

Newsletter

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“ WE ARE NOT A SECRET SOCIETY ”

A DCM and Public Information Chair shares her experience helping carry the message.

In 2005, my second year as a GSR for District 33, at the November Assembly, I and another GSR Lauri S. - currently CPC (Cooperation with the Professional Community) Chair South - attended the roundtable for Public Information. What caught my attention was a public service announcement (PSA) for TV... There was this woman laying on her sofa, like I had done night after night drinking. I remember it like it was yesterday ... I had this AHA! moment. I had never seen a PSA before, and now I wanted very much to know how I could help make these announcements more visible in my area.

Fast forward to today... I've become chair for the Emerald Valley Intergroup (EVI) CPC-PI Committee for the Eugene-Springfield metropolitan area and I can say that our committee is making things happen! The "I thought" video PSA airs on two local TV stations, and nine radio stations play our audio PSA's. Both media have been on board for AA for over a year now...

On October 1, 2009 our first billboard went up for the months of October, November, December of this year and January of 2010. As far as I know this is a first for the Oregon Area. Our Committee carefully looked at how best to reach those of us who are still sick and suffering, and decided a billboard at a very busy intersection in Eugene was a fabulous idea. The EVI Steering Committee agreed. With twenty two thousand (22,000) cars passing by or stopped at the light daily, the billboard really attracts attention! Thanks to all that support EVI, our intergroup officers and the members who know how important Public Awareness is... and "We Are Not A Secret Society."

In closing.... I encourage all Districts and Intergroups to contact your Oregon Area CPC Chairs and PI Chairs ... that's exactly what the Emerald Valley Intergroup CPC-PI committee did. Area help was so valuable to us in getting started. All the Area Chairs of the different committees are here for you, and just waiting to help you better carry the message, our primary purpose.

In fellowship.

LynDee R., DCM. District 33
CPC-PI Chair, Emerald Valley Intergroup
Eugene, Oregon

Wrap-up From Your Area Delegate.

Two years ago, I could not foresee that end of my term as Delegate would ever come - and yet here it is. Being elected your Delegate was overwhelming. Coming to realize how big this commitment was going to be was mind-boggling. It was really fun serving the Oregon Area and I was quite comfortable doing that, but to be responsible and a voice for Alcoholics Anonymous across the Conference was awe-inspiring. How could this have happened to me?

Well, for one thing you trained me. You prepared me and you told me I would be OK. You gave me hugs and words of encouragement and support and you know what? I came through the other side – OK

A great thing about the Oregon Area is how we train our officers for the next job. I believe our system sets up the person to move on easily to their next service position. Not to say anything is automatic, but I think that each service position builds upon another. As Alternate Chair, I came out of my "shell" and began to be more comfortable interacting with committees and people. Two years of traveling and helping assembly committees helped me to learn to share my ideas, and to communicate and learn what leadership in AA really is. This is what is needed to become a chairperson. Those skills are important to the chair, who is working not just as a chairperson, but as a role model, and is becoming more decisive in commitment to Area service. You are a leader in the sense that you solve Area problems thru team work, home work and the use of the traditions and concepts. You don't have the

final voice, but learn to seek a solution thru sharing of ideas. This job really helps you get ready for the Alternate Delegate position. It gives you the tools to be prepared in case the Delegate cannot fulfill their commitment. That is really why we have an Alternate Delegate, who is supposed to be ready to step in if needed. We also use our Alternate Delegate host GSR schools, to help train others in their new service positions. But their main function is to become familiar with the workings of the Conference. All they have learned during the previous years really prepares them for the Delegate job. So you see, you did this, not me. I was just along for the ride. You kept me sober. You got me ready to serve Oregon and Alcoholics Anonymous.

This could happen to any one of you. This is not because any person in service is special. It's more how God puts you in a place where you are supposed to be and it is always just what was needed. I will always love the election assemblies in September when we elect a new Delegate. I will get to watch unfold in front of me, all the gifts you have given me, over and over, again and again. I get to watch people grow in the fellowship, to watch them develop their personalities and glow in Spirit through receiving the gifts of love and service. That is what makes this all wonderful.

Love you guys!!

Dave Adelhart
Panel 58, Oregon Area 58
Delegate

The following is an abbreviated version of a talk given by our incoming chair, Gus P., at a Gratitude Workshop and Chili Cook-off held in Eugene on November 14. This enjoyable and informative fellowship event was organized by the informal Interdistrict Group in the Eugene-Springfield Area. This group consists of DCMs, former and alternate DCMs, and a few other individuals, and coordinates activities related to Area-level service, a function in which the Emerald Valley Intergroup has not been extensively involved.

