



# BOX 4-5-9

NEWS AND NOTES FROM THE GENERAL SERVICE OFFICE OF A.A.

Vol. 19 No. 4

August-September 1974

## D.C. - Area A.A.'s Get a Unique Look At the General Service Conference

Some A.A. members in the U.S. capital have uniquely experienced at first hand a replica of the Fellowship's annual General Service Conference meeting. "Fantastic," "terrific," and "eye-opening" were the terms 130 D.C.-area members used most often to describe it, Fred F. writes us.

Several other areas are going to try the D.C. experiment, as a result of a description of the experience shared by John W., 1973-74 D.C. delegate, at the 1974 Conference in New York.

### LETTER WRITERS NEEDED FOR INSTITUTIONS MEMBERS

We know from the wealth of warm response we always get to requests like this that many A.A.'s enjoy sharing "experience, strength, and hope" in letters with other A.A.'s - especially with those who can't get to as many meetings as most of us.

Here's another call for such help. We need more A.A.'s to share in our Institutions Correspondence Service, exchanging letters with A.A.'s behind walls in hospitals and correctional facilities.

Particularly needed are more A.A. men willing to write faithfully to fellows in jails and prisons. If you'll just send us your name and address, we will send you the names of locked-up alcoholics you can befriend by mail.

To read John's presentation, see *Conference '74*, the final report of proceedings, about to be mailed, described on page 6 of this *Box 4-5-9*.

Delegates representing both U.S. and Canadian A.A. groups attended the first of the annual six-day sessions in New York 24 years ago. And as John pointed out, each year delegates, upon returning home, have enthusiastically tried in many ways to share the excitement and spirit of the Conference with groups in their areas - as almost any of the 730-plus delegates and past delegates now in the Fellowship can tell you.

### VOICE OF A.A. ON RAFFLES - OR IS IT?

Do *any* A.A. members approve of A.A. groups' raffling off color TVs, trips to Europe, or other big prizes to help finance state or area conventions?

If you approve, you were not among the first 50 members from 26 states and provinces who wrote us when we asked in *Box 4-5-9* how you felt about such raffles. Everyone who wrote in was against the idea.

No one who wrote identified himself as a new member; lengths of sobriety claimed by writers ranged from four to 30 years.

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John W. hit upon the idea of a local mini-conference to reproduce for G.S.R.'s (and local intergroup representatives) both the mechanics and the feelings John experienced in New York at the 1973 Conference.

The District of Columbia A.A. assembly unanimously favored the experiment, and representatives of 121 groups attended the night-and-a-day-long session in a Washington motel.

Physical arrangements duplicated as closely as possible those in New York - microphone placement on the floor of the assembly room, six enclosed rooms (for workshops and committee meet-

*(continued on p. 2)*

### ARE OLDER ALCOHOLICS WAITING FOR US?

More and more, G.S.O. is asked, "What is A.A. doing about retirees who develop drinking problems and about other elderly alcoholics?"

*We don't know, unless you tell us.*

We are all generally glad about the younger alcoholics now seen at meetings. But have we overlooked the older (over 55) problem drinkers who might use our help?

Are our institutions committees taking meetings into nursing homes, retirement centers, and geriatric wards? Are public information

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## RAFFLES

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Many said their groups, district committees, or assemblies had discussed the matter and agreed such fund-raising is inappropriate for A.A.

More than half said they felt it might be okay — where it is legal — to raffle off an A.A. book within the group, as long as chances cost no more than 25¢, because this is the way lots of members get the Big Book, "Twelve and Twelve," "A.A. Comes of Age," "As Bill Sees It," and "Came to Believe." Most writers suggested that new members and visitors be given free chances.

Some members opposed any raffles of any prizes at all. But one said A.A.'s in his area raffle off small prizes, donated only by A.A. members, to help supplement the meager income from their annual A.A. picnic.

However, the use of expensive, non-A.A.-related prizes and the sale of raffle tickets to the general public were uniformly opposed.

It was pointed out that solicitation of merchandise or services for prizes violates the spirit of our self-support Tradition, as does acceptance of money from non-A.A.'s. Such activities can also distract us from the primary purpose of our Fellowship — which is not hi-fi sets, vacation junkets, nor pots of cash.

Several writers noted that as A.A. conventions and similar gatherings multiply and become more expensive (and even competitive with each other), they are beyond the means of many, many

alcoholics. "If expenses of such an affair cannot be met simply by the A.A.'s who attend, the desirability of such fancy bashes needs to be severely questioned," one man wrote.

