

Gratitude—from the Russian Republics

In the sprawling republics of Russia, where A.A. is still very young, the excitement of rapidly mushrooming groups is prompting expressions of gratitude from Minsk to Moscow.

About his group, which was established last year, Nikolai R. writes the General Service Office: "We call our group March-94 because in our country, spring comes in March when all live creatures wake up to activity. The same thing happens to us—after many years of drunkenness, we come back to normal human lives."

With seven months of continuous sobriety when writing to G.S.O., Nikolai adds, "Of course, I will never be perfect, but I am in the process of change, and my mother says she sees dramatic changes in me. But the most important thing is, now I know where to go and, for me, there is no way back."

Writes Stanislav K.: "At present there are seven A.A. groups in four cities of our Republic of Belarus. Some of us do what we can to let all our citizens know about A.A. We provide information for TV and the newspapers, meet with members of the Parliament and representatives of city halls, and organize meetings in narco-logical clinics."



In November 1988 the Moscow Beginners Group—the first A.A. group in Russia—sent this lovely teapot to G.S.O. It is displayed in a glass case in G.S.O.'s Archives in front of a statement of appreciation and gratitude (in both English and Russian) with signatures of group members.

"We have read in *Box 4-5-9* about the July 1995 International Convention in San Diego to honor A.A.'s 60th Anniversary. It is very interesting, but many here will not be able to come because it is too expensive for us. But in our souls we will be together with you during this celebration, and we send best regards to everybody."

Also writing from Belarus, Alexander B. sends "greetings from the First Step Group of Minsk." While on a business trip to Moscow, he says, "I had a chance to learn that the A.A. program works, and the Traditions are being cherished there just as they are in Minsk and other cities where I attended A.A. meetings. Everywhere I felt a kind, candid, informal atmosphere."

During his absence from home, Alexander notes, the First Step Group grew "in sense of quantity of members and quality of work. And it happened primarily because of your literature and your support, which we feel despite the huge distance between us."

Gratitude — A Way of Remembering

November is Gratitude Month for A.A. (in Canada, it's October), a time when many individuals and A.A. entities take an extra moment to consider the blessings of sobriety and say thanks. It has been said that a grateful alcoholic won't drink, and it does seem true that gratitude has the power to displace despair, fear, and self-absorption—those states of mind which often accompanied drinking. As one A.A. recently put it, "Some people think that gratitude is a feeling, maybe something that goes along with a pink cloud. But I think it's a kind of perspective—a way to remember what it was like, what it's like now."

Here are several expressions of gratitude from G.S.O.'s mailbox. First, from *Eastern Europe*, Nadya G. writes: "The A.A.s in Bulgaria greet you warmly and acknowledge that every bit of our happiness at this moment is due to your precious help and God's mercy. The literature we have received, translated into Bulgarian, is as dear to us as a newborn baby . . . May God be with you always, and his love be in your hearts."

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Lorne C. from Yorkton, Saskatchewan, Canada celebrated his tenth sober Christmas in A.A.; it was his father's third. Lorne writes: "My dad and I drank together. We had good times, we had rough times. Many people told me this was wrong, but I always had a smart answer for them. Looking back, I know that we didn't have a father-son relationship; all we had was a drinking connection.

"In 1984, I joined A.A. My dad was still drinking. I guess I was a good example of the Big Book and the A.A. way of life because my dad quit drinking in November 1991. He is now 78 years old. I never thought I'd see the day that both my dad and I would not be drinking, but I am not too surprised. God works through people and creates miracles."

From Jim M., Chicago, Illinois, comes this succinct message of gratitude: "This is going to be simple. I can ride my two-wheel bike three times a month instead of driving my automobile and send \$10 to G.S.O. to use as you see fit."

Past delegate John M. of St. Laurent, Quebec, Canada, writes: "One of A.A.'s best-kept secrets is the A.A. Birthday Plan—but not to the members of one particular group in Area 87. This group, which shall be anonymous, has a well-informed group conscience. They recently voted to collect, on a voluntary basis during the year, one, two, three or five dollars from the members of the group until the number of dollars match their years of sobriety. On the group's birthday, the money collected will be sent to G.S.O. as a birthday contribution."

Gratitude can be converted into any kind of action, big or small, individual or group. To celebrate gratitude, 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. Almost any positive action is a reflection of gratitude—for example, a group may decide to make beginners kits available to newcomers and spend an evening 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 out to lunch (or a sponsee), or they may start a Step or Traditions meeting where there's an expressed need. Or they may make a private contract with themselves to always put out a hand to the newcomers and out-of-towners who show up at their home group.

Gratitude in action usually seems to be a form of reaching out. As Bill wrote, "When brimming with gratitude, one's heartbeat must surely result in outgoing love, the finest emotion we can ever know." (*The Language of the Heart*, p. 271).

Quebec A.A.s Carry Torch of Hope to Alcoholics Up North

It all started back in 1992 in Amos, a small country town of approximately 14,000 French-speaking people in the isolated reaches of sprawling northwest Quebec. Says delegate Fernand L.: "There was a call for help from the Community Residence Center in Amos; the only correctional facility in this area, it is where all the local Native Canadians found guilty of breaking the law are detained. We could see and feel their suffering, and we started up an A.A. group. Called Carrying on the Torch, it is still going strong, thanks to a few persevering members."

In remote areas of Canada, Fernand points out, the A.A. message tends to be carried word-of-mouth by alcoholics who have been exposed to the program while in correctional and treatment centers. "We do it like our co-founders Bill W. and Dr. Bob did it 60 years ago," he says, "with one drunk reaching out to another in a connection that literally saves both their lives."

But with a difference. Bill and Dr. Bob spoke the same tongue. Communicating with Native Canadian alcoholics, however, presents a monumental challenge, Fernand explains. Many of the younger people speak French or English, but most of the older alcoholics are isolated by both geographic and communication barriers. They speak in many different languages, from Algonquin and Cree to Inuit and Nuktatuk, and within each there may be several dialects.