The fellowship and information at this event were first rate, and so was the chili. I understand that the group that submitted a particular entry beat the bush to pack the audience with eaters who would vote for their pot, in order to win the coveted "flaming bean" trophy. May other chefs follow their example: the more the merrier at any AA event.

THE HISTORY OF AA'S GRATITUDE MONTH **An Unofficial Collection of Ramblings and Odd Facts**

Like a lot of AA's customs and practices, the idea of Gratitude Month has grown out of what has transpired in our early history, our co-founders' ideas and the well-meaning intentions of those who have followed thereafter. The basic idea of gratitude month is to give AA members an opportunity to say "Thank You" to Alcoholics Anonymous for the gift of our sobriety. And because it is celebrated in November in most places world-wide, except in Canada where is marked in October, you would think it has a connection to our celebration of Thanksgiving. And, you would be right. And so are the Canadians, since Thanksgiving is celebrated in October in their country.

However, the roots of Gratitude Month may have started with Bill W's desire to have us study and become familiar with the AA Traditions. In the November 1949 issue of the *Grapevine*, in an article entitled "A Suggestion for Thanksgiving", Bill wrote "The idea is in the air that AA might adopt Thanksgiving Week as a time for meetings and meditation on the Tradition of Alcoholics Anonymous." This article later appeared in the book *The Language of the Heart* on page 95. The article concluded by saying, "What then could be more appropriate than to set aside Thanksgiving week for discussion of the practical and spiritual values to be discovered in our Tradition? We could thus reinforce our faith in the future by these prudent works; we could show that we deserve to go on receiving that priceless gift of "Oneness" which God in His wisdom has so freely given to us of Alcoholics Anonymous in the precious years of our infancy."

In fact, the idea of a celebration of gratitude had already taken hold earlier in the 1940's when, each fall, the General Service Board hosted small Gratitude Dinners. These events were the precursors of the larger, more elaborate Gratitude Luncheons that would be held during the '60s as an initiative of the Trustees' Public Information Committee.

The first official recognition of an A.A. Gratitude Week, specifically designed to coincide with Thanksgiving week, appeared on page 46 of the final report of the Sixth General Service Conference held in 1956. It describes the initial motion to have a designated A.A. Gratitude Week, and it reads: "The Conference approved a motion asking that the General Service Headquarters designate Thanksgiving week each year as 'A.A. Gratitude Week' and that this action be noted in the annual pre-Thanksgiving appeals to the groups for funds to help support A.A.'s worldwide services." Three years later, Bill urged in a letter, "Gratitude should go forward, rather than backward... if you carry the message to still others, you will be making the best possible repayment for the help given to you." You can find reference to this 1959 letter in the book *As Bill Sees It*, on page 29.

The Oct. / Nov. 1994 issue of Box 4-5-9, the article entitled "In A.A. November is Gratitude Month" addressed the history and practice of both Gratitude Month and Gratitude Week, describing gratitude luncheons and dinners, the 1956 conference action, and communications on the subject from Bill W.

Many areas adopt a two-prong approach to Gratitude Month, observing it through both Traditions meetings and special contributions made to the General Service Office for A.A. services worldwide.

In 1982, an exceptional example of the special contributions aspect of Gratitude Month was created in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. It was called the 'Gratitude Globe'; and it was a three foot diameter Plexiglas sphere used to collect gratitude gifts. According to the April-May 1984 Box 4-5-9 article entitled "A 'Gratitude Globe' Can Symbolize Broad A.A. Sharing," the idea, initially conceived by the G.S.R. Committee in Calgary, came about in order to encourage contributions to the G.S.O. by means of a visual presentation – a "gratitude globe" in which people could simply drop their contributions rather than having to send them in to the G.S.O. Districts in Calgary underwrote the costs of manufacturing the globe. In two years of operation, they were able to send G.S.O. contributions close to \$5,000 (Canadian)."

The basic A.A. Tradition of local autonomy has been invoked to resolve a friendly difference within the Fellowship. In Canada, gratitude week coincides with their Thanksgiving, in October. Overseas groups will be asked to observe the November date, unless some compelling local consideration suggests the desirability of choosing another period.

Grateful for the sobriety they've been given and eager to pass it on, A.A.s are busier than ever in Twelfth Stepping and service. They are reaching out in greater numbers to Loners, people with special needs, members of minority groups and previously unreached alcoholics. It is clear from their sharing

that an overwhelming number of A.A.s - along with many of our professional friends - find their own special ways to say thank you during Gratitude Month and, indeed, all year long. Our members often say "Enclosed is a check for Gratitude Month, because I want A.A. to be there for all those who need it, just as I did."

