just like you and

me, MGS needs more than committee chairpersons, or "Committees of One."

MGS needs human resources – members who will serve on committees to make things happen like those listed above. For example, a Committee of One could barely scratch the surface of all the public libraries in the state, but a committee of members from across Maryland could do that very well. In fact, MGS's Public Information Committee, in cooperation with districts, intergroups and groups from across Maryland, did that very thing only a couple of years ago. But understandably, many of those Big Books are gone now, so the need once again exists!

So while we may still hear talk of money at Area meetings during 2010 (for example, if the till runs low during a characteristic summer lull in contributions, or as budget time approaches in order to help people know what to expect), let's remember that we all have a responsibility to return to the fellowship that saved our lives a portion of the *time* God has given us. Now that can be in the home group, or in sponsorship, or beyond the home group, and it's for each of us to find the venue of serv-

continued on page 4...

(Delegates Corner) continued from page 1...

believe that to be the case and am preparing myself accordingly. I have cleaned out my office; reorganized my files and bookcase; cleaned out my electronic files; read the Delegate information in the A.A. Service Manual...again; made up the notebooks and purchased the blank CDs to hold the General Service Conference Final Agenda and background material for the Regional Panels; completed the forms requested by GSO for the General Service Conference and sent them in; completed the Delegate Highlights of Area 29; created business cards and stationary; and read all of the background information received to date, as suggested or provided by the secretary of the Conference Committee on Finance – which is my conference assignment. In my spare time I study the Traditions and Concepts; answer questions posed by DCMs and others in Area 29; attend meetings and talk with others in recovery.

The final agenda for the 2010 General Service Conference should be received within the next week...and then the fun begins! It is a new beginning for me and I look forward

to serving; learning new things; meeting new people; and experiencing everything there is to experience. When first elected to serve as Area Delegate, I had a lot of fear and self-esteem issues. I would receive questions by e-mail and think "Why are they asking ME?" Then I would remember, and think, "Oh, yeah, I'm the Area delegate now!" As time moves on, I am losing some of the fear as it is replaced with anticipation. Prayer, support from fellow members, and good service sponsorship help.

If Maryland General Service can be of assistance to any person, group or district in Area 29, please do not hesitate to contact me, any Officer, or Committee Chair through our website, www.marylandaa.org. You can also speak to your group GSR or District Committee Member (DCM) who will know how to reach us. We look forward to serving you and hope many of you will join a committee and become a part of Maryland General Service to learn more about the A.A. program and structure that is saving our lives and the lives of those to come. Make it a "new beginning" for you too! ▲

Keeping the Main Thing- The Main Thing

Arnold R

Every member of Alcoholic Anonymous whose feet are firmly planted on the Road of Happy Destiny can remember the dawning of the truth outlined in Chapter 7 of Alcoholic Anonymous entitled Working with Others. That moment when a loving sponsor points out exactly what had happen when their feet found the path which made it possible for them to get sober and grow toward the sunlight of the Spirit. On Page 93 of The Basic Text, Bill writes that "The Main Thing is that he be willing to believe in a Power greater than himself and that he live by spiritual principles."

Let me share a contemporary anecdote by Paul Jordan Smith about Main Things. It happened once that several physicians were drinking and had started quarreling about which part of the body was most important for life. As they could not agree among themselves, they decided to consult a spiritual adviser.

continued on page 7...

What Are You, New? Well, yeah.....

Dawn H, Area 29 Secretary

Well, here we are again. We are new. We are starting at the beginning. All of the new trusted servants for our area are newcomers again. Kind of daunting, isn't it? If I go back in time in my life, there is a track record to build on. We all have that, you know. When I am scared and don't know, I hold onto my track record because it tells me that it worked for me then and it'll work for me whenever I'm willing to work it and ask for help. It wasn't always that way.

