

You have heard the good news that Robin Bromley became executive editor of the A.A. Grapevine on April 1st. The Grapevine Corporate Board unanimously selected Robin as executive editor, and the trustees' Nominating Committee wholeheartedly affirmed the Grapevine Board's decision. Now, I want to express again my gratitude and warm wishes to Robin.

The Grapevine Corporate Board made considerable progress in the past year, while also addressing several challenges. The Grapevine magazine achieved a positive net income of \$5,300 for 2003, and projects the trend to continue for the balance of 2004. Throughout the year, the Grapevine staff fulfilled their responsibilities and avoided distractions. We applaud their dedication.

Charlie Bartell and Murray McIntosh, your trustees-at-large, U.S. and Canada, traveled great distances to convey experience, strength and hope during the first Service Conference in Minsk, Belarus, the XIII Meeting of the Americas in Maracaibo, Venezuela, and the celebration of 15 years of A.A. in Latvia.

Internationally, A.A. continues to take root and flourish. The first Sub-Sahara (Africa) Service Meeting was held in South Africa last June, with G.S.O. general manager Greg Muth and Adrienne Brown, staff member on the International assignment, present as observers. Adrienne delivered an inspiring keynote address. Since then, we've received newsletters from the Sub-Saharan region indicating that the Service Meeting inspired local members to carry the light of A.A. further in their lands. Enthusiastic A.A.s in Uganda established several service committees; members in Zimbabwe held their first A.A. convention under incredibly difficult circumstances; and A.A. membership in Malawi increased by more than 20 members. From Oman in the Middle East, we learned of the third A.A. Convention in Mescot.

Adrienne and Greg also attended the 5th Asia-Oceanic Service Meeting in Hong Kong as observers and resources of shared experience. Zonal Service Meetings are invaluable to emerging countries as forums for passing on A.A. experience and reassurance that, although the growth of A.A. presents challenges, no single member or country is alone, thanks in large measure to the support of groups and members in Canada and the U.S.

Adrienne and I traveled to the Planning Meeting of the World Health Organization (W.H.O.) in Geneva, Switzerland. There, we learned that the W.H.O. will consider inviting A.A. members to future meetings so that information on A.A.'s program of recovery would be more available. During the trip, we were pleased to meet with several members of Switzerland's General Service Board, who sought to gain by shared experience of the U.S./Canada structure so that they may encourage development in Switzerland's service structure.

In November, Greg and I were guests of the General Service Board of A.A. in India. For almost 15 days, we maintained an amazing schedule of visits and meetings with professionals, government officials, and A.A. groups and local offices, culminating in the 32nd General Service Conference of A.A. in that vast country. The depth and breadth of our experiences cannot be described in this report. I encourage you to request a copy of our "trip report" and benefit by the remarkable progress of A.A. in India.

Adrienne, Greg, and publications director Chris Cavanaugh responded to invitations to visit A.A. in Colombia, Nicaragua, Paris, and Vienna, where they shared information on licensing, distribution, copyrights, and production of A.A. literature. The three also attended the 12th European Service Meeting in Frankfurt as observers, where discussions centered on safeguarding the integrity of A.A.'s written message in all languages, in every country and structure throughout the world—values that are rooted in our singleness of purpose, the cornerstone of A.A. here and elsewhere.

Toward that end, your Publications Department is responsible for overseeing translations of Conference-approved books. *Alcoholics Anonymous* in Icelandic and Zulu; *Daily Reflections* in Italian and Portuguese; *Living Sober* in Latvian and Greek; Swahili *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*; and *As Bill Sees It* in Italian have been published since the 53rd General Service Conference last April.

Publications staff also maintains contact with General Service Offices or committees in other countries to achieve accurate translations of Conference-approved pamphlets. Among the pamphlets translated in the last year are: Thai-language "Is A.A. for You?," "44 Questions," "A Newcomer Asks," and "This is A.A."; the Simplified Chinese version of "A Newcomer Asks"; and, "Is A.A. For Me?" in German. Nearing completion are several pamphlets in various languages spoken in India; "Questions and Answers on Sponsorship"; "The A.A. Group," and "Understanding Anonymity" in Latvian; and "The Twelve Steps Illustrated" in Inuktitut. In each case, the translation reflects the original (English) manuscript, and the practice of assuring that the basic A.A. message is tied to our principles and primary purpose.

The General Service Board's role in observance of A.A.'s singleness of purpose occasionally necessitates difficult decisions or actions. Since 1993, with the support of the General Service Conference and the A.A.W.S. and Grapevine Boards, we addressed a serious challenge to copyrights on A.A. literature, first granted to Bill W., and later assigned by Bill to A.A.W.S. on behalf of the Fellowship as a whole.

