

■ I Heard It Through the....

Since its founding in 1944, AA Grapevine has expanded from a pamphlet to a magazine; to publishing books, calendars and the “Man on the Bed” poster; to establishing the Spanish-language magazine *La Viña*; to having a website (including the new one, launched in 2020). And then, last October, Grapevine released its first podcast.

Every Monday since last October 4, 2021, a variety show-style podcast has appeared on the AA Grapevine website, as well as wherever podcasts can be found. From the first episode, the entertaining, affable and longtime-sober hosts, Don M. and Sam M., have aimed for a casual, “meeting after the meeting” atmosphere.

Regular readers of Grapevine will feel right at home with this audio version, which reflects the spirit of “our meeting in print.” The half-hour show has such regular features as “Ask the Oldtimer,” “What’s in a Name?,” “Stump the Thumper” (trivia from the Big Book), “Blasts from the Past: Historic Talks from A.A. Pioneers,” and,

of course, humor from the magazine, “At Wit’s End.” It all begins with light banter from the hosts and the question, “Where did you hear that?” followed by the refrain, “I heard it through the Grapevine!”

The podcast is already a success. As of this spring, the podcast has had over 80,000 downloads, averaging over 3,000 listens per episode, with listenership steadily growing.

The podcast came about thanks to the efforts of the chair of the Grapevine board, Josh E., and the publisher of Grapevine, Chris C. As Josh recalls, “It was back in 2017 at the General Service Conference and we were imagining different ways Grapevine could work with social media and redoing the website.” This led to the AA Grapevine Digital Transformation Working Group.

Chris C. adds, “We formed a working group from the Grapevine Board to see what we could do with digital media, and the Conference last year [2021] gave the



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Note on anonymity: From time to time in this publication full names and/or pictures of G.S.O. employees, Class A trustees and other nonalcoholics are used. The anonymity of A.A. members is maintained, as they are identified throughout by first name and last initial only.

green light for a podcast.”

Josh had been a guest of “The Boiled Owl,” an hour-long podcast about A.A. recovery hosted by Sam and Don, so when the decision was reached for Grapevine to have a podcast, Josh knew where to turn. “There was no audition process,” Josh says, “as Sam and Don stood out as hosts directly parked in the guidelines of the Traditions. They have a strong sense of the service structure and the Concepts.”

Sam, recalling Josh being a guest on the prior podcast, says, “It was really important on the first podcast to hold ourselves to the Traditions. That was a big attraction for Josh having us host.”

Don breaks down the way a podcast episode is put together, which generally starts two months ahead of airing: “We choose three writers to contact, then we send those names to Chris, who provides the contact information.” The first Monday of the month is a tie-in episode interviewing writers and following up on themes in the current issue of Grapevine. Don continues, “The rest of the content is made up of suggestions from the Grapevine board.”

Don (from Greensboro, North Carolina) and Sam (from Palm Beach, California) then interview a guest virtually, after which Don edits the interview down to 20 minutes. After adding the duo’s introduction and other segments, he sends the 30-minute show to Chris C.

“I listen to it every week,” Chris says. As the last person to hear the podcast before it goes out on Mondays, he says his goal is to “try to keep the rhythm going so there are no long pauses. I edit out the ‘ums’ and ‘ahs’ and the stuttering. If I have any concerns (like a 10-second pause or questionable language) we fix that. Then it goes to a web hosting site and is loaded up and pushed out.”

“I might push the envelope on appropriate language or mention a product too many times,” Don acknowledges, “and Chris catches that before it goes out.”

While the Grapevine podcast can be found on Apple, Stitcher and other large podcast hosting sites, it is also published on the Grapevine website, where one can find every podcast from the first, all clearly arranged.

“It’s not the meeting, it’s the casual ‘meeting after the meeting,’” Sam says. “It’s hard to get to know people in a meeting; it’s before and after that you get to know someone.”

Josh echoes the sentiment, saying, “The podcast emulates the tone we have as a Fellowship. There is enough lightness that it is not overwhelming. People who come onto the show walk into a meeting. It’s important to maintain the lighthearted tone.”

That tone began with “The Boiled Owl.” “‘The Boiled Owl’ started four and a half years ago after a Saturday men’s meeting,” Don recalls via teleconference. “We would go to a coffee shop just talking recovery, and someone said we should just put a phone down and record these talks. That’s how it started.” Airing twice a month, “The Boiled Owl” podcast consisted of these post-meeting conversations.

Sam adds that with the AA Grapevine podcast, “We went from two one-hour podcasts a month to five half-hour podcasts a month.” (“The Boiled Owl” podcast was retired in September 2021, but it is archived and available online.)

Don and Sam have also found their access to the potential guests open up. “For the old podcast the guests were all people we knew adjacently,” Sam says. “Now we get recommendations for guests across the country and Canada, and we don’t know who all of these people are.”

The heart of the podcast, as with any meeting, is the sharing of experience, strength and hope. Chris C. mentions one interview with A.A. member Graylin from White Plains, New York, as “the most successful podcast so far.” The interview appeared on the April 11 episode (Season 2, Episode 15) and 3,000 people listened to it on the first day. Both hosts mentioned being “charged up” talking to Graylin, especially about his Third Step experience. (They also both assert, “There should be less and less of Don and Sam, and more and more of the Fellowship.”)

There are ambitions to expand. Josh E. says, “The next evolution is expanding our staff to enable us to put out a daily podcast or at least more frequent podcasts. This is one more way for people to access the A.A. way of recovery — it is all part of an effort by Grapevine to become more relevant via digital means.”