Perhaps the consensus can best be expressed by quoting from still another of our correspondents. "Hustling and being hustled," he said, "was my pre-A.A. way of life — a carnival. Now, sobriety is prize enough."

## SHIPPING SERVICE IMPROVING, SURVEY SHOWS

Our literature shipping department began 1974 somewhat improved over 1973, according to your reports. "Satisfaction with shipping service" was reported by 83.32%, an increase of 2.03% over the '73 figure — even with a much bigger volume of literature orders.

In January, every order of books and pamphlets shipped from G.S.O. contained a short questionnaire, checking up on the efficiency of G.S.O. shipping. Responses came this year from 702 groups and/or offices ordering literature. This represents a return of 35% of all questionnaires sent out.

A total of 83.76% received their order in less than four weeks, an improvement over '73 of 4.2%. But nearly one-fourth of all respondents said their orders arrived in less than two weeks, an improvement of almost 62% over the previous year. Only 4.7% of the orders reported on took six or more weeks for mail to reach its destination.

Information service about delayed or out-of-stock items showed a 46.6% improvement over '73.

As many of you know, we moved the shipping department into less cramped quarters last fall, making it easier to get our "messages in print" on their way to you more quickly after orders are received.

In this regard, as in other A.A. matters, we can only say, "We claim progress, not perfection."

— Bob H., chairman,  
General Services

## LOOK AT CONFERENCE

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ings) and a dining room all on one level.

Speaker at the kickoff dinner Friday night was Niles P., New York, assistant G.S.O. general manager. There followed the latest G.S.O. color-and-sound filmstrip, with staff members describing services they perform for A.A. worldwide.

Then those present were briefed on the next day's activities, and everybody got a packet containing the agenda, committee and workshop assignments, and background materials to study overnight.

Agenda subjects Saturday echoed those of the annual General Service Conference then upcoming.

Members divided first into committees on finance, the Grapevine, literature, elections, institutions, and professional and public relations, each moderated by a former delegate. Afterward, a reporter from each committee reported back to the entire assembly at a summary session almost as spirited as the lively Ask-It Basket interval that followed. Lunch was informal.

Afternoon workshops, mostly headed by past intergroup chairmen, took up the A.A. group, relations between intergroup and the area general service committee, "principles before personalities," and "wearing two hats." In addition, two unstructured workshops offered members a chance to discuss any matters of local A.A. concern.

Again, reporters summarized workshop proceedings when everyone reassembled, and more Ask-It Basket questions were covered.

Many said they found new and important answers to long-troublesome questions. Others spoke of gaining insights into aspects of A.A. they had never known of before. The monthly intergroup paper, *The Reporter*, was asked to run Ask-It Basket regularly to answer questions the mini-conference hadn't had time for.

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## Delegate Corner

### LOOK AT CONFERENCE

(continued from p. 2)

Sounding exactly like delegates leaving New York each year, nearly all the Washingtonians said it was work, all right. But practically everyone said, "There wasn't enough time! We should have gone on!"

"Our suggestion to other areas," writes Fred, "is to try a general service mini-conference to bring the Third Legacy to life. It really works, and we have found it is much better than trying to interest individual A.A. groups in A.A. matters and growth."

D.C. members enthusiastically voted to try another one in 1975, twice as big.

Maybe you wonder how this was financed. Self-support, of course. Registration "donation" — including two meals — was \$17.50 per person. Most said it was worth twice that.

### ABOUT 'GETTING THE EAR'

Evidently *Box 4-5-9* caught the sympathetic ear of many a G.S.R. by asking, "How does a G.S.R. get the ear of the group?"

Leonard L., Valinda, Calif., writes, "First, I ask the secretary of my group for not more than five minutes to present a few news items about general service. Mainstays as sources of material are, of course, *Box 4-5-9* and the Grapevine. I try to keep foremost how everything relates to our Traditions. Also, you can carry the general service message a bit when you lead a group meeting." . . .

"Zip" P., Muncie, Ind., writes about a little group that wanted very much to be in contact with other groups and their state committee through a G.S.R.; but there seemed to be almost no members sober long enough to take the responsibility.

"The Higher Power of A.A. works just fine, if we let Him," Zip continues. The night the group met to solve this plight, in walked a well-qualified member from a nearby group who had no other group obligations at the time. He accepted the assignment. Says Zip, "He has the time, the gratitude to A.A. and the necessary patience and tolerance, and will probably do a swell job." . . .