How many times have I been new? Well, of course we could go back to when I was born, but since I don't remember that, that might be a tad too far back to go. I was a blackout drinker from the very first time I drank; so much of my drinking career is a mystery to me, from when I was a new drinker to when I surrendered. Maybe that's too far back to go too! If you are reading this article, you were new once, too, just like me, when we walked in the doors of Alcoholics Anonymous for our first meeting. I can only tell my experience on this, so I will sum it up by saying I did not know how to act. From 1995 to now, I have learned how to act by watching those who have gone before me and listening to those who love me when I don't know how to do that myself. I was told to act as if the truth was true and I was mystified.

What was the truth? I was as separated from it as I was from God. My fits, starts, and lies in the beginning were evidence of how far away I was from truth and from God.

I remember when I was a new coffeemaker. The most important job in AA and I had never made a big pot of coffee like that, and no one had trusted me with the keys to anything for a very long time. I didn't know how to act, and I couldn't ask or you'd know I didn't know. A true conundrum, so I winged it. My favorite convention speaker said, "We already know you don't know. How could you know? You have never been here before!" I didn't trust him. I remember when I was a new group secretary, making announcements; I did not want to be noticed and you wanted me to talk! I remember when I was a new group chairperson, and this time, I had to talk to people to ask them to speak at my meeting. I asked my friends, until someone suggested I ask people I didn't know so I'd have more friends. Brilliant.

I have been new many times since in many different jobs in Alcoholics Anonymous because that's what my sponsor showed me how to do. Every time I have said "yes" in Alcoholics Anonymous, my universe has grown, and so have I. Saying "yes" has given me a life I never dreamed of, one I never would have asked for or even thought of, and certainly one I didn't deserve when I was truly new, if you had asked me. Through working the steps, practicing the principles, and putting the traditions into

continued on page 7...

(Self-Support...) continued from page 3...

ice where our individual skills and talents can best be used. But even though it's a responsibility, I've found it to be "vastly more than that." What I now see is that at those times when I neglected service beyond my home group, I was really cheating my own self. My experience has been that working with MGS is not only worthwhile – it's *fun*, and it imparts a full meaning to my life!

How do we get this message into the hands of those who are not participating? If you are reading this, chances are that you are already involved in some form of service beyond the home group, whether at the Intergroup, District, Area or beyond. If that describes *you*, then I challenge you to carry the message of service to at least one person during the next week by either showing them this article, or better yet, by describing in your own words what your story of service has meant to you.

And if you are reading this but *not* involved beyond the home group, then I urge you to consider what Service would bring to your sobriety. *You* are needed in general service to insure the preservation of our Society for the alcoholic yet to come – maybe my nephew, maybe your sponsor's grandchild, or maybe your own daughter or son. And my experience has been that, though I came to general service for one of those reasons, I stayed because I learned that I need Service even more than it needed me! 

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, P.O. Box 701, New Market, MD 21774. The submission deadline for the next issue is May 20, 2010.

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.

SEND YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS TO...

In accordance with the 7th Tradition and abiding by the group conscience of your home group, you may send contributions in support of Area 29 to:

Maryland General Service, Inc.
P.O. Box 701
New Market, MD 21774



Area 29 – Maryland General Service
WEEKEND MINI-CONFERENCE
 April 9th – 11th, 2010

60th General Service Conference Theme:
“Practicing A.A.’s Principles—the Pathway to Unity”

WHO:

All A.A. members are invited to experience the legacy that Bill W. left to us - to insure A.A.’s survival through unity.

WHAT:

Participate in a conference experience with topics and issues that will be considered in New York this April.

WHERE:

The Clarion Resort Fontainebleau Hotel
 10100 Coastal Highway, Ocean City, MD 21842-2698
 Room rates are \$89 per night. Call The Clarion at (410) 524-3535
 Please Mention “MGS Mini-Conference” to get the Group Rate

HOW:

Send check for food together with completed registration Form to:
 Maryland General Service, Inc. - Attention: Mini-Conference – P.O. Box 701 – New Market, MD 21774

Name: _____	_____ Registrations \$0.00	= no charge
Address: _____	_____ Sat Breakfasts @ \$9	= _____
City, State, Zip: _____	_____ Sat Lunch Buffets @ \$12	= _____
Email: _____	_____ Sat Dinner Buffets @ \$30	= _____
Phone: _____	_____ Sunday Breakfasts @ \$9	= _____
	Grand Total:	\$ _____

Come and join us on the ‘broad highway’ of service to A.A. as-a-whole & find out what you’ve been missing!!! GSRs: Need financial assistance? Ask your home groups for support.