Future plans for the podcast include featuring one of the many books Grapevine publishes, and to have Grapevine editor Jon W. record a segment about the book. And both Don and Sam are excited for the future, hoping to reach out to more members, especially Grapevine reps, as well as “actively recruiting oldtimers.”

Don, who has a history as a professional entertainer, says, “My wife says now I’m finally famous. But I’m anonymous.”

■ A.A. Comes of Age 2.0: Unified in Love and Service

To borrow a famous phrase from English literature, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.” In many ways, this phrase may best capture the mood and tone of the 72nd General Service Conference, held in Brooklyn, New York, from April 24-30, 2022.

The idea of “Coming of Age” — noted in the Conference theme — implies overcoming a series of challenges, and having crossed the threshold of adversity, being in position on the other side to face the many difficulties, no doubt, gathering just beyond the horizon.

In that sense, the Conference represented the best of times — having met and transcended the many challenges of the past few years, gathering in person for the first time as a Conference since 2019 — and yet, still under the influence of an unrelenting pandemic, the Covid-19 virus left an indelible mark on Conference members — before, during and after the Conference itself.

As noted by Kathi F., the rotating Pacific regional trustee, as she delivered the Keynote Address to the Conference on Sunday, April 24, “Much has changed in our world and in the way A.A. communicates our message of hope. From our Meeting Guide app, virtual meeting rooms, outside literature sales, podcasts, websites, Instagram, and our use of search engine optimization we hope to be everywhere that alcoholics are looking for a solution.

Since we ‘came of age’ and accepted our Conference structure as the link between the little-known boards and the rest of A.A., we have truly done what we were tasked to do so many years ago. The Conference continues to be that link, and with today’s technologies each level of our structure is connected at a greater speed and depth.”

Nevertheless, as Kathi noted, plenty of work remains — and Covid is not done forcing us to adapt our planning and to monitor our progress. Said Kathi, “We are here to have vigorous, loving, and informed discussions on matters affecting A.A. today. We are here to listen to our board reports and to ask questions and make suggestions. We are here to roll up our sleeves, be fully present and do our best, to think deeply, to bring the consciousness of the U.S. and Canada together, to debate in loving discussions and ultimately to hear our Higher Power express itself through our group conscience. It is

important for all of us to take a good hard look at challenges and opportunities that are affecting A.A. today, of which there are many, and to carry these discussions back to those we serve.”

The imprint, however, of Covid on this 72nd General Service Conference began early, with two sitting delegates having to arrange for replacements to the Conference due to Covid concerns, their alternates stepping in at virtually the last minute. Additionally, some G.S.O. employees who had been working on Conference preparations had to go into quarantine after contracting the virus. And, as the Conference continued, Conference members as well as guests and G.S.O. employees began to get sick, with at least 25 infected people by the end of the week and closer to 50 in the days fol-



lowing the Conference. With no established protocols or plans in place to address the expanding infection rate, a series of ad hoc procedures were adopted to keep Conference members in the loop of the Conference itself. Recognizing Concept IV and the need to develop a means of communication for those Conference members quarantined in the hotel or who had chosen to leave the Conference over Covid concerns, an audio link was established to provide access to the deliberations of the Conference, though the full participation of these Conference members for discussion, voting and minority opinion was not possible.

Further complicating matters was the fact that the hotel had no room service capabilities. A volunteer system had to be set up to shuttle food to Conference members, employees and guests who were quarantined, some of whom had to stay on at the hotel for extra days and nights until they were cleared to return home.

The work of the Conference, however, continued despite the complications and the clear challenges of Covid. Additional rapid tests were procured; a growing number of Conference members donned masks and adhered to basic social distancing protocols; and extra chairs and tables were added to the main meeting room, allowing members to more equitably spread out. Discussion of agenda items continued, and debate changed the course of deliberations as unanimity was sought on the multitude of topics brought before the Conference.

Made up of 93 delegates, 26 trustees and corporate directors from A.A.W.S. and Grapevine, along with 14 General Service Office, Grapevine and La Viña staff members, the Conference worked its way through an agenda filled with items — some remaining from the 71st Conference — along with many new items submitted by the Fellowship over the past year. As an added wrinkle, in an effort to relieve the workload of committees with a large number of agenda items and add more opportunities for committees with just a few items, for the first time the Equitable Distribution of Workload (EDW) plan was implemented through the trustees' Conference Committee. An Advisory Action of the 71st General Service Conference, the EDW plan is in the first year of a three-year trial to balance the work of different committees and to provide a full hearing for all agenda items accepted for the Conference agenda.

With multiple opportunities for general sharing in a series of "What's on Your Mind?" sessions, delegates brought issues to the Conference floor for questions and further discussion. One issue mentioned throughout the general sharing was the matter of translation of Conference agenda background material and the desire voiced by many delegates to have the material available in English, French and Spanish at the same time. The difficulties of timing between the deliberations of various trustees' committees, the finalization of background material by staff secretaries and a limited time for translation, and, ultimately, discussion of the material equally throughout the Fellowship were raised, with information and perspective supplied by G.S.O. employees and others. The question ultimately resulted in a floor action approved by the full Conference, recognizing the importance of equal participation in the Conference process regardless of language

and serving as a harbinger for continued improvement.

