Spring 2015

From the Area chair

I was thinking: I was invited to speak on anonymity at a workshop recently. In preparation for that I came across the brochure Understanding Anonymity. "If we look at the history of A.A., from its beginning in 1935 until now, it is clear that anonymity serves two different yet equally vital functions:

- •At the personal level, anonymity provides protection for all members from identification as alcoholics, a safeguard often of special importance to newcomers.
- •At the public level of press, radio, TV, films and other media technologies such as the Internet, anonymity stresses the equality in the Fellowship and all members by putting the brakes on those who might otherwise exploit their A.A. affiliation to achieve recognition, power, or personal gain.

When using digital media, A.A. members are responsible for their own anonymity and that of others. When we post, text, or blog, we should assume that we are publishing at the public level. When we break our anonymity in these forums, we may inadvertently break the anonymity of others."

In the process of doing this workshop I began to focus on how anonymity affects me or better yet how I relate to anonymity. It occurred to me that anonymity protected me from myself a lot. I have the tendency to think highly of myself and to want attention. If offered an opportunity to be a spokesperson for A.A. I would be very tempted to accept. This, of course, would be

NIA Grapevine Chair

February 1st was the start of the AA Grapevine subscription challenge. This a state, province, and territory-wide challenge to increase new subscriptions (renewals don't count) to Grapevine and La Vina in 2015. The prize will be a special section in a 2016 issue featuring members' stories from the state, province or territory with the greatest percentage growth in new paid subscriptions or subscription gift certificates.

As the AA Grapevine enters its 71st year, the number of subscribers is dropping. Why is this? Some say that print magazines are all on their way out. The Grapevine is available online for those of you that roll that way. Don't forget, the Daily Quote is available on your phone or email for free.

Some may say the economy is to blame. I don't think this is valid because of the number of people walking into a meeting with a \$2+ can of Monster is still growing. And most of them have \$5+ for a pack of smokes too.

Has the quality of the content changed or are the sober old timers no able to see the relevance of today's articles? At the last assembly I heard someone say, at the mike, that they didn't subscribe anymore because they didn't like the content anymore. They are using the power of the purse to protest this unappealing change.

I have been told humility is the ability to remain teachable. A closed mind cannot be taught. When I was in treatment, there were old copies of the GV in the lunge. I

GV continued from p 1

Concepts is published quarterly by the Northern Illinois Area of Alcoholics Anonymous. It is intended as a service letter to keep Northern IL Area, districts, and GSRs informed of service opportunities, events, and experience relevant to carrying the AA message. Subscription is free but generally limited to A.A. members within the NIA geographical area. All publication costs are paid by A.A. members through their contributions to NIA. Opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the thinking of Alcoholics Anonymous, NIA or the Editor. Comments, suggestions and subscription requests plus shares of experience, strength and hope, should be directed to the editor: Concepts@aa-nia.org

All A.A. members are encouraged to see Concepts on-line at: http://www.aa-nia.org

If your NIA Treasurer Envelope says St. Charles, Barrington, or Bourbonnais, it's Old. Throw it away!

The current address is

NIA Treasurer

Northern Illinois Area, Ltd.,

P.O. Box 51,

Lake Bluff, IL 60044.

CONCEPTS is a confidential document. It contains names and phone numbers. Please do not take it to jails, treatment centers, etc. It is meant for use in the Area 20 AA community only.

made the mistake of reading one that changed my contempt of the fourth step. It told me that step 4 was not a personal invasion but a necessary cleansing. This, from a decades old copy of the Grapevine that I KNEW had nothing for me.

My sponsor told me I would learn some things were not for me but for someone that I might help in the future. With this in mind, I continue to read the GV stories by younger, older, and different authors. Heck, I will read the Grapevine when the topic of the month is Old Self-Important Women of AA.

Jim Haas. NIA Grapevine Chair

From the editor

So my space got significantly smaller this quarter. © Last edition I had to introduce myself. This edition I just need to hit the high points. Cheryl wrote a great article on safety in AA, for which all members of AA are responsible.

Anonymity needs to be constantly discussed as we have newcomers that have no idea it is not ok to share someone's recovery on Facebook. Look at the pic before you post it with some title that will haunt you and the poor person in the background for the rest of their life.

