

CONCEPTS

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As all of you probably know, the 2020 International Convention has been canceled. I enjoy looking at my panoramic pictures from past conventions, and so I created this picture to hang where the real one would be hanging if the convention took place. This is a picture from inside Ford Field, where the real picture would have been taken, as it is being set up for a Garth Brooks concert. I guess all we have now is to look forward to 2025 in Vancouver, BC. Have a safe and healthy summer. Robert S.



Working With Others

“Practical experience shows that nothing will so much insure your own immunity from drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics. It works when other activities fail.”

Alcoholics Anonymous, p.89

A few days ago, at a Zoom meeting I have been attending, a relative newcomer, sharing on Chapter 3 “More About Alcoholism,” asked a question along the lines of “If Jim had ‘no thought’ or ‘intention’ of drinking when he stopped for a sandwich at ‘a roadside place where they have a bar,’ how do I get past worrying about picking up the first drink?” (BB 35-37) One of the other participants with considerable time in AA suggested that the newcomer continue to hold on to a “fear of the first drink,” because it had served her well over her many years.

When I picked up a drink after almost six years of living life without alcohol, my thinking – or lack thereof -- closely paralleled Jim’s. Having hung around a lot of your meetings for almost three years, I had accepted a dinner invitation from a friend and his wife. After dinner at a local restaurant, they suggested sitting in the bar. I accepted the offer as well as the drink they bought me. It was that simple.

After two years or so of drinking myself into oblivion, I finally crawled into the basement of my first sponsor Tom B. Tom asked me if I could just not drink tomorrow. I told him I wasn’t sure but would try. Among the directions he gave me for how to get through the next day -- and the next and the next -- included attending a meeting and calling him each day. He also shared that his own sobriety was not dependent on his hanging on by his fingernails in fear of picking up another drink, but on his staying in fit spiritual condition by practicing the principles of AA’s Twelve Step program and sharing the program with others as he was willing to do with me.

As Tom took me through the Steps over the next few weeks, I came to understand that, on that first night, he had shared with me a concept fundamental to the very existence of the Fellowship itself and critical to every alcoholic’s recovery. Before AA existed, Bill Wilson, laying in a bed at Towns Hospital for the last time, had come to realize:

[There were thousands of hopeless alcoholics who might be glad to have what had been so freely given me. Perhaps I could help some of them. They in turn might work with others.

Bill’s realization was grounded in something Ebby Thacher had told him just prior to this last admission:

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My friend had emphasized the absolute necessity of demonstrating these principles in all my affairs. Particularly was it imperative to work with others as he had worked with me. Faith without works was dead, he said. For if an alcoholic failed to perfect and enlarge his spiritual life through work and self-sacrifice for others, he could not survive the certain trials and low spots ahead. If he did not work, he would surely drink again, and if he drank, he would surely die.” (BB at 14-15)



Unfortunately, Ebby’s own journey reflected the reality of this message. In Spring 1937, Ebby’s 2½-year period of uninterrupted sobriety ended. Ebby had moved back to Albany where he went to work for Ford Motor Company. Returning to New York City in April 1937 to visit friends and attend meetings, he checked into the Lexington Hotel. This trip marked the end of this period of Ebby’s sobriety. By his own account, from that point through at least the end of 1941, he was nowhere close to sober for any length of time. (Mel B., Ebby 82-86) According to Lois:

Ebby had a most erratic career: periods of sobriety mixed with long periods of maudlin drunkenness. It was hard to know how to handle him when he came begging for money, for we all felt so deeply in his debt that we hated to refuse him.

One time he lay in our Clinton Street vestibule cursing me and calling me ugly names the entire night because I wouldn’t let him in. Bill was away; so, in the morning I got someone to take Ebby to Bellevue Hospital. (Lois Remembers 117-118)

Throughout at least parts of this period, Lois reports, Ebby was sober and even attending meetings. (LR, p.130) But, if his own report is accurate, Ebby could only have created that impression by showing up on Lois’ doorstep on one of his “good” days.

