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What Is Our A.A. Grapevine

By Bill

Hundreds of A.A.s have not yet seen or heard of *The A.A. Grapevine*. Others query, who is it? What is it? What are its ideals? So I have been asked to explain.

The A.A. Grapevine is our principal monthly journal. It is devoted to the interests of Alcoholics Anonymous - and to nothing else. It tries to publish the news and portray the views of A.A.s everywhere. It aims to reflect a cross section of our thoughts and actions. Already reaching all parts of America, it is beginning to be read in foreign lands. Some of its 5,600 subscribers are non-alcoholics vitally interested in our progress and philosophy.

In short, *The A.A. Grapevine* is rapidly becoming "the collective voice of Alcoholics Anonymous." Like everything else that is good *The A.A. Grapevine* has been an evolution - not a promotion. Like Topsy "it just grew." Now let me cut back into our past to let you see more of why and how *The A.A. Grapevine* came to be.

Ten years ago our fellowship was a weak and wobbly infant - just a few alcoholics clinging desperately to an ideal, and to each other. These early ones were the originators of the Alcoholics Anonymous movement. As our numbers swelled the newer members naturally looked to the older ones for help and example. They began to call us

older ones "leaders," and in the case of Dr. Bob and myself they coined for each of us the rather resounding title of "founder." Since A.A. really had a score of "founders" he and I really wish that hadn't occurred. But it did. Simply, we suppose, because we were the first in point of time and were therefore of the longest experience.

Thus it happened that we came to have, in the minds of our fellow A.A.s, a rather unique status. Never official, always informal, yet there it was. In matters of principle or policy A.A.s began to regard Bob and me as representing their collective conscience; they also began to think of us as a sort of heart to the movement which took in the constant stream of incoming problems and perplexities and then pumped out answers. Then we went out among the growing groups, he and I were asked to stand on platforms and expound A.A. to ever larger audiences. So it was that we became the collective "voice of A.A." As a friend put it, "That was a whale of a big order!"

Bob and I agree with him. Its too big an assignment for any two alcoholics. We're too fallible. And were we fallible we couldn't last forever anyhow. Hence he and I have been, for a long time now, in process of passing these functions of conscience, heart and voice over to others.

Years ago we helped set up the Alcoholic Foundation whose trustees became guardians of your general A.A. funds, and who of late, by custom and general consent, are more and more regarded as the custodians of A.A. tradition and general policy. The trustees are no body of authority. They simply act as sort of general service committee to mediators. As such, they are beginning to be seen by the groups as representing our collective A.A. conscience. Bob and I hope that trend will continue. This seems likely as the trustees and their duties are becoming better understood.

A year after the creation of The Alcoholic Foundation, the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* was published in April, 1939. This too was the enterprise of a group of A.A. members who thought our experience ought to be codified and set on paper. This group supplied funds, suggestions and stories. Bob and I were given the task of deciding what should go into the book and I was assigned the writing of its text. The publication of the A.A. book marked the point in our history where our early members, along with Bob and myself, transferred our experience through this new medium to an ever wider circle which now promises to be the wide world of alcoholism.

The A.A. Central Office at New York came into being simultaneously with the book. Here our secretaries nowadays answer thousands of inquiries, look after

our over-all public relations, write letters of encouragement to new and isolated groups, see to the printing and distribution of group lists, pamphlets, literature and the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*. Several years ago the trustees of our Foundation acquired full ownership of the A.A. book and at the same time assumed a custodial oversight of The Central Office whose financial support has gradually been taken over by the groups through their voluntary contributions to The Foundation. Thousands of new members have found their way to A.A., hundreds of groups have been helped with their growing pains, and millions of people have heard of A.A. through the functioning of The Central Office. Little by little, our Central Office is becoming recognized as the heart of A.A. It receives inquiries and problems, then pumps out information and the best answers it can. Thus one more function of the originators of A.A. is in process of transfer to the Central Office staff. The Central Office has almost become the central heart of A.A.

"Now," you say, "what has all this got to do with *The A.A. Grapevine*?" Just this: Like the earlier groups which assembled the Foundation, the A.A. book and the Central Office, *The A.A. Grapevine* began two years ago among several newspaper-minded A.A.s who thought we needed a monthly periodical. They were willing to contribute a little money and boundless effort to make it a success. At the beginning, this group of A.A.s had no special authorization from

anyone. They merely took off their coats and did a job, a job so well done that at the end of a year they found their paper in national distribution. There was no sponsoring, no promoting. Like the A.A. book, the Central Office, and the Foundation, *The A.A. Grapevine* became a national institution on its own effort and merit.

Arrived at this point members of the staff came to the trustees to discuss the future of the publication. They also asked me to write some pieces and requested me to ascertain if the groups would like to have this periodical as their principal A.A. publication. Hundreds of groups and individual subscribers came back with an enthusiastic "YES." There was scarcely a single dissent. Accordingly, *The A.A. Grapevine* was incorporated, its beneficial ownership transferred to the Foundation and it is now being managed by a joint committee composed of two trustees of the Foundation, two members of the volunteer staff and its editor. Not quite self-supporting yet, we hope it will presently become so. Consequently we are witnessing still another transference. *The A.A. Grapevine* is becoming the voice of Alcoholics Anonymous.

As one of the staff members recently put it, "We think that *The A.A. Grapevine* ought to become the 'voice of Alcoholics Anonymous,' bringing us news of each other across great distances, and always describing what can be freshly seen in that vast and lifegiving pool we call 'A.A. experience.' Never taking part

in the controversial issues of religion, reform or politics, never seeking profit, never lending itself to commerce or propaganda, always mindful of our sole aim to carry the A.A. message to those who suffer alcoholism - such is our ideal for *The A.A. Grapevine*."

With these sentiments Dr. Bob and I heartily concur. We hope that A.A.s everywhere will feel it to be their newspaper; that our able A.A. writers will contribute freely; that all groups will send in news of their doings which may be of general interest; that *The A.A. Grapevine* will presently take its place in the minds of all A.A.s as one of our essential central services close alongside the Foundation, the A.A. book and the Central Office.

You see, dear fellow members, Dr. Bob and I have a slightly ulterior motive! For, when the transfer of our original functions of conscience, heart and voice is made complete to these newer, better and more permanent agencies, then we old-timers can really take a walk!