

# Newsletter

Published by the Newsletter Committee, Oregon Area 58. Alcoholics Anonymous

## Anatomy of a Motion

The following motion from the September General Assembly was tabled with rather little discussion. There did not seem to be any controversy concerning it, but understanding both the mechanics of the motion and the situation that gave rise to it may be helpful to group members, especially those who are involved in Corrections.

### **Motion #2** Submitted by District 13

To have the Oregon Area Delegate request the General Service Conference Coordinator include the following request from Oregon Area 58 for consideration in the 2009 General Service Conference Agenda.

" That the conference consider creating literature and or adding A.A. experience to the guidelines about signing legally binding documents required to carry A.A. into certain facilities such as but not limited to The Prison Rape Elimination Act (P.R.E.A.) and sponsorship agreements. "

### **Intent and Purpose:**

To provide A.A. members and service committees some of the needed information to make an informed decision about what documents may be alright to sign and what ones may imply affiliation or otherwise blur the A.A. message.

The **form** of this motion represents the most direct and effective way for concerned AA members to address the question: "Why doesn't the New York Office of AA do something about \_\_\_\_\_? Individual AA members are always free to contact the main office directly and can expect that a responsible party will read, notice, and reply to the communication. However, if it is a matter of general concern requiring action of the part of either the Trustees or the General Service Conference, getting a sense of the Area membership by presenting the matter at an Area Assembly, voting on it, and entrusting our Area Delegate to present it at the General Service Conference, greatly increases the probability that action will be taken. We are fortunate to be a part of an organization that is very responsive to the voice of its membership. Getting a consensus at the membership level is an important first step.

This motion directs our Delegate to present GSO with a request to create guidelines for AA volunteers who may be asked to sign legally binding documents as a condition of carrying the AA message into Correctional Facilities. The immediate concern is the Prison Rape Elimination Act of 2003, a Federal law. AA corrections volunteers are being asked to sign documents agreeing to comply with the statute, which would require them to immediately report any account of rape, either as perpetrator or victim, that arose in the context of an AA meeting or sponsorship relationship. Failure to do so could result in criminal sanctions for the AA member, while doing so would break

anonymity and could impair carrying the message by creating an atmosphere of distrust. AA volunteers are not protected by attorney-client privilege or doctor-patient confidentiality regulations and could conceivably fall under a wide variety of State statutes requiring disclosures.

The motion does not ask AA to take a stand on whether such laws are appropriate. Rather, it is asking people at GSO who are knowledgeable about the issues to create guidelines for prison volunteers so that they understand what they are signing, recognize the personal risks, can make an informed decision about whether to continue to volunteer under the circumstances, and do not inadvertently violate terms of a legal

contract in their efforts to carry the AA message as effectively as possible.

In the brief discussion on this motion at the September Assembly, a mental health care provider subject to certain mandatory disclosure laws stressed the need for this motion. Psychologists keep informed about these laws and know how to comply with them through professional associations and continuing education required for licensing. AA sponsors and Corrections volunteers have no comparable oversight. This motion asks GSO to provide them with at least the information they need to navigate the complex laws governing volunteer counseling in an institutional context.

## Fundraising in AA – Is it Compatible with the 7<sup>th</sup> Tradition?

This is a question that comes up repeatedly in AA service work. It arises in connection with hosting quarterly assemblies and with raising money for AA group events outside of normally scheduled meetings. I have seen it heatedly discussed at group business meetings, EVI Intergroup deliberations, Host Committee meetings, District sponsored 7<sup>th</sup> tradition workshops, Area assemblies, PNC, and PRAASA. The general nature of guidelines issued by GSO in New York and the Tradition of group autonomy ensure a wide range of practices at the group level, some of them more successful than others at furthering the AA message.

Below is a list of questions that have arisen in my experience. Others will no doubt occur to you. Space permitting, I would like to print input from AA members who have dealt with any of these or similar questions, indicating which group practices have worked and which have been problematical. Some (for example #8) also present clear contradictions to traditions but nonetheless may surface in the group context.

