



FINAL REPORT
EASTERN CANADA REGIONAL FORUM
AUGUST 15-17, 2014
LAVAL, QUEBEC

Dear A.A. Friends,

Please mark your calendar for the next Eastern Canada Regional Forum, which will take place in Thunder Bay, Ontario, July 10-12, 2016 at the Airline Hotel and Conference Centre.

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ONLY LAST NAMES OF CLASS A (NONALCOHOLIC) TRUSTEES
AND NON-A.A. EMPLOYEES APPEAR IN THIS REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

The 2014 Eastern Canada Regional Forum was held in Laval, Quebec. Registration for the Forum was 726. This included 419 members attending their very first Forum—many were welcomed at the Forum Orientation on Friday evening.

Everyone openly expressed gratitude and affection to Eastern Canada Regional trustee Richard B. for being with us and chairing his first Forum as Regional Trustee with his characteristic humor and great love for A.A.

ENGLISH WORKSHOP REPORTS

The following are reports from workshops conducted in French and English on Saturday, August 16, 2014.

“What is a G.S.R.?” (Moderator: Marilyn R. / Reporter Dany M.) The Twelve Traditions were read at the start of the workshop. The purpose of this workshop was to discuss the role and the duties of a G.S.R. The chairperson, Marilyn R., read and explained the role and duties of the G.S.R. from *The A.A. Service Manual*. It was stressed that that publication was extremely important. She then opened the meeting to the members in attendance so that they could share their experience and hopes. Members discussed:

- The many challenges of being a G.S.R. and the importance of the position;
- The importance of a service sponsor;
- Transition from a more organized G.S.R.;
- Importance of choosing the right person for any A.A. duties;
- Great cooperation between groups at District Meetings;
- Importance of explaining an inventory, such as its purpose and how to do it (and to do it reasonably).

“Archives” (Moderator: Jennie H. / Reporter: Jean C.) The moderator presented workshop members with the various positions on an Archives Committee:

1. Volunteers
2. Archives Chair (usually a rotated elected position)
3. Archivist – often appointed, non-rotating, indeterminate amount of time in position because of their knowledge and the nature of the job.

In addition, when starting an archives position, some helpful resources include:

1. Local historical societies and/or local museums
2. Archives Association of Ontario (becoming a member gives you access to their enormous database)
3. Local Archives Association of the city or community
4. University resources

The group was presented with suggestions for some activities for an A.A. Archives committee, such as “start where you are, choose a doable project, and complete it.” More specifically:

- Go through your materials, catalogue them, record it. Do these actions with the question: “How are we going to display it?” in mind. Pay a lot of attention to “Records Management” regarding email, paper, and electronic correspondence. Use a “memory stick”. Keep everything in its original package. Some doable projects include:
- Group History – use G.S.O. form and get a photo of the meeting room.
- Old-timer oral history – ask them to share before they pass away.
- Digitizing: great for searches and for getting to materials quickly. Keep three copies. Check what has already been digitized by other areas and districts so their efforts are not duplicated. Keep in mind about posting on websites: public posting can break anonymity. Password protection can help with this issue.
- Storage: Do not store in basements. Most collections have an access policy.

In conclusion, why do we have archives? To generate enthusiasm, better accuracy and to avoid repetition of errors. With archives, we can learn how A.A. has influenced society—for instance, A.A. influenced treatment programs in Ontario.

“Change in A.A., needed or not?” (Moderator: Robb W. / Reporter: Scott M.) The moderator shared with workshop members that, while he has been involved in disputes at the group, district, and area level, he has endeavored to keep in mind something Bill W. said at the convention in St. Louis in 1955. “Within A.A., I suppose, we shall always quarrel a good bit. Mostly, I think, about how to do the greatest good for the greatest number of drunks.” Bill also shared about our “right to be wrong” often. At the same convention in 1955, Bill said, “In the years ahead we shall, of course, make mistakes. Experience has taught us that we need have no fear of doing this, providing that we always remain willing to confess our faults and to correct them properly.” Workshop members discussed two topics, the first being: “Is change required in A.A. at all?” Most members shared that they did not like change, possibly due to fear. Participants agree that the change should be within oneself. Everyone agreed that A.A. will address change, as it is needed, in the future. Second, members were asked, “Should we change our singleness of purpose?” Participants agreed that we should love others enough to help them with recovery from alcoholism, and yet, be responsible and point members with other problems to other fellowships. Members shared that teaching through good sponsorship is important.

“Grapevine: The Grapevine Rep and More—Bringing our Message of Hope to Alcoholics” (Moderator: Ami B., GV Executive Editor / Reporter: Marie-Claudette L.) Workshop members discussed the many benefits and facets of the Grapevine magazine, including:

- Audio book and audio magazine: Members can find many audio options for the Grapevine at www.aagrapevine.org -- including recording your own story.
- Grapevine today: The Grapevine is “A.A.’s International Journal” and it records our history. Sixteen stories from the Big Book were originally Grapevine stories. Bill W. wrote extensively for the Grapevine. Audio recording is offered on today’s Grapevine website, and can bring group members together. In addition, Grapevine plays and workshops are constantly being added and are evolving. The magazine reflects current membership because today’s A.A.s write for it.
- Grapevine tools for recovery (i.e., what is Grapevine and how can it help members maintaining and achieving sobriety?): The magazine is written by alcoholics, for alcoholics. A.A. Grapevine, Inc. publishes the Grapevine in English and La Viña in Spanish. La Vigne is published by A.A.s in Canada in French.

