

Challenge to A.A. Unity and Legacy
Addendum, *Alcoholics Anonymous*: Our Name and Our Message

- In 1993, an individual living in Germany communicated with the General Service Offices in both Germany and Canada/U.S. that he intended to publish his German translation of *Alcoholics Anonymous*. He was advised that the copyright on the A.A. Big Book remained in effect in Germany, and that the German General Service Board held the license to publish/distribute the approved German translation of *Alcoholics Anonymous*.
- Despite the best efforts of the German Board, as well as many communications from our Board, the man published and distributed his German translation of *Alcoholics Anonymous*¹. The Board of A.A. in Germany consulted with their General Service Conference, and retained legal counsel to explain to the individual the seriousness of publishing "A.A. literature" that had not been considered or approved by a representative group conscience or Conference, and was not authorized by an A.A. board licensed for that purpose.
- Every possible means of communication was utilized to explain to the individual the seriousness of continued distribution of literature without authorization. We began to hear from A.A. members and groups who were concerned with the man's efforts to gain support for his enterprise. He appeared at A.A. events, often without invitation, and encouraged concern and unrest among A.A.'s.
- Coincidentally, Directors serving on the A.A. World Services, Inc. Board reported to the 44th General Service Conference (1994) that, "The position of the A.A.W.S. Board is to avoid litigation whenever possible. If it were decided to prohibit all litigation respecting identifying marks and copyrights, such action could have the effect of abandoning the A.A. name and copyrights forever, along with the integrity of our message and our identity." The resolution was discussed during that Conference and, on occasion, in succeeding Conferences. Boards, management and staff furnished background on the subject to interested A.A. members, groups and/or service bodies.
- 1994-1996, the individual distributing unauthorized "A.A." literature traveled to Mexico several times, where he met with a small, but vocal group of A.A. members who were challenging licenses to publish approved translations of A.A. literature granted to the General Service Board of A.A. in Mexico (Central Mexicana).
- November 1996, the individual distributing translations of "A.A." literature without authorization, came to New York City and asked to meet with the General Manager² of our General Service Office. The General Manager and a Staff member met with the German visitor, who was accompanied by two friends from Germany.

¹ The unauthorized translation was distributed at no charge, with a catalog of "A.A." and other literature for sale.

² A position that includes the responsibility of serving as President of A.A. World Services, Inc.,

During the lengthy meeting, the General Manager carefully explained the obligations and responsibilities of A.A.W.S. to A.A. as a whole, that is, to assure the integrity of our printed message, including doing so through approved translations licensed to boards elected to serve A.A. in other lands—one board per country or language. The individual described his objections to the approved German translation of A.A.'s Big Book, and he was encouraged to express his concerns to members of the General Service Conference of A.A. in Germany³

- Early in 1997, the Manager of Sweden's General Service Office called our G.S.O. to ask for an explanation and assistance regarding "Swedish-language Big Books" delivered to local groups without notice or explanation; A.A. in Sweden was confronted by a dilemma created from outside the country. It was determined that the Swedish books were printed in Germany by the same individual publishing and distributing the unauthorized German translation of the Big Book, who also operated a mail order book business.

Soon thereafter, we learned that the man had shipped an unauthorized translation of the Finnish-language Big Book to groups in Finland. Additionally, he began distribution of his translation of the Big Book in Hebrew, again without permission or the consent of local A.A. groups and/or service centers.

- By summer 1997, A.A.W.S. determined that the General Service Board of A.A. in Russia was able to begin publication and distribution of A.A. literature in Russian—a huge step forward for the A.A. Fellowship in Russia⁴. A.A.W.S.' Publications Director, accompanied by a Staff member, traveled to Moscow in August 1997, for the express purpose of conveying A.A.W.S.' license to the Russian Board to permit them to publish and distribute the approved translation of the Russian-language Big Book.

While in Moscow, the Publications Director and Staff member were invited to participate in the 10th Anniversary Celebration of A.A. in Russia. The individual printing A.A. literature without permission was present; he attempted a confrontation with our representatives, who declined to participate.