Another issue of growing concern throughout the Fellowship, especially as brought to the fore by the pandemic, is the growth, importance and representation of online groups and meetings. In a presentation titled "Participation of Online Groups in the U.S./Canada Service Structure," Trish L., trustee-at-large/Canada, offered this perspective: "The sudden onset of the pandemic in 2020, as we all well know, created a brand new (for most) environment for Alcoholics Anonymous groups around the world — the virtual one. No longer able to meet in a face-to-face setting, the quick pivot to available, inexpensive meeting platforms using Internet technology by many groups has led to interesting new challenges and pointed up the need for new ways of thinking regarding the incorporation of this new platform into A.A. life in a manner that respects our Steps, Traditions and Concepts."

A number of delegate presentations examined elements of the Conference theme, covering the topics "How Do A.A.'s Go to Any Lengths to Recover, Unify and Serve?" and "Going Beyond Fear," as well as "How to Reach Anyone, Anywhere." Always interesting, the agenda also included a report on international matters, with the trustees-at-large for both the U.S. and Canada sharing their experiences in their talks, "A.A. Around the World."

A two-part workshop on the topic "The Warranties — Our Promise to the Fellowship and the World" emphasized the importance of communication as the key to inclusiveness and utilizing the six Warranties in Concept XII as a jumping-off point for matters ranging from the Seventh Tradition and its relation to literature sales, to transparency of the various A.A. bodies and communication between them, to speaking and acting with compassion rather than authority, both at Conference and beyond. Focused on innovations in attraction, inclusion and accessibility, a special update



on publishing highlights was the final presentation of the Conference.

Spanning the final three days of Conference business, discussion, debate and voting on the many committee recommendations and considerations that had been developed over the first three days took precedence on the Conference floor and, with substantial unanimity, 35 Advisory Actions were passed.

With the final business ultimately accomplished, the 72nd General Service Conference came to a close on Friday evening with a heartfelt round of goodbyes from rotating Panel 71 delegates. Expressions of gratitude were many, with comments heard such as, “I will never forget our journey. You changed me,” “You’ve made me a better person,” and “This experience started out with the language of the head and ended up with the language of the heart.” One delegate, in quarantine — sharing his thoughts over a cellphone held up to the microphone by another delegate for all to hear — added, “It’s been a very interesting Conference: we got this done, that done ... and then I got Covid.”

The last gathering of Conference members was the closing brunch on Saturday morning featuring talks from this year’s group of rotating trustees. (Five new trustees were selected on Wednesday afternoon.) Representing many years of dedication and many, many miles of travel, Beau B., general service trustee; Jan L., Eastern Canada regional trustee; and Christine Carpenter and Nancy McCarthy, Class A trustees, all spoke graciously and gratefully of their time in service to the Fellowship. Kathi F., Pacific regional trustee, was unable to attend the brunch.

Likening the service structure to “a quilt of dented cans,” Beau expressed the importance of “carrying the message to people we’ll never meet.” Sharing some of her experience as a drug court judge, Christine Carpenter related how she used to suggest the Fellowship to some of the people who were remanded to her court. “Try A.A.,” she would say. “Maybe it’ll help. It certainly can’t hurt ... or else you’ll go to jail.” Decker out in a Blue Jays cap and jersey, Jan L. reflected on the journey she has taken in sobriety: “When I think back to that woman standing in front of the dresser ... I was trying to pour a drink and I couldn’t pour the drink, and the vodka was pouring down the front of me. And I look at myself now and think, wow. And I know that my mom and dad are up there smiling down.” In closing, Nancy McCarthy may have spoken for all Conference members with the words, “Acts of kindness without regard for oneself ... guide our steps and help shape who we are today.”

As noted in the quote from Charles Dickens, the 72nd GSC reflected both the best of times and the worst of times. And, following a group visit on Saturday afternoon to the General Service Office by delegates and their guests (the visit greatly reduced from its original plan due to Covid concerns), with many questions and uncertainties remaining about the pandemic, the thoughts

of Conference members began to turn to next year’s General Service Conference, with its 2023 theme focused on our basic principles – “A.A.’s Three Legacies – Our Common Solution.” And, while it’s hard to predict what the future will bring, the security of our past and the strength of our primary purpose provide hope for the inevitable challenges that lie ahead.

■ 2022 Conference Advisory Actions

Conference Advisory Actions represent recommendations put forward by the standing committees of the General Service Conference that have been discussed, voted on and approved by the Conference body as a whole with substantial unanimity (defined as a majority of at least two-thirds). A sampling of Advisory Actions from the 2022 General Service Conference appears below in abbreviated form. A complete list, along with the full report of additional items considered by each Conference committee, will be published in the Conference *Final Report* (available from G.S.O. in late summer).

Agenda — That the theme of the 2023 Conference be “A.A.’s Three Legacies – Our Common Solution.”

Literature — That text regarding safety and A.A. be added to the pamphlet “Questions and Answers on Sponsorship” and the booklet *Living Sober*; the draft of the pamphlet “Young People and A.A.” be approved; these updated pamphlets be approved: “Is A.A. for You?,” “Is There an Alcoholic in Your Life?,” “Frequently Asked Questions About A.A.” and “This Is A.A.”

Policy and Admissions — That the compilation of all Conference committee background be made available simultaneously in English, French and Spanish.

Public Information — That revisions be made to the pamphlet “Understanding Anonymity” regarding virtual A.A. meetings and in the section “Anonymity in the digital age”; the outdated “A.A. Fact File” be retired; a 2022 A.A. Membership Survey be conducted.

Report and Charter — That *The A.A. Service Manual* be revised to correct inaccuracies and to provide clarity and consistency on the roles, responsibilities and relationships between the General Service Office, AA Grapevine and A.A. World Services, Inc.