Besides observing Gratitude Month, many a member uses the A.A. Birthday Plan "to give back what's been given to them" or to simply say "thank you for my life and for my family." Many members celebrate their A.A. birthdays by sending in a gratitude gift to G.S.O. - usually a dollar or two for each year of sobriety. Some groups follow this Birthday Plan by collecting contributions from members on a voluntary basis throughout the year, or until the number of dollars matches the member's total years of sobriety. On the group's anniversary, the money collected is sent to G.S.O. as a birthday contribution. Many Groups and Districts hold special Gratitude events during November as fund raising efforts, and send the proceeds to GSO, thereby combining a gift of gratitude with a celebration of sober fun. Our *AA Guidelines on Finance* from GSO contains a reference to both the Birthday Plan and Gratitude Month on Page 4.

Gratitude. It's a weighty, high-dignity word, but in truth its close companions are humor and joy. As Bill W observed in the Big Book on page 132, "Outsiders are sometimes shocked when we burst into merriment over a seemingly tragic experience out of the past. But why shouldn't we laugh? We have recovered, and have been given the power to help others." What greater cause can there be for rejoicing than this? Or for demonstrating one's gratitude?

Gus P., Oregon Area Chair

Tips for Keeping Sober for the Holidays

A woman who attends my home group is fond of saying that Alcoholism is a three-part disease – Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Years. Though facetious, this has a certain ring to it. Holidays are difficult for recovering alcoholics, especially during the first year of sobriety or after some traumatic life-changing event. A person who is feeling generally unhappy, has difficulty socializing, is broke, and can't be around alcohol without feeling an almost overwhelming urge to pick up may well think that taking a job with the Department of Sanitation in Saudi Arabia would be preferable to spending Christmas with the folks. Nonetheless, if he looks around he will notice that there are sober people among his acquaintances who actually look forward to the holidays. How do they do it?

A good place to start looking for tips is the slim conference-approved AA book *Living Sober*, a very useful compendium of practical advice. The book has no specific section on holidays, but chapter 26, "Being wary of drinking occasions," has these suggestions: * Be extra cautious in the first few months of sobriety. * Let your host/hostess know you are abstaining. * Skip the first hour if there is to be drinking before dinner. * Bring your own non-alcoholic beverage and always have a glass of it in hand. * Have a glass of non-alcoholic beverage available for toasts. * Don't get a resentment if a friend or family member reveals more about your recovery than you planned to share. * If things get really tough, make an excuse to leave, and don't be too worried about offending people. * Make an effort to attend AA meetings. Suggestions elsewhere in the book include: * Use common sense. * Concentrate on planning for the next 24 hours, not weeks ahead * Volunteer to do useful service, in AA or elsewhere. *Do not keep alcohol in your home.

I sent a request for tips to Area Committee Members and members of my home group, and got the following responses (all from my home group):

Tip: volunteer to be the group event photographer (keeps your hands busy) Jane H., Eugene

I no longer lay in a supply of rum in order to add two tablespoons of it to the pastry for a Swiss nut torte, as the recipe requires. I made this for my parents and in-laws for thirty years. I would use the rest in hot-buttered rum drinks, and gain pounds. When I got sober and stopped adding rum to the pastry no one noticed the difference in taste. (Karen S., Eugene)

More tips from Karen S.

- Keep a supply of alcohol-free drinks on hand for yourself. Keep some in your car if traveling or visiting.
- Play with the children when other adults start drinking or using. Make it a Christmas that's all about children, not about getting smashed.
- Pray in the morning and evening.
- Attend church services, such as a midnight service.
- Take walks.
- Call your sponsor and other friends in the program just to say hi.
- Focus on how you can be of service to others—in the kitchen, the yard, doing chores, minding children, or volunteering in the community.

From my own experience, I'd like to second the suggestions to become involved in children's activities, either in your own family or as a volunteer, and to take advantage of AA meetings and fellowship events, particularly if you away from home. Finding out about special AA holiday activities in a strange city can be tricky. Neither our District or Area websites has a listing for AA groups that actually meet on Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's, for group organized potlucks, or for marathon meetings. All of these options are available in Eugene-Springfield and doubtless in other urban areas, and it would be nice if the stranger had a way to find out about them. Martha S., Eugene

Where can I get an AA-Approved 12-Step Workbook?