From New York City, Yolanda L. writes, "If you attend your group meetings, participate in them the best you can, show willingness to help others, go and speak for your group, do Twelfth Step work with the others, help your group answer the phones at intergroup, and help in the kitchen once in a while, you have no problem 'getting an ear.' *Ole!*"

## G.S.R. Corner

## C.O. Corner

### INTERGROUPS' VITAL WORK

Figures compiled at the 1974 G.S. Conference are the most complete data on central office (intergroup) services we've ever had. Services, and the number of offices providing them, include:

Public information, 81; answering inquiries about A.A., 66; taking A.A. into institutions, 60; providing area meeting lists, 57; local A.A. newsletters, 55; receiving, distributing, and following up Twelfth Step calls, 52; keeping information on hospitals and other facilities, 48; ordering and distributing Conference-approved literature, 43; cooperation with professionals, 35; arranging for hospital and similar admissions, 26 (49 do not — reflecting local autonomy).

Area general service committees, of course, came into being later, for different purposes. But in more sparsely populated regions, they provide some such services, including: public information, by 70; institutions meetings, 52; answering inquiries, 38; keeping hospital and similar information, 37; cooperation with professionals, 35.

### MEET FIVE NEW TRUSTEES

Five new regional trustees on the A.A. General Service Board will arrive at G.S.O. July 26 for an intensive orientation session before joining other trustees for the quarterly board and committee meetings July 28-29. Here they are:

*Dave C.*, Raleigh, N.C., had his last drink in 1957. He began Third Legacy work as G.S.R., and was elected Conference delegate in 1967. Dave is a highway engineer for the state government.

*Terry P.*, Brandon, Man., sober 14 years, was a "trusted servant" at area roundups before becoming delegate to the General Service Conference in 1970. He has an estate-planning consulting firm.

*Pete W.*, Oakville, Ont., sober since 1960, chaired Toronto Intergroup 1965-66, became Conference delegate in 1967, then chairman of the Ontario G. S. Committee. He owns an educational products distributorship.

*Bruce W.*, Waukegan, Ill., had his last drink in 1951 and became Conference delegate 1964-65. He is president of a manufacturing corporation.

*Stan W.*, Fairfax, Calif., has been a Conference delegate, editor of *Good News* (local A.A. paper), and co-chairman of the 1960 International Convention. He supervises investigation for a state department.

## Trustee Corner



## A VISIT TO LONDON G.S.O.

How and why did A.A. groups and their meetings and A.A. committees and offices ever get started? Have you noticed there's only one mention of group meetings in the basic part (first 11 chapters) of the Big Book? (Puzzle: Find the page!)

As the book "A.A. Comes of Age" tells in fascinating style — almost like a suspense novel — A.A. bodies in the U.S. and Canada have just sort of come into being to meet needs of A.A. growth.

In other nations and cultures, is the North American pattern of A.A. evolution simply repeated?

It didn't happen exactly that way in the United Kingdom, which has its own General Service Board and Office, in London, now serving 574 known groups — 389 in England, 125 in Scotland, 43 in Northern Ireland, and 17 in Wales.

The second oldest such outfit in the world, this board will host A.A.'s Third World Service Meeting October 16-18, with 33 delegates expected from more than 15 countries. Theme of the session is "Sharing."

U.S.-Canada will be represented by John L. ("Dr. Jack") Norris, nonalcoholic chairman, and Don A., regional trustee, of our own General Service Board. Niles P. and Waneta N. of G.S.O. will attend as working staff.

G.S.O. has old correspondence between early British A.A.'s and the New York office, showing that A.A. in Britain started in 1946. Two years later, with 98 members (three groups), the Britons were already concerned about proper organizational structure.

Anyhow, an advisory committee and London service office — with printed letterheads, yet — already existed (on paper at least) in 1948, even if most of the members it served had never heard of it.

Late in the 1940's, the U.S. board made a gift of A.A. books to the Londoners, and later advanced funds to help them print their own copies.



In 1957, the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous (Great Britain and Ireland), Ltd., was incorporated at the Redcliffe Gardens address.

At first, it seemed to serve in three capacities, as: (1) an intergroup office for Greater London; (2) a G.S.O. for all groups in the U.K.; (3) the A.A. publishing company (by arrangement with A.A. World Services, Inc., New York) for the "sterling area" — Australia, New Zealand, the West Indies, South Africa, Ceylon, the Middle East, and other places where the U.K. money system prevailed.

Now, however, the first (inter-

group) function is a separate operation.

In 1965, the first U.K. General Service Conference was held. A.A. progress and growth there have been rapid ever since.

Twenty intergroups, 68 groups in prisons, 14 in mental hospitals, newsletters, public information, meeting lists, pamphlets and books, conventions, and other A.A. service appurtenances — all managing to be self-supporting — were reported on at the Second World Service Meeting, in New York in 1972.