Bill was genuinely troubled and perplexed by Ebby’s inability to remain sober. Years later, he noted that his “sponsor” was “sicker than I realize” and speculated that what “caused his backsliding” was most likely the fact that he “took little interest in other alcoholics.” (Talk, Bill W., New York City Medical Society on Alcoholism, 4/28/58) Lois, who had closer day-to-day contact with Ebby during much of this time, agreed with Bill’s assessment:

After those first two years in the Oxford Group, why did Ebby get drunk? It was he who gave Bill the philosophy that kept him sober. Why didn’t it keep Ebby sober? He was sincere, I’m sure. Perhaps it was the difference in the degree of wanting sobriety. Bill wanted it with his whole soul. Ebby may have wanted it simply to keep out of trouble. Or maybe he *couldn’t* want it with his whole soul, because he was too ill. Beyond that crucial visit with Bill, Ebby seemed to do very little about helping others. He never appeared really a member of AA. (Lois Remembers 118)

In the last chapter of our book, Bill discusses “a glimpse of your future” for the newcomer who finds our common solution and “the growth of the fellowship among us.” (BB 153) To Bill they are one and the same. He offers a highly personal insight into his own experience in Akron which led to his meeting with Dr. Bob on Mother’s Day 1935. Six months sober, facing a failed business venture and a “lonely weekend,” Bill describes himself standing outside an “attractive bar” in the lobby of the Mayflower Hotel. His thoughts turn from the “thin ice” of a bottle of ginger ale - or perhaps a drink or three -- to “those men who would die because they would not know how to get well,” -- you and me.

Suddenly I got scared to death. I realized this was the beginning of the usual rationalization which led me to the first drink. . . . The pull of the bar became terrific, I was really tempted this time. . . . Then I suddenly realized how much helping other alcoholics had helped me – even though none had got well themselves. I’d have to find an alcoholic in Akron and find him quick. (Bill W., “Recollections of the Early Life,” recorded at Hotel Bedford, 9/54)

After making several phone calls, Bill ultimately connects with Dr. Bob. The next day, Mother's Day, Bill and Dr. Bob meet. As Bill shared his experience, Dr. Bob recognized him to be "the first human being with whom I had ever talked, who knew what he was talking about in regard to alcoholism from actual experience. In other words, he talked my language." (BB 180) In a letter to Lois written later that day, Bill simply stated: "Today I met a man who has my problem." After one last misadventure, Dr. Bob and Bill begin a lifelong friendship in sobriety.

The meeting that Mother's Day is arguably the most seminal moment in AA history. Wilson's growing awareness that he might actually pick up a drink was followed by a starting insight: "I realized as never before how working with other alcoholics [over the previous five months] had played such a great part in sustaining my original experience." "I thought to myself, 'I *must* find another alcoholic and help him so that I can remain free.'" (Talk, Bill W., National Committee on Alcoholism, NYC, 3/30/56; Talk, Bill W., 2/51, Chicago IL)

For those enamored with the notion of the "pink cloud" period of sobriety, Bill goes on to describe this early period living with Dr. Bob and his wife Ann in Akron: "[Life was not easy for the two friends. Plenty of difficulties presented themselves. Both saw that they must keep spiritually active." (BB 156) Bill W. later explained his and Dr. Bob's motivation to locate another drunk:

I was living at Dr. Bob's place and one day he said to me "don't you think that for self-protection that we had better be working with more drunks." I thought it was a good idea. (Talk by Bill W., Chicago IL, February 1951)



So, they sought out another drunk, AA # 3 Bill D., in a local hospital. Like Dr. Bob, Bill D. identified with the message carried to him:

The second day, when Bill and Dr. Bob arrived to talk again, Bill D. pointed to them and said to his wife: "These are the fellows I was telling you about. They are the ones who know. They understand what this thing is all about." He related that "during the previous night 'hope had dawned on him . . . [If Bill and Bob can do it, I can do it.'" (Kurtz, Not God 39)

The growth of the Fellowship about which Bill wrote in "A Vision for You" emerged from the "kitchen table" message of hope that Ebby shared with Bill. It continued from Bill to Dr. Bob, again a message carried face-to-face from one alcoholic to another; then from Bill and Dr. Bob to Bill D.; and, when he finally returned to New York City, from Bill to Hank P. and Fitz M. In each of these conversations, the common elements that emerge are mutuality of need and identification.