Area 20 recently added a committee: Bridging the Gap. There is confusion about what BTG is. An explanation is here.

In an effort to get Concepts out before the Assembly, so that copies will be at the Assembly, submissions for the next issue need to be made by May 16, 2015.

Thank you for your submissions.

wrong and a break of our tradition of anonymity at the public level. "With characteristic intemperance, however, some of our newcomers cared not at all for secrecy. They wanted to shout A.A. from the housetops, and did. . . . They had changed from A.A. members into A.A. show-offs." Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, pg. 185

Over the years I have heard many different people talk about how they didn't care if others knew they were alcoholic. In fact, some of these people were even proud of the fact. Even today there is still talk about an individual's right to disclose they are an alcoholic anywhere and anytime they want as long as they're not associating themselves with Alcoholics Anonymous. There is even a movement, nationally, to advocate for recovery, and organizations whose sole purpose is to advocate for recovery. People are encouraged to get out in the public and talk about their recovery identifying them as a person in long-term recovery. This in and of itself does not appear to violate our tradition of anonymity. But I wonder.

"The spiritual substance of anonymity is sacrifice." (Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, pg. 184) This is how Bill starts his essay on Tradition Twelve. Sacrifice? "... anonymity is real humility at work. It is an all-pervading spiritual quality which today keynotes A.A. life everywhere. Moved by the spirit of anonymity, we try to give up our natural desires for personal distinction as A.A. members both among fellow alcoholics and the general public." Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, pg. 187

The more I think about this subject the more I wonder just where my rights end and yours begin. Our Tradition states: "Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all of our Traditions." That tells me anonymity is pretty important. If it is the foundation of all

of our Traditions and our Traditions are about unity then anonymity has to be about unity as well. If this is true, is it really my anonymity or does it belong to all of us. Do I have a right to talk about my membership in A.A. in public? Obviously not. I do believe that we can all agree about that. But do I have the right to talk about being in recovery in public? I suppose the question would be: what are my motives?

I do believe that there is work to do in educating the public about recovery. Far too many people are being incarcerated, for alcohol and drug related crimes that need to receive treatment for the disease of addiction rather than being locked up. But who should be doing it. As a member of A.A. NOT ME; again I believe we all are on the same page about that – clearly an "outside issue." But what about me as a person in long term recovery (not identifying myself as a member of A.A.), couldn't I do it then?

To be honest with you, I DON'T KNOW.

If it seems that I am going in circles – good catch – I am. Anonymity is very important. It is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions (Unity) and real humility at work. Humility, by the way, is a pretty important part of personal recovery too, I'm pretty sure I read that somewhere.

I wish that I had an answer, but I don't. So I think I will refrain from talking about my disease, recovery or membership in A.A. outside of A.A. until I have more information. Instead, I think I will work on humility and sacrifice; that seems to be the smarter way for me right now.

Anyway, I was just thinking. Robert S.

Rule 62

You might be an alcoholic if:

- 1. The vodka you are drinking reminds you of the taste of a fine aftershave
- 2. You are lying in your waterbed all warm and comfy when you remember you don't have a waterbed.

A rabbit walks out of a bar p.8

A rabbit walks out of a bar p. 14

A husband and wife were sitting in their living room. The wife said, "Just so you know, I never want to live in a vegetative state dependent on some machine and fluids from a bottle. If that ever happens, just pull the plug." Her husband got up, unplugged the TV, and threw out all her beer.



The Drunk and The Priest

A drunk man had passed out under a tree next to an overpass along a busy interstate highway. The next morning, as he started to wake up, he opened his eyes, shook his head and slowly managed to get on his feet. Just then a car came flying down the highway, lost control and slammed into the concrete overpass with great force. The front of the car was totally mangled and steam was pouring from under the crushed hood.

As the dust settled, the drunk rubbed his eyes and shook his head in disbelief of what he had just witnessed. Then, the driver's door of the car creaked open and a priest stepped out. He brushed himself off, looked around and walked to the side of the highway.

The drunk shouted, "Father, you are one lucky man! You should have been killed in that crash and you escaped without a scratch!"