****All meals must be purchased in advance. No refunds can be made after March 30th!**

SATURDAY

- 8:00 - 9:00am – Registration & Breakfast**
- 9:00 - 12:00pm – Introduction, Overview & Morning Session
- 12:00 - 1:00pm – Luncheon Buffet**
- 1:00 - 4:00pm – Afternoon Session
- 4:00 - 5:00pm – Trustee’s Presentation – John K, Northeast Regional Trustee
- 5:00 - 6:00pm – Archives Presentation – Harold G. with Jim T, Moderator
- 7:00 - 8:30pm – Dinner Buffet**
- 8:30 – 10:00pm – Speaker Meeting – Adrienne B - Conference Coordinator – GSO - New York

SUNDAY

- 8:00 – 9:00am – Breakfast**
- 9:00 – 12:00pm – Committee Reports, Discussions, Questions & Sharing
- Evaluation & Closing

*Agenda subject to change
 **Pre-registration required for all meals

WHY SHOULD I ATTEND THE AREA 29 - MGS MINI-CONFERENCE?

Here are 5 things every AA member can get from the Area 29 - MGS Mini-Conference!

- Contribute your experience to A.A. as a whole! Don’t let others make decisions for A.A. without you! You may be surprised at how relevant your ideas are to issues your Delegate will consider at A.A.’s 60th General Service Conference this April. The Mini-Conference is a place to learn about issues affecting A.A.’s future. Come help keep A.A. here for the alcoholic yet to come!
- Learn about service beyond the church basement! Every A.A. service job is important. An A.A. service is anything that helps us reach a fellow sufferer – whether it’s making a cup of coffee, sponsoring a new member, or sponsoring A.A. in a country where it’s just getting started. Services include not only meetings and rides but also intergroup offices, pamphlets, books, and good public relations of almost every description. Services like these are made possible through the work of committees, conferences and the members who participate in them.
- Help “keep it simple” by participating in A.A. as a whole! “General services” are vital to A.A. Abolishing them would make A.A. more confusing and complicated, not simpler. For example, A.A.’s General Service Office maintains our uniform literature, helping A.A. remain essentially the same everywhere, with a consistent, undiluted message. Could we really do without Big Books and pamphlets? The general service structure keeps the groups ultimately in charge of world services which help to insure our worldwide unity.
- Meet your Regional Trustee, a staff member from your General Service Office in New York, and your Delegate, too! They would like to meet you and hear your views on important agenda items for 2010. Your Delegate will carry your ideas and the conscience of the whole Area to the 60th General Service Conference this April.
- Meet other A.A.s who are interested in service beyond the Home Group! Having trouble convincing others that general services are both needed and fun? Many members have already faced that difficulty and have experience on building interest at home groups. Come and make good friends, and share in the fellowship and fun!

(Exercise Your Voice...) continued from page 1...

Delegate for the General Service Conference and to recommend agenda items to the Area for consideration and possible approval and submission to the General Service Board no later than the December Area Assembly. Each Regional Panel is assigned two topics from the General Service Conference Agenda which they will discuss over a two year period before being assigned two different topics between August and December of even years.

The Regional Panels will consist of GSRs and DCMs in each designated region, as well as Committee Leaders, Past Delegates, Area Officers and all interested members of the fellowship. Each Regional Panel will be assigned, on a rotating basis between August and December of even years, Conference Agenda items for two General Service Conference Committees, one of which will correspond to an Area Standing Committee. Therefore, Regional Panels will also include a Standing Committee Chairperson as one of the panel participants which assists them in fulfilling their primary purpose as Chairs as well. This Regional Panel process mirrors the General Service Conference committee process.

Over the next few weeks, after receipt of

the Final Agenda and background material at the February Committee meeting, the Panels will meet regularly to discuss their assigned topics. More information will be provided on how Panels will present on their agenda topics at the Mini-Conference this year as the format has changed.