- By October 1997, the General Service Board of A.A. in Russia was ready to print and distribute 2,000 Russian Big Books. The Russian Board contacted A.A.W.S. to express deep concern that someone had printed 50,000 copies of an unapproved translation of the Russian Big Book for distribution in Russia and elsewhere. Quickly, it was learned that the same individual who distributed unauthorized "A.A. literature" in other countries had expanded distribution of "free" Big Books to Russia. Catalogs describing the man's mail order book business, and offering "A.A. literature" for sale, began appearing in mail directed to local Russian A.A. groups.

Every effort urging the man to cease activities that fomented disunity and disrupted Twelfth Step work supported by recognized A.A. service centers was refused or ignored.

³ For more than 5 years, the individual distributed written criticisms of German A.A. literature to members of the German General Service Conference and elsewhere.

⁴ Since A.A. in Russia was founded (1987), A.A.W.S. had published and shipped Russian-language A.A. books and pamphlets to the Moscow Central Service Office for the benefit of A.A. in Russia. The support provided by our General Service Board and General Service Conference (Canada/U.S.) had encouraged A.A.'s development and the establishment of a service structure in Russia.

- Up to this point, we had been confronted by only two situations of copyright infringement that could not be resolved through communication and negotiation. Those two instances directly abridged licenses granted to the General Service Boards of A.A. in Mexico and Germany, established service entities that possessed the resources to protect our copyright(s) and their license.

A.A. in Finland, Russia, Sweden and Israel were not prepared to deal with the assault on A.A. unity and services, as well as their licenses to publish granted by A.A.W.S.

- The General Service Board of A.A. in Germany continued communications or negotiations with the individual without resolution. In May 1997, the German Board, with the knowledge of their General Service Conference, filed a complaint with a German Court citing the defendant's illegal activities, and, filed a separate request that the Court order the defendant to cease and desist his activities. Those filings addressed illegal publications of A.A. literature that abridged licenses granted to the German Board.
- Throughout, A.A.W.S., our General Service Board, and the A.A. Grapevine Board were informed of repeated efforts to reason with the individual. In November 1997, Trustees of our General Service Board convened a solemn session attended by Directors of the A.A.W.S. and Grapevine Boards, and G.S.O. and Grapevine staffs. The meeting was called to consider unanimous resolutions adopted by A.A. World Services, Inc. on October 30, 1997:

Resolved: That the A.A.W.S. Board recognizes its responsibility to preserve and protect the copyrights held in trust for all of A.A., both here in U.S./Canada, and through-out the world. The A.A.W.S. Board further recognizes that unchallenged infringement of our copyrighted literature seriously impacts the future growth of A.A. overseas."

"Following adoption of the above resolution, the A.A.W.S. Board authorized management, working with the board's legal advisor, the Chairpersons of A.A.W.S. and General Service Boards, and such other persons as the respective chairs might assign, to take such appropriate action, including legal action, as may be necessary to meet the challenge."

The General Service Board endorsed both resolutions with complete unanimity.

- When all avenues of reason and/or negotiation had been exhausted, A.A. World Services initiated legal proceedings in Germany that sought to prevent further publication and distribution of unauthorized A.A. literature. We prayed that the man would cease activities that fomented misunderstanding and disunity.
- The General Service Board explained the developments to the 48th General Service Conference (1998). That practice was continued during each succeeding General Service Conference, when the Chairman of the General Service Board updated Conference members on progress of the German Court's considerations. Throughout, Trustees and Directors were kept informed. Past Chairmen of our Board, Jim Estelle and Gary Glynn, provided guidance and insight; and, we continued to benefit by Past Chairman Michael Alexander's wisdom and vast experience.

- May 1999, the German Court of Common Pleas ruled for the plaintiffs, the German Board and A.A.W.S., finding that the defendant did not have rights to publish German translations of the pamphlets "Too Young?" and "It Happened to Alice," and the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*. The following month, June 1999, the defendant appealed the Court's ruling as it applied to the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* and Bill W's authorship of the Big Book⁵, thus forcing a process that absorbed energy and resources over four more years.
- In October 2003, the Court of Appeals in Frankfurt decided matters in favor of A.A., represented by the German General Service Board and A.A.W.S. The defendant's claims were not allowed, and the Court required that he cease producing/distributing Conference-approved books and pamphlets in any language. The Court affirmed the validity of copyrights held in trust by A.A.W.S., and recognized Bill W. as author of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, A.A.'s Basic Text.