The priest replied, "Well, my son, it had nothing to do with luck. I had The Lord riding with me!"

To which the drunk answered, "Well, you better let him outta there before you kill him!"

http://www.step12.com

Safety in Alcoholics Anonymous

Each year the General Service
Conference (GSC) votes on theme and a
few topics for presentations. This year one
of the presentation topics will be "Safety
and Respect – Practicing the Principles
Begins in our Home Group." Our East
Central Regional Trustee, Bill F, asked if I
would participate on a panel for Safety in
AA at the Conference of Delegates Past &
Present.

As long as there has been AA, there has probably been the topic of safety. If you read the Big Book or AA Comes of Age you find Bill writing about having furniture ruined, fights and even I believe a fire started by a wet drunk. Once they started letting "fallen women" into AA, the thirteenth step was probably a given. And when you read about Bleeding Deacons in the 12 Traditions, well, I've known a few who try to rule by intimidation, which doesn't make some people feel safe. For myself, I recall at least one business meeting in my early AA where blows were almost struck.

I think the primary concern I hear expressed the most though is regarding predators in AA and the newly sober, and vulnerable. Obviously I come at this from the perspective of a woman. I will not deny that there are women in AA who prey on new/young men. But in my years of AA I have only known one woman like that, but I've known far too many men. I believe this is in part because it's also a cultural issue, and it's not unique to AA or alcoholics.

First, the good old boys club has no place in AA, yet it is alive and well. We have men in my District who see nothing wrong with "boys being boys" and justifying their behavior. If they did these things in the

work place they would be fired. Yet we tolerate them in AA because we think they have a right to be in a meeting because they have a desire to stop drinking. The Third Tradition does not give men (or women) the right to be in AA at the expense of others. It does not shield them from criminal behavior of harassment or making a hostile environment. Any time a member of AA is made to feel uncomfortable in a meeting because of jokes or innuendo it is wrong.

It is in tolerating this behavior that leads to the belief by some people that it is ok to "hook-up" with members of the opposite sex and exploit their vulnerability. I know of a man who preys on women and has for a long time. There are many men who have turned a blind eye to his behavior. They have justified the way he talks around and to women. They have allowed him to stay in meetings despite many complaints by women. Finally a woman went to the board of a local club with the "threat" that either they ban him or she would take legal action. Unfortunately that only worked for a while. At some point, for some reason, he was allowed to come back. Since this is a club, should someone someday bring a lawsuit, they will be open to legal action.

As a man or woman in AA, we have an obligation to work with the members of our sex regarding this issue. It is the responsibility of men to watch each other, and talk to other men who take advantage of women in AA. If a woman in AA who is more "mature"

Continued on p. 6

Safety continued from p.5

comes to you with a concern, listen. Don't just excuse the behavior of the man she is concerned about. Chances are if she is coming to talk to you about another man's behavior, it's because she needs help. As a woman, I can talk to other women, but I can't always address the concern with a man's behavior. Men can also help by warning new men to stay away from women who prey on newcomers. It isn't an "attaboy" double standard here. Men can be driven out of AA by this behavior also.

As a sponsor a woman can work with other women in two avenues. First, to help them understand that just because a man is in AA doesn't mean he's a spiritual giant. There will always be a certain number of sober horse thieves in AA.

My first real encounter in learning about this personally was a man who was inappropriate with me. He was a hugger, and not in a good way. He had a habit of holding a bit too close and too long; of brushing against a woman's body as he put his arms around her; of caressing her shoulder blades as if they were breast. As a newcomer I thought I was mistaken with what I was experiencing. After all, no one in AA would do that! In time I came to learn that I was not mistaken. The other women in AA told me who to watch out for and how to take care of myself.

I was told, and so now I pass it on to women; there is no requirement in AA that you hug anyone. That if you are uncomfortable don't force yourself to do something because you think it's expected. I learned how to "block" hugs with a handshake. I've had people "challenge" me on this and say that I should hug them because it's AA. That is not true! I believe

that because women did it for me, it is my duty to do it for others. It's been joked that I am a mother lion when it comes to new women in AA and men who take advantage.