"We find that transferring the A.A. literature to cassettes in the various languages and dialects and distributing them is effective," Fernand reports. "Of course, the translation is usually done by a Native Canadian who may be relatively new to A.A., and we French- and English-speaking members don't know if the translation is true to the original, but we cross our fingers and leave it all to the God of our understanding and A.A.'s language of the heart."

Here he notes that “the spirituality of the A.A. Fellowship attracts the Native alcoholics, only their realm of the spirit involves close connections with trees, water, the earth and all of nature. When they understand that they are free to express their feelings in their own way, not ours, they more readily trust and embrace the program.”

The A.A. group in Amos has helped to pave the way for a larger effort by southern Canadian A.A. groups to “sister up” with a faltering northern group in the spirit of sharing. This way, Manitoba delegate David W. told *Box 4-5-9* (Feb.-Mar., 1995), “the southern group has a rewarding outlet for its Twelfth-Step work, and the northern one has A.A.s to share with, a source of speakers and emotional support. The aim is not so much to toss money at the small northern groups, but to reach out our hands to them and make them feel they are part of the greater body of A.A. That includes phone calls, letters, literature and visits back and forth.”

Known as Cross Canada, the project had its genesis at the 1994 General Service Conference, when all the Canadian delegates, along with the U.S. delegate from Alaska, met for a brainstorming session and wound up forming a Conference subcommittee. Among other things, it has been working to redefine the massive regions involved—Quebec, part of British Columbia, B.C./Yukon, Labrador/Newfoundland, Manitoba, Alberta/Northwest Territories and an area in Ontario—from the border of the Yukon all the way to the Atlantic Ocean, in order to break them down into more manageable parts. The land mass involved spreads over four time zones and is at least half the size of the United States, and yet is populated by fewer than 60,000 people. “So you can see,” says Fernand, “that our Cross Canada subcommittee has an enormous amount of work to do before making specific recommendations to the Conference.”

Meanwhile, back in Amos, maintaining dialogue with local court officials has been integral to the success of the A.A. effort. “We have held several meetings with them to explain how A.A. works, and to identify and hopefully solve some problems,” says Fernand, “and you would be amazed at how many come. At a recent meeting, for example, we were joined by the provincial judge (who serves the Northern Communities), some Quebec provincial police (for Northern Affairs), a probation coordinator, a treatment center counselor and others. Additionally, meaningful support is being provided by the Native Alcohol and Drug Addicts Program. They welcome A.A.”

Making contact on a one-to-one basis in areas that are often impassable in winter and only a little less so in summer continues to be difficult, but, Fernand says, “times are definitely changing. Not long ago, our past delegate Michel G. spoke by phone to Noah, an Inuit

Native who lives up in the northernmost tip of Quebec province. Noah asked for assorted A.A. literature, and Michel replied, ‘Fine,’ then asked if it should go by mail or dogsled. Not to worry, Noah assured him: ‘Just fax it.’”

Viewpoint

‘Out of Respect for the Program’

Ever since A.A. meetings began, members have been struggling to define the format of meetings. Shall A.A. literature be read? Do we officially ask members to confine their comments to alcohol? Do we greet the speaker with “Hello” said in unison? Do we have a “fellowship break”? What prayer shall be said? Do we hold hands during the prayer? How do we end the prayer?

When A.A. members visit meetings in another city or state, they may say, “Their meetings were so different from my ones at home!” and what they usually mean is that the format of the meetings is different. Some elements are the same no matter where you go; for example, many groups have found it helpful to read the A.A. Preamble at the beginning of meetings. But no regulation dictates the reading of the Preamble, or any other aspect of an A.A. meeting. Those decisions reside safely in the autonomy of each group or A.A. entity.

During the Sunday morning Big Meeting at the 1995 International Convention in San Diego, a speaker went to the podium and read Chapter Five of the Big Book, “How It Works.” When he got to the Steps, some people began to loudly chant the number of each Step: “ONE!” “TWO!” etc. This is how one A.A. member, Clem T., described the event: “I and many others were disturbed and angered at the chanting and shouting and general irreverence displayed during the reading of the beginning of Chapter Five of the Big Book. It may be that some A.A.s—especially young people—connect this kind of behavior with having fun. Now, I believe in expressing the joy that this program has allowed me to feel. At the Sunday morning meeting, the music, the singing, the balloons, the congo line, and even the wave were all appropriate—before the meeting began. But there are times that call for quietness and reflection, for *listening*. Reading from the Big Book is one of those times. I’ve heard it read hundreds of times but I still like to listen to it.”

Clem T. is familiar with the question of chanting because when he was chairperson of the Northern California Council of Alcoholics Anonymous (NCCAA), the same thing happened at its Spring 1988 Conference in Monterey. Clem explains, “When this happened in Monterey seven years ago, I just hoped it would go away.

But some of our members assured me that it was happening at other conferences. One person was especially concerned how newcomers would respond to the chanting; they would, he feared, learn a lack of respect for the Steps, the Program, and the person speaking. I went home from Monterey and wrote a statement that tried to explain why chanting and yelling wouldn't be tolerated." Three months later at the NCCAA Summer Conference, he compared notes with treasurer Anne K., and discovered she had written a nearly identical statement. This is the statement which was eventually adopted for use at all NCCAA Conferences:

"It is an honor to be asked to participate in any capacity at these conferences. It is especially nice to be part of the program, come up here and perform some small service.

"Therefore, will you please be thoughtful enough to listen as the participants are reading and control your desire to join in. Out of respect for the Program and our Traditions, please give the readers your complete attention."

At first, the statement was read only at conferences where the chanting began. Clem explains, "I would get up and interrupt the chanting and say, 'This is not what we're here for.' Some people hissed and booed, but others said, essentially, 'Shut up and listen.'" The present NCCAA chairperson, Diane O., decided that it would be beneficial to read the statement at all meetings conducted during conferences.

"We need to learn to listen," Diane says, "and not always to talk. Chiming in and repeating what the reader is saying shows a lack of respect. And it's hard on the reader, who may be nervous up there!" It bothers Diane that the disruptions tend to occur during the reading of "the oldest and most precious parts of our literature." At her own home group, no statement like the NCCAA one is read; if necessary, the matter is dealt with during the monthly meeting of the steering committee. "But I know it's going on in groups out there," Diane says. "I think it proliferates more at meetings that don't have steering committees or lack connections with the service structure."