All the Regional Panels come together at the Weekend Mini-Conference from April 9th - 11th to be held at the Clarion Hotel in Ocean City, MD. There is a NEW more interactive format for the weekend. It's an opportunity to learn about many of the issues, topics, and discussions taking place in Alcoholics Anonymous.

AA as a whole needs to know what you and your group thinks so it can be passed on to our Delegate!!! In this way we can develop an informed group conscience to prepare our delegate for the General Service Conference. The Mini-Conference is designed to provide a forum for understanding the issues concerning the future of AA that will be decided, on your behalf, whether you choose to participate in General Service or not.

After the Mini-Conference, our Delegate, Nancy B. will venture off to New York to the General Service Conference with our Area 29

conscience which we have provided her through our participation. In May, the Delegate will report to the Area Assembly what took place at the Conference, providing details of the Conference Advisory Actions and Additional Considerations. The Regional Panels should then meet again to review this information and determine if there were any items or issues they would like to recommend be submitted for possible inclusion on the following year's General Service Conference Agenda. If requesting Area input, this should be done as soon as possible and at least by the December Assembly.

So why should you bother attending the Regional Panels and Weekend Mini-Conference??? Both are important for the same reasons because they give any and all members of AA who attend an opportunity to not only voice their thoughts and opinions, but involve themselves in an in-depth look at each of the agenda items on a district, Area and AA as a whole level. In fact, many of the agenda items are for the alcoholic who hasn't been born or arrived at the doors of AA yet. So it's another opportunity to fulfill the primary purpose of carrying the AA message to the still suffering alcoholic. ▲

MARYLAND GENERAL SERVICE, AREA 29 2010 CALENDAR

Area Committee	February 20	District 26
NERAASA	Feb. 26 - 28	Niagara Falls, NY
NERD	March 12 - 14	Albany, NY
Area Assembly	March 20	District 9
Mini Conference	April 9 - 11	Ocean City, MD
General Service Conference	April 18 - 24	Rye, NY
Area Assembly (Report Back)	May 15	District 36
MD State Convention	June 17-20	Hagerstown, MD
International Convention	July 1 - 4	San Antonio, TX
Area Committee	July 17	District 11
Area Assembly	August 14	District 40
Area Committee	September 18	District 21
Area Assembly (Inventory)	October 16	District 35
Fall Conference	Oct. 28-31	Hagerstown, MD
Area Committee	November 20	District 20
Area Assembly	December 18	District 22

(The Main Thing...) continued from page 3...

"Of course it is the heart and blood vessels that are the most important," said the first doctor, "for on them the whole life of men and women depends."

"Not at all," said the second clinician, "It is the brain and nerves which are most vital, for without them, even the heart would not beat."

The third medic said, "You are both wrong. It is the stomach and the digestive system which are the most important for without the proper digestion of food. The body will die."

"The lungs are most important," declared the fourth, "for a man or woman without air will surely expire."

"You are all wrong," said the spiritual advisor. "There are only two vessels of the body that are important, but this group has no knowledge of them."

"What are they, then?" asked the doctors.

The spiritual advisor replied, "The channel that runs from the ear to the soul, and then the one that runs from the soul to the tongue."

Using the analogy of the two vessels, allow me to share with you, The Main Thing that runs along the channel from my ear to my soul. It is taken from The Forward to the Third Edition of our Basic Text. "In spite of the great increase in the size and the span of our Fellowship, at its core it remains simple and personal. Each day, somewhere in the world, recovery begins when one alcoholic talks with another alcoholic, sharing experience, strength, and hope."

Through continued reading of our literature, attendance at A.A. meetings, and the guidance of a sponsor, another Main Thing has resonated along the channel running between my soul and my tongue. It is sustained by the simplicity of our program that Dr. Bob expressed during his talk at the First International Convention in Cleveland in 1950. Dr. Bob asked that we should not louse it (our program) up with Freudian complexes and things that are interesting to the scientific mind, but have very little to do with our actual A.A. work. Our Twelve Steps, when simmered down to the last, resolve themselves into the words, love and service. We understand what love is, and we understand what service is. So let's bear those two things in mind.