1. Passing the basket a second time for a dedicated purpose that is clearly A.A. related, such as sending the GSR to an assembly.
2. Collecting funds in an AA meeting that are earmarked, at the time of collection, for an outside purpose likely to have broad support in the meeting. – for example, a homeless shelter.
3. Selling conference-approved literature to outsiders at a significant markup.
4. Selling non-AA literature, cards, coins etc. through an AA sponsored outlet such as an intergroup office.
5. Charging admission to an event to defray costs, versus suggested donation.
6. Using 7<sup>th</sup> tradition money to help fund social events such as picnics and dances.
7. Fundraisers with a gambling component – raffles, bingo
8. Promotions involving businesses owned by AA members (“if you shop at my business I’ll donate 10% of the proceeds to AA”)
9. Fund raisers involving other 12-step programs (Al-Anon, NA).

10. Garage sales, car washes, other events where AA members act as a group to provide goods and services to the public.

11. Pet projects – Sometimes an individual group member will attempt to persuade the group to support a pet project by offering to contribute all or the lion's share of the expense.

Here is a summary of how my home group, Sober Awakening in Eugene, addressed #6, the question of whether 7<sup>th</sup> tradition money should be used to fund social events. This is a gray area. Tradition 4, group autonomy, suggests that such a use is legitimate if agreed to by group conscience. One could argue, however, that there is a conflict with Tradition 5; that our primary purpose is to carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers, and that social events for people who are already sober are pretty peripheral.

Our group debated the issue three years ago when up front costs for an annual picnic abruptly rose and our treasury was looking a little lean. We heard from a number of people who had attended this picnic in early sobriety who remembered it as having been important in encouraging them to get more involved in AA. We concluded that having a little fun in our group activities did promote our primary purpose and voted to continue subsidizing the picnic. At the same time, recognizing that core costs included donations to Intergroup and GSO as well as rent and coffee, we took steps to lower picnic costs and to make more effort to collect voluntary contributions from those who actually attended. Having some additional fundraising such as a raffle at the event itself was also discussed but not adopted. Our Intergroup, EVI, makes extensive use of these.

More recently, several group members raised the possibility of having a group retreat that would have involved renting a facility on the coast, long-distance transportation, food, and other substantial costs. While acknowledging that such a retreat would be very valuable the group declined to support it. Contrasting it with the picnic provides some useful input for navigating the "gray area".

- The potential cost to the group was much larger, although the actual costs, in a best-case scenario, were comparable.
- The picnic is genuinely available to all group members, occasional attendees, and newcomers. To attend the retreat, people would need a specific free weekend and be able to commit far in advance.
- Although the group was willing to provide some scholarship money, it was not in a position to fund very many people who could not pay their own way. We thought it was contrary to the spirit of AA to endorse or partially subsidize something many members could not afford.
- In addition to money, we also considered the time our group service people would need to devote to the project. In Sober Awakening, people willing to volunteer for service positions are in shorter supply than dollars. This is not uncommon in more affluent urban neighborhoods.

In a nutshell, these decisions on the picnic versus the retreat suggest a group consensus that social events do contribute enough to our primary purpose to justify small inputs of 7<sup>th</sup> tradition money and volunteer time, but need to be scrutinized on a case-by-case basis to make sure they do not become a drain on more fundamental group operations.

Martha S.

## Oregon Area 58 AA Newsletter

Letter to the Editor:

(I received the following from Eric K. in response to an initial request for input on fundraising from members of the Area Committee. That version request included some notes on answers to the questions which I posed. These were points of discussion only and not intended as Area recommendations.)

"I compliment you on your selected theme and your writing to introduce it. It is very thought provoking and invites sharing on a wide variety of experiences.

I hope that someone who was part of the Eugene service structure during the time period of the Intergroup process you mentioned, will contribute to this theme. You wrote the following:

"Selling non-AA literature, cards, coins etc. through an AA sponsored outlet such as an intergroup office. (There is much debate about this. Emerald Valley Intergroup used to sell such things but got out of the business several years ago. This practice does not directly violate a tradition but can create conflicts that interfere with our primary purpose.)"