In Bill's essay "The Language of the Heart," first published in AA Today, a Grapevine book published in 1960 on the occasion of AA's 25th Anniversary, Bill himself later expanded on these elements necessary to an initial face-to-face, heart-to-heart conversation between an AA member and a drunk.

Bill tells us that one insight that he and Dr. Bob shared in their earliest work is that "all true communication must be founded on mutual need." It is critical to break down the still suffering alcoholic's resistance by explaining that sharing with him is vital to the AA member's own continuing sobriety. Bill explains this mutuality of need in terms that make it clear that it applies to each of us when we undertake to serve as sponsor to a newcomer.

Never could we talk down to anyone, certainly not to a fellow alcoholic. We saw that each sponsor would have to humbly admit his own needs as clearly as those of his prospect. (LOTH 247)

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This mutuality of need, Bill describes, is no less than the “foundation for AA’s Twelfth Step to recovery.”

In addition, identification with the AA member carrying the message is critical to the still suffering alcoholic’s ability to experience the surrender, ego deflation and willingness to accept the spiritual program being offered to him.

Irrespective of whether one is asked to sponsor a so-called low-bottom or high-bottom drunk, Dr. Silkworth’s admonition is worth consideration: “Frothy emotional appeal seldom suffices. The message which can interest and hold these alcoholic people must have depth and weight.” (BB xxviii) To establish a basis of identification for the newcomer, we must demonstrate to him that “beyond doubt” we “lived in that strange and hopeless world where [he] still [is].” (LOTH 245) When we establish such a basis for identification one alcoholic to another, the channel for this communication will become “wide open.” (Id.)

In love and service,
Ray M.

Ready for the Beach?



The Trikini 2020

Grapevine Committee Corner

Hi, I'm Susan H. your Area 20 Grapevine/La Vina Committee Chair. I just returned from Oregon (virtually) on 5/3/2020 from a GV/LV Workshop (Zoom) featuring a very fun and informative presentation by Jon W., the Grapevine Senior Editor. The workshop was hosted by District 21 Area 58, and 93 AA's nationwide involved in Grapevine service attended, with the support of Vicky Barrios, the Grapevine/La Vina Outreach Coordinator. Vera F. Area 58 GV chair, hosted the meeting and also presented the updated GV website.

The Grapevine was created by six AA members in the New York area — four women and two men. With the blessings of AA's co-founder Bill W., they published the first issue in June 1944, just nine years after the founding of AA. A copy of that first issue was sent to every AA group — about 300 at the time — and to all known AA members in the armed services overseas. An entire page with the heading, "Mail Call for All AAs in the Armed Forces," was devoted to letters from these members, who began calling the Grapevine their "meeting in print." The title stuck, and today the Grapevine and La Viña carry it on their covers

Jon W. shared that Grapevine receives 150 stories per month to review. Each story is reviewed by three alcoholics to determine the theme of the story and that it was truly written by an alcoholic, not a family member or non-alcoholic. Then the story is categorized by theme – Step, Prison, Sponsorship, etc., and is stored in the correct themed folder. Issues are prepared 5 months ahead, so right now they just completed the October issues. Each issue is 64 pages long and is laid out in thirds. The first 1/3 is the theme stories, the second 1/3 is the Step, tradition and personal stories, and the last third is 'What's on your mind?', emotional sobriety, sponsorship, opinion pieces and of course the jokes included 'at wit's end.' The stories, which can be from 300 - 1800 words are gently edited for clarity, anonymity and language.