The present delegate from Northern Coastal California, Jim M., says that reading Chapter Five "is not a participatory sport. Perhaps it started because people wanted to feel part of the meeting. It is an honor to read at an A.A. meeting—and the reader shouldn't be intimidated by chanting." Of the NCCAA statement, Jim says, "It is done with love but it is done firmly. Nobody wants to be an A.A. 'cop,' but everyone who takes an active part in our area committee wants to see A.A. treated with respect."

Many A.A.s who have experienced the phenomenon of "over-ritualization" at the group level worry that

meetings are being filled up with unnecessary readings, lengthy announcements, and the like. As one A.A. recently put it, "Whatever happened to 'Keep It Simple?'" Concerning the transformation of "Keep coming back, it works" to "Keep coming back it works if you work it so work it you're worth it," Jim M. says, "When I first got sober, I got my answer to staying sober: I had to keep coming back. They didn't go on and say you'd stay sober 'if you work it cha-cha-cha.'"

If your group or area has experience, strength, and hope to share on meeting formats—problems and solutions—please let us hear from you.

SERVICES AT G.S.O.

G.S.O.'s Accounting Department

The efficient and responsible flow of money in and out of an organization is crucial to its overall health; this is especially true of nonprofit organizations, which should on principle "run lean." At the Accounting Department of the General Service Office a visitor soon learns that efficiency and accountability are the guiding principles at work there.

The flow of money into G.S.O. is from contributions from the membership and income from the sale of A.A. World Services literature and related material (such as audiotapes, wallet cards, and "windowshades"). This money is in two forms: cash (primarily checks) and "accounts receivable"—meaning billable items and credit charges. (Last year, G.S.O. began accepting payment via credit card—Visa and Mastercard—for both literature and contributions.) The Accounting Department is responsible for balancing of daily cash receipts for orders, preparing bank deposits, and mailing daily invoices and monthly statements. In 1994, the Accounting Department processed 29,500 orders.

A quarterly analysis of A.A.W.S. sales gives the number of books sold, the sales income from books and other items, and the number of orders processed. Figures for each quarter are compared with those from the year before, in raw numbers and in percentages. For example, a glance at the analysis for the six months of 1995 shows that 277,200 copies of the Big Book were sold (compared to 255,010 for the same period in 1994—an increase of .9 percent).

The outgoing streams of money are much more diverse than the incoming ones. Money goes out as payroll and benefits, rent, office equipment and supplies, telephone, postage, furniture, payments for services, and so on. Payroll is processed through an outside service

bureau, which can do the job efficiently. On alternate Mondays, payroll data is transmitted via computer modem to the firm; a day later the Accounting Department receives the checks, a list of automatic deposits, and a statement of information. As a safeguard, two signatures are required on checks.

The heart of the Accounting Department is the bookkeeping unit, which records and maintains all financial activities, pays all bills for both A.A.W.S. and the General Service Board, summarizes income and expense transactions, and reconciles bank statements. Financial information is fed into the computer—with different categories of information coded in different ways—and the result is entered in the “general ledger.”

This general ledger system, put into effect several years ago, saves time—“there’s less pushing of pencils” as John Kirwin, (nonalcoholic) assistant controller and business administrator, puts it. The system also allows the department to be more precise about money flow. This is important since the guiding light of responsible accounting is accountability—the accurate recording of income and outgo. Don Meurer, G.S.O.’s nonalcoholic controller and a C.P.A., explains: “We can itemize more extensively now than we could on a manual system. For example, we can allocate salaries and expenses to specific departments—C.P.C. or Treatment or whatever. Better allocation helps the Fellowship get a truer picture of where the money is going.”

The Accounting Department is responsible for the regular issuance of monthly and quarterly statements, and here’s another area where the computer is of enormous help. Financial statements compare the actual income and expenditures with the budgeted income and expenditures. They are guides, John says, “to assess results. In his reports to the A.A.W.S. Board, the controller gives explanations of why we’re over or under budget.” The monthly statements are reviewed by the A.A.W.S. Board and quarterly statements are reviewed by both the A.A.W.S. Board and the trustees’ Finance Committee. Condensed material from the quarterly statement forms part of the presentation given by that committee on Board Weekends.

A quarterly compilation, performed by outside auditors, provides further checks and balances. The auditors balance the books, actually and figuratively: they make sure that the bookkeeping is consistent, and that good accounting practices are in place and are being followed. The auditors’ quarterly work forms an important part of the overall view of G.S.O.’s financial activity and health. On an annual basis, the auditors provide the fully audited financial statements that are presented at the General Service Conference.

It is good to know that at the General Service Office, something as fundamental as accounting is handled responsibly, with the same care and attention as is the



Left to right: John Kirwin, assistant controller and business administrator; Bonnie Parks, who handles accounts payable and payroll (and is very popular every other Thursday); Eddie Rivera, who has been with G.S.O. over 20 years, is head bookkeeper. All are nonalcoholics.

provision of services. The spiritual principle of self-support rests on a firm foundation of financial efficiency and responsibility.

1996 Regional Forums

Regional Forums strengthen the Fellowship’s Three Legacies of Recovery, Unity and Service, by providing an opportunity for A.A. group and area representatives, as well as any interested individual A.A.s in a particular region, to share experience, strength and hope with representatives of the General Service Board and G.S.O. and Grapevine staff members. These weekend sharing sessions enhance and widen communication, and help spark new ideas in better carrying the message through service work.

Mailings regarding each Regional Forum will be sent to G.S.R.s, area committee members, delegates, and central office/intergroups, approximately three months ahead of time. The final Forum in 1995 will be Southwest, December 1-3, Holiday Inn, Riverwalk No., San Antonio, Texas. In 1996 Regional Forums are planned as follows:

- *Western Canada*—February 16-18: Marlborough Inn, Calgary, Alberta
- *Pacific*—June 28-30: Red Lion Hotel, Salt Lake City, Utah
- *Eastern Canada*—September 6-8: Delta Sherbrooke Hotel, Sherbrooke, Quebec
- *Southeast*—December 6-8: Radisson Hotel Asheville, Asheville, North Carolina

Rotation Time at G.S.O.