I hope someone might go into detail and relate the lessons learned to Traditions Four, Tradition Seven, and the lack of government in AA. I followed the events during that time period with interest, but only through the eyes of one person and obviously from afar. I gladly learned from him of the importance of AA members understanding, "The power of the purse," the deeper value of maintaining a prudent reserve, and our policy of "Corporate Poverty."

My understanding is that a minority of members at that time thought that the practice that Emerald Valley Intergroup was engaging in was not our highest effort at honoring our Traditions and that it was unnecessary. I was told that as discussions followed, some of the groups cut off their regular contributions until Intergroup discontinued the practice. I am guessing that experience since that time has proven that the previous practice was unnecessary and that unity has been restored. I would find it very interesting to me personally to read in the Newsletter different perspectives of those events, that seem so rich in learning.

I also think that it is valuable to the fellowship to be made aware of, or reminded, about how much power there is an informed membership persistently holding fast for prudent reserves that are as low as possible, contributing additional funds promptly to chosen service entities. When members see trusted servants that are straying from the highest and best practice of honoring our 12 Traditions, they can quickly and powerfully carry the message.

What a freedom that we have... not needing to rely upon a governing body or a rule of law! Such a blessing that we have a means to put the triangle up-side-down, to have the groups in charge, accountable only to their own understanding of a Higher Power and their own conscience! Such common sense in action!

Thank you for reading my Letter to the Editor.

Yours in love and service,  
Eric

## The GSO Conference Report: Well Worth the Read

If you attended the September assembly as a GSR or DCM you should have received a slim brown volume entitled “Communication and Participation – the Key to Unity and Self Support.” This is the final report on the 2008 General Service Conference. Registered groups that did not send a GSR to the assembly can get this publication from their district DCM. It is not just a dry report on the finances and deliberations of the General Service Conference in New York. It also contains the keynote address from regional Trustee Chuck Barta, committee reports embodying thoughtful, in-depth discussions of committee activities as they relate to the general theme of the conference, brief delegate’s reports from other areas, a summary of Conference advisory actions, and a lengthy Grapevine report. Our Delegate presented some of this material in his post-conference reports, but the printed report contains far more. This is valuable AA literature for anyone involved in service at any level, and deserves more attention than it typically gets. If your group or intergroup office has archives, they should also have reports from previous years; these are also worth reading.

## Peanut Gallery

September 2008

Remember, if you hear some bit of wisdom at a meeting, please send it on to the newsletter chair. Eugene meetings are witty, but we don’t have a monopoly on the AA one-liner.

I didn’t drink in elementary school, but I sure needed it. Kathy, Eugene

[Later in Sobriety] the road’s just as bumpy, but you have better shock absorbers. Anonymous, Eugene.

People say to me: You just want to talk to God. You don’t want to listen. Brenda, Eugene

Life as an educational experience works better if you don’t cut classes too often. Martha, Eugene

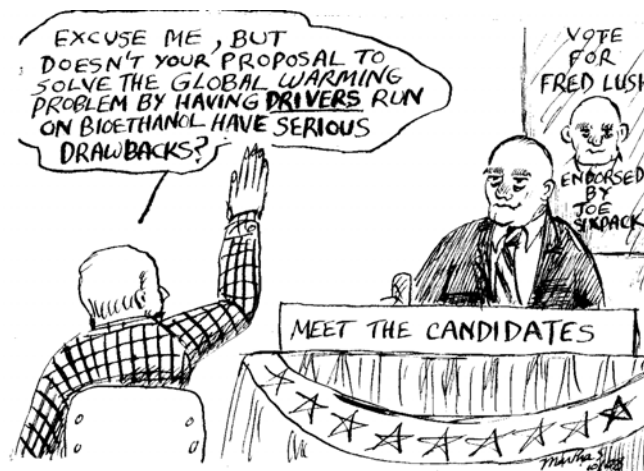
I wake up very slowly in the morning. I keep hitting the snooze button again and again. My spiritual awakening has been that way too. Laurie, Eugene. 1 year sober.

She [a 12<sup>th</sup> step volunteer] said “Get in the car.” For the longest time I thought that was the first step in AA. Janice, Eugene.

I thought not drinking for a month was about as possible as holding my breath for a month. Anonymous, Eugene.