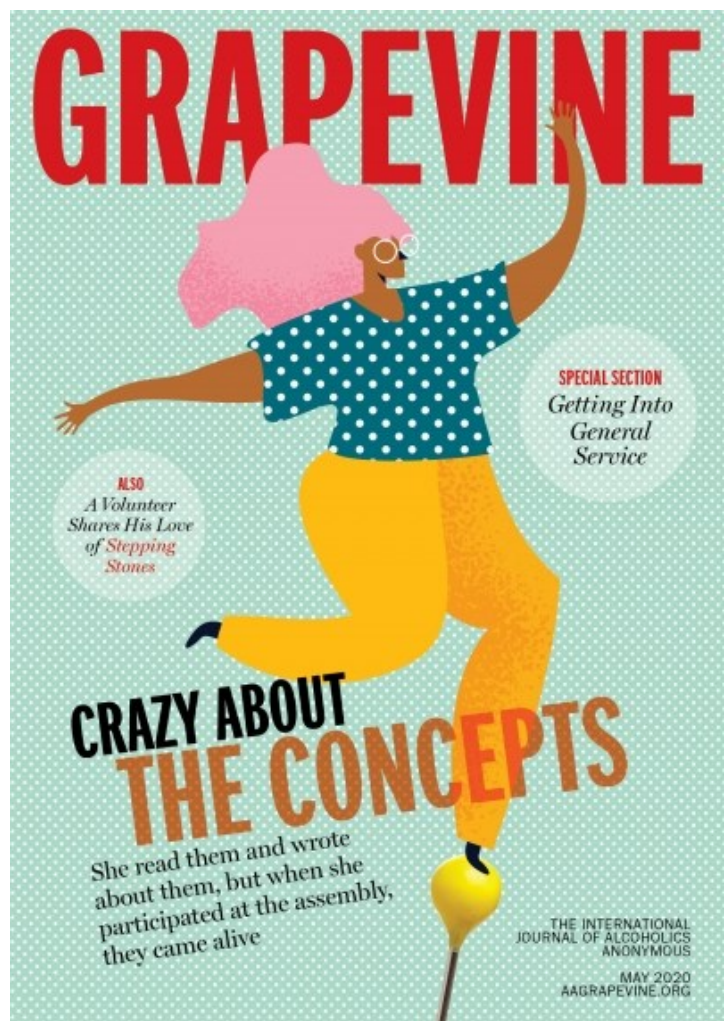
For our Area, I plan to share all the information obtained at that Workshop with the Grapevine and La Vina Committee and prepare an Area 20 Grapevine/La Vine Writing Workshop within the next few months. They (GV/LV) are in need of stories, pictures, drawings, jokes and especially

your experience, strength and hope regarding the steps, traditions and concepts. No poetry accepted due to editing concerns. It all depends on you – they are waiting! It does not have to be your full story, just write down what you would share in a meeting. You do not need to wait for a workshop and can submit an article at any time. Upcoming 2021 themes include: Old-Timers Stories, April is Fun in Sobriety, the Prison issue is always in July, dating in Sobriety and Getting Thru Adversity. The 2021 monthly topics will be posted on the GV website

There is always more to learn about the Grapevine/La Vine literature, as well as the hot agenda items for this committee at the GSC. Look for additional GV/LV information next time.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan





Lessons Learned During Times of Change

Someone made a comment to me recently that we were living in very strange times. They were, of course, referring to the global pandemic and the challenges each of us has faced as a result. When this is over – and it will be over some day – we will all be back together, sitting in our homegroup or our favorite meeting, sharing stories of how we got through this difficult time.

And some of these stories will be difficult. The hard stories of quarantine, job loss, financial hardship, illness, and those of lives lost before their time. But the best stories will be how we helped one another. How we reached out to another alcoholic during a time of isolation to check in, to connect, to share that experience, strength, and hope that is the foundation of our program. How we put aside selfishness and self-centeredness; how we thought of others before ourselves and resolutely turned our thoughts to someone we could help. How we tried to grow in understanding and effectiveness to serve God and our fellows.

Circumstances these past couple of months have forced us to become disciplined, yet adaptable. Reluctantly patient, but flexible. And most importantly, and perhaps the most demanding yet, we have been forced to change the way we have always done things. But one thing that apparently has not changed is our spiritual willingness to believe that we are not in control and that our dependence on a power greater than ourselves is of utmost importance.