The key lesson of these two references to our literature is that recovery from a hopeless state of mind and body begins with the sharing of the good news. This communication from one member to another by necessity is designed to be given in a manner of understanding

couched with care and reverence. That reverence, points directly to our primary purpose; that of carrying the message to the still suffering alcoholic is the central fact of our program.

Recently, I received a call from a friend. He is back out on the streets again. He has been around for a while and has been in and out a lot. He has been through a couple of treatment programs and used up a lot of "second chances" with family, friends, and employers. His options are narrowing.

He reminds me very much of me. It was in the spring of 1982 that I was beginning to enter the surrender process. Along the way, I had invited police officers, judges, and treatment counselors into my life with hand engraved invitations. There had even been some career reversals, business failures, and a lot of disillusionment and fatigue for those who loved me.

I had been seeing my friend around meetings, and he told me he was just a couple of days short of another 90-day chip when he went out again. I didn't ask him why he went back out. I remembered the unbearable pain of living without alcohol's balm back in my revolving door days.

The program finally worked for me when my sponsor shared with me Page 93 and then demonstrated it with the way he lived his life. Some say I learned where the pain was coming from, and started reducing the toxic shame that caused it. Some say, I finally surrendered to the hopelessness of the situation. All those statements could be true. Everyone agrees that sobriety is the grace of a loving God.

My friend is not a bad or weak person. He may be too good and too strong for our simple program. He seems to have acquired that rare form of goodness that makes him incapable of feeling intense guilt when he is wrong. His strength seems to keep him hovering above whatever bottom that would lead him to absolute surrender. His struggle constantly reminds me of how grateful I am that AA was always there for me and the people in my home group keep the focus on "The Main Thing."

The message is clear. I must ask each day what I can do for the person who still suffers. I need to show up and take an active part in the fellowship. It appears that sometimes we have to walk through very intense physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual pain to discover the wonderful life on the other side. I don't want my friend or any other suffering alcoholic to have to walk alone outside this warm, loving and caring home; I call Alcoholics Anonymous.

There is an ancient proverb which states,

"Help your brother's boat across and your own will reach the shore."

Thank God, we have finally got that message. Additionally, as illustrated in A. A. Comes of Age, page 235, "we give thanks to our Heavenly Father, who through so many friends and through so many means and channels has allowed us to construct this wonderful edifice of the spirit in which we are now dwelling---this cathedral whose foundations already rest upon the comers of the earth."

"On its great floor we have inscribed our Twelve Steps of recovery. On the side walls, the buttresses of the A.A. Traditions have been set in place to contain us in unity for as long as God may will it so. Eager hearts and hands have lifted the spire of our cathedral into its place. That spire bears the name of Service. May it ever point straight up toward God."

My friends, let's "Keep the Main Thing the Main Thing." 

(What Are You...) continued from page 4...

action in my life, I have changed for, I hope, the better.

I'm new again now. I have never been a secretary before, but I am one every day. Go figure. I make my living doing what I have been elected to do in AA, and yet, I fear I will not do a good enough job. It's hard to explain, but somehow, this is bigger. I think that's because AA saved my life, so I owe it more. I work really hard and do a good job for a great firm and a really neat boss because that is the right thing to do and it is how I operate, but it's not personal like it is in AA. I keep thinking back to that first coffee pot. It was personal then, too, but I didn't know that then. I wanted to do a good job then, but the truth is that that was about pride and ego. Now, I want to do a good job because you have elected me and trusted me and I am honored and, I hope, humbled. The truth is it is about gratitude for saving my life. It is about giving back to those who taught me how to act. It is about getting out of God's way and passing it on. I know if I watch those who go before me, and if I ask for help, God will help me. And therein lays the true difference between now and then: I have a working relationship with God today. With Him all things are possible. With Him, I know how to act. It has worked for me all along and it will continue to work for me, but I will never do it perfectly. I shall have to be content with patient progress.

Thanks for the opportunity to be of service. 

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