The Court ordered the defendant to turn over all "A.A." books and pamphlets that he printed and/or held as inventory; and, to provide details on the reach and extent of his distribution system. The Court decreed that the defendant must reimburse A.A.W.S. and A.A. in Germany for legal expenses, including attorney fees.

- Early in 2004, we and the German General Service Board offered the defendant an opportunity to forgo reimbursement of legal costs and fees provided the defendant does not publish or distribute Conference-approved literature in any language or country, now or in the future, and accepts all other stipulations in the Court's order.
- The defendant has not responded to our offer. Therefore, we have asked that remedies stipulated in the Court's final order of October 2003 be fulfilled by the defendant.

While these matters were before the Court, we were constrained from discussing relevant details. We promised past and present members of the General Service Conference that we would report more fully when the matter was concluded. Legal fees and related expenses over the seven year period, 1998-2004, totaled \$227,707.

Trustees, A.A.W.S. and Grapevine Directors have no sense of victory or accomplishment. Throughout, we have applied ourselves to the principles handed down to us and to you. We recognized and faced our responsibilities to protect the integrity of Conference-approved literature, and the A.A. message of hope handed down by Dr. Bob, Bill W. and the early members.

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⁵ Defendant did not appeal the Court's ruling that he had no right to publish/distribute German translations of the pamphlets "Too Young?" and "It Happened to Alice,"

April 2004

General Service Board Report
Elaine McDowell, Ph.D., Chair of the General Service Board

I'm delighted to be with you as together we experience the 54th General Service Conference. Each April, your group conscience inspires and guides trustees, directors, G.S.O. and Grapevine staffs, and support personnel. We are grateful for your dedication and example.

We join you in celebrating the Conference theme, "Our Singleness of Purpose—The Cornerstone of A.A." On behalf of your trustees, this report will reflect our respect for A.A.'s primary purpose as vital to A.A. unity and the assurance that A.A.'s simple message is available to alcoholics everywhere.

Since the 53rd Conference, the board has hosted Regional Forums in Grand Island, New York; Columbus, Indiana; Minot, South Dakota; Kansas City, Missouri; and Grande Prairie, Alberta. Special Forums were held in Smithers, British Columbia, and Hawaii, where we visited the islands of Kauai, Maui, Oahu and Hawaii. Your suggestions to encourage attendance and participation in Forums are always welcome.

We welcomed five new trustees to the board: Herbert Goodman, Class A, and four Class B trustee: Murray McIntosh as trustee-at-large/Canada; general service trustee Arnold Ross; and regional trustees Gary Kluksdahl and Michael Perry.

At the close of this annual meeting, three trustees will rotate: Ric Downey, Ted Stoa and George Vaillant. Each represents outstanding service and sacrifice on behalf of the Fellowship. Your board interviewed nine candidates for two Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee openings—one for an existing vacancy and the other that will occur with the rotation of George Vaillant, whose contributions have added immeasurably to the board. The nine outstanding nonalcoholics we interviewed for the Class A openings reflected the respect and admiration that A.A. garners among professionals through contact with sober members like you.

We also welcomed new G.S.O. staff member Irene Kontje, and Publications' production manager Carole Harley, who assumed Bob Cubelo's responsibilities following Bob's retirement after 25 years of faithful service.

In January, the English edition of the Fourth Edition of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, our Big Book, was added to G.S.O.'s Web site, joined by the French and Spanish translations of the Big Book. Shortly after that, the General Service Office received sharing that a suffering alcoholic was led to A.A. and sobriety through the online availability of A.A.'s basic text.

The 2004 budget projects a 2% increase for literature sales, and restoration of pre-Fourth Edition prices for the hardcover and portable Big Books. The incredible response to the Fourth Edition of the Big Book enabled A.A. World Services (A.A.W.S.) to decrease the price of Big Books temporarily.

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