- Grapevine displays, plays and workshops are excellent ways to share the Grapevine magazine and increase visibility.
- Grapevine with other committees – connecting beyond. Some actions GVRs can take to increase readership and visibility: Write to your delegate for news as well as to share Grapevine news. All committees can use the Grapevine in their work. Make sure Grapevine is on the agenda in business meetings, and give the GVR time to share about the Grapevine and how it can help in sobriety.
- Other ideas to get Grapevine known: Give a Grapevine to a newcomer when he or she reaches 30 days of sobriety. Invite GV reps to speak for a few minutes during meetings and presentations in order to share a few of the elements on the aagrapevine.org website (i.e., audio, sobriety counter)

“Problems Other Than Alcohol at Meetings” (Moderator: Terry M. / Reporter: Josée W.) The workshop moderator opened the workshop with his experience regarding three areas mentioned as concerns or issues by A.A. members. They are:

1. Talk in meetings about drugs;
2. Mental health of members;
3. Distractions in meetings, i.e. using meetings for social purposes, sharing not related to alcoholism and recovery, texting during meetings

The moderator shared that when he goes to A.A. literature for answers, he is able to find a place of love and tolerance with which to respond to issues. Bill wrote, in “Who is a Member of Alcoholics Anonymous?” (August 1946) “If alcohol is an uncontrollable problem to him and he wishes to do something about it, that is good enough for us...he doesn’t even have to admit he’s an alcoholic. He can join on the mere suspicion that he may be one.” In addition, the moderator shared that Bill wrote about problems other than alcohol – and that writing has been reprinted as a pamphlet. It states: “Our first duty, as a society, is to insure our own survival. Therefore, we have to avoid distractions and multipurpose activity...We cannot give A.A. membership to nonalcoholic narcotics addicts...A.A. members who are so inclined should be encouraged to band together... But they ought to refrain from calling themselves A.A. groups.” The moderator then asked the workshop members to share one or two questions they would like to discuss. The workshop participants presented two questions:

1. *How do we let people know that this is an A.A. meeting without offending them if they don’t identify as alcoholics?* Have a group conscience that people opening meeting qualify as alcoholics; meet outside of meeting to explain or verify if newcomers are in the right place; request discussion that relates to alcoholism; group supports chairperson in reminding/informing member about singleness of purpose; talk to speaker before they speak; include in the format at the beginning of meeting. Another workshop member shared, “We can’t tell people who they are or how and what to share.” Listen to suggestions and guidance; a member may need to share if drugs/mental health is part of his or her story about alcoholism.
2. *How can we handle “13th stepping”?* Consensus in the group was that members with more time need to protect newcomers by informing them about the predator, in addition to establishing healthy boundaries; older members need to “step up” or “step in” when the potential for harm is there; it is a sponsor’s responsibility to inform newcomers; need to

talk about Fourth Step sex conduct in meetings; and do not minimize behaviors. If we cannot resolve the problem, call police, or call group meeting and address issue with Traditions with the member in question.

“Keeping Our Rooms Safe” (Moderator: Sandy S. / Reporter: Janet C.) The workshop moderator shared personal thoughts and experience regarding safety in the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous and brought up different types of safety, such as personal, physical, emotional, and financial. Although we come to A.A. because we are not well, we all grow at different rates. Sometimes, too, there are people who arrive in the rooms of A.A. with another agenda – not intending to get well. As members who are attempting to live sober, the moderator posited that it is our duty to be watchful and aware and if we see any aggressive or sexual behavior – whether toward newcomers or not – it is our job to address it. If we don’t keep A.A. a safe harbor to share our experience, strength, and hope within, then who will? This does not mean being confrontational – a personal conversation one-on-one or with a partner can share what A.A. is about and what it is not about.

Workshop members then discussed their personal experience with “Thirteenth-stepping” and gossip. Briefly, the participants noted that we need to be mindful that we enter the rooms of A.A. unwell, and personal contact (i.e. hugs) can be inappropriate; don’t overstep people’s boundaries, friendliness can be misinterpreted. Ideas on handling of 13th steppers varied from having conversations; to using Traditions and asking them to leave, to ignoring the behavior. It was noted that it was important to have one-on-one (or two-on-one) discussions as well as a full group discussion at business meetings. Buddy systems work well, as do same sex sponsoring, and pairing newcomers with those who have long-term sobriety. One district put together a newcomer’s packet including a note (from GSO UK and Australia) about predatory behavior. Aside from “13th stepping,” the group also noted that gossip was lethal and can make newcomers feel unsafe in sharing at meetings. Closed discussions should not be heard “discussed” after the meeting is over. Overall, workshop members shared more resolutions than problems. Good sponsorship, working the Steps and Traditions and having regular inventories will help to guide us through these issues and keep our rooms safe.

FRENCH WORKSHOP REPORTS

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

“La Vigne” (Moderator: Raymond D., / Reporter: Pierre C.) *Workshop members discussed and shared experience, strength and hope on seven questions/concerns:*

1. *What topics can be added to make La Vigne more attractive to readers?* Workshop members shared the following ideas: develop the spiritual aspect further; ask RIV’s to better present it; use larger typeface; include an article about one alcoholic talking to another alcoholic; include a section on Archives that tells the story of La Vigne and its 50 years of history.
2. *Are some texts rejected because they are too long? Should we accept some?* Members said that the important thing is content. It is better to be short and to the point, we must trust the editor to shorten the texts as necessary.
3. *Members shared their thoughts about the pictures related to seasons.* Members said they are good and spark reflection.