The second way women can work together is to speak to them when they behave inappropriate to men. While I am not one of those people who think that women "ask" for it, that doesn't mean that we can create an environment where we are sending mixed messages. Also, men need to be able to concentrate on their sobriety in a meeting. Not on how low-cut your blouse is, or how tight your jeans are. Unless you are looking to get a man, there's no reason to dress like you're going to the bar.

I've often sat with women and we read "now about sex..." in the Big Book. I ask them to take their inventory and then to work "to shape a sane and sound ideal of our future sex life." I've found that once a woman starts to work the principles of the program, they start to also find that they don't want to be taken advantage of.

Also, we can encourage women to talk openly about their concerns. Not just with sponsors, but with other women. And if necessary at the groups business meeting or a clubs board meeting. Women need to talk to other women when someone is behaving in a manner that makes them uncomfortable or is downright offensive. In that manner they can check their reactions and see if they are on target or not. I've know many women like myself who experienced abuse in the past and now are oversensitive to some behavior. I had to learn that some men were friendly, and some were overly friendly. I had to learn to let

Safety continued from p.6

down my guard on the friendly ones and let people in. That gave me the strength and courage to address people who did not honor boundaries.

It lies to each of us to step up and be responsible to keeping AA safe, to address the inappropriate behavior of any AA member. We need to do this firmly, but also with some amount of kindness. Many of the things we learned while we were drinking were not in our best interest, much less that of other people. First we have to learn how to behave ourselves. How to live a principled life. Then we get to help others learn to do this also. In working with others, we look to not tear them down or humiliate them, but simple share what we have learned; how to treat everyone with dignity.

The tragedy of all this is that newcomers don't feel safe and they leave, sometimes to drink and die. It is important for those of us who have learned these lessons to carry this message. For people to privately call people out on behavior in an appropriate way. Sometimes it's trying to talk to them after the meeting. Sometimes it's having a conversation with the other person's sponsor and just asking if they are aware of the issue and working with the person. And sometimes it's going to a business meeting and pointing out the obvious: that inappropriate behave can cause legal action, and it can kill the newcomer.

As for the culture issue of the "boys will be boys".... If anyone has some ideas on how to break through that barrier, I sure could use some ideas!

Cheryl V. Delegate

So what does the new NIA Bridging the Gap Committee do?

That seems to be a question for many.

Some do not know what Bridging the Gap
(BTG) is as the name of the pamphlet P-49

- "Bridging the Gap Between Treatment
and A.A. Through Temporary Contact
Programs" would lead us to believe that
this is something that the treatment
Committee does.

But what about the "Temporary Contacts" part? Bridging the Gap provides temporary contacts for alcoholics being released from INSITTUTIONS. What is considered an institution? According to dictionary.com an institution is an organization, establishment, foundation, society, or the like, devoted to the promotion of a particular cause or program, especially one of a public, educational, or charitable character: a public or private place for the care or confinement of inmates, especially mental patients or other persons with physical or mental disabilities.

The temporary contacts will take the newcomer to a few meetings, introduce them to fellow members of A.A. and insure that he or she has the phone numbers of several A.A. members. The first 48 hours following release from an institution is essential to their recovery and if that contact is not in place right away the chances of a sober life diminish quickly.

So Bridging the Gap is not just about Treatment. It includes activities such as Temporary Contact, Re-entry program and Pre-Release Contact. It can be done at a county jail, a product drug court, or the result of bringing meetings into a treatment facility. Assistance could be provided by the Cooperation in the Professional Community (CPC) chair who is comfortable doing a presentation in front of a professional panel, or the Public Information (PI) chair who has developed a relationship with local police department to provide assistance with their drug tank participants.

So if all these committee can do this Twelve Step work why do we need a BTG Committee? Because BTG is a proactive not reactive program. The volunteers need to be in place before you can approach a facility and offer this valuable link. You have to know who to contact when someone sends an email to your area or district because an inmate or treatment program graduate is being released to your local community. The volunteers have to be familiar with what AA does and what AA does not do. We cannot leave these things to chance, they have to be planned and in place before a call or identified need is received

That is what your Area BTG Committee will do, have a list of BTG Coordinators in each district or if none exist go out to a district to provide support and suggestions for setting up a program, share the experience of others doing the same work and how that can be accomplished. So at the area assemblies when the breakout sessions begin anyone interested in learning about how to start a BTG program in their district attend the BTG committee meeting, others will go to share their experience, some will come for assistance

seeking the help of more experienced members.