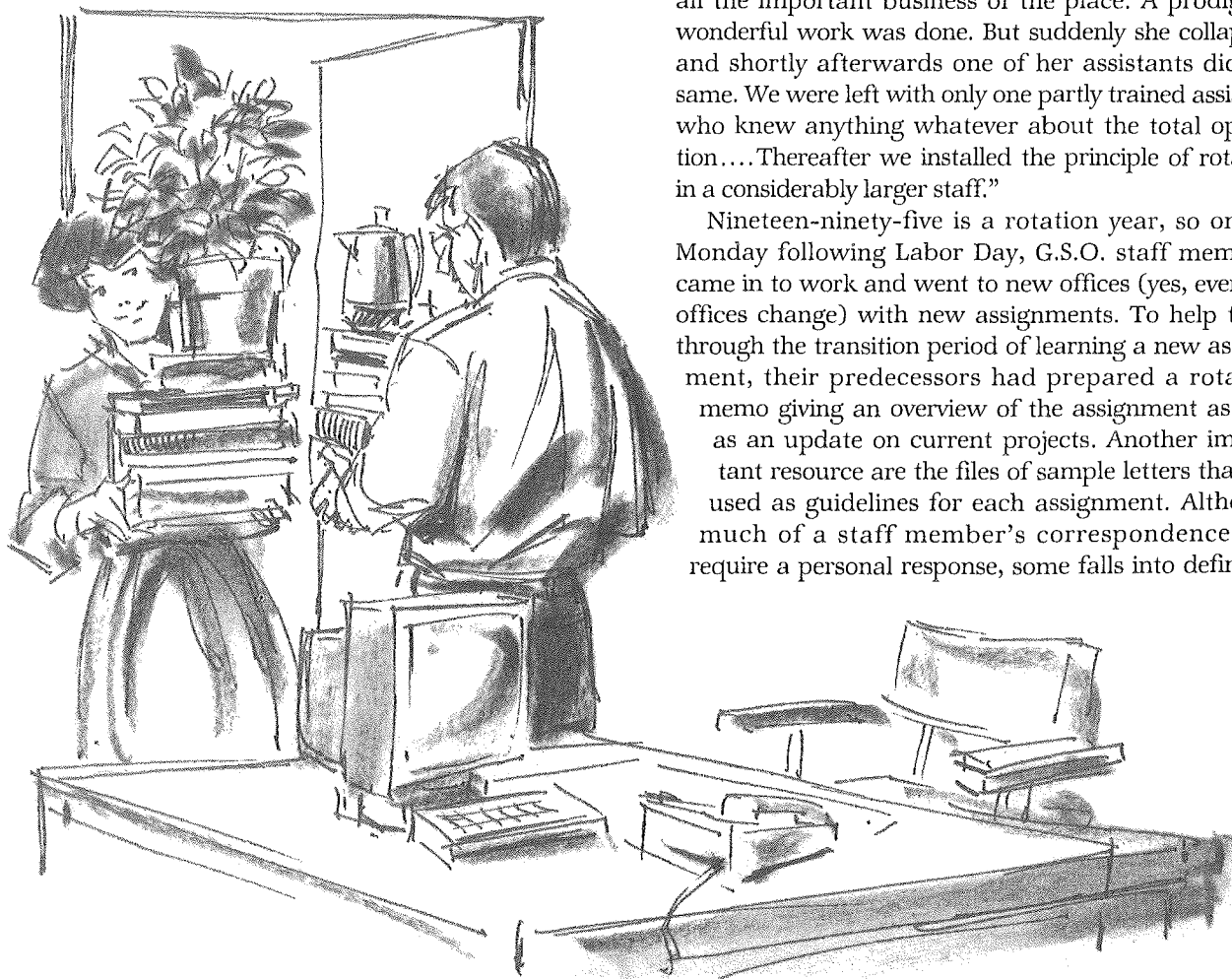
Most organizations and institutions are set up to acknowledge and reward power, prestige, seniority, and influence. But for the recovering alcoholic in Alcoholics Anonymous, these ego “enhancers” can be toxic substances, dangerous both to the individual’s sobriety and to the health of the Fellowship as a whole. The early members of the Fellowship evolved several solutions to the seductions of power: Anonymity is one; another is the rotation of service jobs—i.e., putting a time limit on every job, whether it’s a month for leading a meeting or six months for making coffee. Rotation has proved to be a simple and effective way to prevent the accumulation of power and to curb the individual’s ability to wield it. Whether it’s in the home group or the area assembly, rotation gives more people a chance to serve, encourages participation in decision-making, and insures that no

one can impose his or her personal values on Alcoholics Anonymous. The long form of Tradition Nine puts it bluntly: “Rotating leadership is best.”

The Conference Charter, Article 8, recommends that terms of office for G.S.R.s, area committee members, and delegates be two years, and many years ago, the General Service Office adopted rotation for A.A. staff assignments. Beth K., who worked at G.S.O. from 1959 to 1983, explains that Bill wanted rotation of the staff “so that if anything happened to one person, the office could continue to function smoothly. It wouldn’t fold up if one of us got drunk! The more that people knew about different jobs, the better.” G.S.O. staff member John G. says, “Rotation is healthy for the office—no one individual becomes entrenched.”

Bill described the events that led to rotation at G.S.O. in article three of Concept XI: “We once had the conventional system of one highly paid staff member with assistants at much lower pay. Hers had been the principal voice in hiring them. Quite unconsciously, I’m certain, she engaged people who she felt would not be competitive with her. Meanwhile she kept a tight rein on all the important business of the place. A prodigy of wonderful work was done. But suddenly she collapsed, and shortly afterwards one of her assistants did the same. We were left with only one partly trained assistant who knew anything whatever about the total operation.... Thereafter we installed the principle of rotation in a considerably larger staff.”