4. *What should we do with old issues of La Vigne?* Workshop participants came up with many ideas: give them to a group or a public place; with permission, leave them at the doctor's office; keep them and then bring them to the district committees; give it to a newcomer (first write our name and telephone number in it before giving it to them); use it as a Twelve Step tool; "forget" them somewhere.
5. *What are good themes to use when sharing about La Vigne?* Explain the RIV function; the RIV workbook; talk about the Convention; the slips; sharing by people who join before the holiday season and how they went through without drinking.
6. *Regarding La Vigne audio*, members asked if the book *The Sounds of Sobriety* was available on CD.
7. *Should we send a La Vigne hard copy to those who subscribe on line?* What are the financial impacts? Members said that the hard copy is useful to carry the message; the hard copy will always be useful in a 12th Step; the shipping fees are high; subscribe to La Vigne and give it to a beginner's group. The section listing the Help Line telephone numbers is useful for the newcomer and more accurate than the directories of G.S.O.—it is more frequently updated; the convention page is great. Workshop participants were asked, How to best make La Vigne known? Members answered: The Literature Rep can talk about it; the Pl's can make using the magazine a priority; A.A.s can leave them in libraries and schools; the DCM can invite La Vigne reps to their areas; give training to La Vigne reps for all the products, including the Internet, because much information is lost between the DCM and the GSR; invite yourself to the districts — in many places, La Vigne is poorly represented; organize workshops at Area assemblies; put up exhibits at A.A. conventions; ask delegates to talk more about it — there is much to do to promote it.

“Bridging the Gap” (Moderator: Roger B. / Reporter: Diane P.) The workshop attendees were asked: *“How do you use the temporary contact? Talk about your experience”*. After a lengthy discussion, it was generally noticed that the program “Bridging the Gap” does not seem to work well in correctional facilities in this Region. Members reported that there is no cooperation from the prison directors. However, the program works better in the treatment centers. Members noted that there were better ways to help those behind the walls and “Bridging the Gap,” such as going to meetings behind the walls, and giving out issues of La Vigne. It is important that women find the courage to go and share behind the walls. This is one way to give a message of hope and to show that A.A. works.

“The Twelve Steps: Using the Twelve Steps in Our Lives” (Moderator: Daniel B. / Reporter: Anonymous) The workshop attendees responded to the question: *“How do you put the 12 Steps into practice in your life?”* One participant at the workshop said: In the beginning, the Steps bothered me. I knew everything, but by doing service, I learned to understand them and to apply them in my life. Others said: the Steps taught me to live better with others; the Steps help me to face the hardships of life; the Steps help me to calm me down when I was losing my sanity; I had to trust God and take a sponsor to understand the Steps; I try to put them in practice everyday, but I am a developing being, I am growing, and this taught me to forgive — mostly myself; I learned to express myself and to stay calm because of the 12 Steps. Workshop participants were also asked, “How does literature help you to live the Steps?” Members answered, “At first I was afraid, but with humility and openness, the Steps became easier to put into practice.”

“Keeping our Rooms Safe” (Moderator: Michael C. / Reporter: Sylvie P.) The moderator led the discussion on physical, spiritual, and financial security in our rooms, and about anonymity breaks. Many participants shared different experiences in their group and even when visiting prisons. The sharing dealt with subjects like pushing, fighting, physical aggression, and often the infamous “13th step” by long time members who want to take care of newcomers. Some shared about financial scams towards women who had just lost their husbands as well as anonymity breaks that led to lost jobs and serious family problems. Some members mentioned mental illness and drunken states that sometimes posed a threat to members. Many solutions were proposed. Workshop members talked about listening to others; greeting each other with love; and accompanying the offending member outside and encouraging him to talk. Many talked about our First Tradition and our common welfare, still others stopped the group’s meeting for a few minutes and even cancelled it for the security of all. Members reminded each other to always keep in mind that A.A. is not punitive, but must obey the same laws as society, therefore, contact the police if necessary. Lastly, in an effort to keep the newcomer safe, we can escort him or her to their car. Workshop members concurred that we cannot build barriers around the meetings, but we can create open-mindedness through discussions in our groups and our group inventory. We can integrate policies through a well-informed group conscience and the actions of responsible members.

“CPC – How to be Friendly with Our Friends” (Moderator: Debbie L. / Reporter: Guylaine R.) The workshop attendees were asked to answer two questions:

1. *How should we act and dress when we meet our professional friends to carry the message?* Members agreed that there was no need to wear a tie and a suit, but we should be well dressed and clean. All is in the attitude — be professional, polite, and positive. The first impression is very important. We go as a team — people with experience in the A.A. program (no newcomers). We go by steps, first a letter asking for a meeting, then a follow-up. Be well-prepared (have literature available, bring information documents).
2. *What message do we want to carry and why?* We should carry the A.A. message, as well as what we do and what we do not do. We want to show that A.A. is a well-structured organization with Traditions and a proper way of doing things. When we serve on P.I. Committees or CPC committees, we must expect a little anonymity break, mostly when we contact people, but we insist very much on anonymity. We must be careful not to go in places where our children attend school.