In the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions it speaks to this

spiritual principle in Step Three. It states *“When World War II broke out, this spiritual principle had its first major test. A.A.’s entered the services and were scattered all over the world. Would they be able to take the discipline, stand up under fire, and endure the monotony and misery of war? Would the kind of dependence they had learned in A.A. carry them through? Well, it did. They had even fewer alcoholic lapses or emotional binges than A.A.s safe at home did. They were just as capable of endurance and valor as any other soldier.”* This is just as true for alcoholics today as it was for alcoholics back in World War II. We’re just fighting a different battle.

This recent public health crisis has challenged all of us and we’re not done yet. There is a long road ahead. I am hoping that I have been challenged in ways that will offer me opportunities for positive growth and change in my own personal recovery. The lessons I am learning today will be sure to serve me for a lifetime and because of this program, I will gratefully share them with others.

Lisa S.

Area 20 Treatment Committee Chair





Delegate's Corner

The Grapevine Inc. has a new project going on now called, “2020 Carry the Message Project”.

WANT TO HELP ANOTHER ALCOHOLIC?

GRAPEVINE & LA VIÑA are Great Twelfth Step Tools!

Give a gift subscription to an alcoholic who needs it.

Great for:

- Sponsees • Newcomers • Prisons • Detoxes • Doctor's Offices
- Group Celebrations • District and Area Events • Giveaways

Get your group, district, area or AA friends to join in.

Carry the Message, it's easy!

Go to aagrapevine.org/carry-the-message to get started

“AA is more than a set of principles; it is a Society of alcoholics in action. We must carry the message, else we ourselves can wither and those who haven't been given the truth will die.”

—Bill W., July 1955, The Language of the Heart

The above message is from the Grapevine page on the GSO website. There is a video that goes with it. The video tells us that some people are not able to attend a meeting whenever and wherever they want to. They may be in an institution, home bound, in jail, etc.....

I am blessed to attend any AA meeting that I want. That was until mid March, 2020. Then I didn't leave my home

for four weeks. Just like many of you I heard about ZOOM meetings. I didn't know the mechanics of how to find the meeting id and the password. I learned all by word of mouth. I reach out to you and you helped me. We AA's help each other. That's what we do.

I went on a 12:00 pm Gratitude meeting today. They have this meeting every day at noon. Before going on the Zoom meeting I figured I wouldn't know anyone but as it turned out I saw someone I knew from years ago. It felt like home to me.

There was a young woman on the meeting celebrating 4 months of continuous sobriety. Half of her sobriety has been in “stay at home” mode. That brings me hope that we can reach out to any one any where with the message of hope.

What we are doing is “remote communities”. We are staying sober from our kitchens, living rooms and dining rooms. The message is the same no matter how we connect, it is one alcoholic reaching out to another alcoholic offering help and hope.

I am so grateful to be a part of this community of Alcoholic Anonymous.

In loving gratitude,

Marilyn F.



Maintaining our Spiritual Fitness

A General Service Representative is possibly the most important position in the entire fellowship of AA. GSR's connect their individual group to the entire upside-down triangle of AA.

I was new to the Fellowship and didn't know many people. One evening after a meeting, two of my new friends sat down on either side of me and asked if I would help them set up before something called a Winter Assembly that Saturday. I said "sure". Heck, I didn't have anything to lose, except my obsession with alcohol, right? When I arrived, the place was abuzz with people doing different things, setting up chairs, assembling the electronics, and putting out literature. I found my friend and we got started filling the coolers with water and pop and making coffee. People seemed way to happy giving up their time on a Saturday in December. It reminded me of the atmosphere the first time I walked into my Home Group 30 minutes early, but on a much larger scale. These people were serious about living a happy life. And I wanted some, just like a cold glass of water on a hot day.

A few months passed and I was at my Monday night group, someone mentioned they needed a GSR for the group. Of course, no one raised their hand. I had talked to my sponsor about getting involved in service, so I raised my hand. They took a vote and elected me their new GSR. After the joy of acceptance passed, I instantly felt PANIC! I had no idea what I had just got myself into or how I was going to learn about the service structure. My sponsor just laughed when I talked to him about it and happily walked me through the basics before my first District Meeting.