They do no replace the Treatment, Corrections, CPC or PI committees but partner with them. They work to share the message of basic Twelve Step Work. They continue the work that goes as far back as 1939 when in Cleveland, OH articles published in the Plain Dealer encouraged a massive effort by A.A.s to reach the drunks in the hospitals. At that time they didn't have enough older members so brand new A.A.s were sent in, and it was discovered they could do as good a job as the old timers, escorting the new men to the meetings. This is where the idea of personal sponsorship for each new man and woman began. As Dr. Bob said to Bill, me, "If you and I are going to stay sober, we had better get busy." Carol H. Area BTG Alt chair

Questions, contact btg@aa-nia.org.

NEEDED IN AREA 20

ALT CHAIR FOR COOPERATION
WITH THE PROFESSIONAL
COMMUNITY

ALT PUBLIC INFORMATION

ALT TREATMENT CHAIR

ALT CHAIR PUBLIC INFORMATION



HISTORY OF THE GENERAL SERVICE CONFERENCE

1945 JOINING THE FOLD...

AFTER WORLD WAR II ENDS, A.A. GROUPS BEGIN TO SPRING UP IN OTHER LANDS, WITH WORD OF THE FLEDGLING ORGANIZATION SPREADING SOUTH OF THE BORDER, ACROSS THE ATLANTIC, AND TO THE PACIFIC RIM. THE NEXT DECADE ALSO WITNESSES THE FELLOWSHIP'S FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION AND THE CREATION OF THE GENERAL SERVICE CONFERENCE.

1951 A.A.'S FIRST GENERAL SERVICE CONFERENCE

THE FIRST GENERAL SERVICE
CONFERENCE, ORCHESTRATED BY CHAIRMAN
OF THE ALCOHOLIC FOUNDATION BERNARD
SMITH, IS HELD IN APRIL 1951 AT THE
COMMODORE HOTEL IN NEW YORK. BILL W.
LATER WRITES OF ITS SIGNIFICANCE TO A.A.:
"THE DELEGATES . . . LISTENED TO REPORTS
FROM THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES AND FROM
ALL OF THE SERVICES. THERE WAS WARM
BUT CORDIAL DEBATE ON MANY QUESTIONS
OF A.A. POLICY... [IT WAS PROVED] AS NEVER
BEFORE THAT A.A.'S TRADITION TWO WAS
CORRECT: OUR GROUP CONSCIENCE COULD
SAFELY ACT AS THE SOLE AUTHORITY AND
SURE GUIDE FOR ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS."

1954 THE ALCOHOLIC FOUNDATION BECOMES THE GENERAL SERVICE BOARD

CHANGING THE NAME OF THE
ALCOHOLIC FOUNDATION TO THE GENERAL
SERVICE BOARD OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS
WAS FIRST PROPOSED AT THE FIRST GENERAL
SERVICE CONFERENCE IN THE SPRING OF

1951, BUT THE SWITCH BECOMES OFFICIAL IN 1954. THE MOTIVATION IS TO SIGNAL THAT THE A.A. MEMBERSHIP IS TAKING FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR ITSELF.

1955 BILL W. PASSES THE TORCH, JULY 1955

THE ST. LOUIS CONVENTION

CULMINATES WITH BILL OFFICIALLY HANDING
LEADERSHIP OF A.A. OVER TO THE MEMBERS.

THE RESOLUTION HE READS IS PASSED WITH
A ROAR OF APPROVAL: "BE IT THEREFORE
RESOLVED THAT THE GENERAL SERVICE
CONFERENCE... SHOULD BECOME AS OF THIS
DATE... THE GUARDIAN OF THE TRADITIONS
OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, THE
PERPETUATORS OF THE WORLD SERVICES OF
OUR SOCIETY, THE VOICE OF THE GROUP
CONSCIENCE OF OUR ENTIRE FELLOWSHIP,
AND THE SOLE SUCCESSORS OF ITS COFOUNDERS, DOCTOR BOB AND BILL."