Nineteen-ninety-five is a rotation year, so on the Monday following Labor Day, G.S.O. staff members came in to work and went to new offices (yes, even the offices change) with new assignments. To help them through the transition period of learning a new assignment, their predecessors had prepared a rotation memo giving an overview of the assignment as well as an update on current projects. Another important resource are the files of sample letters that are used as guidelines for each assignment. Although much of a staff member’s correspondence will require a personal response, some falls into definable



categories that have evolved over the years. Thus, the file of sample letters is invaluable: it isn't necessary to reinvent the wheel every two years.

A staff member who has questions about an assignment need only walk down the hall and confer with somebody who's done it before. Beth explains, "I was afraid of some assignments, maybe because I thought I couldn't do it. But that was the nice thing—they gave me faith in myself. I needed pushing. Rotation stretched me." Sarah P., who has worked at G.S.O. for 20 years and has just entered her tenth rotated assignment, believes that the two-year rotation is beneficial because it keeps the staff a little "off-balance" and forces them to ask for help: "Because we rotate, we don't become authorities. We always have to depend on other people, include other people. Otherwise, it becomes *my* assignment, done *my* way." As Beth says, "Rotation was good for my ego—it meant I didn't have to know everything."

If rotation prevents specialization, it encourages more wide-ranging skills. John says, "As Richard [Richard B., G.S.O. staff] says, we're supposed to be generalists. We're here to serve the Fellowship—that's our basic job." Sarah comments, "You have to be a jack-of-all-trades. But probably one of the most important skills is a certain temperament: the ability to go with the flow. Nothing is really yours. You learn what letting go is all about." Rotation, as a delegate once remarked, emphasizes the message over the messenger.

Rotation has a certain practical genius since it doesn't depend on a change in human nature to work. However, like many things in A.A., it does encourage change—in this case, by teaching humility. Rotation has been described as "anonymity in action"; it teaches that none of us is the center of the universe and that what matters is the survival of the Fellowship as a whole. So the principle of rotation connects quite directly with all of our Twelve Steps and with the Traditions that address our primary purpose, anonymity, and the authority of a Higher Power. John explains that what rotation has taught him is that "I don't control the world! I can't. Everybody does things differently. That's good because everybody brings a different viewpoint to the job—which it may need."

Do staff members think there are any disadvantages to rotation—from a personal point of view? John says, "It's hard sometimes when you get a brand-new assignment. You may have to come before the General Service Board right away and tell them what's going on. It can be stressful. On the other hand, it's nice to have a change. It keeps you from getting stale." Is it hard to leave some assignments? Sarah says no. "I've never missed a former assignment. I've never looked back—just forward to the challenge of the next."

Meetings for the Hearing Impaired on The Rise in Chicago

"In 1987 I asked myself, how was I ever going to get sober and fit into A.A.? As a hearing-impaired person, I was afraid that the program might not work well for me because of the things I didn't hear and didn't understand at the meetings." Then, says Michael M. of Chicago, he learned from the central office about the work of the Special Needs Committee: "An A.A. named Victor gave me a card indicating the date of the committee's next meeting and said, 'Be there; you will make a difference.' So I went, and the rest is a familiar story around A.A. service. Plant the seed, give it plenty of work and water (or coffee) and maybe, if God wills, it will grow."

Writing in the March 1995 issue of the "International Deaf Group Meeting by Mail Newsletter," published by John B. of New Brunswick, Canada, Michael notes that "to date the number of interpreted meetings in the Chicago area has grown to four"—signaling what Diana S., who chairs the Special Needs Committee, calls a period of "remarkable progress."

In a letter addressed to "the A.A. Fellowship in the Chicago Area," Diana explains: "First, there was the ongoing support of the area A.A. groups in donating to the Hearing-Impaired Fund so that professional American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters could be booked for two weekly meetings. Second, the hearing-impaired members themselves took important steps toward being self-supporting. Sober Hands, the meeting run by the deaf, for example, made regular contributions, totaling \$398, to the fund in 1994."

Additionally, Diana noted, "there was another 'currency' the deaf could spend to insure that an ASL interpreter was present at the meetings. This was the Donated Funds Initiative (DFI), administered by the Chicago Hearing Society via state funding for persons with disabilities. Under the Initiative, a deaf resident of Illinois is entitled to six hours per month of an interpreter's services for personal use. When deaf individuals in the program were asked to donate two of these hours per month (or one A.A. meeting), the response was a resounding success. Effective July 1994, the DFI was implemented to defray the expenses incurred in hiring interpreters; from that time on the hearing-impaired literally became self-supporting."

Signed meetings can be important not only to hearing-impaired A.A.s but to their friends as well. "In the International Deaf Group Meeting by Mail Newsletter," Doug G., of Mountain View, California, relates that "I started to study sign language about a year ago because

Danny, my best friend in A.A., began losing his hearing. Danny and I were very frightened at the prospect of not being able to communicate. For both of us, our whole sobriety has been a gift, and we share a deep enthusiasm and love for A.A. and the Big Book and Twelfth-Step work. How would we attend conventions together? How would we be able to help newcomers together? How could we be of maximum service to our fellow alcoholic?"

Taking action, Doug and Danny joined the fledgling Signs of Sobriety Group, in San Jose. "More than a third of the members are deaf or hard-of-hearing," reports Doug, and a number of the hearing A.A.s "are studying sign language so they can better carry the A.A. message face-to-face with deaf alcoholics." It "has been a joy," he says, "to watch new deaf alcoholics come into our group and get sober. Equally, it has been wonderful to see the acknowledgement of the S.O.S. group by the hearing A.A. community." When attending meetings or assemblies, he adds, "I always use sign *and* voice when introducing myself as my group's general service representative. As a result, other groups in our area are beginning to recognize the need for interpreters at meetings. Meanwhile, my signing has improved considerably, and our group continues to grow and recover. With it, so do I."

John B., publisher of the "International Deaf Group Meeting by Mail Newsletter," welcomes the shared experience of the deaf and hearing-impaired in A.A. There is no charge for newsletter subscriptions, he notes, "though small donations are helpful in covering the cost of materials, photocopying and postage." You can contact him by writing to the Group Services desk at G.S.O. or by calling John direct: 506-652-2109 (TTY only).