Treatment and Accessibilities — That the Long Form of Tradition Five be added to the pamphlet “The A.A. Group” in the section “What is an A.A. Group?” at its next printing.

Trustees — That the trustees’ Literature Committee revise the pamphlet “Do You Think You’re Different?” to update the stories to represent greater diversity.

Floor Action — That the trustees’ Literature Committee continue to make edits to the draft pamphlet “The Twelve Steps Illustrated.”



■ A Fresh Edition of “A.A. for the Black and African-American Alcoholic”

In 2021, acting on a request from the trustees’ Literature Committee, the General Service Conference issued an Advisory Action requesting that the pamphlet “A.A. for the Black and African-American Alcoholic” be updated to include current stories of recovery and a new title that is respectful and inclusive.

Vera F. of Bend, Oregon, nontrustee director of the A.A.W.S. board and a member of the trustees’ Literature Committee, leads a working group established by the trustees’ committee to develop a new and more inclusive version of the pamphlet. Vera’s involvement with “A.A. for the Black and African-American Alcoholic” began when she was a delegate to the 2019 General Service Conference and, after researching the pamphlet, brought a floor action that it be updated. “The original was approved in 2001 with the title ‘Can A.A. Help Me Too? Black/African Americans Share Their Stories,’” she says. “And then in 2007, it was retitled to its current title, but the stories were not changed — the same stories have been in this pamphlet for over 21 years.”

After she became a member of the trustees’ Literature Committee in 2021, Vera was contacted by committee chair Deb K., who asked if she would be interested in putting together a working group to guide the revision of the pamphlet. “I said yes, with a grateful heart,” Vera says. “I was happy this was a working group, not a sub-committee. Because that meant that I could go directly to A.A. members and ask them to be a part of this project.”

The working group has seven A.A. members, including Kesho S., of Grinnell, Iowa, who is on the advisory council for the International Women’s Conference; Paul B., district committee member (DCM), District 1, Area 82, Halifax, Nova Scotia; and Chase C., of Pleasant Hills, California, DCM of California Northern Coastal Area (CNCA) 6, District 70. Along with Vera, they all took part in a recent call with *Box 4-5-9*.

“I am someone who got sober in what are now called ‘white spaces,’” says Kesho, who has 35 years in A.A. “And my group never had a pamphlet called ‘Blacks in Recovery’ or anything like that. Not that they were omitting it — there were just so few of us in the meetings. I was probably 10 or 12 years in before I knew such a pamphlet existed. And I read it. It was relevant. But I do think there are some outdated ideas in it, and it isn’t representative of the diversity of Black experience, particularly indigenous Americans, Black Americans and Canadians. But also Black experience globally.”

Paul agrees. “This is actually long overdue, especially in Nova Scotia. Where I live, there are maybe five African-Nova Scotians who are in meetings. When I first came to A.A. [Paul has 33 years sober] I didn’t see people of my color. And I thought, ‘Aren’t there any black folks in Alcoholics Anonymous?’ So I had to keep searching, but I also couldn’t let that deter me from my primary purpose, which was to stay sober. It was a true battle at one point.”

“Being a member of A.A.,” Chase adds, “I don’t say no when it comes to service. Vera shared a few of the intentions behind creating the pamphlet: that it was to include stories from a diverse group of A.A. members from the intended audiences, both to present a greater perspective from a variety of ethnicities and also to build this band of inclusivity overall. In the wake of political unrest and in light of us becoming essentially a virtual society due to Covid, there was this need to band together amid all the upheaval — but then the question became, how do we tie that in with our alcoholism and getting sober?”

The working group meets once a month to talk about the scope of the project and to consider story submissions using a rating sheet they created for the task. The challenge, Vera says, is to “pick new stories that reflect the experience of the Black community today, told in modern

language. The current pamphlet is U.S.-centered, and for the new one we want stories from Canada, stories from the Caribbean. We want to get a cross-section of Spanish, French and English speakers. We want stories that don't shy away from the difficult things that are often faced by Black alcoholics. We want the stories to reflect the lived experience of Black A.A. members today."

Much of the work the group is doing involves outreach. A call for stories went out in the Spring issue of *Box* 4-5-9; on the Meeting Guide app; on the "What's New?" page on aa.org; and to YPAA groups, Conference delegates and Corrections groups. But, says Vera, "Many Black folks in A.A. are not a part of the service structure. Unlike YPAA and the LGBTQ community and some other groups, there's no regular forum or convention or event that we can tap into. So a lot of our efforts have been put into some creative outreach to reach as many people as possible." This outreach includes holding writing workshops for the pamphlet at PRAASA and NERAASA, as well as getting invited by local groups and districts to hold these workshops. For example, working group members participated virtually at a Black History month marathon meeting held by The Black Experience Group in Hawaii, which was attended by some of the oldest Black groups in the country. Vera is also hoping to tap into A.A.W.S. resources, where people can call in or send in their audio story, akin to Grapevine's Audio Project.

For his part, in Canada, Paul reports he is reaching out to try to solicit stories from "correctional institutions, women's shelters, from the churches. No one ever thinks of reaching out to those kinds of communities, rather than those centered on the broader A.A. community, to get stories. But for me it's all about reaching outside of the box."

"I'm looking forward to reading the stories, to being a part of a group that is really going to digest all of them," says Chase. "At first, we were going to designate maybe one or two people to read them, but then we thought,

■ Request for TRANSLATORS

The Publishing department at the General Service Office is seeking professional freelance translators who have a familiarity with A.A. structure and content to join our publications team (English to French/Spanish; Spanish/French to English). We work on various projects spanning books, pamphlets, correspondence and reports and we need your talent to help us translate the material that helps French- and Spanish-speaking members carry the A.A. message of recovery. Send your resume and cover letter to aapublishing@aa.org.

how about if we all read the stories and share our feedback together? In essence, that's a more unified, God-conscious informed action."