This is a question people frequently ask at the Emerald Intergroup office. They may have seen, or been told about, a printed workbook that guides people through the Twelve Steps, and they expect that an AA Central Office will carry such an item alongside the Big Books and other literature. We don't carry such an item, because it doesn't exist. Neither the AA General Service Office nor Grapevine Inc. publishes one. In years past our office did carry some literature that was not AA conference approved, but after taking a group conscience we decided this violated Tradition Six ("An AA group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the AA name to any related facility or outside enterprise"), and possibly Tradition Seven if the items were sold at a profit.

Doubtless the question of whether A.A. should publish such a workbook has been discussed at the Conference level in the past, and there is no reason why the issue could not be raised in the future. There is obviously a demand among the fellowship. However, not every demand necessarily represents the best policy for individual sobriety or the fellowship as a whole. That is one of the reasons AA has an elected body of trusted servants, the General Service Conference, who use their collective

experience, group input, and awareness of a Higher Power to determine which items of literature receive the AA stamp of approval.

Individual AA members, or indeed anyone who wants to use the 12 steps to work through a myriad of human problems, are free to acquire and use a 12-step workbook. There are a multitude of them out there. A cursory search on the Internet revealed 12-step workbooks geared toward Alcoholics Anonymous, Overeater's Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, and a number of other recovery programs. Some were books and pamphlets available for purchase (these are often available at non-AA recovery bookstores), some were adjuncts to treatment programs, and a few could be downloaded free from the Internet.

Some presumably have content that violates AA traditions or ignores key aspects of our program. "A gentle path through the 12 steps – This is the only 12 step workbook that is as gentle as it says it is, with plenty of breaks" doesn't sound rigorous enough for a real alcoholic. The 12-step workbook put out by the National Association for Christian Recovery jars with our tradition of not being allied with any sect or denomination, though it might be useful if both sponsor and sponsee were already Christians. The "Skeptic's Guide to the 12 Steps", if it encourages skepticism about the basic AA process, would be self-defeating. The "Deep Soul Cleansing 12-Step Workbook," which contains room for 300 resentments, probably hits rather wide of the mark, as does a "Practical and Effective Workbook" that claims to eliminate or reduce addictive behavior without recourse to those pesky 12 steps.

The search also produced two downloadable workbooks and several reviews of workbooks available for purchase that did follow the Big Book and 12 x 12. Looking at one of these from the vantage point of someone with a number of years of sobriety, who has been both a sponsee and a sponsor, I think it would be helpful to me as a sponsor guiding a sponsee who appears to need a lot of structure.

This workbook contains a strong admonition at the beginning that it be used in conjunction with a sponsor and a step group. Had I attempted to use it or any workbook early in sobriety, without feedback from a sponsor, it would have given me the illusion of having a handle on sobriety without the substance. AA is very much a WE program, requiring frequent interaction with other sober alcoholics to achieve much effect. A well-designed and thorough workbook carries the risk of turning recovery into a solitary exercise. Perhaps that is why the General Service Conference has never approved one for general AA use.

Martha S., Eugene, Oregon

Peanut Gallery November 2009

(No one volunteered any tidbits from meetings to this feature this quarter, so the offerings are once again a compendium of things people said at the meetings your newsletter chair attends. We're a pretty articulate bunch in Eugene but I am sure there are clever people in other parts of the state who deserve exposure for their witticisms.)

In sobriety, memory becomes a gift rather than a threat. *Hank A., Eugene.*

There's so much that could be said about lying – and so little of it would be true. *Shanta, Eugene.*

Sometimes I think I have so much experience with Murphy's Law, I qualify to be Murphy's lawyer.
Martha, Eugene.

I came from a place where if I made a mistake, I was a mistake. *Jane H., Eugene*

I believe that God gave me breasts with which to nurse grudges. *Jerry, Eugene.*

I was an agnostic, but it was an agnostic of convenience – I could even be an atheist if I was mad enough at God. I tried praying but thought God couldn't hear me because the neighbors had the radio turned up too loud. *Anonymous, Eugene*

I can't how understand how she [my sponsor] put up with me day after day. I was boring myself to death, and it was *my* drama. *Kristine, Eugene.*

My sponsor told me: "That sounds like 'my parents did a crap job of raising me and by golly I'm going to prove it by having a miserable life.'" *Greg, Eugene*

Telling myself 'if I felt better, I could do better things' is like saying, 'if I was stronger, I could lift weights.' *Jerry, Eugene*

If there ever was a fertile compostey field for relapse, this [divorce] is it. *Laurie, Eugene*

WACYPAA 13

The thirteenth Western Area Conference of Young People in AA will take place December 31, 2009 – January 3, 2010 at the Hilton Hotel and Conference Center in Eugene Oregon. Details and an online registration form are available at <http://wacypaa13.org>. This promises to be an exciting event and is very accessible to young people in our Area.