1962 TWELVE CONCEPTS FOR WORLD SERVICE PUBLISHED

IN 1962, THE GENERAL SERVICE
CONFERENCE ACCEPTS BILL'S LONG-AWAITED
MANUSCRIPT FOR TWELVE CONCEPTS FOR
WORLD SERVICE. IN THE INTRODUCTION, BILL
WRITES THAT HIS AIM IS "...TO RECORD THE
'WHY' OF OUR SERVICE STRUCTURE IN SUCH
A FASHION THAT THE HIGHLY VALUABLE
EXPERIENCE OF THE PAST, AND THE LESSONS
WE HAVE DRAWN FROM THAT EXPERIENCE,
CAN NEVER BE FORGOTTEN OR LOST."

FROM AA.ORG



Announcement

Alcoholics Anonymous: www.aa.org NIA 20: www.aa-nia.org
Sat, March 14 St. Patrick's Day Celebration, 6:30 Corned Beef & Cabbara Dimens \$40, \$45 for applied \$5 for abildren 5.42, Onco.

Cabbage Dinner: \$10, \$15 for couples, \$5 for children 5-12, Open Speaker Meeting at 8:00, Dance with DJ to follow: \$5. Stillwaters Alano Club 28W144 Industrial Drive-Suite 122, Lake Barrington, IL

Contact: Tim T. 847-322-7606



Contact Info: Emma W. @ 224-223-2648 or emstress3341@gmail.com.

<u>Sat March 21</u>, 2015 District 91 Winter Workshop Restraint of Pen, Tongue, and text. 224 S. Seminary st. Galesburg, IL (309) 343-1530

March 27-29 Spring Conference Pheasant Run 4051 East Main Street (Rt. 64), Saint Charles. Joe M. (847) 401-2595 or John G. (630) 204-4661. On line registration at www.NIASpringConference.com

<u>Sat March 28</u> Serenity Corner "Swing into Spring" Knights of Columbus Hall 806 Oakley Ave. Streator IL. Fellowship @ 5, dinner @ 6, Speaker @ 7pm. Kim J. (815) 603-7982 or Ron N. (815) 992-2252

Sat March 28 Spring Assembly Pheasant Run 4051 East Main Street (Rt. 64), Saint Charles. Joe M. (847) 401-2595 or John G. (630) 204-4661. No registration required.

<u>Sat April 11</u> Pre-General Service Conference Workshop Lord of Life Lord of Life Church SE corner Rte. 38 & La Fox Rd, La Fox. Elburn for GPS devices.

<u>Sat May 9</u> Spring Committee meeting at Lord of Life SE corner Rte. 38 & La Fox Rd, La Fox. Elburn for GPS devices

May 15th & 16th Big Book Workshop @ Concordia Lutheran Church 316 South Oakwood Geneseo, IL, Adrian C of New York, NY 6:00-9:00 PM Friday 9:00 AM-4:00 PM Saturday \$15.00 (Scholarships Available) Call Joe R (309) 235-1128 or Marie H (309) 236-9437. See flyer on the NIA website in the events tab.

<u>Sat May 30</u> Bridge the Gap workshop. First Baptist Church 1735 West Highland Ave Elgin, IL Saturday--May 30, 2015 12:00 -3:00 PM. Weezie 309-631-3830 Area 20 Treatment Chair

Jun 5-7 Midwest Motorcycle Alcoholics Anonymous convention.
Winnebago County Fairgrounds Pecatonica IL 61063. contact Mike O.

mike@mmaac.org or connect to MMAAC website through NIA website in the events tab

Sat June 13 Summer Assembly

July 2-5 2015 International convention of AA. Atlanta GA. www.aa.org

<u>Sat Aug 8</u> Summer committee meeting Lord of Life SE corner Rte. 38 & La Fox Rd, La Fox. Elburn for GPS devices

<u>Aug 28 - 30</u>, 2015 Illinois State Conference Normal, IL 2015ISCAA@gmail.com

Sat Sept 19 Fall Assembly/ Area Elections

Sat Oct 17 Fall Committee Meeting Lord of Life

Sat Oct 24 Big Book Conference at Palatine High School