Kesho points out that there are many alcoholics all over the world who need to hear the message contained in the new pamphlet. "After the shutdown of our society in March 2020 because of the pandemic, I got thrown into a whole bunch of virtual meetings where there were people from all over the world, of all different ages. I started meeting young people, BIPOC [Black Indigenous People of Color] who hadn't met anyone who'd been sober for 30 to 35 years. They would ask, 'How the hell did you do that?' I want this pamphlet to contain stories that talk about how you can do that."

"I was a victim of racism inside Alcoholics Anonymous last year, where I was actually told to leave a meeting," says Paul. "I went to my delegate and shared that experience, and then I got on a call with the Eastern Canada regional trustee. I am a firm believer that you have to go out there and say, 'How can I be a part of stopping racism inside the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous?' Those are some of the kinds of stories we're looking for."

For her part, Chase believes, "The target of this pamphlet may actually be the White alcoholic. How does someone know how they are behaving unless we share and express how we are feeling? In this regard, the pamphlet is more of a learning tool — I say that somewhat lightly — but that is how I view it. Of course, it is going to bring hope to the Black member. But it may really bring awareness to the White member regarding how we are affected by racism."

"I don't think A.A. is racist at all — or sexist or homophobic or any of those things — as a structure," Kesho adds. "Certainly I don't think the purpose of our organization is to address those things or to fix those things or to have anything to do with that. We are here to carry the message that there is a solution to alcoholism. But racists do come to A.A. People who are racially ignorant come to A.A. And they say things that are offensive. And what happens — particularly and acutely in these times — is that many young A.A.s feel they have to choose between Alcoholics Anonymous — and dealing with the racial stuff — and not attending meetings. And if they talk about it with their sponsors, many of whom are White, they are told, 'A.A. doesn't deal with outside issues.' This is all very delicate. And one of the hopes that I have is that we get some stories that talk about that delicacy. We're going to find a solution. But we can talk, through the stories, about this intersection."

October 31, 2022, is the last day submissions are accepted for the new pamphlet, and Vera hopes to have a draft pamphlet ready by January or February 2023 to present to the General Service Conference in April. To submit your story of 500-800 words (typed, double-spaced), email it to pamphletstories@aa.org. The subject line should be "A.A. for the Black and African-American Alcoholic."

■ 2025 International Convention: *Frequently Asked Questions*

Q. When and where will the 2025 International Convention take place?

A. The 90th anniversary of Alcoholics Anonymous will be celebrated at the 2025 International Convention in Vancouver, BC, Canada, July 3 – 6, 2025.

Q. What is the theme of the 2025 International Convention?

A. The theme of the 2025 International Convention is “90 Years — Language of the Heart.”

Q. Have A.A. International Conventions been held in Canada before?

A. Yes. There have been International Conventions in Toronto (1965), Montreal (1985), and Toronto (2005). As you may know, the Responsibility Statement was adopted at the 1965 International Convention in Toronto.

Q. Are there any restrictions or regulations affecting travel to Canada in 2025?

A. Yes. The U.S. and Canada each have restrictions and regulations that apply to citizens and visitors who travel from one country to the other. Border crossing into Canada has significantly changed, particularly in the last two years. (Access links appear below for more information.)

Q. Who will have to process forms and applications to gain admission to Canada?

A. It is suggested that those who believe they have some past legal incident, such as a DUI or felony that could inhibit their attendance at the 2025 International Convention, seek assistance/information by accessing the Government of Canada link noted below.

Q. What Canadian travel information is currently available?

A. The International Convention assignment at G.S.O. is not yet up-and-running. However, below is a resource to aid members in making plans to attend the 2025 International Convention (most questions can be answered by connecting to the links below). Also, a

good travel book on Canada will provide valuable information on needed documents and border crossing requirements, as well as vacation tips.

Details on entry requirements are available here:
<https://www.cbsa-asfc.gc.ca/menu-eng.html>

Information for those who may have entry issues due to past criminal history:

<https://www.cic.gc.ca/english/helpcentre/index.asp>

Q. When will registration and hotel information be available?

A. General registration and housing information will be available on the International Convention webpage in early 2024. Actual registration site links, forms, and hotel booking links will be communicated to the Fellowship in August/September 2024.

Q. If travel to Canada is difficult for some U.S. members, why are we holding an International Convention in Vancouver?

A. The Fellowship of the United States and Canada makes up the General Service Structure of Alcoholics Anonymous in North America, and functions as one entity in spirit and in service to the Fellowship. As this event rotates through the regions of A.A., there will be times when it takes place in the U.S., and other times when it's held in Canada.

Laws and other circumstances may impede some members from traveling from one country to the other. For instance, some Canadians could not attend the 2000 International Convention in Minneapolis because of the difference in value of the Canadian dollar and U.S. dollar. Rotation of International Conventions provides accessibility for all members. The Vancouver Visitors and Convention Bureau has assured A.A. that Canada will do whatever is possible to welcome and cooperate with members for the 2025 International Convention in Vancouver.