As a GSR I soon realized that I had duties to our

Group. It was my duty to attend the group weekly and have a business meeting once a month. I also needed to attend the District meeting monthly and attend the Area Assembly once a quarter.

At the group level, I enjoyed relaying information to the group on what is happening at the District and Area levels, and AA as a whole. As GSR it was my duty to schedule and run the group business meeting. This is where we decided if the group needed to change the format, how we wanted to disperse the 7th Tradition collection, like buying literature or donating to District, Area, or the GSB. We also discussed the group's opinions on District and Area motions, as well as the agenda items that would be voted on at the General Service Conference. I'd also report on any A.A. events in and around the area. Not only did these discussions happen in the group, the voice of the group would then be carried back to the District and Area. The information flow is a two way street.

I appreciate being a part of a home group and learning to develop and sustain friendships inside the fellowship. Service is a key element to my continued growth in AA and I enjoy attending a meeting that studies all 36 principles – steps, traditions and concepts. I participate in our district's activities like picnics and workshops. At the Area level I was on the planning committee for the Spring Conference, and I even spoke in front of hundreds of people at the Area's Big Book Conference (way out of my comfort zone). Now I am one of those people who happily helps out where and whenever I can, and treasure the experience. All because I said "sure" one night after a meeting.



David F.
Alternate DCM, District 22



Ready, Set, Zoom!

Is A.A. For You

Only you can decide whether you want to give Alcoholics Anonymous a try—whether you think it can help you. We who are in A.A. came because we finally gave up trying to control our drinking. We still hated to admit that we could never drink safely. Then we heard from other A.A. members that we were sick. (We thought so for years!) We found out that many people suffered from the same feelings of guilt and loneliness and hopelessness that we did. We found out that we had these feelings because we had the disease of alcoholism. We decided to try to face up to what alcohol had done to us. There are some of questions we tried to answer *honestly* (www.aa.org, search “Is A.A. for you”). If we answered YES to four or more questions, we were in deep trouble with our drinking. See how you do. Remember, there is no disgrace in facing up to the fact that you have a problem.

What is NIA?

The principal function of Northern Illinois service Area 20 is to be a forum for effective communication between the Groups and the General Service Conference through its Delegate. In addition to counseling its Delegate about the collective Group Conscience of the Fellowship in Northern Illinois, NIA will assist its Districts, Groups and members to carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers in a broad variety of ways, including but not restricted to conducting workshops, sharing sessions and seminars in all fields of general service.

NIA Statement on Self-Support

Our Seventh Tradition states that “Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.” Northern Illinois Area 20 wants our fellowship to endure, and be ready for the still-suffering alcoholic to come. NIA makes this possible by taking care of its essential services such as website. The groups and districts in Area 20 fund this website thru their continued contributions and support. For additional information see the A.A. pamphlet regarding self-support.

NIA Statement on Singleness of Purpose

Our Third and Fifth Traditions state that “The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking.” “Each Group has but one primary purpose – to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers. And as a Fellowship we do one thing only: “- share our program of recovery.”



2020 Events

Jun 13 Summer Assembly - Hosted by District 52, Kankakee, IL

Aug 8 Summer Committee Meeting @ Lord of Life Lutheran Church - 40W605 IL Route 38, Elburn, IL 60119

Aug 14-16 47th Annual Illinois State Conference - Hosted by Area 19, Chicago

Sep 11-13 Bridging the Gap Weekend Workshop - Rock Island, IL

Sep 19 Summer Assembly - Hosted by District 22, Elgin, IL

Oct 17 Fall Committee Meeting - Hosted by District 40 @ Lord of Life Lutheran Church - 40W605 IL Route 38, Elburn, IL 60119

Oct 24 Big Book Conference - Hosted by District 10 & 12, Grayslake, IL

Nov 13-15 National Correction Conference @ Schaumburg Hyatt

Dec 12 Winter Assembly - TBD

For more information or directions to the events, please check the NIA website for details.

Please Note: At this time, all events are subject to be cancelled, postponed, or attended through a virtual format such as Zoom, Skype, etc. Please check the Area Website before attempting to attend an event.

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Send articles for submission to the Concepts Editor by August 9th for the fall edition.