“How to be a More Effective Sponsor” (Moderator: Jules R. / Reporter: Josée L.) The workshop members were asked if there was a subject they wanted to discuss before answering the question of how to be a more effective sponsor. One member asked, “Why would members not want to sponsor?” Some topics covered were: How to choose a sponsor and what is the difference between a service sponsor and a group sponsor. Many people said that we have to bring back members into a way of life that uses the Steps and Traditions. Others said that we need to have a “God communication.” Participants talked about involvement and carrying enthusiasm for A.A. We talk about our experiences with the sponsee and we do not tell him what to do — we refer to literature. In answer to the question regarding why people do not want to sponsor, workshop members shared that people may not want to sponsor because they are afraid. They do not want to feel guilty (in case they fail) and they may struggle with feelings of inadequacy. Finally, a service sponsor invites sponsees into service and guides them in their A.A. service activity.

PRESENTATIONS

I Am Responsible When . . . Dave A., Delegate Panel 64, Area 81 N.B./P.E.I.

Responsibility was not one of my most treasured characteristics as a father, son, husband, employee, friend, or neighbor. In fact, it had become far removed from my thoughts and actions several years before finding my way to Alcoholics Anonymous. If I were to break the word down into two parts, they would be *response* and *ability*. My ability to respond would be better described as reacting. When I was drinking, I did not have the ability to respond appropriately since I was operating on unbridled feelings and emotions of which I had no control. On top of that, my conscience seemed to be deadened. I had very little sensitivity toward the consequences for myself and to those around me. It's no wonder that the end of my drinking would be best summed up as being isolated from everyone near and dear in my life.

I have since learned that responsibility is not a directive but now more of a freedom I have gained through the practice of our Fellowship's thirty-six principles found in our Steps, Traditions, and Concepts. Each of these principles has an underlying personal responsibility to help guide me to a life that I would never have otherwise understood. Through these principles I have been able to leave the old world of isolation and self-pity behind by becoming part of the human race, all the while gaining the freedom I desired all along.

Historically, Bill W. realized he would not live forever, and that if A.A. were to continue to flourish in the future, the Fellowship would need to become responsible for itself. This brought about the need for our Traditions and trustees. "This meant that we had to form a conference representing our membership which could meet . . . and thus assure direct responsibility for the guardianship of A.A. Tradition and the direction to our principle service affairs." (*The A.A. Service Manual* p.S2) This is best expressed in Concept One, where it states: "The final responsibility of services and the ultimate authority for A.A. world services should always reside in the collective conscience of the whole Fellowship."

Much later, the Responsibility Declaration was written for the 1965 International Convention in Toronto, penned by former trustee Al S. Reflecting on that, Dr. Jack Norris wrote in the souvenir book from that convention, "We must remember that A.A. will continue only so long as each of us freely and happily gives it away to another person, only as each of us takes our fair share of responsibility for sponsorship of those who still suffer, for the growth and integrity of our group, or our Intergroup activities and for A.A. as a whole. It is in taking responsibility that the real freedom and enduring satisfactions of life are found. A.A. has given us the freedom to be responsible for ourselves. As we become responsible for ourselves, we are free to be responsible for our share of A.A., and unless we happily accept this responsibility we lose A.A. Strange, isn't it?"

As a follow-up to the theme of the 1965 International Convention, Bill W. wrote the following in the October 1965 Grapevine concerning Cooperation with the Professional Community: "We should seriously ask ourselves how many alcoholics have gone on drinking simply because we have failed to cooperate in good spirit with many of these agencies. No alcoholic should go mad and die merely because he did not come straight to A.A. in the beginning. Many sufferers have mental and emotional complications that seem to foreclose their chances. Yet it would be conservative to estimate that at any particular time there are four million alcoholics in the world who are able, ready and willing to get well if only they knew how."

So at what point am I to be responsible? In Bill's writings on Tradition One in *The Language of the Heart*, concerning Unity, it says: "Our personal ambitions will have to be set aside every time they conflict with the safety or the effectiveness of our Fellowship. It means that we must sometimes love our Society more than ourselves." (p. 317) "We can clearly see that our job as individuals and as a Fellowship is to keep right on growing by the constant use of our Twelve Steps. We of A.A. can never set any hampering limitation upon the ultimate destiny of ourselves and our Fellowship." (p. 311) "In the affirmative or positive aspect of Traditions we learn both directly and impliedly, how we may best apply the high ideals of sacrifice and willing responsibility, trust, love in our relations with each other and the world around us. Out of these practices flows the spiritual energy that moves us along the road to a full liberation." (p. 316) "Faith is more than our greatest gift; its sharing with others is our greatest responsibility. May we of A.A. continually seek the wisdom and willingness by which we may well fulfill that immense trust which the Giver of all perfect gifts has placed in our hands." (Grapevine, April 1961) "All A.A. progress can be reckoned in terms of just two words: humility and responsibility. Our whole spiritual development can be accurately measured by our degree of adherence to these magnificent standards." (Bill W.'s talk 1965, Grapevine January 1966)

Our whole history from beginning to the present day has been a series of people inside and outside of the Fellowship who have given of themselves to make this the absolute best model for the human spirit to be awoken and brought into the light. So much so that other fellowships have borrowed the A.A. principles for their own needs. In doing so, lives and hearts have been changed forever, not only for the alcoholic but for those lives that have been touched directly and indirectly from these efforts.