The story of A.A. services in other overseas regions will appear in future *Box 4-5-9's*,

## WANT A 'UNITY' PLAQUE?

Would A.A. groups like to have for meeting rooms a display-size poster of the Unity Declaration voiced at the 1970 International Convention in Miami Beach?

The 1974 Conference suggested that thought be given to introducing such a plaque. It would be similar to the A.A. Preamble and "I Am Responsible" plaques.

If enough groups want it, A.A. World Services, Inc., will have it made up.

The wording is as follows:

*A Declaration of Unity*

*This we owe to A.A.'s future:*

*To place our common welfare first;*

*To keep our Fellowship united.*

*For on A.A. Unity depend our lives,*

*And the lives of those to come.*

Prices for "Unity" would probably be the same as those for Preamble and "Responsible."

## DENVER PLANS PROCEED APACE

No convention registrations or hotel room reservations for A.A.'s Sixth International Convention can be accepted until January 1975.

Announcements will be mailed to all groups late this year when plans are complete, according to Waneta N., Convention secretary.

Program arrangements for the Fellowship's 40th-year celebration in Denver, Colo., July 4-6, 1975, are well under way, supervised by Conference, host, and trustees' committees, plus G.S.O. personnel.

Alkathons practically around the clock, Spanish- and French-lan-

guage and American Indian sessions, guest speakers, Al-Anon Family Group and Alateen sessions are all being arranged for A.A.'s and their families from all over the globe.

Panels and workshops, meetings of all sizes, dances, and a variety show are also on the agenda.

So start now saving dough one day at a time if you want to share the "mile-high" party. But don't "project" about registration and reservations until flyers and forms arrive from G.S.O. — probably early in January.

*Denver Convention Complex*



## NEWSPAPER COLUMNIST PLUGS A.A. GRAPEVINE

"I read the Grapevine because I find the message it aims at people who can't handle alcohol is just as pertinent for people who can.

"The Grapevine discusses human failings that are universal. It teaches the need for self-mastery, patience, perspective, understanding, and humility in the presence of the 'one ultimate authority, a loving God.'"

The above mention of our magazine was a complete surprise to editors Jack M. and Paula C. when it appeared in Bill Gold's "The District Line" column in the Washington (D.C.) *Post* recently.

Mr. Gold said he quotes from the Grapevine so often that readers ask whether or not he is an alcoholic. "I am not, fortunately," he wrote. "My boozing is pretty well limited to a glass of wine before dinner."

The columnist also told his readers how to subscribe to the

A.A. magazine, and quoted our Serenity Prayer.

For years, A.A. public information and institutions committees have been urging that nonalcoholic professional men and women (especially doctors and clergymen) who work with alcoholics be given gift subscriptions to help them understand alcoholics and A.A.

Maybe sending the GV to local newspapers is a method of carrying the message some of us have overlooked.

This year, the Conference recommended groups give subscriptions on A.A. anniversaries and birthdays, too. Any other ideas?

## "CALLING ALL . . . ?"

"4-5-9! 4-5-9!" blared the radio in the police patrol car as it sped away.

A California A.A. nearby overheard it, and wondered what in the world . . .

Later, he went around to the nearest precinct house and had a

chat with a friendly desk sergeant — thinking he might also subtly carry the message a bit, incidentally.

He began by saying, "Hi! My name is —, and I am a member of Alcoholics Anonymous." Then he explained about G.S.O. and its mailing address. He said that he had overheard the shortwave police-band call and couldn't help wondering.

The sergeant smiled. As a code call to policemen, he explained, "4-5-9" in that community means "Robbery in progress!"

"But," he added, "I know what you mean. It always makes me think of the G.S.O. *newsletter*. I'm 'a friend of Bill's,' too. Hi! My name is —, and I'm G.S.R. of the — Group. What's your home group?"

Think that was a coincidence?

We wonder whether "4-5-9" has any other special or secret meanings we don't know about.

## CLOSED MEETING TOPICS FROM THE GRAPEVINE

*August:* Read "Me and God" and discuss our changing attitudes toward the Higher Power — as we understand Him — and how A.A. has taught us to lead a more balanced life. "A Plea of 'Not Guilty'" brings up the topic of guilt over the past and its effect on our progress. Read Traditions Eleven and Twelve at the meeting; then discuss the meaning of anonymity as expressed in "Are We a Secret Society?" One member's view of "The Twelve Steps" is a good starting point for Step meetings. *September:* A 19-page section on "Doctors, Alcohol, and A.A." suggests many fruitful subjects. (For doctors in your community, this issue would make a fine introduction to A.A. and its magazine.) "Just Getting Them There Is Good" points to a discussion of alcoholics "sentenced" to A.A. by outside agencies. How many are recovering? How can we help them?