Sharing Online Builds A.A. Bridges for the Hearing Impaired

"Recently I got a call from an A.A. in North Carolina who is hard of hearing like me," explains Roland F. of Kentucky. "Unfortunately, he was having trouble using the Internet in his new location, so we talked briefly using my TDD (text telephone) and his computer. We had a real good 'talk,' and I mentioned two other deaf or hard-of-hearing A.A.s I have connected with on Internet, so soon there may be four of us.

"We exchange mail regarding how we handle our hearing problems in meetings and with other A.A.s in various situations. We also talk about our online communication difficulties, which are many and hard to understand. There is an array of costly hardware that is

intended to help but winds up adding to the problem of educating the users of each new device and technology."

Roland feels that the literature regarding deafness and hearing loss "is really not very good; we could use more and better books, but so far there isn't much published for the hearing impaired. This I suppose is due to the nature of the prospective market, which is perceived as small, since only about 10% have hearing loss; only about half of those are classified as severe, one-tenth as deaf. Like alcoholism, though, each deaf person impacts on those who live and/or care about them, so when you put alcoholism and deafness together, you are getting into a pretty specialized area."

Roland says he is amazed that "so many A.A.s have gone out of their way to talk to me in a quiet area after meetings. Several have even gone to the trouble of corresponding via Internet, because relay phone conversations are troublesome to handle. I have used fax in some instances as well as 'snail mail.' I do not use ASL (American Sign Language) however, since it is quite hard to learn when late-deafened like me, but I've picked up some."

California Group Takes Stock

When the Nooners Women's Group in Mt. Shasta, California, took its inventory last year, it was mainly because we realized "how easy it is for individuals and groups to slip into self-centered thought and behavior," says member Judy M. "At times some people voiced their dislike of the process, which took almost two months, using half of our meeting time. But on the whole, we believe it was a worthwhile project."

Taking their questions from the pamphlet "The A.A. Group" (p. 35), the Nooners set out to look at their assets and liabilities with unflinching honesty. Exploring the question, "Do new members stick with us, or does turnover seem excessive?," the members concluded that several actions needed to be taken, from setting up temporary sponsorship lists to refraining from taking others' inventories in the meetings. When they asked themselves, "Does the group carry its fair share of helping the District, Area and General Service Office?," they decided that "Yes, we do support these services financially, and we have an active general service representative. Our group sets aside \$10 a month for her to attend area functions."

A question about sharing responsibility for the group's kitchen and housekeeping chores predictably hit a sticky wicket. "There seems to be a tendency for other A.A.s to take the trusted servants for granted," the

inventory concludes. "Every member of A.A. needs to pitch in at the groups we attend." However, contemplating the question, "Has everything practical been done to provide an attractive meeting place?," the group passed itself with flying colors. "Yes," it found. "We moved from the old location when the rent was raised to a lovely location in a church. We keep our books and pamphlets up-to-date, and we clean up the room before and after each meeting."

Looking at the question, "What is the basic purpose of a group?" the members came up with four answers: "to carry the message to the alcoholic; serve as a support system to the newcomer; provide a set time and place to share our experience, strength and hope; and furnish a place where the older members (sober six months to years and years) get a chance to be willing to listen, to not succumb to ignorance, prejudice, self-will, to seek humility and actively participate in tolerance, kindness and love."

Says Judy: "We hope that sharing our inventory will help other groups to become more responsible about carrying the message inside and outside the groups. We have been courageous, patient and loving throughout this process. Our group has grown, and we have a new focus on co-founder Bill W.'s message of singleness of purpose. Let us all join together in supporting our Three Legacies of Recovery, Unity and Service."

Baltimore Intergroup Is Rich in A.A. History

In all of Maryland there were only two A.A. groups—in Baltimore and Towson—when, after heated discussions, the members agreed to start an intergroup. A tiny room in the Bromo-Seltzer Tower Building was rented in late 1948. Pioneer member Lib S. stated that if you stood in the middle of the room and extended your hands, you would touch the walls...

Interest in the history of A.A. in Maryland has been running high, thanks in large part to a series of articles published in the *MarGenSer Newsletter*, published by Maryland General Service, Inc., of Alcoholics Anonymous. Under the title *Gleanings From Maryland's A.A. History*, four articles published in consecutive issues last year highlighted the birth of A.A. and the role of Marylanders in the early days and the spread of the Fellowship from Washington, D.C. and Baltimore into southern Maryland. The 1995 articles cover the beginnings of A.A. on the Eastern Shore and in other parts of the state; the growth of intergroups and other organizational elements; special events that strengthened the Fellowship; and the changing attitudes toward women, minorities and gays.

According to *Gleanings*, the first 857 Group, also called the Reboos Club, was formed in Baltimore in June 1940. "The group had no traditions to guide them in those early days, so they tried whatever they thought might work. For example, they asked judges to lock up drunks until they got sober, and the A.A.s would then try to help them. They asked the Salvation Army to provide beds, and they gave out meal tickets, which didn't work because the drunks sold the tickets for booze money."

As *Gleanings* points out, "The drunks of 50 years ago had little chance for a decent life. They were viewed as psychos by the medical profession and as spiritual lepers by the clergy. Now, here was an answer—recovery in A.A.—and the several dozen recovering Baltimore alcoholics were eager to pass it on."

It was in this environment that Lib S. and Tom S. thought up the idea of buying a beat-up Baltimore row house and using one floor for a club house, one for a business office that would educate the public about alcoholism, and another for detoxing and housing drunks. After much squabbling, Tom, Lib and a friend went to New York to muster support from A.A. co-founder Bill W. To their surprise, he turned thumbs down on the project because, he said, experience showed that A.A. should be self-supporting, should not have any outside affiliation, and should focus on attraction rather than promotion. Lib and Tom dropped their plan, the 857 Group decided to follow the examples of Cleveland and Boston, each of which had an effective central A.A. office, separate from groups and clubs. And so the Baltimore Intergroup Office was born. Since 1948 it has moved four times and is presently located at 5438 York Road.

As the *Gleanings* history notes, "operating Intergroup back in the 1940s was a simple but important job. Since then, responsibilities have snowballed. Over 3,000 calls ring monthly. The volume of activity requires special workers: one full-time and three part-time. In addition to regular staff, about 30 volunteers answer calls for help and information about the more than 900 meetings held weekly in the Baltimore area. The staff coordinates with employers, clergy, media, hospitals, professionals and institutions as required. Intergroup conducts all its affairs according to the A.A. Traditions.