In conclusion, I often reflect on Dr. Bob's last message that he gave on Sunday, July 3, 1950 at the first International Convention in Cleveland, Ohio, where he says: "Our Twelve Steps, when simmered down to the last resolve themselves into the words "love" and "service." We understand what love is and we understand what service is. So let us bear those two things in mind. None of us would be here today if somebody hadn't taken the time to explain things to us, to give us a little pat on the back, to take us to a meeting or two, to do numerous little kind and thoughtful acts on our behalf. So let us never get such a degree of smug complacency that we're not willing to extend, or attempt to extend, to our less fortunate brothers that help which has been so beneficial to us."

The last thing I would like to remind you about is, of course, what we adopted back in 1965 Toronto: "**I am responsible when . . .**"

Thank you all for you time and patience. God bless.

My Journey in Service—Fredy M., Alternate Delegate Panel 64, Area 86 Western Ontario for Jim Wilson, Panel 64 Delegate, Area 86 Western Ontario

Hello everyone. I am the Panel 64, Area 86 Delegate for Western Ontario, and my name is Jim W.

My journey in service began like most of yours, with a job at the home group. In my second week in Alcoholics Anonymous I heard at meetings that it was important to get active, so I asked my sponsor at the time if I could get active in the group. Jack asked me for my education status and I replied that, yes, I had gone to high school; he asked about college or university and I said no but I was thinking about it. Jack said wait right here, I have to go and speak to the group elders. I followed Jack with my eyes over to the corner while he pleaded my case. Arms were waving, heads were shaking, and people were staring at me. Jack returned and said that he had managed to get me a job but it was a tough sell. I was happy that he got me a job—"ashtrays" he said, "ashtrays" I groaned. Jack asked if I thought that I could handle it, to which I replied that yes I could. Jack stated that the guy working the mop wanted to move up. Jack also said to be at the meeting for setup at 6:00 for an 8:30 meeting. He explained the chairs had to be set out before the ashtrays were placed around the meeting, plus we made the coffee and then worked the door as greeters. I was too young in the program to understand that when you're involved and being of service, that's when your own healing begins. Being of service to others is a key to sobriety.

After two years of setting up chairs and ashtrays it was time to do something else, as new members were looking for jobs as well. On the night of elections at our business meeting I stood for every position available and did not get elected for anything. I found out afterwards that as it was put Old Nick, who ran the group, had all his people in place so the election was just a formality. I got very discouraged and started to think. We all know that with resentment and a coffee pot groups have been known to start. After some investigation I found an available church basement, a night where other meetings were held in our district, and an eagerness of being in service to my area. The Paradise Group was started May 3, 1990 at the intersection of my last drunk. So for the next few years I was the G.S.R as well as setup guy, until a few members showed an interest in being of service.

At the same time that I was backing away from these duties to let others get active, my aunt, who was also a member of the Fellowship, put my name forward for our local roundup committee and for the next ten years or so I stayed active rotating through all the committee positions. After chairing the roundup you're expected to rotate out and I was looking forward to a little break from service. This was exactly one month before my sponsor told me that I was needed to step up as the alternate D.C.M. for our district, because they could not fill the vacancy. Here we go again!, I thought; alternate for two years and then I'd let my name stand for D.C.M. I thought the D.C.M. job was going to be a great one, but it turned out to be the roughest test of patience and tolerance that I had ever faced. Eight years ago I had become very disheartened about continuing service in A.A. and also did not know whether or not I was even going to stick around for meetings at all.

I discussed everything with my sponsor and he knew that I was ready to walk. Martin showed up at the door one day and said "Get in the van, we're going on a road trip." With our driver Joe we stopped along the way to pick up a delegate named Dot and her D.C.M. husband Tim; Martin was also a delegate at this time. Twelve hundred miles later we had arrived in Truro, NS for an

Eastern Canada Regional Forum, my first one. We all talked, laughed, and shared stories about service the whole way to Truro.

When we got to the Forum my sponsor took me to the main meeting room to look around, and that's where he introduced me to his friend Mary. Mary was an employee at the General Service Office. She shook my hand, welcomed me to the Eastern Canada Regional Forum, and I soon felt part of. The whole weekend was overwhelming and I soon learned the real meaning of service—we all play our part, from making coffee and setting up our group meeting to chairman of A.A.W.S. or manager of the General Service Office. Not once the whole weekend did I hear "I can't do it" or "it can't be done." My attitude sure changed for the better. I have had the opportunity to thank Mary for speaking at one of our assemblies. Mary has really become a good friend over the years; she has been a source of information from G.S.O. and also an inspiration to me. This past April I attended the 64th General Service Conference as Panel 64 Delegate for Area 86 Western Ontario—what a privilege and honor to be of service.

I have heard many people say "Hang on to your____, you are in for the ride of your life!" and the saying is so true—this has been beyond my wildest dreams. I sincerely hope that all of you at this Regional Forum, meet with the staff of the General Service Office, the Class A and Class B trustees, and the editor and staff of the Grapevine. They all give of themselves freely and are there to be of service. Talk to them, ask questions.

Mary is retiring this year and I don't know if our paths will ever cross again, but I pray that they will. If you're ever struggling with service and you're thinking of giving up, I do hope that you meet your own Upstairs Mary, someone who will inspire you to stay, put your hand up and become willing, and let your Higher Power do the rest.