## OLDER ALCOHOLICS

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committees carrying the message to senior citizens?

Do we need special A.A. meetings or literature for older people? Are today's aging problem drinkers like the alcoholics in A.A., or do they find it hard to identify with us?

Do we make special efforts in twelfth-stepping and sponsoring older prospects? Can folks in their "golden years" really participate in A.A. activities? Or do younger members take over, and leave the older newcomers on the sidelines?

Are we really alert to the wrinkled hands reaching out for help? Or are we depriving ourselves of the sort of maturity, wisdom, and serenity that people with long living experience could bring us?

It will be interesting to see what the 1974 A.A. survey shows about older alcoholics in A.A. Our 1971 survey — reported in the pamphlet "Profile of an A.A. Meeting" — showed 30% of A.A.'s at meetings in the 51-65 age bracket, and 10% over 65.

A recent study sent to G.S.O. by the Rutgers Center of Alcohol Studies suggests that 7.5% of all people over 55 may be problem drinkers — perhaps 3,000,000 in the U.S. alone.

It shows one-third of all calls to alcoholism information and similar centers are from, or about, problem drinkers over 55. It also reports that many agencies set up to aid the aging fail to identify the problem drinker, feel unable to help, and expect somebody else to do it.

Our trustees' Public Information Committee has asked several publications for older people whether they are interested in information about A.A. One of these publications has indicated that it is interested. As a result, it will shortly publish an article or letter about this problem (written by one of our "local" trustees, incidentally).

The Grapevine (October 1973) carried a beautiful article, "Is There

Life Before Death?," by C. E. C., a 74-year-old A.A. of North Hollywood, Calif. He said he never really knew himself until recovery began, at 70, and if there was any living yet to be done by a man his age, he wanted his share of it.

His first meeting was "young people's night at the clubhouse," but he got the message from a 14-year-old girl and an 18-year-old fellow sober two years, who said, "If you're an alcoholic who's still drinking, you're never too young to have lived too long."

That was "Wow!" to C. E. C., who said he swallowed, along with his last drink, "that abominable false pride that has kept us from surrendering to reality."

Are there other septuagenarian, sexagenarian, or octogenarian A.A.'s willing to share their experience with older problem drinkers? If so, have you written or talked about your willingness anywhere?

("Annie the Cop Fighter" — see p. 514 in the Big Book — was 76 when she joined us, 81 when she wrote her story.)

Is the A.A. group in a Connecticut nursing home the first in such an institution? Can you tell us of any others?

Please fill us in, dear A.A.'s, as you always do when asked. Flood us with mail about older alcoholics and A.A. We need all the experience we can get — to share! Thank you.

## AVOIDING ONE KIND OF A.A. MONEY PROBLEM

Now and then there turns up at G.S.O. a sad note from an A.A. group that has suddenly lost its small bank account — on account of the "sudden illness" of a treasurer!

Don't worry. It has happened before and probably will happen again, somewhere.

Of course, praying for the recovery of the ex-trusted servant comes first. But such group troubles can be averted.

This is a reminder to all A.A. groups, committees, boards, etc. that have bank accounts: It is both common sense and good business practice to arrange that all checks on such accounts must bear *two* signatures, not just one.

P.S. Have you read the pamphlet "The A.A. Group" lately?

## FINAL CONFERENCE REPORT SOON AVAILABLE

*Conference '74*, full proceedings of the April 22-27 meeting in New York, goes to delegates before July 31. Extra copies of this 48-page, 8½" x 11" booklet are available to any member (through the A.A. group G.S.R. or secretary) at \$1.75 each.

Illustrated, it contains all Conference and board committee reports, presentations, summaries of workshop and discussion sessions, financial data, rosters, Ask-It-Basket questions and answers, and Conference formal advisory actions.

The Conference unanimously recommended that each A.A. group be encouraged to purchase at least one copy.

## G.S.O. SHARES A LETTER

"Before leaving I wrote you for information on meetings in Spain. You responded shortly with what I needed.

"So I attended a great meeting in Torremolinos. Ann M., formerly of California, was chairman. I read 'How It Works'; after Step Two passed it to our member from France, who read a few then passed it to our Norwegian. Each of us read in his native tongue.

"What great fellowship we did enjoy. A.A.'s love and fellowship override the language barrier.

"Just wanted to pass on something great that will be long remembered and cherished. We would miss this sort of thing when we travel if we did not have the necessary information with us."

— Ralph F., Mobile, Ala.