"This volume of work would be impossible to handle without the aid of modern technology. A computer database helps keep accurate information on meeting locations and times; Twelfth Step lists are kept updated. All groups receive bulletins and council reports twice monthly, and 20,000 directories are printed for distribution every eight months. Also, the office stocks and sells A.A. Conference-approved literature. Action is the magic word in A.A., and there is plenty of action at the Intergroup Office, Baltimore's service hub."

C.P.C.

Taking the Stress Out of Referrals in SE Texas

"By helping probation officers understand what A.A. does and does not do, we are helping ourselves."

Explains Jan M., past chairperson of the Southeast Texas Area Committee on Cooperation With the Professional Community: "We were having major trouble at our meetings with offenders who were mandated to A.A. whether they were alcoholic or not. They were arriving late, with one objective in mind—getting their proof-of-attendance papers signed. Then they'd take off, many of them hostile, angry and without qualms about breaking anonymity. So our mission, as we saw it, was to reach the probation officers who monitor the attendance of these people and tell them about A.A.'s primary purpose—namely, that helping alcoholics is our only business; and if they need to refer those with problems other than alcohol, we'll be glad to suggest appropriate programs of recovery."

First, says Jan, "our C.P.C. committee needed to establish communication with area probation departments. Early last year, because of my work at a local treatment facility, I was able to get my toe in the door of the Galveston County probation department and approach the supervisor with my A.A. hat on regarding a presentation. Around the same time, the G.S.R. from a Spanish-speaking district in our area joined the C.P.C. committee and started what turned out to be a productive dialogue with the Harris County probation department in Houston." When the department heads first met with the committee members, Jan recalls with a smile, "some of them seemed surprised to see us all neat and suited up; it absolutely blew their stereotyped view of A.A.s as scruffy and down-and-out."

To date the C.P.C. committee has given orientation sessions for more than 220 probation officers. Once they understood that A.A. cannot be all things to all addictions, "several officers apologized for sending drug addicts to A.A. instead of to programs such as Narcotics Anonymous, Cocaine Anonymous or Pills Anonymous," Jan reports. "They were interested in some options we presented to facilitate the signing of attendance papers and keep the referrals from lighting out early: for example, furnishing pre-addressed, stamped envelopes in which the cards could be mailed by the group secretary directly to the court. They were enthusiastic about the A.A. video *Hope: Alcoholics Anonymous*, which clearly explains the Steps, Traditions and basic recovery tools of A.A., and quite a few officers signed up to receive copies of *About A.A.*, the newsletter for professionals published biannually by G.S.O.

To accurately measure response to the presentations is impossible, Jan points out, but "there definitely are fewer complaints about court referrals from the groups. What we hope is that the probation officers we reach will check out the referrals to our meetings—making as sure as possible that they have a primary problem with alcohol and so can identify with the A.A.s there. We have been careful to emphasize to the probation officers that none of us came to A.A. under our own power. We were all 'sentenced,' if only by ourselves. What we have is our recovery in the Fellowship, and in order to keep it we give it away to the alcoholic who still suffers."

South Carolina Borrows A Leaf from Arizona

Brian P. was not happy. Many newcomers mandated to A.A. by the courts hadn't the foggiest about the program or how to behave at meetings and consequently were often disruptive. What to do?

Then Brian picked up the Holiday 1994 issue of *Bar* 4-5-9; as chairman of Upstate South Carolina's Committee on Cooperation With the Professional Community, his eye turned naturally to an article on how Arizona C.P.C.s had been developing a positive approach to referrals by the courts and other agencies. "One simple but effective tool described," Brian says, "was a short, informative letter about A.A. that they were making available to these people, both through their parole officers and at the start of meetings. Letting them know what to expect defused their fear and made life at the meetings a lot easier for everybody concerned. I was feeling really impressed when suddenly it hit me: this was something we could do too."

So Brian contacted G.S.O. for the information he needed. "Then we adapted the text into a folded leaflet," he relates. "Right at the start it says, 'So the court sent you to A.A., and you hate the idea. Don't worry, it's not all that bad.' Among other things it stresses that 'if a judge, court, school or employer has sent you to A.A. meetings, it is because they believe there is evidence that you may have a drinking problem.' At the end, under the heading *Keep Coming Back!*, there is ample space to list the names and phone numbers of A.A. contacts."

The C.P.C. committee printed a thousand copies of the message, which they passed out to G.S.R.s at the district meeting. "The G.S.R.s ran with it," Brian reports, "and we're receiving feedback indicating that the flyers really help. We are grateful to the Arizona C.P.C. committee for their fine idea, and for their generosity in passing it on." (The Arizona C.P.C. committee is pleased to share its experience, strength and guidelines, which are available in both English and Spanish.)