Singleness of Purpose—Joyce S., Alternate Delegate Panel 63, Area 83 Eastern Ontario for Mel C., Delegate Panel 63, Area 83 Eastern Ontario .

Ever try to put something in the way of an ant making its way from one spot to another? Your foot perhaps? A stick? The ant marches right up to it, backs up an inch or two, then goes left or right to the end of the impediment. If you shift the foot or the stick, the ant backs up again, and goes one way or the other to the end. You can do this all day long and the ant will do the same thing until you finally remove the obstacle and the ant marches forward in the direction it was heading in the first place. Who knows what compels the ant to do this, but its actions are clear: it has a singleness of purpose. It doesn't stop to consider "why" the foot is there or "why" the stick keeps moving every time it gets to the end; it seems to have a higher purpose, one that looks over the stick or the boot. It doesn't get bogged down in details.

Alcoholics Anonymous is like that. We have a thousand things we could focus on—our personal recovery programs, the dynamics of our home groups, our area's smooth operation, the General Service Office, or the General Service Conference level—but the truth is, we have but one directive, one goal, one overriding reason for being, and that mission has been successfully accomplished for seventy-nine years now because we have employed one simple rule: a complete and utter singleness of purpose. And why is that important? What is the goal to which we direct our purpose? Well, it can be described in many ways but is often simply described as attaining long-term, contented sobriety. And how do we do that? We do that through the

consistent application of our Twelve Steps and our Twelve Traditions, with the Steps concerning our personal recovery and the Traditions concerning issues of our Fellowship. Let's look at both.

Our walk in the Steps had better be completely focused. We aren't afforded the luxury of being able to multitask in our recovery. Our cunning, baffling, and powerful foe John Barleycorn would be only too happy to see us divert our attention from the full and complete application of the Twelve Steps in our lives to things like new responsibilities at work, cooking classes now that we're sober, learning how to sail, or the dreaded first-year relationship with that new special someone we met in the program. Yes, it is easy to see in the Steps where singleness of purpose is key. Ask any Sponsor with a chronically slipping sponsee and the answer as to why the sponsee cannot stay sober is most often some variation of not being able to accept Step One, which of course has singleness of purpose as its bedrock.

Three of our Traditions are telling with respect to singleness of purpose:

Tradition Four: Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole. The last part of this Tradition ("except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole") tells us our Fellowship has a singleness of purpose and that a group is subservient to the whole, not above it. We can have groups with "personalities" and groups with variations in form, but we can't have groups that have variations in focus. Our Fellowship is based on alcoholism. Alcoholism only. Allowing people with an eating disorder and no alcohol problem to share at closed meetings is an example of a violation of our singleness of purpose mandate. Autonomy is *not* a get-out-of-jail-free card groups can use to disregard the whole of A.A.; it is a beautifully crafted word that allows each group to reflect its members' vision of our program while still remaining part of the whole.

Tradition Five: Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers. Each alcoholic uses for recovery, as his or her basic text, the Big Book and the Twelve and Twelve, as written by Bill and Dr. Bob. They also employ Conference-approved literature. The amalgamation of that knowledge, the group conscience driven "recovery message," is what is passed on to the still-suffering alcoholic. The man or woman who walks through the door for that first time is fed the warm, nourishing soup of a recovery program based on specific written texts and hard-won personal experience. It is not up to the group to reinvent the model or rewrite the cookbook; it is up to the group to undertake the application of these principles in all their affairs and pass on a clean, clear message that reflects the program of Alcoholics Anonymous as interpreted first by our founders and later by our Conference—and each and every day by us A.A.s.

Tradition Ten: Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy. We don't even have an opinion on alcohol— isn't that amazing! The subtext of this Tradition is that our personal opinions on this, that, or the other thing really have no bearing on our common problem of alcoholism, and thus are no help in finding common solutions. The thing that we *are* concerned with is how to effectively employ the Twelve Steps in our lives, how to live fruitful, meaningful existences carrying the unified message to the newcomer, and how to put safeguards in place that will ensure that our message is protected and kept unsullied.

In conclusion, we must always be vigilant in protecting our program's magnificent concept of singleness of purpose. It is that singleness of purpose that will sustain us when forces—almost

always from within—want to mold and morph our purpose to suit other goals or objectives. When the newcomer arrives in the room for the first time, it is our ability to share a consistent, clear, and uncomplicated story of a recovery solution that is critical; one that does not confuse from meeting-to-meeting or area-to-area. Personal opinions have no place in our rooms, nor do rewrites or self-styled “improvements” to the basic text. We have a spiritual solution to a deadly foe who wants nothing more than to kill us. We can never afford to look away from that, even for an instant.