Alcoholics Anonymous: Two newly developed PSAs offer a message of hope for people with a drinking problem



- > **If alcohol is building a wall around you... that doesn't let you see where you're going... that keeps you feeling isolated and alone...**
- > **That makes you feel hopeless... know this:**
- > **We're here to help — if you want us to. It's never too early — or too late — to ask for help with a drinking problem.**

Public service announcements (PSAs) — short videos or audios — play a critical role in the way Alcoholics Anonymous informs the public about what A.A. is, what it does, and how to contact the Fellowship. PSAs are designed to inform the active alcoholic — and the individual who may know one among family, friends or coworkers — that help can be found in Alcoholics Anonymous.

A.A.'s two newest PSA videos — each in 15-, 30- and 60-second versions in English, Spanish and French — are “Sobriety in A.A.: My Drinking Built a Wall” and “Sobriety in A.A.: When Drinking Is No Longer a Party.” Created and approved through the General Service Conference process and paid for by Seventh Tradition contributions, these PSAs carry the message to still-suffering alcoholics in a way that is in sync with A.A.'s policy of “attraction, not promotion.” As Bill W. wrote in 1962:

We are trying our best to reach more of those 25 million alcoholics who today inhabit the world. We have to reach them directly and indirectly. In order to accomplish this it will be necessary that understanding of A.A. and public good will towards A.A. go on growing everywhere. We need to be on even better terms with medicine, religion, employers, governments, courts, prisons, mental hospitals, and all those conducting enterprises in the alcohol field. We need the increasing good will of editors, writers, television, and radio channels. These publicity outlets — local, national, and international — should be

opened wider and wider, always foregoing, however, high pressure promotion tactics. It is to, and through, all these resources that we must try to carry A.A.'s message to those who suffer alcoholism and its consequences. (*A.A. Service Manual/Twelve Concepts for World Service*, p. C39, 2021-2023 Edition).

Explains Patrick C., Public Information coordinator at G.S.O., each of these new PSAs is an attempt “to broaden our reach to all potential alcoholics and to meet one of the key goals in the General Service Board’s Strategic Plan that ‘the G.S.B. will model inclusivity and acceptance by assisting the Fellowship in carrying the message and encouraging the spirit of the Third Tradition throughout A.A.’ In ‘My Drinking Built a Wall,’ we chose a storyline with a broad-based focus on representing alcoholics who are younger, middle-aged and older. With ‘When Drinking Is No Longer a Party,’ we had a storyline that we felt was going to be relevant for our current times. Its focus is on an alcoholic person of color attending a virtual party, crossing the line with her drinking, and ultimately finding her way to a virtual A.A. group’s meeting.”

These videos — which by Conference action use professional actors to portray alcoholics — are available to view on aa.org at Downloadable Videos. Centralized distribution has been completed to over 2,000 media outlets in the U.S. and Canada. (“Centralized distribution” means the PSA is sent to major media outlets, along with an information packet requesting that they consider

airing the PSA.) The old image of a PSA playing at three o'clock in the morning on a grainy, flickering television set is no longer the case, Patrick says. "We're seeing that the PSAs are playing in the morning, the afternoons, in prime time." G.S.O.'s ability to know this — with U.S. stations, at least — is thanks to the fact that PSAs are digitally encoded, so reports of how often and where the PSAs are aired in the U.S are easily accessed.

The tracking, which G.S.O. has been doing in some form since 2003, provides a wealth of data on viewings of the PSAs. As of mid-May, when *Box 4-5-9* spoke with Patrick, the English-language versions of both videos had been shown a total of 1,900 stations, with 30,370 airings and audience impressions (i.e., the television set is on when the PSA is playing) of 82 million. This adds up to a media buy value of \$4.6 million.

The Spanish-language versions of both videos reached 280 stations, with 13,812 airings and audience impressions of almost 145 million, the equivalent of a media buy of more than \$7 million.

Unfortunately, there is no equivalent tracking or monitoring in Canada, so stations must report on airings, and some do, while others do not. However, for French

Canada, the French versions of the videos reached 27 stations, with airings of 1,180. There are no audience impressions available, but viewings for French Canadian stations are almost certainly underreported.

Patrick has also sent out a letter to encourage the work of local P.I. committees, members and groups to build relationships with the stations within their vicinities to increase the PSA airings. "The reporting portal [for digital tracking] is something we distribute out to the entire Fellowship," says Patrick. "Those involved with local P.I. service — or any member, really — can go to our downloadable PSA page, find out which stations in their area may not be playing the video, and perform some local outreach to see if they will air it. Someone from Suffolk County [New York] intergroup, for instance, reached out to her local access public television station. She downloaded the PSAs, sent them to the station, and they're going to air it."

All of this makes PSAs vital instruments for carrying A.A.'s message. Eighty-two million audience impressions add up to a healthy number of chances for alcoholics to help other alcoholics by letting them know that they are not alone.

■ CCS in Canada

As many A.A. members may know, the Corrections Correspondence Service (CCS) — a vital form of service that matches A.A. members with individuals who are incarcerated via a correspondence program — was first established in the States in 1962, and the more updated version of matching correspondents was implemented in the fall of 2021. This updated matching system allows for more members to connect with individuals serving sentences or who might be approaching parole. "There is a greater expansion and participation with our friends, both on the inside and the outside," explains Sandra W., Director of Staff Services at the General Service Office. Indeed, these efforts and hard work have greatly impacted CCS in the United States, but this streamlined system has yet to cross over the border to our friends in Canada.