My mother said I was the most compartmentalized person she knew. There was a good Bob and a bad Bob and they didn’t know each other. Bob, Eugene.

My sponsor said an Area Assembly was the nuts and bolts of AA. I’m not sure about the bolts, but after about two hours I knew who the nuts were. Colleen, Eastern Washington



## Images of Sobriety

Sharon D. of Eugene shared this wonderful anecdote and metaphor for sobriety in a meeting several months ago. To illustrate it she supplied the attached pencil sketch, which depicts a video she saw of an elephant actually painting a picture of an elephant. Sharon has exhibited her oil paintings at galleries and shows in Eugene, and teaches art to troubled teenagers at an alternative school. The most cursory comparison of paintings she did during her alcoholic bottom with those she has produced in sobriety leaves no doubt that sobriety is a great asset to artistic creativity.

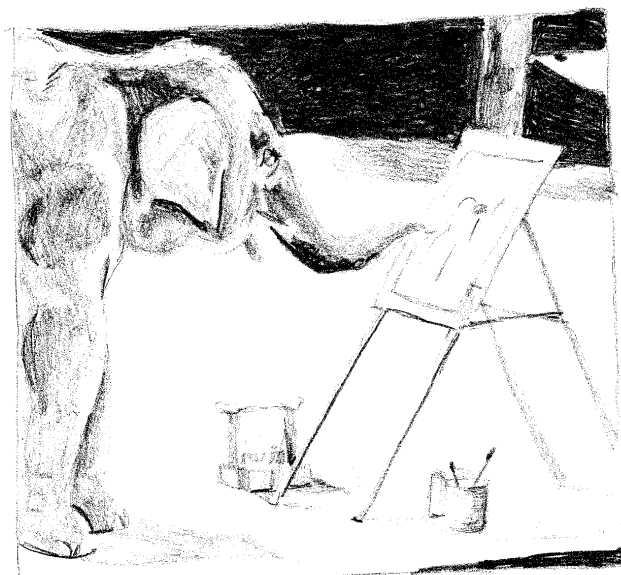
As I became an adult, I learned the most about life from my painting professor in college. An imposing Dutchman with formidable eyebrows, he told us from the first day of classes that he didn't care what our work looked like or about anything as absurd as "talent;" all that he cared about was that we made PROGRESS. *Progress*: that word sparkled in the air as he spoke it. I knew I had no *talent*, but I wanted very badly to make art. Focus on progress gave me the freedom and the possibility.

Each day, the professor would make his rounds around the circle of easels as we all tried furiously to paint the model, and most of us sought to avoid his monumental stare. When he stopped beside me, he would invariably say something like "It looks like an elephant came by and shit all over your canvas.... but it's better than what you did yesterday." This was greatly encouraging! I was told that I would likely not be the next Michelangelo, but that I could hope someday to become myself. Given this hope, my horrible paintings began slowly, and with practice, to come into focus and to develop a style that was all my own.

Some years later, I found AA. How happy I was, then, to find myself in a program that stressed "progress, not perfection." That word *progress* resonated deep inside me during my first meeting – it had changed my life once,

allowing me to pursue art, and perhaps it would work again, allowing me to pursue life. And yes, my life in those first few months of sobriety looked very much as if an elephant had come by and shit all over it. But each day I could see that I was making progress and that my life was becoming a work of art that emerged slowly and with practice out of goopy disorder, motion by motion, stroke by stroke, into something that resembled a human being. I am thankful to this day to my professor and to AA for teaching me that if I continue to make progress, I have a chance at becoming myself.

Sharon D., Eugene, Oregon



### Notes to people who have submitted materials.

I have two poems in hand. They have not been rejected and will be inserted at a future date. If you attempted to send something to the newsletter address on the website, it may have been deleted as spam. I would encourage you to send legitimate entries to my home address, 250 E. 38<sup>th</sup> Ave, Eugene Oregon, or get my e-mail address from the Oregon Area roster, which your DCM has. The spammers are getting rather clever about making their communications look legitimate, and some of the stuff they send out is toxic.

# Oregon Area 58 AA Newsletter