Service in my life—Luc T., Delegate, Panel 64, Area 90, Northwest Quebec

Good day! My name is Luc Tremblay, I am an alcoholic, group 64 delegate, Area 90, Quebec North-West. I decided to talk about service in my life to try to take away the fears of the future servants, and most of all to try to inspire you to make this spiritual journey called service. First of all, let us start at Page S1 of *The A.A. Service Manual* (edition 2013-2014): “Our Twelfth Step – carrying the message – is the basic service that the A.A. Fellowship gives; this is our principal aim and the main reason for our existence. Therefore, A.A. is more than a set of principles; it is a society of alcoholics in action. We must carry the message, else we ourselves can wither and those who haven’t been given the truth may die. Hence, an A.A. service is anything whatever that helps us to reach a fellow sufferer – ranging all the way from the Twelfth Step itself to a ten-cent phone call and a cup of coffee, and to A.A.’s General Service Office for national and international action. The sum total of all these services is our Third Legacy of Service. Services include meeting places, hospital cooperation, and intergroup offices; they mean pamphlets, books, and good publicity of almost every description. They call for committees, delegates, trustees, and conferences. And, not to be forgotten, they need voluntary money contribution from within the Fellowship.”

In reading this text, we understand the importance of service in the association. Let us not forget the Three Legacies of our cofounders: Recovery, Unity, and Service. But after having said all that, what should I do? Why should I do all that? Is it worth the effort?

Let us go back to the beginning. Like every new member, when I came into a meeting room, the only thing I wanted was to stop suffering and to try to get hold of my life. I was a man with no self-esteem, I no longer wanted to live, and most of all, I was jealous of your smiles. I did not understand your language and I did not want to tell my story because I was too ashamed of myself, so the idea to serve and to greet others seemed impossible, for I could not even greet myself.

However, my sponsor took care of me. He introduced me to other A.A. members, he took me to the “after meetings” so I could open up more. After a few months of this, he told me that if I wanted to keep what I had gained, I had to give it back. It seems at this time that I did not have much, but I followed his advice because since I started listening to him, nothing worse happened to me. So I started making coffee, preparing the meeting rooms, placing ashtrays on the chairs, and shaking hands with a smile. Without knowing it, I had just opened the door to rebuild my self-esteem. I was beginning to talk without telling lies, and I was becoming a responsible man with a more normal life. However, while I thought this was enough, my sponsor thought otherwise. So I started to go to district meetings and I saw a bigger picture of the movement beyond my home group. Afterwards, I went to a general assembly of the area, where there were members from everywhere, member who spoke with confidence in front of everybody. What

struck me when I saw these members—I saw in their eyes something that I did not have. I was serving in my group and my district, but surely there must be something more.

The strangest thing is that without realizing it, my life was better. I had managed to get a diploma, I was working, I had a driver's license, and, most of all, I was getting back the joy of living despite the ups and downs of life. Deep inside, I knew that something was missing, but I did not have the ability to do what the members of the area could do. In my opinion, these people were dedicated to A.A., and it seemed they must have been doing only that. As for me, I had a life to live; I had something else to do besides attend service meetings. More than that, these members were not only respected, as I was hearing many comments or criticism about them. I did not want any of that in my life. I did not know that with all these meetings came many gifts.

But my self-confidence was still fragile and I certainly did not think that members trusted me, as I saw nothing good in myself. Then came an important moment in my life: my first International Convention in Toronto in 2005. At that time, I felt an unconditional love between members all over the world and there was only one objective: to carry the A.A. message. So in October 2005, I raised my hand to become D.C.M. for my district. There were four of us who wanted to serve and I was elected. I did not know at the time that this little gesture would change my perspective of this wonderful movement that saved my life.

With experienced members, my service sponsor, and the proper readings, I learned to serve A.A. and its members a bit more humbly, with lots of love and passion. I know today that I am privileged to be able to go to meetings all over the area and never feel alone. This is one of the first promises that I heard in 1997: you will never be alone. For almost nine years now I've served at the area level. There have been meetings, discussions, questions, discouragement, tears, and laughter. At times I was saying to myself: "Not another meeting . . ." but deep inside, I knew that I would be receiving something, maybe not the same day, but one day. With all that I have learned in service, I could bring that to work. I am more responsible. I can be trusted. I am attentive to others. I know that I give a lot, but I can tell you that I receive much more, as I have friends around me, I am now able to look at myself in the mirror, and life is beautiful.

Thank you.

PAST TRUSTEES' SHARING

Donald C., past regional trustee, Eastern Canada, 2010-2014

Thank you for allowing me to serve Alcoholics Anonymous. It is moving to find myself here, before you, and to know that I served you — and with you. When I came to your meetings, I just wanted to learn how to drink. I never thought that I would stop drinking or that I would become trustee one day. I was told to serve in A.A. and I started by cleaning the room, the ashtrays and doing other chores in the group.

I am at your service, as is everyone at the General Service Office. But they do not lead, because you are the leaders. The trustees do not lead, you do. You are the base — the important ones. Everything that is done at the General Service Office is for the newcomer; it is for the still-suffering alcoholic. It was not necessary for me to go to the General Service Office to understand that. I wish for you all to serve one day, wherever Alcoholics Anonymous may need you. We say: “just put my name on the list” — we do not decide. When I started as a trustee, I asked myself: “What am I doing here?” It is intimidating. I am a boy who comes from the back streets of Montreal and therefore, I have no business being here. I should be dead, but instead I am living extraordinary things. This is what awaits you.

Michel G., past trustee-at-large/Canada, 1995-1999

I have been a member of Alcoholics Anonymous for 35 years. I am nostalgic for those moments in service that have been the most exciting, the most marvelous of all my life. Service saved my family, my marriage, my job, and it also saved my life, my future, and how I live now, thanks to you who showed me how to walk—how to act. My wife did not trust me even to go and get milk at the corner store. As a trustee-at-large, I was also a World Service delegate. You even dared sending me to different countries, to share the beauty of Alcoholics Anonymous.