Much of past — and current — progress of CCS in Canada has occurred, thanks largely to the hard work of Ruth L., who lives about 20 minutes west of Montreal and who has made this kind of service her passion and mission. In 2010, she attended her first meeting for women at Maison Tanguay prison when she was four months sober. "I had spent some time in this institution," recalls Ruth, "and I was terrified that they would keep me after the meeting." Instead, the elderly woman who was chairing the meeting asked her what she had experienced during the meeting. "After I told her how much I got out of it, she told me that I was going to be there every Friday night, and that I needed to arrange my life around this commitment. She gave me a giant box of literature, and said, 'Here you go.'" Indeed, Ruth

was given a crash course on bringing the message of A.A. to members in custody. "It opened my eyes to another world of service," she remembers. "I fell in love with A.A. in correctional facilities — and it's been a part of my sober life ever since."

In 2015, the Canadian version of CCS was established, but the initiative wasn't making meaningful inroads into the greater prison population. In 2018, in response to Ruth's efforts, A.A. received approval from the government to build a letter-writing program between individuals in custody and A.A. members on the outside. "We used the well-oiled machine of CCS in America," explains Ruth, "and implemented it here."

During the 70th General Service Conference in 2020, the Corrections Committee reported on all that was being done in the States, including the digital distribution of literature in prison through tablets. "When I asked the committee chair if this sort of program was available to Canadian confined members, sadly there was nothing," says Ruth. It was quickly identified that more work was needed in Canada in order to increase awareness about CCS — both among the administration and staff working at the various facilities throughout the country as well as the individuals behind the walls. "People have to be made aware of our programs via the correctional staff. If someone is identified as an alcoholic, they need to be able to say, 'Here is some information. Here is a way that you can connect,'" explains Nancy McCarthy, a former Class A trustee who serve as chair of the trustees' Corrections Committee and who was an employee

of the Missouri Department of Corrections, Board of Probation and Parole for 33 years. “Correctional staff may be familiar with A.A. meetings or our Bridging the Gap program, but very few are aware of CCS.” Particularly during the years of the pandemic, there has been more of a disconnect in terms of providing the necessary information about meetings, CCS, and other services, especially for prison facilities located in remote areas of Canada. “We’re looking to highlight all of the services of A.A., not just one thing,” said Nancy.

After the General Service Conference in 2020, Ruth decided to take the lead on this effort and reached out to the Director of Citizen Engagement at the Correctional Service of Canada in Ottawa. “She returned my initial email with incredible enthusiasm and energy,” remembers Ruth. “Since then, we’ve created an ad hoc team, which has been figuring out how best to talk about our services as well as looking at the differences between the U.S. and Canada, particularly due to our laws.” As a part of this effort to bring more awareness to the greater correctional community in Canada, two pieces of information were put together: one directed toward the corrections professional about what services are available, particularly bridging the gap to the insider who is about to leave, and one for people in custody. “We want to make sure that their connection on the inside happens on the outside, too,” explains Sandra W. “We need to keep that continuity with the hand of A.A.”

To this end, Ruth and the team published a newsletter about what A.A. is and all the tools of the program that might be helpful to the member behind walls. This newsletter has been distributed internally at the National Headquarters for the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) in Ottawa. A new version of the “inside”-friendly newsletter is currently being developed for members in custody throughout Canada so they can have access to this information, too.

During the coming months, Ruth hopes that digital literature will become available to individuals in custody through the use of tablets. Recently she has created a dialogue with the Canadian government about giving people in prison access to tablets for education and activities, including participating in Alcoholics Anonymous. Due to the pandemic and the greater difficulty involved in holding in-person meetings in prison, there is a more pressing need for this. “Access to tablets would allow individuals to be able to read A.A. literature online,” Ruth continues. “It’s a way to receive some help immediately because there might not be an A.A. meeting available in that particular institution.” And like the



updated system for matching individuals in the States, there is a goal to have the CCS system implemented throughout Canada, too.

“This is the Fellowship’s project,” Nancy adds, referring to the building of CCS in Canada. “It’s about bringing value and service to the local area. When someone is in prison, they become a number. When they walk into a meeting of A.A., they are called by their name. No one else does that in prison. And then, at the end of the meeting, they ask them to come back. It’s an unbelievable gift.”

Like other aspects of the program, it all comes down to one alcoholic talking to another. “I had the privilege of sitting with members in prison who are filled with regret, remorse and a sense of tragedy,” says Ruth. “As time passes and they attend A.A., they learn that they aren’t bad people, but they made a bad choice — and you see fear turn into hope. And then, you watch them help someone else and do the exact same thing. It’s life-changing: In a place of such hopelessness, they find hope in A.A.”

— CALL FOR STORIES —

Fifth Edition Big Book

Deadline for submissions: October 31, 2022 The trustees’ Literature Committee is delighted to invite A.A. members to contribute stories of recovery to the Fifth Edition of the Big Book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, through the new story submission section on the G.S.O. website.

The new page features:

- Guidelines and suggestions on how to write your story;
- Automatic copyright signing process;
- Acknowledgment receipt (**Note:** The anonymity of all authors will be observed whether their story is selected for publication or not).

If you have any questions, please email 5BBStory@aa.org.

NOTE: Due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, events may be canceled or moved to online formats. Please contact the event coordinators as listed before making your plans.