Bill W. copyrighted the First Edition of our Big Book so that the text could not be altered to suit individual views or interpretations not fully considered by a representative group conscience. The General Service Conference (U.S./Canada) has served as the effective group conscience of A.A. as a whole since 1955 and adoption of the historic resolution in St. Louis. (*The A.A. Service Manual/Twelve Concepts for World Services*, pp. S89-90)

Most of you are aware that a German citizen undertook to publish and distribute several Conference-approved books and pamphlets, first in Germany and then in other countries. Our first contact with him occurred in 1993. For more than four years, we and the General Service Board of A.A. in Germany used every possible means of communication to reason with him. Each contact was a sincere effort to persuade him that unauthorized publications in the name of A.A. ignored principles established by Bill W. and reflected in the Current Conference Charter: "In countries where a General Service Structure exists, the United States/Canada Conference will delegate sole right to publish our Conference-approved literature to the General Service Board of that structure."

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For four years, we requested that he cease publishing unauthorized literature in the name of A.A. Yet, he translated and distributed Conference-approved books and pamphlets in several languages, including Finnish, Hebrew, Russian, Spanish, and Swedish, as well as German and English.

The effect in countries with new or struggling service structures was profound. The unauthorized books created confusion within the membership, were unconnected to the local service office or structure, and raised concerns about the integrity of A.A.'s simple message. Unsolicited books arrived in local groups; A.A. members were confused and distracted from the group's primary purpose. In some cases, Unity was threatened.

Secondarily, a majority of A.A. service entities in other countries depend on literature sales, as well as contributions, to support basic services. Our friends in other countries looked to your structure for they recognized the challenges to copyrights held in trust by A.A. World Services (A.A.W.S.) for A.A. as a whole.

In November 1997, we realized that we had exhausted all avenues of reason and/or negotiation. The German General Service Board and A.A.W.S. initiated legal proceedings in Germany that sought to prevent further publication and distribution of unauthorized literature. Our aim was that the defendant would cease activities that fostered misunderstanding and disunity.

Past General Service Board chairmen updated each succeeding General Service Conference 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, joined by past chairman Michael Alexander, who has served on the board's Legal Affairs Committee since its inception. (Established by Board Chairman in 1999 to provide guidance on legal matters.)

Although, the German Court of Common Pleas ruled for the plaintiffs, the German Board and A.A.W.S. in May 1999, the defendant appealed the ruling, thus forcing a process that absorbed energy and resources over four more years.

In October 2003, the Court of Appeals in Frankfurt decided the matter 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 directed that he cease producing and 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 German 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. In the process, we drew on the experience and wisdom of A.A.'s founders and early members, as well as examples of self-sacrifice for the common welfare that you and those before you exemplify.

We gain nothing financially from protecting foreign copyrights. We receive no payments or financial benefits from any A.A. literature published by other boards or service structures. Protecting copyrights is a service we perform to help carry the message. We believe protecting copyrights is of great benefit to A.A. worldwide because it helps maintain the integrity of the message in our literature, and because it helps other boards and offices to serve their groups. It is also our legal duty as trustees.

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, and the supreme importance of protecting the integrity and simplicity of Conference-approved literature, as well as the message handed down from Dr. Bob, Bill W. and the first members.

My remarks on this matter, coupled with additional background, will be made available to you during the Conference.

Your General Service Board continues to be led by a Power Greater than any single trustee, delegate or group. Throughout the year, we have been uplifted by the humility demonstrated by each newcomer who enters an A.A. meeting, wishing, hoping, but not yet believing, that A.A.'s solution can push away the fog of alcoholism, and lead him or her to the Sunlight of the Spirit.

We join you in looking upward to two significant gatherings. The 18th World Service Meeting will take place in New York City this coming October, where the theme will be "One Message—Many Languages—One Fellowship." With hearts full of gratitude, we join you and A.A.s everywhere in joyful anticipation of the Fellowship's 70th Anniversary in Toronto, where we will come together for the 2005 International A.A. Convention, and reaffirm "I Am Responsible."

During the 1995 General Service Conference, a trustee shared these thoughts: "Not one of us is given a torch big enough to lead the drunks of the world out of darkness and into the light. Instead, each of us has been given a candle that burns for a short while with a flickering flame. If we stand together, the light will outshine the greatest torch. If we argue and bicker and blow at each other's candle so that each of us starts shielding our own little flame, then the alcoholics of the world will continue to suffer in darkness, and so will we."

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