About twenty years ago, I went to Switzerland for a conference. The person who came to get me at the airport for this Conference, which did not have much money, accompanied me throughout. He was new in Alcoholics Anonymous and was the designated driver to accompany me and take me to meetings. I was sleeping at a member's home every night, and I was taken around to share in different parts of Switzerland. The man and I have since stayed in contact through the Internet. Last year, I went to France and we met at the airport. This man is now an A.A. trustee in Switzerland. It gives me shivers to talk about this incredible thing.

I have witnessed transformation miracles. I lived some extraordinary experiences when I went to Mexico. I remember big signs of Bill and Bob, the music, the sombreros, everybody getting in the room singing and dancing. They were really extraordinary things. At that conference, in the back, there were about ten cameras ready to film. We tried to explain to them (after all, we were guests), that we do not do that at home — we do not film people who are sharing. And then we saw people put down cameras, one after the other, except one. We asked, “Why this one?” They answered that it was for the archives. So we kept that one, for we were told that our sharing of that morning would be saved in their archives.

I wish you lots of forums like the one this weekend. Thank you for listening.

Robert P., past regional trustee, Eastern Canada, 2002-2006

I came to A.A. on May 15, 1983. I was drinking too much for a long time. I was in the house, and my two sons were outside. When I came out, they would come in. It was a Sunday. I was alone and crying, wondering where I was going with my life. I said, "Help me, I cannot go on anymore!" The following day, I called Alcoholics Anonymous. They told me, "Go to a meeting." They gave me an address and I went. By the grace of God and the help of Alcoholics Anonymous, I never drank again.

At my second meeting, I found a sponsor. At a business meeting, he suggested my name for the job of cleaning the room. I never thought I would take a job like that. I had a big job, a company car and all that jazz. One day, in a big room, two people were talking. A cup of coffee was spilled on the floor. I came with the mop, looked at them and said, "Excuse me." They saw that I had a mop in my hand, they saw the coffee on the floor, and they looked at me and said, "Thank you." They had said something I had been looking for for the past 47 years — something as simple as mopping the floor, a smile, and a 'thank you'. I stayed in A.A. It became a passion.

An incident happened many years ago regarding Eskimos, as we called them at the time. They are Inuits. One of them wrote G.S.O. and said, "I have a problem with alcohol. I need help for me and for my people." From G.S.O., it fell into the hands of Michel, who was our delegate at the time, and so we started an A.A. meeting for the Inuits in the St. Jerome prison in 1996. 18 years later, I still sponsor the group. A lot of our money is sent to G.S.O. to help someone, somewhere, who has an alcohol problem. In 1996, when I started working with the Inuits in prison, there was nothing written in Inuktitut. We could not have any translations from the General Service Office so they gave us the authorization to translate locally, provided that A.A. is the owner of the copyrights, for they own the copyrights to all of our literature.

At the international level, A.A. is available anywhere. The story of the Sister who brought A.A. to Tahiti started from Lennoxville, Quebec. One day, a little girl came to her, crying, and told the Sister that her father had come home drunk the day before and put a gun to her mother's head. The Sister told the girl: "When your father is away, tell your mother to call me." When the mother called, the Sister went to see her. When she left, she took the gun and brought it to her community safe room. The Sister made a request to Alcoholics Anonymous and they went to Area 88. This is the way it works. When we say, "I am responsible" it means responsible anywhere.

“CLOSING REMARKS”

Terry Bedient, Class A (nonalcoholic) General Service Board Chairperson

We are in the presence of giants of A.A. I'm delighted and privileged to serve with all of you. It has been said that 18 million people in the U.S. and Canada suffer from a life-threatening problem. Not drinking is not the solution. The solution is spiritual growth and application of the Twelve Steps in all aspects of our lives. Former Class A trustee, George Valliant, wrote that service is linked to survival and to spirituality. Spirituality includes and requires service. Your presence here this weekend demonstrates your commitment to service and to growth along spiritual lines. Dr. Bob said that it all comes down to love and service. I like that he put “love” first. This weekend, in Laval, I think that we have all felt that love. The spirit of gratitude has been alive and well here this weekend. We have talked about the importance of sponsorship, the need for inclusiveness, and special needs communities. I've sensed the serenity that comes not from the absence of problems, but from the presence of a higher power.

Fighting isolation is a key to ongoing sobriety. It is easy in today's world to buddy up with a laptop or a smart phone or a television instead of a real person. And that can be a challenge for all of us, just as we are challenged to effectively utilize technology to deliver our message of A.A. To deliver that message, it must be person to person. A.A. must be a clear and authoritative voice that can be sorted out and heard in the midst of misinformation, miscommunication and uninformed personal opinion. We are Alcoholics Anonymous, not Alcoholics Invisible.

Bill wrote a lot about building for the future – and for the newcomers and our youth. Today, every successful mutual help group in the world is modeled after your Twelve Steps. No other group in the world provides your kind of support to others suffering from a common illness. A member wrote, “When I drank, I had a drinking problem that I could not handle. When I stopped drinking, I had a living problem I could not handle.” For those who are restless, irritable, and discontent, drinking is not the solution. As Bill said, our message to the world is not that we have succeeded in ceasing to drink, but that in ceasing to drink, we have succeeded in learning to live. Thank you for the opportunity to serve.