Calendar of Events

Events listed here are presented solely as a service to readers, not as an endorsement by the General Service Office. Please note that we cannot attest to the accuracy, relevancy, timeliness, or completeness of information provided by any linked site. **For any additional information, please use the event contact information provided.**

June

- 3-5—*Sheridan, Wyoming*. Area 76 Spring Conv; Write: Ch., PO Box 705, Sheridan, WY 82801; Email: Area76SpringConvention2022@gmail.com
- 3-5—*Winnipeg, Manitoba*. Western Canada Regional Forum; Write: Forum Coord., Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163; regionalforums@aa.org. Info: https://www.aa.org/pages/en_US/regional-and-local-forums
- 10-12—*Kenton, Oklahoma*. 45th Camp Billy Joe Roundup; Write: Ch., 57556 29 Palms Hwy #299, Yucca Valley, CA 92284
- 16-19—*Sparks, Nebraska*. 14th Annual Sober Float; Write: Ch., 1366 300 St. Primrose, NE 68655; Email: soberfloat@gmail.com
- 24-26—*Frederick, Maryland*. 50th Annual Area 29 Maryland State Convention; Write: Ch., 5400 Holiday Drive, Frederick, MD 21703; Info: <http://www.marylandaa.org/state-convention>
- 24-26—*Shoreline, Washington*. Pacific Northwest Conference; Write: Ch., 20323 19th Ave NE A201, Shoreline, WA 98155; Info: <https://www.pnc1948.org>

July

- 7-10—*Raleigh, North Carolina*. 75th North Carolina State Convention; Write: Ch., PO Box 41451, Raleigh, North Carolina 27629; Info: www.aanconvention.com
- 8-10—*Debrecen, Hungary*. Hungarian National Meeting; Write: Ch., Böszörményi str 132 Debrecen, Hajdu-Bihar Megye H-4032; Info: <https://aa2022.ewk.hu/>
- 15-17—*Carrabassett Valley, Maine*. Maine Area 28 Round Up; Write: Ch., PO Box 311 Brunswick, Maine 04011; Email: maineroundupinfo@gmail.com

- 22-24—*Las Vegas, Nevada*. 26 Aniversario de La Viña de la Region del Pacifico; Write: Ch., 3701 Glendale Ave. Apt A North, Las Vegas, NV 89030; Info: <https://www.aalavina.org/get-involved/events/26-aniversario-de-la-vina-de-la-region-del-pacificoadconvention.com>
- 29-31—*Hot Springs, Arkansas*. 80th Old Grandad Conv; Write: Ch., PO Box 7660, Little Rock, AR 72217; Info: www.oldgrandadconvention.com
- 29-31—*Jefferson City, Missouri*. Missouri State Conference; Write: MOSC Registration, PO Box 407, Columbia, MO 65205; Info: www.mostateconvention.org

August

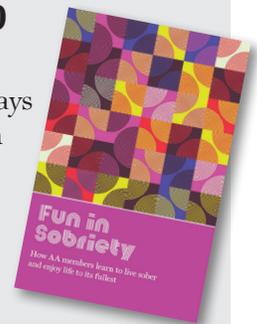
- 3-7—*Fort Lauderdale, Florida*. 65th Florida State Convention; Write: 5201 SW 9th St, Plantation, FL 33317; Info: www.65.floridastateconvention.com
- 12-14—*York, Pennsylvania*. Sunlight of the Spirit; Write: P.O. Box 3538 York, Pennsylvania 17402; Info: www.sunlightyork.org
- 26-28—*Chattanooga, Tennessee*. Serenity in the Scenic City; Write: Ch., PO Box 22602 Chattanooga, TN 37422; Info: www.Serenityinthesceniccity.org
- 26-28—*Kenai, Alaska*. Kenai Wilderness Jamboree; Write: Ch., Box 1625, Kenai, AK 99611; Info: www.aakenaipeninsula.org

September

- 3-4—*Boston, Massachusetts*. XLIX Convencion Hispana de AA Estados Unidos y Canada; Info: <https://www.convencionhispanadeaauasay-canada.com/informes>
- 3-4—*Monterey, California*. Monterey Bay Area Roundup; Write: Ch., P. O. Box 1462, Monterey, CA 93942; Email: MBARChair2022@gmail.com
- 16-18—*Chouteau, Oklahoma*. Gratitude Getaway 2022 Women's Conference. Write: Ch., 406 E 76th Street N Sperry, OK 74073; Info: www.gratitudegetaway.com
- 16-18—*Gatineau, Québec, Canada*. 22e Congres du District 90-22 Gatineau. Écrire: Prés., 85, rue du Barry, Gatineau, Quebec J8T 3N5; congres22@aa90.org
- 16-18—*Salt Lake City, Utah*. Pacific Regional Forum. Write: Forum Coord., Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163; regionalforums@aa.org. Info: https://www.aa.org/pages/en_US/regional-and-local-forums
- 23-25—*Kalispell, Montana*. Montana Fall AA Roundup; Write: Ch., P.O. Box 155 Bozeman, MT 59771; Email: information@aanwmt.org
- 23-25—*Richland, Washington*. Three Rivers Big Book Weekend III; Write: Ch., 750 W Livernois Way, Chino Valley, AZ 86323; Info: <https://www.threeriversbigbookweekend.org>

■ GV45 — FUN IN SOBRIETY \$11.50

Fun in Sobriety features 50-plus inspiring stories by members of Alcoholics Anonymous about the many ways they've learned to have a good time after putting down the drink. Chapters include travel, outdoor activities, arts & hobbies, social entertainment, fun-filled AA activities and sober events. The stories were previously published in Grapevine, the International Journal of Alcoholics Anonymous. Full of passion and humor, this book shows how, by working the program and developing a sober network, life can begin to take on new, exciting adventures.



To order this item or any other product from our collection, visit us at www.aagrapevine.org and click on Store or call (800) 631-6025 US/Canada, (847) 559-7327 International or fax us at (847) 564-9453.