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

- 5-8—*Rapid City, South Dakota.* Native American Indian Conv. Write: Ch., Box 84824, Seattle, WA 98124
- 6-8—*Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada.* 19th Annual Conf. Write: Ch., Box 2012, Kelowna, BC V1X 4K5
- 6-8—*Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, Canada.* Northeast Area Conf.. Write: Ch., Box 1298, Sault Ste. Marie, ON P6A 6N1
- 6-8—*Sacramento, California.* 48th Annual Fall Conv. Write: Tr., Box 1484, Kohnert Park, CA 94927-1484
- 6-8—*Daytona Beach, Florida.* First Annual Fall Sponsorship Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 4911, S. Daytona, FL 32121
- 6-8—*Burley, Idaho.* Idaho Area 18th Fall Assembly. Write: Ch., Box 2611, Twin Falls, ID 83303
- 6-8—*Lafayette, Louisiana.* 12th Annual Cajun Country Conf. Write: Ch., Box 3160, Lafayette, LA 70502
- 6-8—*Lincoln, Nebraska.* Big Red Roundup VI. Write: Ch., 2840 S. 70th, Ste. 127, Lincoln, NE 68506
- 6-8—*Cherry Hill, New Jersey.* Southern NJ Big Book Seminar. Write: Ch., Box 383, Manuta, NJ 08051
- 6-8—*Tahlequah, Oklahoma.* Serenity Harvest. Write: Ch., Box 18872, Oklahoma City, OK 73154
- 6-8—*Aiken, South Carolina.* Caro-Lambda Recovery Weekend. Write: Ch., C.R.W., 2730 Stepp Drive, Columbia, SC 29204
- 6-8—*Calpe, Spain.* Fourth Costa Blanca Intergroup Conv. Write: Ch., Mail Boxes 167, c/Corbetta 10-5, Calpe 03710, Alicante, Spain
- 6-8—*Clarksburg, West Virginia.* Jackson's Mill Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 825, Clarksburg, WV 26302-0825
- 7-8—*Silverdale, Washington.* Washington Area Assembly. Write: Ch., Box 4042, Silverdale, WA 98383
- 13-15—*Waterloo, Iowa.* Area 24 Fall Conference. Write: Ch., Box 992, Waterloo, IA 50704
- 13-15—*Austin, Minnesota.* Seventh Annual Hiawathaland Get-Together. Write: Ch., Box 5792, Rochester, MN 55903
- 20-22—*St. Cloud, Minnesota.* St. Cloud Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 125, St. Cloud, MN 56302
- 20-22—*Amherst, New York.* 54th Buffalo Fall Conv. Write: Ch., Box 58, Orchard Park, NY 14127
- 20-22—*Rapid City, South Dakota.* Area 63 Fall Conf. Write: Ch., Box 234, Rapid City, SD 57709
- 21-22—*Hinton, West Virginia.* 29th Annual Bluestone Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 20388, Charleston, WV 25362-1388

- 27-29—*Yuma, Arizona.* 1995 Arizona Area Conv. Write: Ch., 13319 E. 49th Dr., Yuma, AZ 85367
- 27-29—*Binghamton, New York.* Two Rivers Soberfest. Write: Ch., 662 State St., Binghamton, NY 13901
- 27-29—*Greensburg, Pennsylvania.* 44th Laurel Highlands Conf. Write: Ch., Box 6, Bovard, PA 15619
- 27-29—*Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.* 1995 Philadelphia Freedom Roundup (sponsored by gay & lesbian members). Write: Ch., Box 15978, Philadelphia, PA 19103
- 27-29—*St. Thomas, Virgin Islands.* 10th Annual Conv. Write: Ch., Box 3435, St. Thomas, VI 00803
- 27-29—*Bellingham, Washington.* Mt. Baker Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 28231, Bellingham, WA 98228
- 27-29—*Cape May, New Jersey.* NERC 95. Write: Ch., Box 170, Sicklerville, NJ 08081

November

- 2-5—*Memphis, Tennessee.* Bluff City Conv. Write: Ch., 1774 Sugarloaf St., Memphis, TN 38108
- 3-5—*Norfolk, Virginia.* Virginia Area Fall Assembly. Write: Ch., 2656 Wayside Dr., Richmond, VA 23235
- 9-12—*Helen, Georgia.* 15th Chattahoochee Forest Conf. Write: Ch., Box 363, Statesboro, GA 30459
- 9-12—*Cherokee, North Carolina.* Second North Carolina Native American Conv., Write: Ch., Box 2015, Cherokee, NC 28719
- 10-12—*Okoboji, Iowa.* Pre-Winter Rally. Write: Ch., Box 346, Sutherland, IA 51058-0346
- 10-12—*Leominster, Massachusetts.* 32nd Annual State Conv. Write: Reg., Box 454, Leominster, MA 01453-0454
- 10-12—*Cincinnati, Ohio.* Third Buckeye Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 5314, Cincinnati, OH 45205
- 17-19—*Wichita, Kansas.* Fall Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 47713, Wichita, KS 67202
- 17-19—*Fontana, Wisconsin.* McHenry's Sixth Annual Soberfest. Write: Ch., Box 213, Ringwood, IL 60072-0213
- 23-26—*Las Vegas, Nevada.* Las Vegas

Closed Meeting Topics From the Grapevine

For more detailed suggestions, see the pages noted.

October (page 30): A.A. Everywhere—Anywhere

November (page 29): A.A. in cyberspace, group inventory

- Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 43177, Las Vegas, NV 89116
- 24-26—*Hamilton, Bermuda.* Bermuda Conv. Write: Ch., Box 178, Warwick WK BX, Bermuda
- 24-26—*Toronto, Ontario, Canada.* Fifth Annual ERCCYPAA. Write: Ch., 5 Fernwood Garden, Apt. #1, Toronto, ON M4K 2J8
- 24-26—*Clearwater Beach, Florida.* Suncoast Conv. Write: Ch., Box 86703, St. Petersburg, FL 33738
- 24-26—*Detroit, Michigan.* Third Holiday Roundup. Write: Ch., 17181 Stout, Detroit, MI 48219
- 24-26—*Diamondhead, Mississippi.* Sixth Annual Gratitude Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 7851, Gulfport, MS 39507
- 24-26—*Omaha, Nebraska.* Great Plains Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 34192, Omaha, NE 68134
- 24-26—*Tulsa, Oklahoma.* Green Country Thanksgiving Weekend. Write: Ch., Box 2724, Tulsa, OK 74101-2724

December

- 1-3—*Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.* 55th Anniv./Golden Triangles. Write: Ch., Box 6501, Pittsburgh, PA 15212
- 1-3—*San Antonio, Texas.* Southwest Regional Forum. Write: Forum Coordinator, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163

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

8-10—Minot, North Dakota. Fifth Annual
Magic City Conv. Write: Ch., 508 9th St.
NW, Minot, ND 58701

January

5-7—South Padre Island, Texas. 22nd
Annual Lower Rio Grande Valley
Jamboree. Write: Ch., Box 5453,
Brownsville, TX 78520

12-14—Bryant/College Station, Texas. 34th
SETA Assembly and Conv. Write: Tr., Box
9120, College Station, TX 77840-9120

18-21—Raleigh, North Carolina. 29th Tar
Heel Mid-Winter Conf. Write: Ch., Box
18412, Raleigh, NC 27619